

**MORE POLITICAL
AND SOCIAL WRITINGS
1945-1997
BOOKS 1 AND 2**

**THE QUESTION OF
THE WORKERS' MOVEMENT
VOLUMES 1 AND 2**

BETA

by **Cornelius Castoriadis***

translated from the French
and edited anonymously
as a public service

*"Cornelius Castoriadis" is here a pseudonym for Paul Cardan.**

**A Paul Cardan (active 1959-1965) was a pseudonym for Cornelius Castoriadis (1922-1997).

NOTICE

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*Much Castoriadis material has gone out of print and much more remains to be translated into English, publication projects in which T/E is currently engaged. So far, in addition to the present volume, thirteen other Castoriadis/Cardan volumes (listed below with the electronic publication dates) have been translated from the French and edited anonymously as a public service:

- *The Rising Tide of Insignificance (The Big Sleep)*. <http://www.notbored.org/RTI.pdf>, December 4, 2003.
- *Figures of the Thinkable*, including *Passion and Knowledge*. <http://www.notbored.org/FTPK.pdf>, February 2005.
- *A Society Adrift: More Interviews and Discussions on The Rising Tide of Insignificance*, including *Revolutionary Perspectives Today*. <http://www.notbored.org/ASA.pdf>, October 2010.
- *Postscript on Insignificance*, including *More Interviews and Discussions on the Rising Tide of Insignificance*, followed by *Six Dialogues, Four Portraits and Two Book Reviews*. <http://www.notbored.org/PSRTL.pdf>, 2011, 2nd ed. August 2017.
- *Democracy and Relativism: Discussion with the “MAUSS” Group*. <http://www.notbored.org/DR.pdf>, January 2013.
- *Window on the Chaos*, including “How I Didn’t Become a Musician” (Beta) <http://www.notbored.org/WoC.pdf> July 2015.
- *A Socialisme ou Barbarie Anthology: Autonomy, Critique, and Revolution in the Age of Bureaucratic Capitalism*. <http://soubrtrans.org/SouBA.pdf> and London: Eris, 2018 (£19.99, paperback sold at cost).
- *Crossroads in the Labyrinth*, vol. 1 (1978). Electronic publication date: March 2022. <http://www.notbored.org/cornelius-castoriadis-crossroads-1.pdf>
- *Crossroads in the Labyrinth*, vol. 2: *Human Domains* (1986). Electronic publication date: March 2022. <http://www.notbored.org/cornelius-castoriadis-crossroads-2-human-domains.pdf>
- *Crossroads in the Labyrinth*, vol. 3: *World in Fragments* (1990). Electronic publication date: March 2022. <http://www.notbored.org/cornelius-castoriadis-crossroads-3-world-in-fragments.pdf>
- *Crossroads in the Labyrinth*, vol. 4: *The Rising Tide of Insignificance* (1996). Electronic publication date: March 2022. <http://www.notbored.org/cornelius-castoriadis-crossroads-4-rising-tide-of-insignificance.pdf>
- *Crossroads in the Labyrinth*, vol. 5: *Done and To Be Done* (1997). Electronic publication date: March 2022. <http://www.notbored.org/cornelius-castoriadis-crossroads-5-done-and-to-be-done.pdf>
- *Crossroads in the Labyrinth*, vol. 6: *Figures of the Thinkable* (posthumous, 1999). Electronic publication date: March 2022. <http://www.notbored.org/cornelius-castoriadis-crossroads-6-figures-of-the-thinkable.pdf>

Plus two English-language subtitled videos:

- Castoriadis outtakes from Chris Marker’s 1989 13-part film *L’Héritage de la chouette* (The Owl’s Legacy). French with English-language subtitles. <http://vimeo.com/63299326>, May 2013.
- Interview with Cornelius Castoriadis for the Greek television network ET1, for the show “Paraskiniom,” 1984. Greek with English-language subtitles: Ioanna <http://vimeo.com/kaloskaisophos/castoriadis-paraskiniom-english-subtitles>

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N.B.: Years in parentheses generally indicate, here and in footnotes, the first date of publication of a text in English or French, whichever occurred first. See each individual publication note for date of composition.

**MORE POLITICAL
AND SOCIAL WRITINGS
1945-1997
BOOK 1**

**THE QUESTION OF THE
WORKERS' MOVEMENT
VOLUME 1**

French Editors' Notice*

This edition of Cornelius Castoriadis's political [T/E: and social] writings—of which *La Question du mouvement ouvrier* [*The Question of the Workers' Movement*] constitutes the first two volumes—is in no way a mere reprint of the works published in the Éditions 10/18 collection between 1973 and 1979. First of all, it has been enriched with the bulk of the author's political interventions extending all the way to his death in 1997, articles as well as interviews, and it includes, of course, *Devant la guerre* [*Facing War*] (1981). We have especially added thereto a number of hitherto unpublished texts, in particular the sufficiently completed parts of two unpublished works, *Illusion et vérité politiques* [*Political Illusion and Truth*] (1978-1979) and the second volume of *Devant la guerre* (1981-1983), as well as a few components of a volume foreseen in the Éditions 10/18 "publication plan"—*La Dynamique du capitalisme* [*The Dynamic of Capitalism*]—which he was not able to complete but on which he worked for thirty years.

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Here, then, is the overall publication plan for these *Écrits politiques* [Political Writings], 1945-1997 (with *political* meant to be understood here, it will be seen, in a very broad sense):

- The Question of the Workers' Movement* (QWM)
- What Democracy?* (WD)
- Bureaucratic Society*¹

*Advertisement, in [EPI](#), 7-10.

¹T/E: This volume, foreseen for "December 2013" according to the French Editors here, was finally published in 2015.

- Facing War and Other Writings*²
 —*On the Dynamic of Capitalism and other Texts,*
 followed by *Imperialism and War*³

Moreover, we did not think that we had to respect scrupulously Castoriadis's initial plan or the layout of each volume (except as concerns *La Société bureaucratique* and the first volume of *Capitalisme moderne et révolution: L'Impérialisme et la guerre*, whose makeup remains essentially the same). Why have we taken these liberties when it comes to works published by the author during his lifetime? In the first place, it should not be thought that the way the articles were distributed across various volumes in his reprints from the 1970s followed some overly strict logic. While the headings themselves were, to a certain point, easy to determine, the makeup of each volume never seemed quite obvious, some texts not easily fitting under this or that heading. Above all, it seemed to us that the important thing today is to allow the reader to perceive the *movement* of Castoriadis's labor of reflection through its various stages; a more clearly chronological classification, tempered by a few thematic considerations, from then on became preferable. One is not being unfaithful to the author if one does not stick to a presentation of his work that was in no way definitive; one would have betrayed him by failing to respect his underlying volition: to attempt to fit what is most alive in his texts into a *present-day* discussion and thereby to try to make it easier to approach and understand them, though at the cost of a few adjustments.

²T/E: This volume, also foreseen for "2013" according to the French Editors here, was finally published in 2016 as *Guerre et théories de la guerre* (War and Theories of War).

³T/E: This volume, foreseen for "2014" according to the French Editors here, was finally published in 2020. Another volume of these *Écrits politiques* (Political writings) was published at the same time under the title *Écologie et politique*, suivi de *Correspondances et compléments* [*Ecology and Politics*, followed by *Correspondence and Additional Writings*].

~

We have thus deemed it fitting to place in appendixes certain late-1940s and early-1950s texts. When republished in 1973-1974, more than twenty years had elapsed, yet the social and intellectual world of which they bore a trace was still present for an entire generation of potential readers. Those readers were certainly a minority, but for them the tone, the discussions, and the references were not overly alien. These texts are now more than sixty years old; for today's reader, even a person who takes an interest in these questions, they are too far removed from his own experience; making them the ones to be read right off the bat would undoubtedly have been too disconcerting. Nonetheless, on some key points they offer an initial formulation of Castoriadis's ideas and their interest will be, without undue difficulty, apparent to attentive readers—be it only through their critique of other ideas that played a historical role and that have perhaps not said, alas, their final word. It therefore would have been regrettable to eliminate them: whence, this compromise solution.

Some texts or sets of texts are preceded by brief introductions designed to specify the conditions under which they were drafted. We have added footnotes (preceded by the designation "FRENCH EDITORS") only in order to remind readers who this or that important individual or what some event or another was, to clear up some allusions that have in our day become nearly unintelligible for young readers, and also to refer readers to other parts of his work. (Let us recall that such additions were introduced by the author himself in the 1973, 1974, and 1979 reprints.) Nonetheless, we have generally not provided further information about persons or facts about which internet users can obtain all necessary information in a few seconds.⁴ In any case, it was impossible

⁴T/E: For the English-language edition, such additions may prove useful to readers less familiar with French or other historical personalities, events, or quotations mentioned or alluded to by Castoriadis, and so we have provided identifications, explanations, and references where deemed suitable, within in-line brackets or in new links and/or notes. In a further-

to explain everything, and, moreover, that which may appear too concise or obscure is often cleared up by the reading of other passages; in certain cases, we have deemed it preferable to allow readers the time to befittingly use their own eyes or, rather, ears. (In Castoriadis's work, for example while reading some phrase, one comes across some bits of sarcasm so colossal that one may ask oneself whether they will immediately be perceived as such by a somewhat overly hasty reader.) In the case of texts reread by the author or of translations approved by him, we have allowed ourselves to offer only some quite rare formal editorial corrections, especially regarding misprints, which were sometimes noted by Castoriadis in his working copies, some undeniably incorrect constructions, and some overly conspicuous anglicisms.

There was no question of printing *all* more or less completed political texts, whether published or previously unreleased, or, of course, all his interviews: beyond the fact that that would have swelled inordinately the size of these volumes, we did not believe that an undertaking of that sort—assuming that it would be achievable in our lifetime—would garner much interest. Certainly, as we had noted in the French Editors' Preface for *[A Society Adrift](#)* (lviii-lix): “Castoriadis, like other good minds of the past, deemed that something that is right can be said twice, three times, or even one hundred times. He barely worried, to say the least, about such repetitions or almost literal restatements; he would not have wanted to lose a minute in trying to avoid them.” And one will no doubt find here some nearly identical formulations, sometimes made years apart. Certain repetitions may be useful—Castoriadis's ideas have not become “commonplace [*banales*],” far from it. Yet it served no purpose to restate, in an interval of a few pages, what was said

off future when, we hope, these translations will continue to be read, it cannot be assumed that even some of the more obvious mentions and allusions will still be readily recognizable.

so excellently in another place. We have not hesitated, however, to retain certain texts containing ideas that have been well presented elsewhere, though in collections we could not reprint in the present edition. We hope that we have achieved a satisfactory balance in this regard.

~

We also publish a few letters that shed light on certain issues broached in this volume, independent of the personality of the interlocutor or the role he may have played in the author's life. The selection of such letters is therefore in no way representative of the nature of the available correspondence, or, doubtless, of the correspondence that will perhaps one day be brought together, for that task still awaits, with too many major pieces lacking for now. There is certainly no room here for the mistrust Castoriadis manifested toward "rough drafts" when it came to interviews or the initial version of a text: to judge by certain misprints (which we have eliminated, of course), these letters often were written hastily and barely reread. They nevertheless cast a strong light upon points whose importance is not negligible.

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Let us note, finally: some of the author's writings have been published in Web-based editions that may be described, if one is feeling conciliatory, as "militant." They can neither be condemned in principle (they have sometimes placed at readers' disposal things that otherwise could not be found) nor given outright approbation (a true editorial effort would have been preferable). Yet, everyone knows: the Web contains both the best and the worst. Let us hope that these *Political Writings* will serve at least to furnish versions suitable to unselfish pirate editors. In any case, they are intended for those who have not given up on reading, and on reflecting, while holding in one's very hands some good old paper.

Enrique Escobar, Myrto Gondicas, and Pascal Vernay

BOOKS BY CORNELIUS CASTORIADIS PUBLISHED IN ENGLISH, WITH STANDARD ABBREVIATIONS:

- ASA(RPT) *A Society Adrift: More Interviews and Discussions on The Rising Tide of Insignificancy, Including Revolutionary Perspectives Today* <http://www.notbored.org/ASA.pdf>. Translated from the French and edited anonymously as a public service. Electronic publication date: October 2010.
- CL *Crossroads in the Labyrinth*. Tr. Martin H. Ryle and Kate Soper. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press and Brighton, England: Harvester Press, 1984. 345pp.
- CL1 *Crossroads in the Labyrinth*. Vol. 1. Tr. and ed. David Ames Curtis. Translated from the French and edited anonymously as a public service. Electronic publication date: March 2022. <http://www.notbored.org/cornelius-castoriadis-crossroads-1.pdf>
- CL2 *Crossroads in the Labyrinth*. Vol. 2. *Human Domains*. Tr. and ed. David Ames Curtis. Translated from the French and edited anonymously as a public service. Electronic publication date: March 2022. <http://www.notbored.org/cornelius-castoriadis-crossroads-2-human-domains.pdf>
- CL3 *Crossroads in the Labyrinth*. Vol. 3. *World in Fragments*. Tr. and ed. David Ames Curtis. Translated from the French and edited anonymously as a public service. Electronic publication date: March 2022. <http://www.notbored.org/cornelius-castoriadis-crossroads-3-world-in-fragments.pdf>
- CL4 *Crossroads in the Labyrinth*. Vol. 4. *The Rising Tide of Insignificancy*. Tr. and ed. David Ames Curtis. Translated from the French and edited anonymously as a public service. Electronic publication date: March 2022. <http://www.notbored.org/cornelius-castoriadis-crossroads-4-rising-tide-of-insignificancy.pdf>
- CL5 *Crossroads in the Labyrinth*. Vol. 5. *Done and To Be Done*. Tr. and ed. David Ames Curtis. Translated from the French and edited anonymously as a public service. Electronic publication date: March 2022. <http://www.notbored.org/cornelius-castoriadis-crossroads-5-done-and-to-be-done.pdf>
- CL6 *Crossroads in the Labyrinth*. Vol. 6. *Figures of the Thinkable*. Tr. and ed. David Ames Curtis. Translated from the French and edited anonymously as a public service. Electronic publication date: March 2022. <http://www.notbored.org/cornelius-castoriadis-crossroads-6-figures-of-the-thinkable.pdf>
- CR *The Castoriadis Reader*. Ed. David Ames Curtis. Malden, MA and Oxford, England: Basil Blackwell, 1997. 470pp.
- DR *Democracy and Relativism: Discussion with the "MAUSS" Group*. <http://www.notbored.org/DR.pdf>. Translated from the French and edited anonymously as a public service. Electronic publication date: January 2013. 63pp.

- [FTPK](#) *Figures of the Thinkable* including *Passion and Knowledge*. <http://www.notbored.org/FTP.K.pdf> and [http://www.costis.org/x/castoriadis/Castoriadis-Figures of the Thinkable.pdf](http://www.costis.org/x/castoriadis/Castoriadis-Figures_of_the_Thinkable.pdf). Translated from the French and edited anonymously as a public service. Electronic publication date: February 2005. 428pp.
- [IIS](#) *The Imaginary Institution of Society*. Tr. Kathleen Blamey. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press and Cambridge, England: Polity Press, 1987. 418pp. Paperback edition. Cambridge, England: Polity Press, 1997. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998. N.B.: Unless otherwise indicated, pagination always refers to the 1987 English-language edition of *IIS*.
- [OPS](#) *On Plato's Statesman*. Tr. David Ames Curtis. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002. 227pp.
- [PPA](#) *Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy: Essays in Political Philosophy*. (N.B.: The subtitle is an unauthorized addition made by the publisher.) Ed. David Ames Curtis. New York: Oxford University Press, 1991. 304pp.
- [PSRTI](#) *Postscript on Insignificancy, Including More Interviews and Discussions on the Rising Tide of Insignificancy. Followed by Six Dialogues, Four Portraits, and Two Book Reviews*. <http://www.notbored.org/PSRTI.pdf>. Translated from the French and edited anonymously as a public service. Electronic publication date: March 2011. 2nd ed. August 2017.
- [PSW1](#) *Political and Social Writings*. Volume 1: 1946-1955. *From the Critique of Bureaucracy to the Positive Content of Socialism*. Tr. and ed. David Ames Curtis. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988. 348pp.
- [PSW2](#) *Political and Social Writings*. Volume 2: 1955-1960. *From the Workers' Struggle Against Bureaucracy to Revolution in the Age of Modern Capitalism*. Tr. and ed. David Ames Curtis. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988. 363pp.
- [PSW3](#) *Political and Social Writings*. Volume 3: 1961-1979. *Recommencing the Revolution: From Socialism to the Autonomous Society*. Tr. and ed. David Ames Curtis. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993. 405pp.
- [RTI\(TBS\)](#) *The Rising Tide of Insignificancy (The Big Sleep)*. <http://www.notbored.org/RTI.pdf> and http://www.costis.org/x/castoriadis/Castoriadis-rising_tide.pdf. Translated from the French and edited anonymously as a public service. Electronic publication date: December 4, 2003.
- [SouBA](#) *A Socialisme ou Barbarie Anthology: Autonomy, Critique, and Revolution in the Age of Bureaucratic Capitalism*. Translated from the French and edited anonymously as a public service, with a Translator/Editor's Introduction by David Ames Curtis. London: Eris, 2018. 488pp.
- [WIF](#) *World in Fragments: Writings on Politics, Society, Psychoanalysis, and the Imagination*. Ed. and tr. David Ames Curtis. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997. 507pp.

WoC *Window on the Chaos, Including “How I Didn’t Become a Musician.”* <http://www.notbored.org/WoC.pdf>. Translated from the French and edited anonymously as a public service. Electronic publication date: July 21, 2015.

A complete bibliography and webography of writings by and about Cornelius Castoriadis can be found at: <https://www.agorainternational.org>

BOOKS BY CORNELIUS CASTORIADIS PUBLISHED IN FRENCH, WITH STANDARD ABBREVIATIONS:

- CE *La culture de l'égoïsme*. Avec Christopher Lasch. Traduit de l'anglais par Myrto Gondicas. Postface de Jean-Claude Michéa. Flammarion, Paris, 2012. 105pp.
- CFG1 *Ce qui fait la Grèce*. Tome 1. *D'Homère à Héraclite*. Séminaires 1982-1983. *La Création humaine II*. Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2004. 355pp.
- CFG2 *Ce qui fait la Grèce*. Tome 2. *La Cité et les lois*. Séminaires 1983-1984. *La Création humaine III*. Texte établi, présenté et annoté par Enrique Escobar, Myrto Gondicas et Pascal Vernay. Précédé de "Castoriadis et l'héritage grec" par Philippe Raynaud. Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2008. 313pp.
- CFG3 *Ce qui fait la Grèce*. Tome 3. *Thucydide, la force et le droit*. Séminaires 1984-1985. *La Création humaine IV*. Texte établi, présenté et annoté par Enrique Escobar, Myrto Gondicas et Pascal Vernay. Précédé de "Le germe et le *kratos*: réflexions sur la création politique à Athènes" par Claude Moatti. Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2011. 374pp.
- CL *Les Carrefours du labyrinthe*. Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1978. 318pp. Paris: Éditions du Seuil/Points, 2017. 432pp.
- CMR1 *Capitalisme moderne et révolution*. Tome 1. *L'impérialisme et la guerre*. Paris: Union Générale d'Éditions, 1979. 443pp.
- CMR2 *Capitalisme moderne et révolution*. Tome 2. *Le mouvement révolutionnaire sous le capitalisme moderne*. Paris: Union Générale d'Éditions, 1979. 318pp.
- CS *Le Contenu du socialisme*. Paris: Union Générale d'Éditions, 1979. 441pp.
- D *Dialogue*. La Tour d'Aigues: Éditions de l'Aube, 1998. 112pp.
- DEA *De l'écologie à l'autonomie*. Avec Daniel Cohn-Bendit et le public de Louvain-la-Neuve. Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1981. 126pp. *De l'écologie à l'autonomie*. Paris: Éditions Le Bord de l'Eau, 2014. 107pp.
- DG *Devant la guerre*. Tome 1: *Les Réalités*. 1^{er} éd. Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 1981. 285pp. 2^e éd. revue et corrigée, 1982. 317pp.
- DH *Domaines de l'homme. Les carrefours du labyrinthe II*. Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1986. 460pp. Paris: Éditions du Seuil/Points, 1999. 576pp.
- DHIS Cornelius Castoriadis, Paul Ricœur. *Dialogue sur l'histoire et l'imaginaire social*. Édité par Johann Michel. Paris: Éditions de L'École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, 2016. 80pp.
- DR *Démocratie et relativisme: Débats avec le MAUSS*. Édition établie par Enrique Escobar, Myrto Gondicas et Pascal Vernay. Paris: Mille et une nuits, 2010. 142pp.
- EMOI *L'Expérience du mouvement ouvrier*. Tome 1. *Comment lutter*. Paris: Union Générale d'Éditions, 1974. 445pp.

- EMO2 *L'Expérience du mouvement ouvrier. Tome 2. Prolétariat et organisation.* Paris: Union Générale d'Éditions, 1974. 445pp.
- EP1 *Écrits politiques 1945-1997. Tome 1. La Question du mouvement ouvrier.* Tome 1. Édition préparée par Enrique Escobar, Myrto Gondicas et Pascal Vernay. Paris: Éditions du Sandre, 2012. 422pp.
- EP2 *Écrits politiques 1945-1997. Tome 2. La Question du mouvement ouvrier.* Tome 2. Édition préparée par Enrique Escobar, Myrto Gondicas et Pascal Vernay. Paris: Éditions du Sandre, 2012. 578pp.
- EP3 *Écrits politiques 1945-1997. Tome 3. Quelle démocratie?* Tome 1. Édition préparée par Enrique Escobar, Myrto Gondicas et Pascal Vernay. Paris: Éditions du Sandre, 2013. 694pp.
- EP4 *Écrits politiques 1945-1997. Tome 4. Quelle démocratie?* Tome 2. Édition préparée par Enrique Escobar, Myrto Gondicas et Pascal Vernay. Paris: Éditions du Sandre, 2013. 660pp.
- EP5 *Écrits politiques 1945-1997. Tome 5. La Société bureaucratique.* Édition préparée par Enrique Escobar, Myrto Gondicas et Pascal Vernay. Paris: Éditions du Sandre, 2015. 638pp.
- EP6 *Écrits politiques 1945-1997. Tome 6. Guerre et théories de la guerre.* Édition préparée par Enrique Escobar, Myrto Gondicas et Pascal Vernay. Paris: Éditions du Sandre, 2016. 723pp.
- EP7 *Écrits politiques 1945-1997. Tome 7. Écologie et politique, suivi de Correspondances et compléments.* Édition préparée par Enrique Escobar, Myrto Gondicas et Pascal Vernay. Paris: Éditions du Sandre, 2020. 448pp.
- EP8 *Écrits politiques 1945-1997. Tome 8. Sur la dynamique du capitalisme et autres textes, suivi de L'Impérialisme et la guerre.* Édition préparée par Enrique Escobar, Myrto Gondicas et Pascal Vernay. Paris: Éditions du Sandre, 2020. 709pp.
- FAF *Fait et à faire. Les carrefours du labyrinthe V.* Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1997. 284pp. Paris: Éditions du Seuil/Points, 2008. 352pp.
- FC *Fenêtre sur le chaos.* Édition préparée par Enrique Escobar, Myrto Gondicas et Pascal Vernay. Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2007. 179pp.
- FP *Figures du pensable. Les carrefours du labyrinthe VI.* Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1999. 308pp. Paris: Éditions du Seuil/Points, 2009. 364pp.
- HC *Histoire et création. Textes philosophiques inédits (1945-1967).* Réunis, présentés et annotés par Nicolas Poirier. Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2009. 307pp.
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- M68 Edgar Morin, Claude Lefort et Jean-Marc Coudray. *Mai 68: la brèche. Premières réflexions sur les événements.* Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 1968. 142pp.
- M68/VAA Edgar Morin, Claude Lefort et Cornelius Castoriadis. *Mai 68: la brèche suivi de Vingt Ans après.* Paris: Éditions Complexe,

1988. 212pp. Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 2008. 296pp.
- MI *La Montée de l'insignifiance. Les carrefours du labyrinthe IV.* Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1996. 245pp. Paris: Éditions du Seuil/Points, 2007. 304pp.
- MM *Le Monde morcelé. Les carrefours du labyrinthe III.* Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1990. 281pp. Paris: Éditions du Seuil/Points, 2000. 349pp.
- P-SI* *Post-Scriptum sur l'insignifiance.* Entretiens avec Daniel Mermet (novembre 1996). La Tour d'Aigues: Éditions de l'Aube, 1998. 37pp.
- P-SID* *Post-Scriptum sur l'insignifiance.* Entretiens avec Daniel Mermet suivi de *Dialogue*. La Tour d'Aigues: Éditions de l'Aube, 2007. 51pp.
- SB1 *La Société bureaucratique.* Tome 1. *Les rapports de production en Russie.* Paris: Union Générale d'Éditions, 1973. 317pp.
- SB2* *La Société bureaucratique.* Tome 2. *La révolution contre la bureaucratie.* Paris: Union Générale d'Éditions, 1973. 441pp.
- SB(n.é.)* *La Société bureaucratique* (nouvelle édition). Paris: Christian Bourgeois Éditeur, 1990. 492pp.
- SD* *Une société à la dérive. Entretiens et débats 1974-1997.* Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2005. 307pp. Paris: Éditions du Seuil/Points, 2011. 40pp.
- SF* *La Société française.* Paris: Union Générale d'Éditions, 1979. 315pp.
- S. ou B. *Socialisme ou Barbarie. Organe de Critique et d'orientation révolutionnaire.* Paris. 1949-1965.
- SouBA* *Socialisme ou Barbarie. Anthologie.* La Bussière: Acratie, 2007. 344pp.
- SPP* *Sur Le Politique de Platon.* Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1999. 199pp.
- SV* *Sujet et vérité dans le monde social-historique.* Séminaires 1986-1987. *La Création humaine, 1.* Texte établi, présenté et annoté par Enrique Escobar et Pascal Vernay. Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2002. 496pp.

A complete bibliography and webography of writings by and about Cornelius Castoriadis can be found at: <https://www.agorainternational.org>

ABBREVIATIONS FOR TEXTS WRITTEN BY CORNELIUS CASTORIADIS:

- CSI* (1955) “Sur le contenu du socialisme,” [*S. ou B.*, 17 \(July 1955\)](#). Reprinted in *CS*. “On the Content of Socialism, I.” [*PSW1*](#). Excerpts in [*CR*](#).
- CS II* (1957) “Sur le contenu du socialisme,” [*S. ou B.*, 22 \(July 1957\)](#). Reprinted in *CS*. “On the Content of Socialism, II.” Based on the translation of Maurice Brinton. Now in [*PSW2*](#). Excerpts in [*CR*](#).
- CS III* (1958) “Sur le contenu du socialisme,” [*S. ou B.*, 23 \(January 1959\)](#). Reprinted in *EMO2*. “On the Content of Socialism, III.” [*PSW2*](#).
- GI* (1973) “Introduction generale.” [*SBI*](#). Reprinted in *SB(n.é.)*. “General Introduction.” [*PSW1*](#).
- HWM* (1973) “Introduction: La Question de l’histoire du mouvement ouvrier.” *EMOI*. “The Question of the History of the Workers’ Movement.” Now in [*PSW3*](#).
- MCR I* (1960) “Le Mouvement révolutionnaire sous le capitalisme moderne,” [*S. ou B.*, 31 \(December 1960\)](#). Reprinted in *CMR2*. “Modern Capitalism and Revolution.” Part 1. Based on the translation of Maurice Brinton. Now in [*PSW2*](#).
- MCR II* (1960) “Le Mouvement révolutionnaire sous le capitalisme moderne,” [*S. ou B.*, 32 \(April 1960\)](#). Reprinted in *CMR2*. “Modern Capitalism and Revolution.” Part 2. Based on the translation of Maurice Brinton. Now in [*PSW2*](#).
- MCR III* (1960) “Le Mouvement révolutionnaire sous le capitalisme moderne,” [*S. ou B.*, 33 \(December 1960\)](#). Reprinted in *CMR2*. “Modern Capitalism and Revolution.” Part 3. Based on the translation of Maurice Brinton. Now in [*PSW2*](#).
- MRT I* (1964) “Marxisme et théorie révolutionnaire,” [*S. ou B.*, 36 \(April 1964\)](#). Reprinted in *IIS* (FR). “Marxism and Revolutionary Theory.” Now in the first part of [*IIS* \(EN\)](#). Excerpts in [*CR*](#).
- MRT II* (1964) “Marxisme et théorie révolutionnaire,” [*S. ou B.*, 37 \(July 1964\)](#). Reprinted in *IIS* (FR). “Marxism and Revolutionary Theory.” Now in the second part of [*IIS* \(EN\)](#).
- MRT III* (1964) “Marxisme et théorie révolutionnaire,” [*S. ou B.*, 38 \(October 1964\)](#). Reprinted in *IIS* (FR). “Marxism and Revolutionary Theory.” Now in the third part of [*IIS* \(EN\)](#). Excerpts in [*CR*](#).

- MRT IV* (1965) “Marxisme et théorie révolutionnaire,” [*S. ou B.*, 39 \(March 1965\)](#). Reprinted in *IIS* (FR). “Marxism and Revolutionary Theory.” Now in the fourth part of [*IIS* \(EN\)](#). Excerpts in [*CR*](#).
- MRT V* (1965) “Marxisme et théorie révolutionnaire,” [*S. ou B.*, 40 \(June 1965\)](#). Reprinted in *IIS* (FR). “Marxism and Revolutionary Theory.” Now in the fifth part of [*IIS* \(EN\)](#).
- PO I* (1959) “Proletariat et organisation,” [*S. ou B.*, 27 \(April 1959\)](#). Reprinted in *EMO2*. “Proletariat and Organization, I.” Based on the translation of Maurice Brinton. Now in [*PSW2*](#).
- PO II* (1959) “Proletariat et organisation (suite et fin).” [*S. ou B.*, 28 \(July 1959\)](#). Reprinted in *EMO2*.
- RBI* (1964) “Le Rôle de l’idéologie bolchevique dans la naissance de la bureaucratie,” [*S. ou B.*, 35 \(January 1964\)](#). Reprinted in *EMO2*. “The Role of Bolshevik Ideology in the Birth of the Bureaucracy.” Based on the translation of Maurice Brinton. Now in [*PSW3*](#).

French Editors' Introduction: Castoriadis, Political Writer (I)*

In the oldest industrialized countries—and even worldwide—never has this system suitably called *capitalist* seemed more dilapidated and never, since its origins, has it seemed more incontestable. This society, which even its apologists say has been on the verge of collapse for a few years, is said at the same time to be irreplaceable, and those who sometimes take over public squares to denounce it generally limit themselves to criticizing its *excesses*. If they are envisioning another type of organization for social life, on this question vagueness rules. Absolute rejection—at least in words—of this system seems to be confined to a few marginal sectors that quite often are, without saying it too loudly, nostalgic for societies that supposedly were, to various degrees, “socialist”—without saying it too loudly since those societies have, for very good reasons, been lastingly discredited. One might therefore think that a kind of political thinking that states in the clearest terms that another type of society is necessary and *possible* while trying to draw the lessons from the experience and the failure of systems that in the twentieth century seemed, be it only in words, opposed to “private” capitalism, should elicit amazement or curiosity, nay, should even be widely discussed. Nothing of that sort has happened. Even among those who know the philosopher Cornelius Castoriadis, very few—beyond a small circle of the faithful—are aware of the breadth and significance of a *political oeuvre*, one spanning several thousands of pages and worked out over more than a half century, wherein a few of the essential problems of the society in which we live are broached. The remarks that follow thus are intended, not for those familiar with his oeuvre, but for those for whom a reading of these thousands of pages (or, what boils down almost to the same thing, a rereading after many years) will be a discovery.

*[EPI](#), 15-50.

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First, a few clarifications on the nature of the texts the reader is going to have before her eyes.

It was never an easy task, for all those who one day or another have had to present his oeuvre, to define who Castoriadis was in one or two words, even if they had the best of intentions. Economist, philosopher, psychoanalyst, he was all of these, certainly, but the texts brought together here have but a very indirect relation to what is ordinarily produced by the practitioners of those three disciplines. He was not a “political analyst [*politologue*],” or a “sociologist,” or, above all, a “Sovietologist,” of course (though referred to as such by some embarrassed journalists). Whatever the degree of technicality of certain analyses or the nature of the references employed, we are not dealing here with some “scholarly” texts. These texts presuppose, indeed, a particular type of connection with a certain *public*—roughly, workers and intellectuals interested in society’s transformation—which is not that of “colleagues,” of “peers” among whom one is admitted after having followed a canonical path qualifying one as legitimate within a certain milieu. Yet these are not, far from it, texts of what could be labeled, as one used to say, “agitation and propaganda”: they presuppose, too, at least in the initial period, a particular type of relation to a certain form of *theory* (“critique and revolutionary orientation,” of which *Socialisme ou Barbarie* wished to be an organ).

In our day, it goes without saying that there are some more or less cultivated journalists and then some practitioners of various disciplines who are recognized as such. That is about all. Castoriadis wished to be something else. We no longer have an immediately intelligible word to designate those who reflect on society and who want, outside of this or that established framework, to influence it in more or less direct fashion. The French word *publiciste* is no longer understood in that meaning of the word [i.e., a journalist/essayist writing for the public]; *intellectual* just brings a smile to one’s face ever since some mountebanks tried to grab hold of it. That, however, is quite precisely what, among many others, the authors of *The Prince*, the *Second Treatise of Government*, or the *Communist Manifesto* were

doing. In these works, we now no longer see anything but “classics” of certain disciplines (political philosophy or political sociology, etc.), or rather of their prehistory, since these works are said to have achieved in our day a mysterious maturity. Yet one generally forgets that while such works have earned their authors entry into treatises about those disciplines, this is, so to speak, for lack of something better: they would have much preferred to have won other battles—precisely those battles that drove them to put pen to paper. *Political writer* is no doubt the most accurate term for these kinds of authors, for part of their oeuvre at least, and it is also the one that best fits the Castoriadis one will read here.¹

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A few words now about style and tone. To be found in the initial texts is a sometimes quarrelsome temperament and even some invectives that today may vex or annoy. These are the legacy of a polemical tradition to which the masters of the very young Castoriadis—Marx and Lenin—belonged. This tradition is what it is, and sometimes one says to oneself, just as when one read certain Surrealists, that he could have gotten along without all that. (It remains the case there are not one hundred ways of saying “Mr. X is an imbecile or a scoundrel” when one is dealing with an imbecile or a scoundrel.) Also to be found in his work—and this until the very end—are some

¹This is also to say that it would be absurd to judge him by applying to him criteria that govern the production of works in some university department pertaining to this or that “social science.” For someone like [\[Pierre\] Bourdieu](#), for example, it went without saying that what Castoriadis was saying bore no “scientific” status. It also may be thought that Castoriadis unveils aspects of social reality that do not appear at all, or not with the same clarity, in some other authors’ works and, in particular, in Bourdieu’s. For the Poles to whom Bourdieu gave assistance in December 1981—which is entirely to his credit—[Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste](#) could have at the very most, given the size of the book, served as a projectile. To claim that they could have found therein some genuine weapons for combating those who opposed them would just be a sick joke. The dissidents of the Eastern-bloc countries were, moreover, never mistaken about that.

formulations, too brutal or baffling for the highly cultivated reader, that are reminiscent of the arguments of So-and-So, of the objections of somebody else, of the checkered history of the problem at hand and even of its distant origins. In general (beyond fits of temper or witticisms), it is fitting to read them as if they were preceded by the following: "I know that one could advance against what I am saying the apparently solid objections of *x*, the subtle reservations of *z*, about which one should, in my opinion, think this or that," and so on; "*but*, when it comes right down to it, it is still this formulation that, as brutal as it might seem to some, removes us the least far from the truth." (We have already discussed our point of view on this matter in the "Postface" to *Sujet et vérité*.)²

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Finally, there is the content of some of the texts that figure in these first two volumes. "Proletariat," "party," "Russian question," "socialist program" (not to forget the terminology—those "class" reactions, those "bourgeois" theoreticians, those "petty-bourgeois illusions"—one finds in the initial texts)—all that, at first sight, does indeed seem to come from another century, and it will be asked whether the republication of certain things is justified, whether they can be of interest beyond a limited (and aging) circle of connoisseurs of Marx or of the quarrels that formerly stirred up the revolutionary Marxist movement. In short: whether or not they are of concern to a great many people. Let us recall, first, that there are few words in the Western political vocabulary that are not worn out, that have not become hackneyed, and around which one would systematically have to place quotation marks or for which one would not have to follow up immediately with a definition—unless one gives up on them, though that would mean having to invent other ones. Moreover, certain ones we cannot get along without ("democracy"—whether true or false—"people," and, above

²In 2002, with Pascal Vernay (*SV*, 475-88).

all, “socialism”) are not exceptions to the rule. We would like to try here to share with the reader our conviction:³ Whatever distance a certain vocabulary might introduce, whatever the criticisms that might be brought to bear about certain parts, and whatever might have been the transformations of Western societies [since the Éditions 10/18 eight-volume series of reprints ended publication in 1979], the texts published in the present volumes (drafted for the most part between 1947 and 1961; the last one, therefore, more than 50 years [before the first Éditions du Sandre volume of 2012]) contain analyses and critiques about some fundamental aspects of modern societies—the nature and organization of *labor*, the crisis of *political life* and of all spheres of life in society—that concern what millions of individuals are living through today. Besides, no one doubts that these writings by Castoriadis are “dated”; that is the case with any political writings that are one day worth being reread.

The drafting of these writings by Castoriadis stretches over a period of more than half a century. The first ones were published right after one of the most deadly wars in history, when systems that at first sight seemed irreconcilable were facing off against each other; the last ones, at a moment when the so-called liberal [*liberal*, in the Continental sense of “free-market” ideology] form of the capitalist system seemed to reign uncontested within a “globalized” world. The author was witness to a transition: from societies that were founded upon what Marx called “the revolutionary base” of modern industry (and which had succeeded, thanks to that base, in imposing themselves upon the rest of the world)—societies

³It is no doubt honest to point out here to the reader that the author of these lines is in no way, as it happens, an “impartial” observer. A former member of the Socialisme ou Barbarie group during its final years, he was, after the group ended (in 1967), closely associated with Castoriadis’s effort to republish the latter’s writings in the Éditions 10/18 series and then contributed in various ways to making his oeuvre known.

that were deeply divided but seemed to have created the material conditions for their own self-surpassing [*leur propre dépassement*], and in particular a working class that was always increasing in numbers and ever more conscious of a historical role to play (Marx: “disciplined, united, organized by the very mechanism of the process of capitalist production itself”⁴)—to a world in which the relative importance of nations and continents has changed, becoming in appearance increasingly multipolar but in a sense more unified than ever, in which the working class nowhere asserts itself as a conscious actor of social life, and in which the very idea of a possible overcoming [*un possible dépassement*] seems to have disappeared (despite a few stirrings these very last few years), as have disappeared, in practice, the idea of a conscious reorganization of society. In the world of his youth, Marxism had appeared to Castoriadis as an effort to connect political activity in present-day society to an analysis and critique of that society and of its dynamic, in order to spot its contradictions and to identify the social forces that would be capable of going beyond [*dépasser*] them—in order to ground, for the first time in history, a rational political project. Such were at least the pretensions of Marxism. That the young Castoriadis might have found therein his point of departure should not be surprising, save for those for whom all collective action aimed at transforming society could not but be ineffective or harmful.

“How could one have been Marxist?”, some ask today with a quite relative—and, generally, wholly feigned—naivete. “The encounter with Marxism was inevitable,” Castoriadis nevertheless wrote in 1972,⁵ whereas he had totally broken with Marx almost ten years earlier. Here, the falsely naive pout. What is this *inevitable*? Were there some

⁴T/E: From [Chapter 32 in Volume 1 of *Capital*](#).

⁵T/E: Escobar may be thinking of the first sentence of “Marxism and Revolutionary Theory” ([S. ou B., 36 \[April-June 1964\]](#), reprinted in [IIS, 9](#)), written by Castoriadis as he was breaking with Marxism: “For anyone who is preoccupied with the question of society, the encounter with Marxism is immediate and inevitable.”

things that were not known by the end of the Thirties and that could have been learned only in the early Sixties? This is to forget what should nevertheless go without saying, that there is no necessary sedimentation of generational experience and that each generation sometimes has to go about exploring and discovering at its own expense, stumbling and groping about in the dark where others had already found a way out. It is to forget, especially, what were the horizon and memories of a young man who arrived at age 23 in Paris in December 1945. He was coming from a country, Greece, that had undergone one of the most terrible occupations Europe had known.⁶ He was born right after a horrifying war that led inexorably to the one that came twenty years later. His childhood and his adolescence passed beneath the shadow of catastrophes past and to come. Should one really be surprised to see an adolescent join a movement and subscribe to an interpretation of history that seemed to bear in them the promise—let us leave aside the question of whether there ever was the slightest chance that these promises might be kept—of an end to the cycle of catastrophes.

A very young Greek Marxist (the “[Pierre] Chaulieu” who wrote in 1948 the Editorial “Socialism or Barbarism” at age 26), having passed through Trotskyism, tried to reflect on the contemporary world and to act within the framework of Marxism, then endeavored between 1953 and 1964—a relatively long phase of maturation—to reconcile the irreconcilable, and then broke definitively with Marxism in the 1964-1965 texts published in the [S. ou B. review](#) and reprinted as the first part of [his main work \(1975\)](#), while holding all along to the idea of a necessary, thoroughgoing transformation of society. He did that because he came to think that, at bottom, Marx and, with him, the movement to which Marx had given birth partook of the spirit of this society they claimed to be fighting; because they remained prisoners, he would say a few years later in his own language, of the central *imaginary significations* of capitalism; because this society is in its

⁶One may consult Mark Mazower's *Inside Hitler's Greece: The Experience of Occupation, 1941-44* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993).

essence characterized by the unlimited expansion of a (pseudo) rational (pseudo) mastery, a false mastery and a false rationality that lead humanity into an impasse; and because, beneath various masks and whether one is claiming to defend the “market” or the “plan,” the same logic is at work. This path is all the more interesting as, after the cracks that seem to be heralding the end of thirty years of “neoliberalism,” certain “Marxists” (here the quotation marks are imperative, for reasons we will try to explain elsewhere) feel exhilarated. In the Introduction to the *What Democracy?* volume of the present edition, we broach the question of whether the expression *a return to Marx* (that old chestnut again popping up in magazines’ special supplements) makes the least sense.

To do full justice to certain analyses, one would have to do something that the youngest readers would have a hard time doing and that would take up too much space here, viz., compare them to a thousand other things produced during this past decade. One would then easily see what Castoriadis’s genuine place is. Whatever may be the leftover dross, the inadequacies, or the excesses (and there are some), the considerations of this young militant, philosopher, and economist, who at age thirty had tried to understand the crisis of the society in which he lived and to formulate the elements of a response, are today much more pertinent and stimulating than the immense majority of the “actors” or “observers” of this day and age. One sometimes hesitates to write, even when this is indisputable, that this or that formulation offered by Castoriadis from those years is wholly outdated [*dépassée*] (and overtaken [*dépassée*], in part, by Castoriadis himself) because, in rereading these texts, it is easy to see that many of the actors of French political and intellectual life, *in 2012* [the year this Introduction was drafted], fall *far short* of other formulations, and on questions that are not just details.

How is one to explain that certain formulations, analyses, or observations would have been so poorly received at the time (their later fate is another matter), that their *novelty* would not have been perceived by readers, even the most curious and best-intentioned ones? What explains in part, without fully justifying it, such indifference, or some people’s discomfort, is the contrast between the apparent archaism of

the form (of texts published by a group coming out of the Trotskyist Far Left, whose initial project was tied to a particular historical situation, that of the postwar period, and whose language bore all too visibly the traces of this point of departure) and the novelty or the modernity (which the author himself for a time did not fully acknowledge) of the ideas. Such archaism is also due in part to a concern for consistency, which sometimes made him go “less fast” than others—who, for their part, went faster because they were lighter, because their concern for rigor was lesser, because they did not worry overly much about the concord between their ideas and their acts.... And let us not forget the fragmentary character (in the form and sometimes in the substance) of how things were worked out, numerous texts being, as the reader will glimpse straight off, responses to events—which does not only have advantages, even when the event in question is a major one. And yet, ultimately, this is tied, of course, to how established society evolves and how it weighs one down, to what that society at a given moment allows most observers to see and not see. Some things quite simply could not be heard and still surely cannot be heard. It will perhaps not always be so, and the present edition would like to contribute to that.

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It is difficult to retrace more clearly than the author a path he himself has recalled on several occasions: in the 1972 General Introduction [in [PSW1](#)] (to be reprinted in the *What Democracy?* volume of our edition), in the 1974 interview [retranslated as “‘The Only Way to Find Out If You Can Swim Is to Get into the Water’: An Introductory Interview” in [CR](#)], in “Done and To Be Done” (1989) [translated in [CR](#) and reprinted in [CL5](#)], and, finally, the 1993 interview “The Rising Tide of Insignificance” [now in [CL4](#)].⁷ We refer the

⁷Let us add “The Question of the History of the Workers’ Movement,” pp. 197-98 of new translation in [PSW3](#) (to be reprinted in the *What Democracy?* volume of our edition). [T/E: One may also consult his “detour by way of my personal history” in “The Logic of Magmas and the

reader once and for all to these extremely concise presentations.⁸ Nevertheless, while trying to avoid as much as possible all paraphrases and laborious reformulations, we would like to give the reader a general overview of the articles brought together in the present volumes, adding thereto a few further details likely to shed some light on their context and meaning.

Apart from discussions on the political positions, as remote as possible, of Jean-Paul Sartre and Anton Pannekoek—the texts gathered together in Part One deal with the workers' struggles that developed in several Western countries (France, England, the United States) beginning in 1953. This date is important. For, these struggles that eluded in part the confrontation between the two Blocs (along with some other factors tied to his own intellectual evolution, particularly as concerns Marxist economics and the theory of imperialism) helped Castoriadis to no longer lock his reflections into the perspective of an inevitable world conflict.

Question of Autonomy," now in *CL2*, and the 1990 Agora International Interview: <http://www.agorainternational.org/enccaiint.pdf>.]

⁸Let us recall, too, that several works, of varying levels of merit, have appeared over the past years that provide introductions to Castoriadis's political thought and that may interest the reader: Gérard David, *Cornelius Castoriadis: le projet d'autonomie* (Paris: Michalon, 2000); Jean-Louis Prat, *Introduction à Castoriadis* (Paris: La Découverte, 2007); Philippe Caumières, *Castoriadis: le projet d'autonomie* (Paris: Michalon, 2007); Nicolas Poirier, *L'Ontologie politique de Castoriadis: création et institution* (Paris: Payot, 2011); Arnaud Tomès et Philippe Caumières, *Cornelius Castoriadis: Réinventer la politique après Marx* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2011). One will also find some information, as well as some sometimes debatable interpretations, in a number of dissertations devoted to S. ou B. and to Castoriadis: Alan Binstock (University of Wisconsin, 1971), Philippe Gottraux (Lausanne, 1995) [published as "*Socialisme ou Barbarie*": *Un engagement politique et intellectuel dans la France de l'après-guerre* (Lausanne: Éditions Payot Lausanne, 1997)], Stephen Hastings-King (Cornell University, 1999) [published as *Looking for the Proletariat: Socialisme ou Barbarie and the Problem of Worker Writing* by Brill in 2014 and in paperback by Haymarket in 2015], and [Marie-France Raflin \(Paris, Institut d'Études Politiques, 2005\)](#). The space granted there to texts published in this first volume varies greatly.

In his polemic with Sartre, he wrote the following, which permitted him to recall that the “socialism or barbarism” alternative was not, for him, purely rhetorical: “Is it inevitable that this experience⁹ will end up moving in a positive direction, going beyond the present situation and toward revolution? Certainly not. The inevitable has no place in history.” Yet what is certain is that all these texts were written by someone who believed that the experience would end up, and in a not too remote period of time, moving “in a positive direction.” Besides its interest as a critique of Sartre’s political positions, which remains quite vivid because the imitators of Sartre—the intellectual fascinated by a power he wants to believe is “progressive”—are legion, this text perfectly summarizes his position on the following two facts that lie at the origin of his reflections: that the Russian Revolution of 1917 culminated in the reconstitution of an oppressive and exploitative society (this aspect is treated in the articles gathered together in the *Bureaucratic Society* volume of our edition) and that the organizations the working class had created to liberate itself had become cogs of the system. (Those who believe, in this beginning of the twenty-first century, that these two questions are of no interest but historical are quite naive.) To the question, “If the Russian Revolution could degenerate, how is one to believe that it will be different for a future revolution?”, Castoriadis’s answer was, at the time: Because the proletariat has had, as a matter of fact, an experience of the bureaucracy as a *reality*. Without being “wrong,” that response today seems insufficient, for it may be thought—as Castoriadis would admit years later—that this experience itself “guarantees” nothing and that, truly speaking, the sole lesson that for the moment the working class—and with it, the other strata of society—seems to have drawn therefrom is that of the uselessness of every effort at emancipation.

Is it nonetheless necessary—for, some will find all this quite remote, to the point of being unreal—to insist on the fact that this *presence*, this image of the working-class

⁹T/E: He is speaking here of the working class’s experience of Stalinism.

condition and of workers' struggle, such as they are described in these texts, is neither constructed nor extrapolated by Castoriadis for purposes of the demonstration? What is said here is not only reinforced by numerous firsthand testimony gathered in the review—that of Paul Romano, Daniel Mothé, and Georges Vivier¹⁰—but could easily be corroborated (issues of interpretation put aside) by a whole, more specifically sociological literature on life in the factory at the time.¹¹ As for the articles on the “French Situation” (Part Two), which are inseparable in certain respects from those on workers' struggles, they have hardly lost any of their interest, even though the political life of the Fourth Republic may seem almost as remote as that of the Third (consider, for example, the role the peasantry or some grocers' association still played in the 1950s). They might perhaps better have been reprinted by the author in a set of texts wherein the nature of the French *society* of those years might have been broached in more systematic fashion, and then this 1979 collection of articles would have better merited the title Castoriadis gave to it. Yet one may as well be satisfied with what was done: such as they are, these articles are teeming with absorbing insights on the period.

The debates that seem the most remote from what preoccupies people today are undoubtedly those that concern

¹⁰One will find references to the texts by Romano, Mothé, and Vivier in several of the author's articles reprinted in this volume. In 1985, Acratie (La Bussière, France) published “*Socialisme ou Barbarie*.” *Anthologie: Grèves ouvrières en France, 1953-1957*; in 2007, Acratie came out with “*Socialisme ou Barbarie*”: *Anthologie* [now translated as [A Socialisme ou Barbarie Anthology: Autonomy, Critique, and Revolution in the Age of Bureaucratic Capitalism](#) (London, Eris, 2018)], where some of these texts are again reprinted. The London Solidarity group, moreover, published in the 1960s and 1970s numerous brochures that describe those struggles.

¹¹Besides the works of [Elton Mayo](#) and [James A.C. Brown](#) cited by the author, see, for example, Alvin W. Gouldner's 1954 work, [Wildcat Strike: A Study in Worker-Management Relationships](#) (New York: Harper & Row, 1965); William F. Whyte *et al.*, *Money and Motivation: An Analysis of Incentives in Industry* (New York: Harper & Row, 1955), with contributions by Donald Roy, who was quoted by the author in *CS III* [in [PSW2](#)].

the organizational question (organization of workers' struggles, organization of revolutionaries), as reproduced here in the Appendixes to this first volume. For, some will say to themselves that the conception of the Leninist party, for example, is correct or erroneous, admirable or execrable, but that that is of no consequence since it is nowadays present only in the minds of a very limited number of people. We shall try to show below that this is a somewhat shortsighted view: behind the traditional conceptions of the party, in particular Leninist ones, there is a much more deeply rooted idea of what political action is than one thinks, and consequently the critique thereof remains relevant, even if the terms in which that critique was conducted between 1947 and 1952 by Castoriadis are of course outdated.¹²

Among the texts grouped together in the Appendixes, there is one from 1948 (though unpublished until the author included it in *SBI* in 1973), "Phenomenology of Proletarian Consciousness," that merits special commentary.¹³ It involves a curious reformulation, in a Hegelian-Marxist language, of what was first and foremost for the young Castoriadis an analysis that issued from a concrete experience: the brutal discovery, as early as his first years of political activity in Greece, of the reality of the Stalinist bureaucracy. The author was determined to publish it because it gave a good idea of a moment in his reflections, but this phenomenology—sometimes ingenious in its details, but whose drafting often bears too obvious traces of two years of work on the critique of Hegel's *Logic*¹⁴—does not truly "ground" his political analyses: we have here, rather, a sort of philosophical "duplicate," of which, it may be thought, those analyses have after all no need. Despite a few felicitous formulations that

¹²The author was to resume this critique in *PO I* (1958), *RBI* (1964), and *HWM* (1973).

¹³See also what Castoriadis himself says about it in *PSW3*, 197-98.

¹⁴See the remarks from 1946-1948 on the critique of Hegelian logic in Castoriadis's *Histoire et création: Textes philosophiques inédits (1945-1967)*, ed. Nicolas Poirier (Paris: Seuil, 2009), pp. 51-76.

make this text interesting, it remains the case that its key idea is that there finally is a moment when “all the data of the problem and even its solution are there, explicitly posed”—and that this moment is the one we are living. Now, it is obvious that the “solution” was not forthcoming. Castoriadis nevertheless believed until the end of the 1950s, as we have seen, that the workers were going to undergo the experience of bureaucracy, that that would allow them to respond to the forms their organization and their power had taken on, and that this experience was, in a sense, “historically necessary.”

One was no doubt wrong to make fun, be it only in a friendly fashion, of “to be continueds” lacking an apparent follow-up for this or that article published by Castoriadis in the *S. ou B.* review—in particular, when it comes to certain texts written between 1957 and 1965.¹⁵ For, there is little doubt that, in a sense (and Castoriadis explicitly indicated this in 1974 in one of the notes to the republication of one of those texts), the articles included in *The Question of the Workers' Movement I*, and in particular in “On the Content of Socialism” (1955-1957), “Proletariat and Organization” (1958), and “Modern Capitalism and Revolution” (1959)—as well as, later, certain parts of “Marxism and Revolutionary Theory”—are but installments of one and the same unendingly reworked overall text, even though the angle of attack sometimes dictated by circumstances (programmatic question, organizational question, etc.) might vary and while events brought about corrections, deepened investigations, or reorientations. A few remarks, now, about these three major parts.

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We provide in the body of the text, within the presentation of the corresponding Part, some information about the

¹⁵In what follows, we sometimes give, when it seems pertinent, the dates when certain texts were drafted (as Castoriadis himself gives them elsewhere) and not the dates of publication.

nature of the diverse set of articles titled “On the Content of Socialism” and in particular about *CS I* (1955). *CS II* (1957) merits a more detailed commentary.¹⁶ While that text presents itself as “the theoretical formulation of the experience of a century of working-class struggles” and while it is also said there that the revision of the traditional ideas on the nature of capitalism—“many of which have reached us (with or without distortion) from Marx himself”—to which the analysis leads “did not of course start today” since “various strands of the revolutionary movement—and a number of individual revolutionaries—have contributed to it over time,” we are dealing here with one of the most original and innovative texts the author published in the review. No doubt, Castoriadis did not underestimate this novelty (the need for a “radical revision” is stated on the very first page), but probably neither the group nor Castoriadis himself gauged all the consequences thereof, concerned as they were at the time with emphasizing all the points of continuity, rather than the points of rupture, with a certain Marxist tradition. In particular, one finds in this text, in a fragmentary way, some key elements of an Economics textbook, of a general presentation of his positions in this domain that Castoriadis would have liked to write, but, for various reasons, was never able to write: the impossibility of rigorously imputing the product to various “factors” or “units” of production and, therefore, of providing any basis whatsoever for income and wage differentials; the potential for a “socialist” society to instaurate a genuine market grounded on consumer sovereignty.¹⁷ The main idea here is that of the possibility of democratically deciding the overall distribution of a society’s resources between consumption and investment and between public consumption and private consumption, with the help of a “technical” setup (the “plan

¹⁶Here and there, I take up again some passages from my presentation of *CS II* in the above-mentioned [Anthology](#).

¹⁷We will print the main published economics texts and a certain number of unpublished ones in the *On the Dynamic of Capitalism* volume of the present edition.

factory”) subject to the political control of the collectivity, itself organized through forms (“councils”) that allow for effective self-government, including at the level of production units. These ideas—which, moreover, Castoriadis maintained until the very end of his life—are obviously in total conflict with the basic orientation of contemporary society, but also with entire sections not only of “Marxist” ideology but, ultimately, of the work of Marx himself. That is clearly apparent in this critique in particular, which goes to the heart of the Marxist system of interpretation: “Marx shows” in *Capital* that capitalism is “despotism in the workshop and anarchy in society”—instead of seeing it as *both* despotism *and* anarchy in *both* workshop *and* society.” All that could not help but give rise to reservations or resistances, which would finally end, among the members of the group who were most attached to the Marxist tradition, in a break.

In *CS II*, the “predominant role of the working class”¹⁸ signifies that the *business enterprise* is not uniquely a unit [*unité*] of production but the basic social cell of the new society: “The normal form of working-class representation in the present age undoubtedly is the workers’ council.” It is obvious that, in a society where the working class is no longer in the majority, “considerations of geographical proximity” or other such considerations treated in the text would play a much more important role and that in no way does the extraordinary degree of political activity on the part of the population in such a society go without saying—though Castoriadis continued to believe, until the very end, that the Council “form” (the assembly of elected representatives, able to be recalled at any moment, giving an account of their activities before their constituents, and combining the functions of deliberation, decision-making, and execution) was the sole conceivable instrument for the self-governance of society. The text’s main idea (“socialism is autonomy, people’s conscious direction of their own lives”) seems to be more remote than ever from being achieved. This does not mean, for all that, that it would be absurd. In the introduction

¹⁸T/E: We do not find this exact expression in *CS II*.

to *What Democracy?*, we return to the question of direct democracy today.

The privilege granted the industrial proletariat in *CS II* should not, however, be surprising: Castoriadis's texts from the 1950s are one of the most vigorous and rigorous presentations ever given in the twentieth century of the idea of *proletarian revolution*—and in them one can see with the greatest clarity its difficulties. This privilege becomes most flagrantly manifest when the author writes:

The dictatorship of the proletariat means the incontrovertible *fact* that the initiative for and the direction of the socialist revolution and subsequent transformation of society can only belong to the *proletariat in the factories*. Therefore it means that the point of departure and the center of socialist power will quite literally be the *workers' councils*.

This statement is tempered immediately by one about necessarily associating other strata of the population with this leadership [*direction*]*—*while maintaining the idea that there might be circumstances that would justify “*unequal participation of the various strata of society in the central power.*” There is nonetheless something like a wavering in this affirmation (we shall return thereto below) which shows that, while the idea of a primacy of the proletariat is hard to abandon, the consequences he draws therefrom do not seem entirely satisfactory to the author himself. For, when it is said, for example, that these “social cells,” the primary units of the social life of the individual in such a society, are the business enterprises of “industry, transportation, commerce, banking, insurance, and public administration,” it is immediately understood that when it comes to “workers’ management,” this term is above all not to be interpreted in too “strict” a sense.

One can of course hold the view, let us repeat, that the reduction in the relative importance of the business enterprise in social life, just like the transformation of the social structure itself over the last few decades, as well as the degree of participation of citizens in public affairs and the

transformation of the attitudes such participation requires, in a society like the one Castoriadis has in mind, render the solutions then being proposed by him difficult to implement under present circumstances—and some will say: *impossible*. Must one for all that defend as such representative democracy (and those “horse-and-buggy terms of parliamentary political machinery”)? Is one not allowed to note that representative democracy no longer functions, that the citizens are turning away from it, and that it is certainly not up to the task of responding to the daunting problems our societies will have to confront in the near future? Today, many are the intellectuals, journalists, and journalist-intellectuals for whom the critique of representative democracy, if conducted thoroughly, leaves no other outcome but violence—and it is known that violence benefits only the strong—or who think that a breaching of the “legality” of the moment by popular movements—a “legality” the established powers never hesitate to violate when it suits them—quite simply opens the way to fascism. In this regard, some do not stint in offering themselves any easy way out.

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Here, let us make a remark about a point that is not minor, even if it is broached only in passing in *CS II*. This concerns what one might call the *quarrel over transparency*. It is understood that one of the characteristics of totalitarianism is to reduce as much as possible the domain in which individuals' acts elude the view of those in power. Some particularly unscrupulous hack writers have drawn from this fact the following strange conclusion: All willingness (on the part of judges, for example) to reduce the opacity indispensable for certain “good deals” (those, in particular, of the owners of the newspapers in which our hacks write) would be an unequivocal sign of a will to totalitarian transparency. Transparency therefore gets bad press. Now, Castoriadis wrote, in *CS II*: “Socialism implies that the *organization* of a society will have become transparent to its members.” What would they like to write, those who would find fault with this

sentence? Maybe: “Democracy”—let’s say that we’re dealing here with democrats—“entails the opacity of the *organization* of society for the members of society”?¹⁹ Castoriadis later returned, with the necessary sharpness, to the question of “transparency” in the section titled “‘Communism’ in its Mythical Sense” from *MRT IV* (1965), in the first part of *IIS*, recalling in particular that society could never be totally transparent to itself, be it only because society is made of individuals who have an *Unconscious*.

Yet what might be archaic and outstripped [*dépassé*] (by history and by the author himself) in *CS II* should not, as we have said, make one overlook the extreme novelty of certain parts. Even those who know this text may be surprised, when rereading it, by the incredible *advance* Castoriadis has in certain areas over most of the intellectuals who gave their opinions on the state of society during those same years. This is the case for the critique of the alleged rationality of the capitalist organization of labor and of the corresponding technology, for the critique, too, of the idea of a “neutral” technics that could be used as such for other ends, since capitalist technology, he says, is only a *choice* carried out within a “spectrum” of possible technical solutions, and, finally, for the critique of the basic “productivism” common to the system’s apologists and to Marxists:

All such ideologists (whether “Marxist” or bourgeois) accept as self-evident that the ideal economy is one that allows the most rapid possible expansion of the productive forces and, as a corollary, the greatest possible reduction of the working day. This idea, considered in absolute terms, is absolutely absurd. It epitomizes the whole mentality, psychology, logic, and metaphysics of capitalism, its reality as well as its schizophrenia.

It is understandable that, while he could not but rejoice to see certain things being said by others after 1968, Castoriadis

¹⁹See, in Castoriadis’s 1984 seminars, *CFG3*, 28-30, 53-56.

would not have been especially dazzled by them and might even have regretted having been so little read, since those things seemed so new....

It will easily be noted that *CS III* is not, in the main, a “sequel” to the previous text. Discussed here are the relations between the contradictions of the organization of the capitalist business enterprise and working-class forms of organization, consciousness, and struggle. To borrow the term he himself will use in 1973 (*PSW3*, 188, 197), the idea of a relative “circularity” between the project of another society and the interpretation of present-day society—an idea already announced in his polemic against Sartre—is expounded here straight off: what, according to the author, allows one to escape making “fragmentary observations” and employing “empirical sociology,” as well as to “organize all perspectives and to see everything again with new eyes,” is “an explicit notion of the content of socialism” (the one Castoriadis defined in *CS II*). And there definitely is no critique, nor even any possible analysis of the crisis of capitalism outside the prospect of *another* society: “Every critique presupposes that something other than what it criticizes is possible and preferable.” Conversely, this positive content of socialism “can be derived only from the real history, from the real life of the class that is tending toward its realization”; it is “the historical product of preceding developments, and in the very first place, of the activity, the struggles, and the mode of living of the proletariat in modern society.” After having criticized once again, in Marxism, an abstract concept of the proletariat to which the abstract concept of socialism as nationalization plus planning corresponds, Castoriadis therefore looks into the concrete reality of elementary groups within the business enterprise, which “tend to merge in a *class*, the class of executants, defined by a community of situation, function, interests, attitude, mentality.”

The key aspect of the text is its study of the opposition between the formal organization and informal organization of the business enterprise, its *dual reality*:

The formal organization, therefore, is not a facade; in its reality it coincides with the managerial stratum.

The informal organization is not an excrescence appearing in the interstices of the formal organization; it tends to represent a different mode of operation of the enterprise, centered around the real situation of the executives. The direction, the dynamic, and the outlook of the two organizations are entirely opposite—and opposed on a social terrain that ultimately coincides with that of the struggle between directors and executives.

More than fifty years later, the reader can not unreasonably say to herself that one has not seen a genuine dynamic of the executives' struggle develop, nor has a new perspective asserted itself. Can one for all that assert, *mutatis mutandis*, that this opposition is not to be found in most organizations that frame the collective life of individuals *today*? It remains equally true (this is another deep idea to be found in the text, an idea that is as incomprehensible for the system's apologists as for its Marxist critics) that people's dissatisfaction in their labor has, since the beginnings of capitalism, provoked more wastage and lost revenue for society as a whole than all conceivable "macroeconomic" disequilibria. (Perhaps one day some economists will be found who finally will look seriously into the problem and who will think that they are discovering something.) As it remains true that no more today than yesterday can the system answer the question: How much labor is there in an *hour* of labor?

With the way things have evolved [since the 1980s], it may surprise some today that Castoriadis granted such an importance to certain "nonwage" demands (labor conditions, etc.) in *CS III* and as well as in most of his other texts from the 1950s. For, nowadays, especially in working-class circles, the recurrent themes would rather be: We aren't earning enough; we don't want to lose our jobs. Yet one need not believe that the problem of labor conditions was, in those years, just a fad among some radical intellectuals. And above all, it must not be forgotten that, beyond that time, the Sixties and Seventies witnessed the rise of these types of demands throughout Europe and that the worries raised by such struggles among the bosses undoubtedly played a role in some

of the choices the ruling strata made during the Eighties. Now, some authors are pretending today as if, in the Seventies, one had passed in a few years from a "Fordist" model to a new paradigm. They quite simply bracket some *forty years* (1930-1970) of crisis and critique of the contradictions of the Fordist model (a critique that was, as a matter of fact, one of S. ou B.'s main contributions). The myopia, in this respect, of certain sociologists and historians who have looked into this issue is quite astonishing.²⁰

PO (I and II) is in some ways the continuation of a reflection on the fate of the workers' movement that was begun years earlier but poses once again, since the problem had arisen anew within the S. ou B. group, the question of the nature and modalities of revolutionaries' intervention in society (the "organizational" question). Before broaching that question, Castoriadis went back over the bureaucratization of the workers' movement, reaffirming what was the review's position from the outset: that leaders [*dirigeants*] do not "betray"; they express quite simply other interests than those of the workers: their own, those of the bureaucracy of the "working-class" parties and trade unions. Yet he deepens this idea: bureaucratization reflects *the reproduction, within the workers' movement, of the fundamental social relation of capitalism* and the persistence of its principle (division between directors [*dirigeants*] and executants, party and class, theory and application). The idea that there remained in Marxism a "theoretical ambiguity" that allowed exploitative society to exert an influence inside the workers' movement had already been formulated in *CS I* (1955), then in *CS II*. In *PO I*, it is formulated still more energetically: "bureaucratization has meant that the fundamental social relationship of modern capitalism, the relationship between directors and executants, has reproduced itself within the labor movement."

²⁰See, for example, the chapters "Fordism" and "From Fordism to Flexible Accumulation" in [David Harvey's *The Condition of Postmodernity* \(Cambridge, MA and Oxford, England: Blackwell, 1990\)](#), where it may be read: "In retrospect, it seems there were signs of serious problems with Fordism as early as the mid-1960s." Not before then, really?

And through the role it granted to a particular type of theory, which claimed to be a “science,” and to the possession of this theory by a category of leaders who “know,” Marxism has played a major role in this process. As the proletariat is neither alien nor external to the society in which it lives, likewise, revolutionary activity is subject to a contradiction: “It participates in the society it is trying to abolish. This is the same sort of contradictory position the proletariat itself is in under capitalism. It is nonsensical [*une absurdité*] to look *now* for a *theoretical* solution to this contradiction.” There is, therefore, no guarantee against bureaucratization—except participation, reflection, and action by each. Against the positions defended at the time by Claude Lefort, Castoriadis affirms that one must not draw absurd conclusions from bureaucratization: “just as men will never stop breathing, for fear of swallowing some microbes, or thinking, for fear of being mistaken, so will they never cease to act, for fear of being transformed into bureaucrats.” And it is reaffirmed, at the end of *PO II*, that “it is within men’s grasp to create, on the scale of society and on that of a political organization, institutions they understand and they dominate.”

The “organizational question,” which was recurrent not only within the group but in the workers’ movement itself, would no doubt merit a separate study, as much from the historical and sociological angle as from the philosophical point of view, since certain properly philosophical postulates²¹

²¹Without going back to Marx and Bakunin and to discussions within the First International, or to the polemics symbolized by the names of Rosa Luxemburg, [Herman Gorter](#), [Otto Rühle](#), [Anton Pannekoek](#), and [Errico Malatesta](#), the reader interested by the philosophical aspect of this debate would be well advised to consult Karl Korsch’s *Marxism and Philosophy* (1923; trans. with an intro. by Fred Halliday [New York: Monthly Review Press, 1970]), specifically pp. 114-15; by the 1930s, [Korsch](#) was insisting on the continuity on this point (relations between “science” and “consciousness of the masses”) between Social-Democratic orthodoxy and Leninism. She may also reread attentively Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s remarks on Sartre’s “ultrabolshevism” in *Adventures of the Dialectic* (1955). Frederick I. Kaplan has devoted a useful chapter to Lenin’s theory of knowledge in *Bolshevik Ideology and the Ethics of Soviet Labor, 1917-1920: The Formative Years* (New York: The Philosophical Library, 1968

as well have played a major role in certain choices, at least among its leaders. It is known that, for example, for Lenin—though in *What is to be Done?* (1902) he was merely expressing in his own way the conventional wisdom of his era—the proletariat was the “blind instrument” of a historical process, with “consciousness” of that process being able to be brought to it only from the outside, by revolutionary intellectuals. Socialist consciousness could arise only on the basis of “profound scientific knowledge” (Kautsky).²² In short, the proletariat had a part to play in a play written by others. Castoriadis (and the group along with him) sought, as we have seen, to go beyond this abstract conception and, starting from the *concrete situation* of the workers at the point of production,²³ to see to what extent this situation was

and London: Peter Owen, 1969), a work that undoubtedly has not received all the attention it merited (though one will find therein a few surprisingly naive remarks; see p. 458). In *RBI* (1964), Castoriadis insisted on the terrible historical *effectiveness* of certain Leninist conceptions. That, in another connection, some historians might nowadays find success for themselves in certain circles by stating that one must “[repeat Lenin](#)” says a lot about our era.

²²T/E: In *What is to be Done?*, Lenin is quoting Karl Kautsky’s article on the new draft program of the Austrian Social-Democratic Party, published in *Die Neue Zeit*, 20:1 (no. 3, 1901-02): 79.

²³The readers of the hundreds of pages Castoriadis devoted to this question will know what is to be thought of the following astonishing statement made by the Marxist philosopher and Marxologist Isabelle Garo: “the analysis produced by Castoriadis tends not only to maintain the break between the political question and social critique but to occult the labor question [*sic*], rendering unthinkable the eminently political problem of the democratic organization of production” (“Imagination et représentation: de Castoriadis à Marx: ‘Rester marxistes ou rester révolutionnaires,’” p.23 [2007], available on the website of the “[Marx au XXI^e siècle](#)” seminar coorganized by the [Centre d’Histoire des Systèmes de Pensée Moderne](#) [University of Paris-I], the [Centre d’Etudes en Rhétorique, Philosophie et Histoire des Idées](#) [Lyon], and the review [ContreTemps: Revue de Critique Communiste](#)). Independent of any issues of interpretation, the accumulation of factual errors in this article forestalls all criticism. [T/E: Nevertheless, a strong critique of Garo’s text, G. Haldec’s “[D’isabelle \[*sic*\] Garo à Castoriadis](#),” has been published online.]

preparing workers to struggle against present-day society, to want another one, and to establish different relations with “their” organizations. As early as 1964-1965, the author broadened this critique to everything that concerns the relations between theory and practice, between thinking about society and social doing. In 1983, Castoriadis said: “Democracy implies that, in the political field, no one possesses a *science* which can justify statements such as ‘this is true; this is false,’ and so on. Otherwise, anyone possessing such a science could and *should* take a sovereign position in the body politic.”²⁴ Yet the idea that there is rigorous scientific knowledge about society and political affairs retains a formidable vitality and has not finished doing damage. This view of social actors as subjects proposing (or accepting) objectives for themselves in a fully lucid way, or on the contrary plunged in the darkness of ignorance, until the custodians of knowledge come to “enlighten” them, without any intermediary world being conceivable, and this conception of a theory that knows in advance what the subject will choose (or why this subject will be incapable of doing so, or will be mistaken in its choice) are undoubtedly too deeply rooted,²⁵ and are situated in the most varied settings, not just among those who are dependent on the Marxist conception of revolutionary “science,” for them to be stamped out before other Bastilles are taken. It may be doubted that those who think that they have access to such knowledge would easily give up what is the guarantee of—and sole criterion for—the correctness of their decisions.

²⁴“Marx Today: The Tragicomical Paradox” (with corrections by Castoriadis of Franco Schiavoni’s original English-language translation, which appeared in *Thesis Eleven*, 8 [1984], of this 1983 interview with the French journal *Lutter*), *Solidarity Journal*, 17 (Summer 1988): 7-15; see: 10. Now available as “Marx Today,” in *CL2*; see: 45.

²⁵True, all hope is not lost: even some former disciples of Pierre Bourdieu are discovering in our time that the line of demarcation between scholarly knowledge and ordinary knowledge is blurrier than it seems, or that among social actors there are multiple ways of acting when faced with various types of situations that correspond to equally varied levels of reflection.

It was, however, undoubtedly an illusion to believe, as Castoriadis had said in *POI*, that “a continuous elaboration of revolutionary theory and ideology” was going to occur “through a fusion of the experience of workers and the positive elements of modern culture” and that the revolutionary organization was the sole site where that fusion might take place. Thinking that for theory itself what could be defined as “basic subject” was what could be linked to laboring people’s own experience was another such illusion. What is certain, in any case, is that the fusion of the experience of workers and intellectuals *qua a collective work* [*œuvre collective*] mostly remained within the Group simply on the drawing board. Yet a theory that, as some others wanted to work it out in the 1960s, would not give full priority to a reflection on the fate of people in society—their needs, their hopes, their struggles, and their dreams—is more chimerical still.

As early as 1953, Castoriadis had called into question the Marxian²⁶ conception of the *economic dynamic* of capitalism (and in 1964-1965 he would call into question the conception Marx has of the dynamic of *historical development*). In 1958, he attacked another cornerstone of

²⁶Although it was often stated, rightly, that there is a “traditional Marxism” whose historical weight goes far beyond what is found in the letter of Marx’s writings, Castoriadis is speaking here of Marx, and in particular of what Marx signed his name to and published during his lifetime. He kept to the essential, which never was to the taste of the Marxologists who live on the exploitation (in more than one sense of the word) of an immense corpus. Moreover, the lure of the “esoteric Marx” has not ceased to wreak its havoc. In some circles, it is permitted to make comments only on the drafts of Marx’s drafts, the hidden assumption of this kind of undertaking being that Marx was systematically mistaken about the choice of what he had to publish and that the “unknown Marx” of 1857-1858 was infinitely more intelligent than the apparently too well known one of the [1859 Preface](#) [to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*]. So, one turns stupid in the space of a year. Certain “Marxists” (and Marxologists) should be forced to reread out loud every evening before bedtime the above-mentioned Preface and [chapter 32 of volume one of Capital](#). [T/E: The “[Krisis Group](#),” for example, distinguishes between an “exoteric” and an “esoteric” Marx; Takahisa Oishi is the author of the 2001 Pluto Press book [The Unknown Marx: Reconstructing a Unified Perspective](#).]

Marxian analysis. The “most essential fact of capitalism,” he wrote in *PO I*, is that the “*use value and exchange value of labor power are objectively indeterminate*” (emphasis added); “they are determined rather by the struggle between labor and capital both in production and in society.” Let us recall that for Marx (his [January 8, 1868 letter to Engels](#)), “if the commodity has a double character—use value and exchange value—then the labor represented by the commodity must also have a twofold character”—and here, he says, it is a matter, as some myopic reader ([Eugen Dühring](#)) had not seen, of one of the “three fundamentally new elements of” *Capital*. And Marx draws therefrom a number of conclusions, retraced in part by Castoriadis here. (Yet it is true that Castoriadis still had not abandoned—and he would do so in none of the texts reprinted in this volume—the other great element of the Marxian edifice: the idea of *proletarian* revolution. He would not take that leap until 1963, when he drafted “*Recommencing the Revolution*” [now in [PSW3](#)].)

For Castoriadis, in 1953, “long periods of passivity and inaction” were part and parcel of an experience, yet an overcoming, a “new phase” was possible. In 1957, he believed that “the revolutionary movement finds itself at the beginning of a long period of ascent” and that no “presently identifiable factor seems to be up to the task of reversing this process for many long years to come.” The bureaucracy having become an objective force, the proletariat now found the bureaucracy *facing opposite* itself: this was the beginning of a new historical period. In late 1959 (in “Results”),²⁷ while noting that there had been no genuine opposition to the installation of the Gaullist regime, Castoriadis wrote: “it is the French population, in its great majority, that has withdrawn from politics.” As early as 1958 (*CS III*), he had noted that conflict within society was being expressed both as a struggle against alienation *and* “as people’s *absence* from society, passivity, discouragement, retreat, and isolation.” Yet he saw

²⁷T/E: Actually, this article, translated below, was published in [issue 26](#)—thus, in late 1958, not 1959. The French Editors give the correct date below.

the extreme case of this “absence from society” occurring especially in the East: in the Poland of 1955-1956, for example. In 1959, one had to bow to the evidence: the hopes grounded on the movements of the 1950s were not being realized, either in the East or in the West.

MCR (drafted mainly in 1959 and published in the review in 1959-1961)²⁸ resumes and reassembles certain themes but also sometimes redirects them. Castoriadis wants to give here a more systematic presentation of his analysis of contemporary society. He reexamines the past (critique of the revolutionary perspective in “traditional Marxism”), tries to delineate the broad outlines of capitalism in the present and what he calls its “ideal tendency,” and thinks about the future of the revolutionary movement. The two most salient traits are for him *bureaucratization* and *privatization*, truly two sides of one and the same phenomenon. As regards bureaucratization, he states:

The result of two centuries of class struggle has been the profound, objective transformation of capitalism. This transformation can be summed up in one word: bureaucratization. By bureaucratization we mean a type of social structure in which the direction of collective activities is in the hands of an impersonal, hierarchically organized apparatus. This apparatus is supposed to act according to “rational” criteria and methods. It is economically privileged, and it gains recruits according to rules it actually proclaims and really applies.

Against any superficial view of the process that would see therein only the appearance of new strata or the extension of one type of organization, he specifies:

Bureaucratization entails a transformation of the values and significations that form the basis of

²⁸T/E: The first installment was actually published in [issue 31 \(December 1960\)](#). Drafts first appeared in the group's *Bulletin Intérieur* in 1959.

people's lives in society. It remodels their attitudes and their conduct. If this aspect, the profoundest one of all, is not understood, nothing has been understood about the *cohesiveness* of present-day society, or about the *crisis* it is undergoing.

As regards privatization, Castoriadis begins by noting that, even if it remains entrenched in production, the proletariat

no longer expresses itself as a class on the political plane; it no longer expresses a will to transform or even to orient society in its own direction. ... This disappearance of political activity... is a general phenomenon that can be found among all categories of the population. [It is] the flip side of the bureaucratic coin.

It is here that he introduces the notion of *privatization*:²⁹

The *privatization* of individuals is the most striking trait of modern capitalist societies. We should become aware that we live in a society whose most important characteristic, as far as we are concerned here, is its success till now in destroying the socialization of individuals in terms of their political socialization. This is a society in which, outside the labor process, people more and more perceive themselves as private individuals and behave as such; in which the idea that collective action might be able to determine how things turn out on the societal scale has lost its

²⁹The term *privatization* no longer evokes today for ordinary mortals anything but the transfer to the private sector of business enterprises that formerly were in the public sector. It is not impossible that there was, in Castoriadis's choice of this term, a reminiscence of its use ("enforced privatization") by the American sociologist David Riesman in *The Lonely Crowd: A Study of the Changing American Character* (1950). But the differences in usage and perspective are flagrant, even for a superficial reader. [T/E: Of note, Part III of Riesman's book is titled "Autonomy" and begins with a chapter titled "Adjustment or Autonomy?"]

meaning save for an insignificant minority (of bureaucrats or of revolutionaries, it matters little here). In modern society, public matters—or more exactly, social matters—are seen not only as foreign and hostile but also as beyond people's grasp and not liable to be affected by their actions. It therefore sends people back into “private life,” or into a “social life” in which society itself is never explicitly put into question.

These lines, written more than fifty years ago, speak to us of the problem, *par excellence*, of contemporary Western societies. It is understood that privatization does not signify “absence of society” (the alleged individual of contemporary “individualists,” he will state a few years later, is wholly social): “it means a peculiar mode of social living.” Some having quite obviously misunderstood Castoriadis on this point (we would be said to no longer be living, so to speak, “in society”), it would no doubt be necessary to enlarge more fully thereupon.

What was said about the appearance of a *new capitalist policy* seems—even though that undeniably corresponded to the reality of the time—not to have been confirmed by the way things subsequently evolved, inasmuch as this policy has for decades been characterized by a growing disengagement of the State from economic activity. And yet, beyond the fact that in no way was it said that this situation would be enduring, it has to be recalled that the new situation has been able to be instaurated, starting in 1980, only through a massive *political intervention* on the part of certain state actors. And also, that the idea that this “new capitalist policy” discussed in *MCR* “is tending to put all spheres of social activity under its control” is truer than ever, even if considerable efforts have been deployed by the established powers to mask as much as possible this aspect of affairs. As for privatization, the destruction of significations, and general irresponsibility, it would be an understatement to say that they are still present: these are the key traits of society at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

The affirmation in *MCR* that seems most tied to the

situation of the Western capitalist countries in the late 1950s is the following one: "The ruling classes have successfully gotten a handle on the level of economic activity and have been able to prevent major economic crises. In numerical terms, unemployment has decreased to a great extent." These traits were described as "new" (in relation to the nineteenth century and the interwar period), which is hardly debatable, but also as "enduring." Castoriadis also believed that "a crisis of 1929 proportions is henceforth inconceivable outside of a sudden epidemic of collective lunacy in the capitalist class." This is false, but true, too; for, nowadays the word "lunacy [*folie*]" is perhaps not too strong to characterize certain forms of behavior. When one reads "the political weight of the working class in modern societies prevents the State from allowing unemployment to develop beyond a relatively moderate point," one of course furrows one's brow, since current rates of unemployment have nothing "moderate" about them. But one may also ask: What today is the "political weight" of the working class?

In 1974, while presenting the English-language translation of *MCR*,³⁰ Castoriadis nevertheless could still think that the event confirmed not only everything concerning demands that were "noneconomic" and not "political" (in the strict sense), as well as the critique of the capitalist ideology of growth and consumption, but also the system's entry into a phase characterized by state control over economic activity, wage increases, and an enduring fall in unemployment. No doubt, the entire part devoted to the analysis of "modern bureaucratic capitalism" poses numerous questions today, and in particular that of whether there still is a "managerial apparatus" that is the genuine site of power within the business enterprise and whether "bureaucratization (i.e., the management of activity by hierarchized apparatuses)" remains

³⁰T/E: The 1974 edition of this work by "Paul Cardan," *Modern Capitalism and Revolution. A Solidarity Book*, was in fact the "second edition." The first edition, which had already included new material written by the author, was published by London Solidarity as early as 1963 and was reprinted in 1965, again with new material.

“the very logic of this society, its response to everything.” We shall return to this in the introduction to *What Democracy?* Let us say straight off that the evident decline of the State in the economic domain has kept the population, and especially intellectuals, whether apologists or critics, from being able to see any longer to what extent the management of activities by specialized and hierarchized apparatuses (bureaucratization) has invaded and *continues* to invade everything.

If the contradictions of capitalism are no longer economic in nature and if the system has succeeded in surmounting them, can one still speak of a *crisis of capitalism*? There is, for Castoriadis, a “fundamental contradiction,” an ultimate source of the system’s crisis: capitalism’s need “to realize simultaneously the participation and exclusion of the workers in the production process,” with the same going “for citizens in the political sphere, and so on and so forth.” The privileging of production is still there, but the contradiction is enlarged to the whole of social life. And again:

The capitalist organization of society is contradictory in the same way that a neurotic individual is so: It can try to carry out its intentions only through acts that constantly thwart these same intentions. ...This contradiction constitutes the fundamental fact of capitalism, the kernel of capitalist social relations.

More than a half century later, any person who has had the experience of laboring within a business enterprise or an administration knows that, even if it no longer culminates in overt conflicts, this dynamic of participation and exclusion is ever present: those who want work to be done will have to try to manage [*se débrouiller*] to do so despite or against the official directives, and the “functional” ineptitude of management [*la direction*] is a perpetual source of suffering. Whether that might one day lead up to some collective reactions is, it will be said, in no way certain. Nor is that ruled out in advance.

This idea of the “fundamental contradiction” gives echo to the one Castoriadis explicitly enunciated in 1957: that, in actual fact, capitalism is obliged to lean on the “capacity for self-organization” and “creativity” of laboring

people. Some more or less malicious observers have wanted to see in this idea the heralding of what the bosses would have, it seems, tried to do in the 1970s and 1980s: systematically exploit those capacities for its own profit. Let us recall, however, that the system has known how to impose very strict limits on the “liberation” of laboring people’s creativity (in the—extremely rare—cases when such “liberation” was not just a masquerade), and above all, it ultimately chose another path: the elimination, to the greatest extent possible, of every human group likely to join together to defend itself or struggle against that system. Capitalism, wrote Castoriadis, imposes upon society an arbitrary objective: the “ultimate end of human activity and human existence...is maximum production.” It entails the “*destruction of the significations of social activities*” as well as the “*destruction of people’s responsibility and initiative.*” Some have feigned to see in these ideas, years later, some seeds of (or at least parallels with) the “antistatist” rhetoric of the conservative liberal currents of the 1980s and beyond. “Neoliberalism” would apparently want to “restore initiative” to man.... We shall return in the introduction to *What Democracy?* to the realities (as to be distinguished carefully from the rhetoric) of the new phase of capitalism that began at that time.

That capitalism would above all be “an enterprise that dehumanized the worker and destroyed work as a signifying activity (we take ‘signifying’ here to mean ‘creative of significations’)” is something one tends to forget nowadays, inasmuch as in certain Western countries it has become an enterprise for the outright destruction of work. While “the factory and the working-class community” are radically opposed to the logic and values of capitalism, a solution to the problem, for the system, was to eliminate them. Whether that might in the long term be viable, and whether countries that want to play a role in the world (or, quite simply, not be wiped off the map) might not be able to be content, as Castoriadis will pretty much say later on, with producing software and keeping the population occupied in performing “services” is another matter. It seems that one is beginning to glimpse this, a few decades late.

Yet the text also teems with observations and analyses showing that all sectors of social life are now being challenged. It is understandable that Castoriadis would have found himself on familiar ground when looking at what was most positive in the movements of the Sixties around the world, since he had written as early as 1959 that the critique of capitalist society

ought to broaden itself to encompass all aspects of life, to denounce the disintegration of communities, the dehumanization of relations between individuals, the content and methods of capitalist education, the monstrousness of modern cities, and the double oppression imposed upon women and youth.

And also:

The socialist program ought to be presented for what it is: a program for the humanization of work and of society. It ought to be shouted from the rooftops that socialism is not a backyard of leisure attached to the industrial prison, or transistors for the prisoners. It is the destruction of the industrial prison itself.

MCR also presents the idea that, for the two classes struggling against each other, a historical experience is being constituted that, for the proletariat, becomes development toward a socialist consciousness:

each class antagonist is changed by the action of the other. These actions bring about profound changes of the social setting, of the objective terrain on which the struggle unfolds. In their culminating moments, they give rise to a historical creation, the invention of new forms of organization, of struggle, or of life that in no way were contained in the previous state of affairs. Nor are they predetermined by the anterior situation.

Castoriadis would later speak of a *social imaginary* in order to designate the instituting activity of the anonymous-

collective field. When in those years he presented the sudden appearance [*surgissement*] of another society (“socialism”) as a creation of society itself, he did not yet write that this creation is a positing of imaginary significations—though the idea is not far off. Castoriadis does not succeed, however, in undoing the language of “phases” and “levels,” of the “ripening of the conditions for socialism”—even if, when all is said and done, he reduces these conditions to a single one, which would be neither objective nor subjective: “the *accumulation of the objective conditions for an adequate consciousness.*” Yet it is still an “accumulation.”

Some will reproach Castoriadis for having blurred at one place in this text the boundaries between totalitarianism and “liberal” capitalist societies. “Thus modern societies, whether ‘democratic’ or ‘dictatorial,’ are in fact *totalitarian*, for in order to maintain their domination, the exploiters have to invade *all* fields of human activity and try to bring them to submission.” It is probably preferable to reserve the term *totalitarian* (for reasons that will appear more clearly to the reader in the *Facing War and Other Writings*³¹ volume of our series) for the type of society Germany and Russia had experienced in the 1930s and 1940s. Yet it is certain that capitalist societies, and in particular its factories, have at all times been familiar with “pretotalitarian” realities and in particular, certainly, in the factory.³² Those for whom “capitalism,” “market,” and “democracy” are practically synonyms will find this incomprehensible or unacceptable, of course.

³¹T/E: This volume was published in 2016 as *Guerre et théories de la guerre* (War and Theories of War).

³²T/E: Nearly a decade after *Devant la guerre*, Castoriadis did not hesitate to point out that “the Ford factories in Detroit in 1920 constitute totalitarian minisocieties” (“The Idea of Revolution” [1989], now in [CL3](#); see: 215).

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It undoubtedly will be said, upon reading these two volumes: The hopes of revolutionaries like Castoriadis have *always* been frustrated, decade after decade. And, when S. ou B. was set up, the history of the revolutionary workers' movement was already that of a century of failures. Castoriadis's answer in the 1950s was, as we have seen: It is necessary for the workers to have a *concrete* experience of the reformist, then "revolutionary" (Stalinist) bureaucracy in order to be able to go beyond not some ideas but some *realities*. And certainly, the experience has not been conclusive or has not led to the expected outcomes. Can one for all that state, as certain people do, that, since the idea of a *workers'* power that would instaurate another type of society is to be abandoned, it is the very prospect [*perspective*] of another society that is to be abandoned—even if it means "resisting," if necessary, established society to the end of time?³³ However, "revoltism," which has spread in numerous forms in all Western countries since the early 1970s—Let's resist the system, but above all let's not aim at power—has contributed neither to altering this society nor, indeed, to resisting anything at all: in any case, it has not contributed to an effective opposition to the "neoliberal" counterrevolution.

Disappointed hopes, yes. But what about those of the "reformists"? Where are they at, those who think that there are a few or a lot of things to "ameliorate" in this society but that it basically has to be maintained—nearly the whole "political" world? Castoriadis wrote in 1958 ("Results"), after

³³This was the position not only, of course, of Claude Lefort beginning in the 1960s but also of Jean-François Lyotard a bit later on: "the principle of a radical alternative to capitalist domination (workers' power) *must* be abandoned" *but* one must continue "resistance by other means, on other terrains, and perhaps without goals that can be clearly defined" ("The Name of Algeria" [1989], in Lyotard's *Political Writings*, trans. Bill Readings with Kevin Paul Geiman [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993], p. 166). By the look of it, few people understand what a resistance "without goals that can be clearly defined" can be, and, as "resisting" is not easy, the overwhelming majority refrain from doing it.

De Gaulle had come to power:

What have they all ended in, all these years of relentless effort, these evenings spent in meetings and these nights spent putting up posters, this money, these newspapers sold, these brawls, these insults, this perpetual tension? ... For years, militants have acted to be effective—and what was the result? They could just as well have spent their years copying *Capital* on the back of a postage stamp or building a miniature Kremlin with matches, and their objectives would have benefitted therefrom just as much.

Some twenty years later, countless “Socialist” militants who wanted to “change life”³⁴ dodged a thousand fundamental questions in order not to hamper their party from arriving at power—and have, when all is said and done, effectively contributed to neoliberalism’s smooth installation in France. Where are they at today, those who believed that the regime was endlessly “reformable”? They settle for hoping that the system, while unexpectedly collapsing around them, will not fall on their heads, and that the total discredit in public opinion of their current adversaries will be such that they will have—without illusions—the right to take another lap. And in order to do *what*? Here we have all the wisdom of the “realists.” *Effectiveness* and *realism* are certainly terms to be employed with the greatest precautions.

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For the more or less young reader, what is undoubtedly the most striking in these texts from the 1950s is of course the omnipresence of the theme of the *working class*, a source of problems for the system, a source, too, for solutions for those who would like to put an end to it and create another one. Such a person can say to himself that if

³⁴T/E: The slogan for French Socialist candidate François Mitterrand’s first successful presidential campaign, in 1981, was *Changer la vie*.

the “socialist perspective” (let us say, the prospect of a humanized society that is not rushing toward self-destruction) depends, as Castoriadis still believed in *PO I* (1958), only on the “proletariat develop[ing] on its own toward socialism,” one could not bet heavily on that prospect. And if one is struck by the precocious character of the critique of certain Marxist themes in the 1950s, especially as concerns the question of *labor*—and Castoriadis was right, in 1963, to reproach the “traditionalists” within the Group for seeming to have discovered suddenly what had been there for several years—one is struck just as much by the central role that continued to be granted, even till 1963-1964, to *production*, and this even in the most innovative texts.

On that point, it will become clearly apparent to the attentive reader that there is in these writings from the 1950s, and sometimes in the same text, something like a wavering between that which concerns the proletariat *stricto sensu* and things dealing with wage-earning executants as a whole. In *CS II* (1957), for example, one finds the following sentence, already quoted above: “The dictatorship of the proletariat means the incontrovertible *fact* that the initiative for and the direction of the socialist revolution and subsequent transformation of society can only belong to the *proletariat in the factories*.” Here we have, one says to oneself, the sort of sentence Castoriadis certainly would not have signed off on a few years later. Yet it surprises even at that date, for in other spots, during the same period, “workers’ management” is management “by the collectivity of the workers, employees, and technicians.” In *CS III* (1958), at issue is a “class of executants” that tends to constitute itself on the basis of the experiences of elementary groups in the business enterprise. Yet sometimes the proletariat is sharply distinguished from “employees,” “technicians,” and “intellectuals” whom it has to draw to its camp (*PO I*, 1958). And in the same text, “the proletariat consists of all exploited wage earners and salaried employees. It is the collective producer.” In *MCR* ([drafted in] 1959), “*There is only one condition for socialism, and it is neither ‘objective’ nor ‘subjective,’ but historical. It is the existence of the proletariat as a class that, in its struggle, develops itself as the bearer of a socialist project*” (emphasis

in the original). And yet, also in that same text, it is stated that the development of capitalism,

in proletarianizing society, broadens—and here we are speaking quantitatively—the basis of the socialist revolution. In other words, the reason is that it multiplies the numbers of compartmentalized, exploited, and alienated wage earners and ultimately makes them into the majority of capitalist society.

And in 1959, in his polemical article on Alain Touraine, “Subject to an ever-greater division of labor, obliged to perform repetitive, monitored [*contrôlées*], and standardized tasks, dragged into mechanization, office workers are henceforth but fragmented, exploited, and alienated salaried executants; they are proletarians and behave more and more as such.” And finally, in the final paragraphs of *MCR*, he states:

The class divisions of this society are more and more becoming the division between directors and executants. The immense majority of individuals, whatever their qualifications or level of pay, have been transformed into wage-earning executants who carry out compartmentalized tasks. They feel the alienation in their work as well as the absurdity of the system, and they tend to revolt against it.

What remains here of the predominance of the “proletariat in the factories”?

Yet it is true that this narrow, “classical” conception of the proletariat implicitly contradicts the definition of the content of socialism Castoriadis was making his own around the same time (*POI*): “Socialism” (which he would later call *autonomous society*)

is not a correct theory as opposed to false theories; it is the possibility of a new world rising out of the depths of society that will bring into question the very notion of “theory.” Socialism is not a correct idea. It

is a project for the transformation of history. Its content is that those who half the time are the objects of history will become wholly its subjects—which would be inconceivable if the meaning of this transformation were possessed by a particular group of individuals.

What one sees being formulated here, then, is the key idea—of which we have, let it be said in passing, the confirmation each day—that *no particular stratum measures up to the problems that are posed to society*. Nor do, it goes without saying, the ruling strata. Castoriadis will add, a bit later: nor other fractions of this society, be they in the majority (“proletariat” or “wage-earners”). And one must give up, too, the idea of a subject of the revolution that would be a class, a part of society, that would speak in the name of the entire society, and of humanity in its entirety. In 1973 (*HWM*, in [PSW3](#), 199), Castoriadis wrote:

[I]t is clear that today one can neither maintain a privileged position for the proletariat in the traditional sense nor mechanically extend its characteristics to wage earners as a whole, nor, finally, pretend that the latter behave as a *class*, even an embryonic one. Alienation in contemporary capitalist society, the contradictions in and the intensive wear and tear on the system, the struggle against that system under an infinite variety of forms—all the strata of modern society, with the exception of the ruling summits, live out this alienation, these contradictions, this struggle and act them out in their daily existence.

Starting in the 1970s, some have said to the proletariat their “farewell,”³⁵ which in reality is addressed to an

³⁵We are not thinking here only of André Gorz’s *Adieux au prolétariat* (Paris: Galilée, 1980; translated by Michael Sonenscher as *Farewell to the Working Class: An Essay on Post-Industrial Socialism* [Boston, MA: South End Press, 1982]). It should be pointed out, moreover, that until his

abstraction upon which they had been determined to put a face—and it was that of the Communist Party. Nothing of that sort in Castoriadis's work, even though he was forced to note in 1968 that the working class had acted [then] not as vanguard but as “lumbering rear guard.” Without launching into absurd quarrels over figures (since the general tendency is indisputable),³⁶ it is obvious that the old working class from the 1950s no longer represents but barely 15 percent of the active population, whereas it had represented more than half of it. If one is addressing oneself to the majority of society,³⁷ one must take that into account. But the “farewell” to the redemptive role of the working class is accompanied, among some, by a memory lapse, a willful ignorance about the *real* situation of this not-long-ago-praised class, a total lack of interest in the question of the working-class condition. The term *treason*, Castoriadis recalls more than once in these texts, is largely meaningless, or has no rigorous meaning, in the analysis of social relations—yet if there are some people who could, rightly, feel that they have been abandoned and betrayed by all during the last few decades, it is really the workers of the formerly industrialized countries.

last breath Gorz ceaselessly sought substitutes for this “proletariat” about which he understood (relatively late) that it would not play any messianic role (cf. computer scientists as vanguard, in his very last years...). As for what in another connection is to be thought about saying a “farewell to work,” as Gorz does in that same volume, see what is said in *CS II*.

³⁶The German “Luxemburgist” economist Fritz Sternberg already observed in 1951 that, on the eve of World War I, and going against the trend of the entire nineteenth century, the relative weight of the working class was no longer steadily increasing (see chapter 5 of *Capitalism and Socialism on Trial*, trans. from the German by Edward Fitzgerald [London: Gollancz and New York: John Day, 1951]).

³⁷That is, of course, what the great representatives of revolutionary Marxism always believed they were doing, and one could provide an endless series of quotations. For certain “far-left” currents, the matter is of hardly any importance, since the key thing is the (economic) mechanics that will bring about the destruction of present-day society and replace it with another, whatever the eventual number of infantrymen in this battle, and, moreover, whatever these infantrymen might actually want.

And they have especially been abandoned, it could be said, by all those who either have wanted at any cost to find some “substitutes” for the working class or continue to mythologize it in a variety of forms, all of which disfigure it. The workers (in the strict sense) are neither the center of history nor a particularly retrograde category whose speedy disappearance one might wish for since that category “votes for [the \[far-right French\] National Front](#)” (it massively abstains, rather, as some have often recalled, but one does not want to know that) or whose replacement one might wish for by populations coming from elsewhere that are miraculously immunized against all excesses. In any case, they are certainly not less worthy of interest than other categories of the population. From the standpoint of historical reflection, they are certainly more worthy. All those who forget this, refusing to take into account the lessons of the age-old, in many respects enigmatic, and in so many respects admirable history of this social group and of the movements that have accompanied it along its path—those who do not want to understand what was the *question of the workers' movement*, such as it is broached in the pages that follow—are, especially when it comes to the actors of political life, going to encounter some serious disappointments.

—E. E. (January 2012)³⁸

³⁸Although I alone have signed this text, critical readings by M.G. and P.V. have considerably helped to improve it.

Translator/Editor's Foreword

Forthcoming.

2023

BETA

On the Translation

It is greatly fortunate that, under current circumstances, the present volumes have been able to benefit from the eye of a professional copy editor, as had also been the case with Castoriadis volumes published by commercial and academic presses. The copy editor is to be thanked for his/her invaluable assistance in copyediting, in proofreading, and in making a considerable number of highly useful editorial suggestions. The reader's indulgence, and her suggestions for improvements in subsequent editions, would nevertheless be most appreciated, as some errors may, of course, still be extant. For questions of terminology, the reader is referred to David Ames Curtis's Appendix I: Glossary in [PSW1](#) and Appendix C: Glossary in [PSW3](#), as well as to his "On the Translation" in [CLI](#).¹

We note here simply the English-language phrases Castoriadis employed in the original French-language versions: understatement, shop stewards, lock out, lobbies, leaders, Quaker Oats, rounds, show.

¹Curtis may be contacted at curtis@msh-paris.fr. It may be possible to persuade him to publish a list of errata, which could then form the basis for a second edition; the same procedure could be used for [ASA\(RPT\)](#), [PSRTI](#), [DR](#), [WoC](#), and, most recently, [CLI-6](#).

**PART ONE:
THE EXPERIENCE OF THE
WORKERS' MOVEMENT, 1**

BETA

FRENCH EDITORS: This first Part [of Book 1 of *The Question of the Workers' Movement*] essentially reprints *EMOI*, 121-444.¹ The lengthy and important Introduction which accompanied these texts first published in the review *Socialisme ou Barbarie* is reprinted in the [third] volume of our reprint edition, placed in its corresponding chronological order. The reader will easily be able to ascertain that this is not a mere introduction but one of the most substantial political texts published by Castoriadis in the 1970s; it was therefore legitimate to acknowledge its distinctive existence as a separate text. Other texts, coming either from *SF* (the one from 1947) or from *SBI* (the one from 1948), are published in the Appendixes, along with other articles from 1948 to 1952, for the reasons we have explained in our "French Editors' Notice."

In the Notice he included in his 1974 edition, Castoriadis noted: "As with all the other volumes in this publication, the texts are reproduced here without modification, save for the correction of misprints and of two or three *lapsus calami*, and for updating, when need be, the references. The original notes are designated by Arabic numerals; those designated by lowercase letters have been added for the present edition" [French Editors: they are here integrated with the other notes but preceded by the year of the reprint]. For an overall view of the ideas and how they evolved, the reader may refer herself to the General Introduction (*PSW1*, 3-36). (Just like the introduction to *EMOI*, this General Introduction, dated October-November 1972, has been included in the [third] volume of our reprint edition.)

Following this Notice was a *Plan d'ensemble de la publication* (overall publication plan), which was included at the time in each of the Éditions 10/18 volumes and which hardly varied at all, except for some dates of publication and for the title of what would become *The Imaginary Institution of Society*. Two of those 10/18 volumes, it must be recalled (*La Russie après l'industrialisation* [Russia after its industrialization] and *La Dynamique du capitalisme* [The dynamic of capitalism]), never saw the light of day. It will also be noted that the order of this *Plan* does not correspond to the order of the real dates of publication.

Here, then (we are omitting the dates and the mention "Éditions 10/18" and we restore the definitive title of the second part of *Imaginary Institution*), is this overall publication plan:

I. Bureaucratic Society

1. The Relations of Production in Russia
2. The Revolution Against the Bureaucracy
3. Russia after its Industrialization

II. The Dynamic of Capitalism

¹T/E: This 1974 collection includes texts translated in *PSW1* and *PSW2*.

III. Modern Capitalism and Revolution

1. Imperialism and War
2. The Revolutionary Movement under Modern Capitalism

IV. The Content of Socialism

V. The Experience of the Workers' Movement

VI. [The Imaginary Institution of Society](#)

1. [Marxism and Revolutionary Theory](#)
2. [The Social Imaginary and the Institution](#)

VII. French Society

Sartre, Stalinism, and the Workers*

See: http://libcom.org/files/cc_psw_v1.pdf

BETA

*Originally published as “Sartre, le stalinisme et les ouvriers,” *S. ou B.*, 12 (August 1953): 63-88. Reprinted in *EMOI*, 179-248, and in *EPI*, 55-100. Translated in *PSWI*, 207-41.

Response to Comrade Pannekoek*

Dear Comrade Pannekoek,

Your letter¹ brought great satisfaction to all the comrades in our group: satisfaction to see our work appreciated by an esteemed comrade such as you, who has devoted his whole life to the proletariat and to socialism; satisfaction to see a confirmation of our idea that there is a deep-seated agreement between you and us on fundamental points; and, finally, satisfaction to be able to discuss matters with you and to enrich our review with this discussion.

Before discussing the two points to which your letter is devoted (nature of the Russian Revolution; conception of the role of the Party), I would like to underscore the points upon which we are in agreement: autonomy of the working class at once *qua* means and *qua* end of its historical action; total power of the proletariat on the economic and political level as sole concrete content of socialism. I would like, moreover, in this connection, to clear up one misunderstanding. It is inaccurate to state that we would be restricting “the activity of these (soviet) bodies [*organismes (soviétiques)*] to the organization of labor in the factories after the seizure of power.”² We think that the activity of soviet bodies—or Workers’ Councils—after the seizure of power will extend to the total organization of social life, that is to

*Originally published as “Réponse au Camarade Pannekoek,” *S. ou B.*, 14 (April 1954): 44-50. Reprinted in *EMOI*, 249-59, and *EPI*, 101-107. [T/E: On occasion, we have consulted Asad Haider/Salar Mohandesi’s translation, “Letter 2: Castoriadis to Pannekoek,” appearing in “Workers’ Inquiry,” issue 3 of *Viewpoint Magazine* (September 30, 2013): <http://www.viewpointmag.com/2011/10/25/letter-2-castoriadis-to-pannekoek/>.]

¹1974 note: Reproduced in the Postface to this text. [T/E: See the next chapter in the present publication.]

²T/E: Here and elsewhere in this letter, Castoriadis’s translations of phrases from Pannekoek’s first letter, written in English, are simply translated back into English, since the original has not been located.

say that, so long as there will be a need for a body exercising power, its role will be fulfilled by the Workers' Councils. Nor is it accurate to state that we would be thinking of any sort of role for the Councils only for the period following the "seizure of power." Both historical experience and reflection on the matter show that the Councils would be unable to be bodies genuinely expressing the class, were they created, so to speak, by decree the day after a victorious revolution, that they will be something only if they are created spontaneously by a thoroughgoing movement of the class, therefore *before* the "seizure of power." And if that is so, it is obvious that they will play a primordial role during the entire revolutionary period, whose beginning is marked (as I was saying in my text on the party in [issue 10](#))³ precisely by the constitution of autonomous bodies of the masses.

Where, by contrast, there is, indeed, a real difference of opinion between us is on the question of whether, during this revolutionary period, these Councils are the *sole* body that plays an effective role in the conduct of the revolution, and, to a lesser extent, what the role and tasks of revolutionary militants are in the meantime. That is to say, the "party question."

You say, "in order to conquer power, we have no use for a 'revolutionary party' that seizes the leadership of the proletarian revolution." And further on, after having rightly recalled that there are, alongside us, a half dozen other parties or groups claiming to champion the working class, you add: "In order that they (the masses in their Councils) decide in the best way possible, they have to be enlightened through well-considered advice [*avis*] coming from the greatest possible number of sides." I fear that this view of the matter does not at all correspond to the most glaring as well as the most deep-seated features of the present-day and foreseeable situation of the working class. For, these other parties and groups of which you speak do not represent simply different opinions [*avis*] on the best way to make revolution, and the sessions of the Councils will not be calm gatherings of reflection during

³1974 note: See "Proletarian Leadership" [now in [PSWI](#)].

which, after advice from various advisors [*conseillers*] (the representatives of groups and parties), the working class will decide to follow one path rather than another. As soon as working-class bodies are set up, the class struggle will be transposed into the very bosom of these bodies: it will be transposed therein by the representatives of most of these "groups or parties" that claim to represent the working class but which, in most cases, represent the interests and the ideology of classes hostile to the proletariat, like the reformists or the Stalinists. Even if they are not to be found there in their present form, they will be found there in another form, let us be sure of that. In all likelihood, they will have at the outset a predominant position. And the entire experience of the last twenty years—from the Spanish Civil War and the Occupation up to and including the experience of the tiniest trade-union meeting at the present time—teaches us that militants who share our opinions [*opinions*] will have to conquer through struggle even *the right to speak* within these bodies.

The intensification of the class struggle during the revolutionary period will inevitably take the form of an intensification of the struggle of various factions within mass bodies. Under such conditions, to say that a vanguard revolutionary organization will confine itself to "enlightening" the Councils "through well-considered advice" is, I believe, what is called in English an *understatement*.⁴ After all, if the Councils of the revolutionary period turn out to be these assemblies of wise men wherein no one comes to disturb the calm necessary for well-thought-out reflection, we would be the first to be pleased about that; we would, indeed, feel sure that our advice would prevail if things happened in that way. But it is only in that case that the "party or group" could limit itself to the task you are assigning to it. And this case is by far the most unlikely. The working class that will form these Councils will not be a class different from the one that exists today; it will have made a huge step forward, but, to borrow a famous phrase, it will still be stamped with the

⁴A statement that sins by excess of moderation.

marks of the situation from which it proceeds.⁵ It will on the surface be dominated by deeply hostile influences, to which will be opposed at the outset only its still-confused revolutionary will and a minority vanguard. That vanguard will have to, by all means compatible with our fundamental idea of the autonomy of the working class, enlarge and deepen its influence over the Councils, winning over the majority to its program. It will perhaps even have to act *beforehand*; what should it do if, representing 45 percent of the Councils, it learns that some neo-Stalinist party is preparing to take power the next day? Ought it not to try to seize it immediately?

I do not think that you would be in disagreement with all that; I believe that what you are aiming at in your criticisms is the idea of the “revolutionary-leadership [*direction révolutionnaire*]” party. I have, however, tried to explain that the party could be the class’s leadership neither before nor after the revolution; neither beforehand, because the class is not following it and because it could at the very most direct [*diriger*] only a minority (and still, “directing” it in a quite relative sense: influencing that minority through its ideas and its exemplary action), nor afterward, for the proletarian power cannot be the power of the party but the power of the class in its mass autonomous bodies. The sole moment when the party can come close to a role of effectively actual leadership, of a body that endeavors to impose its will even through violence, may be a certain phase of the revolutionary period immediately preceding the denouement of that period; major practical decisions may have to be made in other places besides the Councils if the representatives of what are in fact counterrevolutionary organizations participate therein, and the party may, under pressure of circumstances, engage in decisive action even if it is not, in votes, followed by the majority of the class. The fact that, in acting in this

⁵T/E: Karl Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Program* (1875): “What we have to deal with here is a communist society, not as it has developed on its own foundations, but, on the contrary, just as it *emerges* from capitalist society; which is thus in every respect, economically, morally, and intellectually, still stamped with the birthmarks of the old society from whose womb it emerges.”

way, the party will not act as a bureaucratic body aiming at imposing its will on the class but as the historical expression of the class itself, depends upon a series of factors that can be discussed in the abstract today but that will be able to be assessed in concrete fashion only at that very moment: what proportion of the class is in agreement with the party's program, what the ideological state of the rest of the class is, where the struggle with counterrevolutionary tendencies is at within the Councils, what the subsequent prospects [*perspectives*] are, and so on. Drawing up right now a series of rules of conduct for various possible cases would undoubtedly be childish; one can be sure only that the sole cases that will show up will be the unforeseen ones.

There are comrades who say: Tracing out such a perspective leaves the path open to a potential degeneration of the party in a bureaucratic direction. The answer is: Not to trace it out means accepting right now the defeat of the revolution or the bureaucratic degeneration of the Councils, and this, no longer as a possibility, but as a certainty. In the end, refusing to act for fear that one might be transformed into a bureaucrat seems to me as absurd as to give up thinking for fear of making a mistake. Just as the sole "guarantee" against error consists in the very exercise of thought, so the sole "guarantee" against bureaucratization consists in permanent action in an antibureaucratic direction, while struggling against bureaucracy and demonstrating on a practical level that a nonbureaucratic organization of the vanguard is possible and that it can organize nonbureaucratic relations with the class. For, the bureaucracy is born not of false theoretical conceptions but of necessities peculiar to working-class action at a certain stage of such action, and it is in action that one is to show that the proletariat can do without the bureaucracy. In the end, remaining preoccupied above all with the fear of bureaucratization is to forget that, under present-day conditions, an organization could gain a notable amount of influence with the masses only on the condition that it express and fulfill their antibureaucratic aspirations; it is to forget that a vanguard group will be able to attain a genuine existence only by perpetually modeling itself upon those aspirations of the masses; it is to forget that there no longer is

a place for the appearance of a new bureaucratic organization. Here we find the most deep-seated cause behind the permanent failures of the Trotskyist attempts to recreate a “Bolshevik” organization pure and simple.

To conclude these few reflections, neither do I think that one might say that, during the present period (and from here to the revolution), the task of a vanguard group would be a “theoretical” task. I believe that this task is also and especially a task involving struggle and organization. For, the class struggle is permanent, through its ups and downs, and the ideological maturation of the working class occurs through this struggle. Now, the proletariat and its struggles are dominated at present by bureaucratic (trade-union and party) organizations, the result of which is to render struggles impossible, to divert them from their class goal, or to lead them into defeat. A vanguard organization cannot remain indifferent while watching this spectacle or confine itself to appearing as the owl of Minerva at dusk, dropping from its beak some tracts explaining to the workers the reasons for their defeat. It has to be capable of intervening in these struggles, combating the influence of bureaucratic organizations, proposing to workers methods of action and ways of organizing [*modes d’action et d’organisation*]: it sometimes even has to be capable of imposing them. Fifteen resolute vanguard workers can, in certain cases, get a factory of five thousand to go out on strike, if they are willing to jostle a few Stalinist bureaucrats—which is neither theoretical nor even democratic, those bureaucrats always being elected with comfortable majorities by the workers themselves.

Before closing out this response, I would like to say a few words about our second divergence, which at first sight is merely theoretical in character: the one about the nature of the Russian Revolution. We think that to characterize the Russian Revolution as a *bourgeois revolution* does violence to the facts, to ideas, and to language. That in the Russian Revolution there might have been several elements of a bourgeois revolution—in particular, the “fulfillment of bourgeois-democratic tasks”—has always been recognized, and, long before the revolution itself, Lenin and Trotsky had made of these the basis for their strategy and their tactics. Yet

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such tasks, in the given stage of historical development and the configuration of social forces in Russia, could be tackled only by the working class, which, at the same time, could not but set for itself essentially socialist tasks.

You say: The participation of the workers does not suffice. Of course; as soon as a fight becomes a mass fight, the workers are there, for they are the masses. Yet the criterion does not lie there; it lies in whether the workers find themselves there as the mere infantry of the bourgeoisie or whether they fight for their own goals. In a revolution in which workers fight for "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity"—whatever the subjective meaning they might give to these slogans—they are the infantry of the bourgeoisie. When they fight for "All Power to the Soviets," they are fighting for socialism. What makes the Russian Revolution a proletarian revolution is that the proletariat intervened therein as the dominant force with its own flag, its face, its demands, its means of struggle, its own forms of organization: it is not only that it set up mass bodies aiming at itself appropriating all power but that by itself it passed to the expropriation of the capitalists and began to achieve workers' management of the factories. All that forever makes of the Russian Revolution a proletarian revolution, whatever may have been its ultimate fate—just as neither its weaknesses nor its confusion nor its final defeat keep the Paris Commune from having been a proletarian revolution.

This divergence may appear at first sight theoretical: I nevertheless think that it has a practical importance insofar as it expresses a methodological difference apropos of what is, *par excellence*, a present-day problem: the problem of the bureaucracy. The fact that the degeneration of the Russian Revolution did not give rise to a restoration of the bourgeoisie but to the formation of a new exploiting stratum, the bureaucracy; that, despite its deep-seated identity with capitalism (*qua* domination of dead labor over living labor), the regime that bears this stratum differs therefrom in a host of aspects that could not be overlooked without one refusing to understand anything about it; that, since 1945, this same stratum is in the process of extending its domination over the world; and that it is represented in the countries of Western

Europe by parties deeply rooted in the working class—all that leads us to think that confining oneself to saying that the Russian Revolution was a bourgeois revolution amounts to willfully closing one's eyes to the most important traits of the world situation today.

I hope that this discussion will be able to continue and to deepen, and I think it hardly need be repeated that we are delighted to welcome in the pages of *Socialisme ou Barbarie* everything that you would like to send us.

Fraternally,

BETA

Postface to “Response to Comrade Pannekoek”*

The “Response...” one has read above was preceded, in [issue 11](#) of *S. ou B.*, by Anton Pannekoek’s letter and an introductory note, which are reproduced below.¹

I have learned since then, for my amusement, that I am said to have “suppressed” a second letter from Pannekoek “in the same way that Stalin suppressed Lenin’s testament [*sic!*],” for reasons that to me remain obscure, even after reading this second letter, and which the reader interested in this will be able to try to sort out in a libelous text published in [issue 8 \(May 1971\) of the *Cahiers du Communisme de Conseils*](#) (where he will learn, too, if he does not already know, that lying, insinuation, putting words into someone else’s mouth, and spitefulness are in no way the privilege of Stalinists, and that people who proclaim that they are ready to die for the truth and the autonomy of the working class are just as capable as others of making use thereof and of being motivated thereby). On the sole issue that calls, on my part, for a clarification, that of the nonpublication of the second letter, there is simply the following to be noted:

1. It was physically impossible for me (who never personally received the review’s correspondence) or anyone else to have suppressed this letter—or any other one—for, this correspondence was brought to the meeting of the group and its content communicated thereto (as the author of the libel in question knows perfectly well, since he himself attended a number of those meetings).

2. Such a “suppression” would therefore have required the complicity of all the comrades of the group, in particular Mothé, Vivier, Lefort, Guillaume, Véga, Garros, Simon, René Neuvil, G. Pétro, and so on. As the object of this correspondence, the “organizational question,” constantly engendered

*First published in *EMOI*, 261-77. Reprinted in [EPI](#), 109-19.

¹French Editors: [EPI](#), 111-15.

lively discussions, tensions and two splits within the group, such complicity would have been impossible. Beyond the insult done to those comrades (some of whom were much closer to Pannekoek's position on the organizational question than to mine), the libeler thus offers a slanderous image of the operation of the S. ou B. group, which, while it was not a model of organization, was always jealous of its independence and ultrasensitive to everything that might appear to be a germ of internally crystalized power. (How little I "dominated" the group is shown, for example, by the fact that two of what were, in my view, my most important texts, [the second part of] "On the Content of Socialism" and "Modern Capitalism and Revolution" [both now in [PSW2](#)], were published only after bitter controversies and with the mention that they "open[ed] a discussion" and that the ideas expressed therein "do not necessarily express the point of view of the entire *Socialisme ou Barbarie* group.")

3. Finally, it seems curious that I would have "suppressed" Pannekoek's letter, and that I would not have suppressed, once embarked upon this track, the letter of another Dutch comrade from the Spartacus group, Theo Maassen, who took up again Pannekoek's arguments (letter published in [S. ou B., 18 \[January-March 1956\]](#)).

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For my part, I no longer remember, twenty years later, what the circumstances surrounding the nonpublication of this letter were. Yet I am certain about one thing, which is that such nonpublication could have been decided upon only by the group as a whole (and it might also be noted that Pannekoek himself notes, at the end of his second letter, that it does not "contain [any] new arguments"). In any case, it is reproduced here without the permission of the [Cahiers du Communisme de Conseils](#) (a new manifestation of my bureaucratic arbitrariness) and in the [French] translation they provide in the above-mentioned issue. In reading it, one will perhaps understand why, feeling myself incapable of responding to it, I would have decided to "suppress" it.

A Letter from Anton Pannekoek

We have received from comrade Anton Pannekoek the letter we publish below, along with the response from comrade Chaulieu. It is certainly unnecessary to remind our readers of the long and fruitful activity, as militant and theoretician, of Anton Pannekoek, his struggle against the opportunism within the Second International already prior to 1914, the resolutely internationalist attitude the group led by him and Herman Gorter had during World War I, his critique of the nascent bureaucratic centralism of the Bolshevik Party as early as 1919-1920 (which is known in France only through Lenin's response in "[Left-Wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder](#)"; Gorter's [Open Letter to Comrade Lenin](#) was also published in French). We hope to be able to publish soon, in this review, some excerpts from his work [Workers' Councils](#), published after the War in English.

November 8, 1953

Dear Comrade Chaulieu,

I offer you many thanks for the series of eleven issues of *Socialisme ou Barbarie* you gave to comrade B... to give to me. I read them (though I haven't yet finished) with great interest, because of the great agreement between us they reveal. You probably noted the same thing when reading my book *Workers' Councils*. For many years it seemed to me that the small number of socialists who expounded these ideas hadn't grown; the book was ignored and was met with silence by almost the entire socialist press (save, recently, in the [Socialist Leader](#) of the [Independent Labour Party](#)). I was therefore happy to make the acquaintance of a group that had come to the same ideas through an independent path. The workers' complete domination over their work, which you express by saying "The producers themselves organize the management of production," is what I myself described in the chapters on "[Shop Organization](#)" and "[Social Organization.](#)" The bodies of which the workers have need in order to deliberate, made up of assemblies of delegates, which you call "soviet bodies," are the same as those that we call "Conseils ouvriers," "*Arbeiterräte*," "Workers' Councils."

There are of course some differences; I will deal with them, considering this as an attempt to contribute to the

discussion in your review. Whereas you restrict the activity of these bodies to the organization of labor in the factories after the workers' seizure of social power, we consider them also as having to be the bodies by which the workers will conquer this power. In order to conquer power, we have no use for "a revolutionary party" taking the leadership of the proletarian revolution. This "revolutionary party" is a Trotskyist concept that found acceptance (since 1930) among numerous ex-partisans of the CP who were disappointed by the latter's practices. Our opposition and our critique dated back already to the first years of the Russian Revolution and were directed against Lenin and were elicited by his turn toward political opportunism. Thus, we remained outside the lines of Trotskyism; we were never influenced by it; we considered Trotsky as the cleverest spokesman for Bolshevism who should have been Lenin's successor. But, after having seen in Russia a nascent state capitalism, our attention was drawn mainly toward the Western world of big capital, where the workers will have to transform the most highly developed capitalism into a real communism (in the literal sense of the term). Through his revolutionary fervor, Trotsky captivated all the dissidents Stalinism had thrown out of the CP and by inoculating them with the Bolshevik virus rendered them almost incapable of understanding the great new tasks of the proletarian revolution.

Because the Russian Revolution and its ideas still have such a powerful influence over people's minds, we must dig deeper into its basic character. This was, in a few words, the last middle-class revolution, but it was the work of the working class. Middle-class revolution¹ means a revolution that destroys feudalism and opens the way to industrialization, with all the social consequences that implies. The Russian Revolution is therefore in line with the English Revolution of 1647 and the French Revolution of 1789, with its sequels in 1830, 1848, and 1871. During all those revolutions, the craftsmen, the peasants, and the workers provided the massive

¹The text says *middle-class revolution* in the English sense of the "middle classes," that is to say, bourgeoisie.

power needed to destroy the Ancien Régime; then, the committees and parties of politicians representing the wealthy strata that constituted the future dominant class came to the fore and seized governmental power. That was the natural outcome because the working class was not yet ripe to govern itself; the new society was also a class society in which the workers were exploited; such a dominant class needs a government made up of a minority of officials and politicians. The Russian Revolution, in a more recent era, seemed to be a proletarian revolution, the workers being the authors of their strikes and mass actions. Then, however, the Bolshevik Party little by little succeeded in taking power for itself (the laboring class was a small minority among the peasant population); thus, the middle-class (in the broad sense) character of the Russian Revolution became dominant and took the form of state capitalism. Since then, as far as its ideological and spiritual influence in the world goes, the Russian Revolution became the exact opposite of the proletarian revolution which has to liberate the workers and make them masters of the production apparatus.

For us, the glorious tradition of the Russian Revolution consists in this, that, in the initial explosions of 1905 and 1917, it was the first to develop and to show the workers of the whole world the organizational form of their autonomous revolutionary action, the soviets. From this experience, later confirmed on a lesser scale in Germany, we have drawn our ideas about the forms of mass action that belong to the working class and which it will have to apply for its own liberation.

We view exactly opposite the traditions, ideas, and methods that came from the Russian Revolution when the CP seized power. These ideas, which serve solely as obstacles to correct proletarian action, constituted the essence and the basis of Trotsky's propaganda.

Our conclusion is that the organizational forms of autonomous power expressed through the terms *soviets* or *Workers' Councils* have to serve both in the conquest of power and in the management of productive labor after this conquest. First, because the power of workers over society cannot be obtained by any other means, for example by what is called

a revolutionary party. Secondly, because these soviets, which will later be necessary for production, can be formed only through the class struggle for the conquest of power.

It seems to me that in this concept the "knot of contradictions" in the problem of "revolutionary leadership" disappears. For, the source of the contradictions is the impossibility of harmonizing the power and freedom of a class governing its own destiny with the requirement that it obey a leadership made up of a small group or party. But can we maintain such a requirement? It squarely contradicts Marx's most quoted idea that the emancipation of the working classes must be conquered by the working classes themselves.² Moreover, the proletarian revolution cannot be compared to a single rebellion or to a military campaign led by a central command, and not even to a period of struggles similar, for example, to the great French Revolution, which was itself but an episode in the bourgeoisie's rise to power. The proletarian revolution is much vaster and deeper; it is the rise of masses of people to an awareness of their existence and their character. It will not be a single convulsion; it will form the content of an entire period in the history of humanity, during which the working class will have to discover and to achieve its own faculties and potential, as well as its own goals and methods of struggle. I have sought to work out certain aspects of this revolution in my book *Workers' Councils*, in the chapter titled "[The Workers' Revolution.](#)" Of course, all that offers only an abstraction, which can be used to advance various forces into action and their relationships.

Now, you may ask: but then, in the context of this orientation, what use is there for a party or a group, and what are its tasks? We can be sure that our group will not succeed in commanding the working masses in their revolutionary action; alongside us, there are a half dozen or more other groups or parties, which call themselves revolutionary but which all differ in their program and their ideas; and compared to the big socialist party, they are but Lilliputians. In the context of

²T/E: International Workingmen's Association, [Rules and Administrative Regulations of the International Workingmen's Association](#) (1867).

the discussion in [issue 10 of your review](#), it was rightly stated that our task is principally a theoretical one: finding and indicating, through study and discussion, the best course of action for the working class. Education based on that, however, is not to be conducted only for members of the group or party, but for the working-class masses. They are the ones to decide, in their factory meetings and their Councils, on the best way to act. But, for them to decide in the best possible way, they have to be enlightened by the well-considered opinions from the greatest possible number of sides. Consequently, a group that proclaims that the autonomous action of the working class is the main force of the socialist revolution will think that the primordial task is to go toward the workers; for example, by means of popular tracts that will clarify the workers' ideas by explaining the major changes in society and the need for the workers to be led by themselves in all their actions as well as in their future productive labor.

Here you have a few of the thoughts a reading of the highly interesting discussions in your review have sparked in me. Moreover, I have to say how much I was pleased with the articles on "The American Worker,"³ which clarify a large part of the enigmatic problem of this working class without socialism; and with the instructive article on the working class in East Germany.⁴ I hope that your group will be able to publish other issues of its review.

Please excuse me for having written this letter in English; it is difficult for me to express myself in French in a satisfactory way.

Very sincerely yours,

Ant. Pannekoek

³1974 note: [S. ou B.](#), nos. 1-8. [T/E: [The American Worker](#) (1947; reprinted, Detroit: Bewick Editions, 1972) was translated for the first eight issues of [S. ou B.](#) Excerpts appear in [SouBA](#).]

⁴1974 note: [S. ou B.](#), nos. [7](#) and [8](#). [T/E: See Hugo Bell (Benno Sternberg), "Stalinism in East Germany," excerpted in [SouBA](#).]

Second Letter from Anton Pannekoek*

"T/E: Presented here, we believe for the first time, is a *transcription* of a scan of the original, numbered, four-pages-on-lined-sheets manuscript "draft" (marked in Dutch: *klad*) of Anton Pannekoek's second letter written, directly in English, to Pierre Chaulieu (pseudonym for Cornelius Castoriadis); the scan appears online here: <http://archivesautonomies.org/IMG/pdf/echanges/documents/Pannekoek-Chaulieu-juin54.pdf>. When used twice, the caret symbol "^" indicates the beginning and end of interline or marginal additions. Crossed-out words appear in ~~strikeout~~; a crossed-out paragraph appears in ~~gray highlight~~. Crossed-out words that are illegible appear as: ~~xxx~~. All suggestions for improvements in this transcription are welcome.

For additional information about this epistolary exchange and the controversy surrounding it, the reader is referred to "[Réponse au Camarade Pannekoek](#)" (*Socialisme ou Barbarie*, 14 [April 1954]: 44-50), its [Postface \(1974\)](#)—now translated, above—and the newly published accompanying "[Documents sur la 'Réponse,'](#)" in Castoriadis's *EPI*, 101-26—now translated below. Additional material in English may be found in Marcel van der Linden's text "[Did Castoriadis Suppress a Letter from Pannekoek? A Note on the Debate regarding the 'Organizational Question' in the 1950s,](#)" *A Usable Collection: Essays in Honour of Jaap Kloosterman on Collecting Social History*, ed. Aad Blok, Jan Lucassen and Huub Sanders (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2014): 252-62, which presents information, analyses, and references, as well as translations and transcriptions. Neither Linden nor Castoriadis's posthumous French Editors, however, included any mention of Jean-Luc Leylavergne's "Remarques sur la brochure: *Correspondance Pierre Chaulieu-Anton Pannekoek 1953-1954*; présentée et commentée par Henri Simon (Échanges et Mouvement 2001)," a text that was composed by Leylavergne in early February 2003 and that was sent to Simon but that never received a response from Simon, author of the above-mentioned 2001 *Correspondance* brochure—a rather hypocritical bit of negligence on Simon's part, given that at one time both he and [Cajo Brendel](#) claimed that Castoriadis had "suppressed" publication of Pannekoek's second letter to Chaulieu "in the same way that Stalin suppressed [Lenin's testament](#)" (even though Pannekoek himself, in this second letter, described "these expositions," now transcribed here, as "contain[ing] no new arguments"). Nevertheless, since June 20, 2009 Leylavergne's scathing "Remarques sur la brochure" have been made available to all on the following website: <http://collectiflieuxcommuns.fr/160-remarques-sur-la-brochure>. See also pp. 34-35n21 in the [Translator/Editor's Introduction to A Socialisme ou Barbarie Anthology: Autonomy, Critique, and Revolution in the Age of Bureaucratic Capitalism](#) (London: Eris, 2018) concerning other tendentious claims contained in Simon's brochure, along with a misidentification that was brought to Simon's attention but that Simon, despite Simon's promise to do so, has never corrected in the [brochure's online version](#). Readers may also wish to visit, respectively, the [Antonie](#)

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June 15, 1954

Dear Comrade Chaulieu,

It was a great satisfaction for me to see that you printed a translation of my letter of November 8 [1953] in N° 14 of your review "Socialisme ou Barbarie,"[^] and added your critical remarks,[^] in this way involving your readers in a discussion of principles.[^] There is one place in the translation where, probably by lack of clearness in my English, just the reverse has come out of what I meant to say: page 40 line 13 I intended to say: pour conquérir le pouvoir nous ne pouvons pas faire usage d'un "parti révolutionnaire."^{^1} Because you express the wish to continue the discussion I will present here some remarks on your response. Of course there remain differences of opinion, which by discussion may come to the front fore with greater clarity. Such differences have usually[^] their origin in a difference of the points of chief interest,

Pannekoek Archives: <http://aaap.be> and the Cornelius Castoriadis/Agora International Website: <http://www.agorainternational.org> for additional information and bibliographical references about these two revolutionary authors.

It is unknown at this time whether this scanned document, at some point marked "draft," is the actual sent letter or a preliminary version then turned into a clean copy and mailed to France by Pannekoek, though the scan is currently available on a [French website](#). In any case, a Dutch translation of an original English-language version in Pannekoek's possession appeared in the "Spartacus" Communistenbond's [Daad en Gedachte \(Deed and Thought\)](#), 2:5 (October 1954): 64-66, and it was on the *indirect* basis of this Dutch translation that a French translation, "Deuxième lettre d'Anton Pannekoek à Pierre Chaulieu," first appeared, with commentary by Brendel, in the [Cahiers du communisme de conseils](#), 8 (1971): 32-35, was reprinted in [Simon's brochure](#), and was reproduced by Castoriadis in his 1974 Postface. Here, editorial notes either translate French phrases in Pannekoek's original English or signal where, for whatever reason, the subsequent Dutch or French translations depart substantially from this original English-language "draft."

¹T/E: The Dutch and French translations drop this marginal note on translation, called out in the draft by an "x". In his [August 22, 1954 reply to Pannekoek](#), now transcribed, Chaulieu/Castoriadis corrects Pannekoek's misimpression of a translation error; see his "P.S." on page two. See now "Pannekoek's Third Letter to Comrade Chaulieu" and "Chaulieu's Response to Pannekoek's Second and Third Letters."

proceeding either from different practical experiences or from living in a different milieu. For me it was the study of the political strikes and massal [*sic*] actions of the workers, in Belgium 1893, in Russia 1905 and 1917, in Germany 1918-19, from which I tried to get a clear understanding of the fundamental character of such actions. Your group is living and working ⁱⁿ ^{among} the tumultuous working class movements of a big industrial town; so your attention is ^{struck} ^{directed to} ^{by} ^{the} ^{practical} problem how efficient modes of fight may develop out of the present often inefficient strife and partial strikes.

Surely I do not suppose that the revolutionary actions of the working class will take place all in a sphere² of peaceful discussion. But what I contend is that the final result of the often violent strifes is determined ^{not by accidental facts but} by what stands behind them in the minds of the workers, as a basis of firm convictions acquired by ^{experience,} study, and discussion of arguments. When a the personnell in a shop has to decide on strike or not it is not by fists and violence but usually by arguments that the decision is taken.

You put the dilemma in an entirely practical way: what shall the party do when it has 45% of the (council) members ^{as its adherents} and expects that another party (neo-stalinien [*sic*], aspiring at totalitarian state power)³ will try to seize power by violent action? Your answer is: forestall them by doing ourselves what we fear they will do. What will be the final result of such an action? ^{There} ^{Look at what happened in Russia.} ^{There} was a party ^{with} ^{good} ^{excellent}⁴ revolutionary ^{principles} as any, imbued with Marxism; it could moreover lean upon soviets already formed by the workers; yet it had to seize power

²T/E: While the Dutch has: *sfeer*; the French interpolates: *atmosphère*.

³T/E: While the Dutch has: *die naar totalitaire macht streven*, the French, eliminating all mention of totalitarianism, modifies this to: *qui s'efforcerait de conquérir le régime* (which would endeavor to capture/conquer the regime).

⁴T/E: While the Dutch has: *uitstekende* (excellent), the French ("bon") seems to mirror the crossed-out "good."

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^{^for itself^} and the result was the totalitarian system of Stalinism. (This “had to” means that the conditions were not yet ripe for a real proletarian revolution; in the highly capitalistic Western world they certainly are more ripe; how much more can only be shown by the course of the class struggle[.]) So it ^{^the question^} must be asked ^{^posed^}: will the action⁵ of the party you suppose will it save the workers' revolution? It seems to me that it would rather be a step towards new despotism.⁶

Certainly there are difficulties in either way. When the situation in France or in the world should call for massal actions of the working class, then immediately the CP will try to bend the action into a pro-Russian party-demonstration. And you will have to wage a strenuous fight with them. But it is not by copying its methods that you we can defeat the CP. ~~You We can win real and lasting success by~~ ^{^This can be achieved^} only by applying our own method—the genuine mode of action of the fighting class—: by the strength of quiet argument based on the great principle of self-determination.⁷

The argument with the 45% example fits entirely in the parliamentary world of fighting parties each with a certain percentage of followers. In the workers' revolution which we foresee it is the class that rises into action; there all the conditions, ^{^e.g., of party-adherence^} have changed. We do not say: it shall be *our* party with its most excellent program that has to seize power and we ^{^it is our task to^} call upon the workers to sustain *us* against the others. It ^{^We say it^} is our task to arouse and induce the workers to establish their own class-power in the shops and enterprises. The difference may be expressed in

⁵T/E: Stronger than the English's “action,” the Dutch has: *strijd* (fight) and the French: *lutte* (struggle).

⁶T/E: Differing from the original English's “despotism,” the Dutch has: *onderdrukking* (crackdown/oppression/ repression/suppression) and the French has: *oppression*.

⁷T/E: While the Dutch has: *zelf-belissing* (self-determination), the French has the more roundabout: *autonomie des décisions* (autonomy of decisions). Probably misreading an editorial mark, both are followed by an otherwise anomalous exclamation point.

another more fundamental way. Our ^{^Your^} point of view is this ^{^seems to me to be^}; the worst that could happen to the liberation of the working class is the domination of party-communism; for then the workers will have lost the possibility to propagate and develop their ideas of freedom by means of council organisation. Or, expressed in another way: our first duty is to prevent the CP from ^{^and thereby^} establishing a totalitarian state power and to defend against them the western parliamentary democracy. It looks quite sensible and logical: it has the same sense and logics as had reformism xxx when it said: revolution is far away; let us for the present by reforms make capitalism tolerable for the workers. Marxist argument then replied: reforms the workers will get not by conciliatory tactics but by increasing their fighting power. So now we may reply: the workers can prevent mastery of the CP only by developing and strengthening their own class power, i.e. their united will to seize and control themselves the production apparatus.

The main condition for the working class to win freedom is that the ideas of self-rule and self-management of the production apparatus have taken deep roots in the mind of the masses. There is a certain analogy to ^{^with^} what Jaurès wrote in his *Histoire Socialiste*, on the Constituante: "Cette assemblée, toute neuve aux choses de la politique, sut, à peine réunie, déjouer toutes les manœuvres de la Cour. Pourquoi? Parce qu'elle portait en elle quelques idées abstraites et grandes, fortement et long[u]ement méditées, qui lui étaient une lumière."⁸ The cases are different, surely: instead of the

⁸T/E: This excerpt from Jean Jaurès's *Histoire Socialiste* can be found here: http://fr.wikisource.org/wiki/Histoire_socialiste/La_Constituante/La_Fuite_à_Varennes. In English: "This [Constituent] Assembly, quite new to political affairs, was able, shortly after it began meeting, to foil all the Court's maneuvers. Why? Because it bore within itself a few grand and abstract ideas it had vigorously meditated upon at length, which were to it a shining light." The French version merely retranslates the Dutch of Jaurès directly back into French, and both create a new paragraph break after the quotation.

grand political ideas of the ~~xxx~~ revolutionary bourgeoisie⁹ we will have the grander social ideas of the workers, ^{^the ideas^} of control of production in organised collaboration: instead of the ~~five~~ six hundred¹⁰ delegates elevated by the abstract ideas they had studied we will have the millions guided by their life experience of ^{^exploitation in^} productive work. Hence I see it to be the noblest and most useful task of a revolutionary party, by its propaganda in thousands of leaflets, pamphlets and papers, to awaken these feelings to ever greater consciousness and clarity.

As to the character of the Russian revolution:¹¹ the translation of middle-class revolution into *révolution bourgeoise*¹² (en Allemand on dit: *bürgerliche Revolution*)¹³ ne rend pas exactement¹⁴ its essence. When in England the ^{^so called^} middle class (~~the capitalist class~~ ^{^was called this, because it stood} ~~between~~ ^{^the^} aristocracy and the working people) rose to power it consisted of a numerous class of mostly small ^{^capitalists} ^{or^} business men, owners of the (industrial) productive apparatus of society. Though the pulling down of aristocratic power needed ~~xxx~~ actions of the masses, these were not yet able to lay hands upon the ^{^xxx means of^} production apparatus; this spiritual, moral, and organisational capability can be acquired by the workers only by means of their class-struggle in a highly developed capitalism. In Russia there was no

⁹T/E: While the Dutch has: *revolutionaire bourgeoisie*, the French has: *Révolution française*.

¹⁰T/E: Both the Dutch and the French seem to adopt the crossed-out "500," now written as a numeral.

¹¹T/E: Unlike the English (and the Dutch translation), the French translation divides this paragraph in to three smaller paragraphs.

¹²T/E: In English: "bourgeois revolution."

¹³T/E: The Dutch retains, but the French suppresses, this parenthetical phrase.

¹⁴T/E: In English: "does not exactly render."

bourgeoisie of any importance; so a "new "middle class," as directors of the productive work had to arise out of the avant-garde ^{^of the revolution^} and ^{^to^} take possession of the production apparatus, not ^{^as^} individually ^{^owners^} each of a small part but as collectively ^{^owners^} of the totality. ^{^Generally we can say:^} When the working masses (because they come out of pre-capitalist conditions) are not yet capable to take the production in their own hands, the results, inevitably, is a new ruling class, master of the ~~xxx~~ production. This similarity is why I called the Russian revolution (in its lasting character) a middle-class revolution. Surely the massal force of the proletarian class was needed to destroy the old system (and this was a school for ~~the~~ workers all over the world). But a revolution of society can achieve no more than corresponds to the nature of the ~~xxx~~ relevant social classes,¹⁵ and when the greatest radicalism was needed to overcome the resistances it has afterwards to retrace its steps. This seems to be a general ^{^common^} rule in the revolutions till now; thus in ~~xxx~~ ^{^up to^} 1793 the ^{^French^} revolution became ever more radical, ~~till~~ until the peasants ^{^at last^} were assured ^{^unquestioned^} ^{^definitely^} free masters of the soil and the foreign armies were repelled; then the Jacobins were massacred and ~~the ugliest~~ capitalism presented itself as the new masters. Seen in this way the Russian revolution falls in line with its predecessors, ^{^all against vanquishing feudal16 powers,^} in England, France, Germany. It ^{^was^} is not an abortive proletarian revolution; the proletarian revolution is a thing of the future, before us.

I hope that these expositions, though they contain no new arguments, may serve to clarify some of ^{^the differences in^} our points of view.

¹⁵T/E: The English "relevant social classes" becomes *opstandige klassen* (rebellious classes) in Dutch and *classes révolutionnaires* (revolutionary classes) in French.

¹⁶T/E: While the Dutch has: *feodale*, the French drops any mention of "feudal."

Documents about the “Response”*

French Editors: The letters of Cajo Brendel and Castoriadis, which we reproduce below, should suffice to close all discussion on the “suppression” of Anton Pannekoek’s second letter. Yet when passions are sufficiently violent, the libelers never relent. In an (undated) *Échanges et Mouvement* brochure,¹ where the Castoriadis-Pannekoek correspondence is reprinted (and which, moreover, can be consulted on the internet),² Henri Simon, a former S. ou B. member, writes, apropos of Castoriadis’s 1974 Postface:

It would have been easy for Castoriadis, rather than to indulge in this polemical exercise, to refer, in order to reestablish the truth, to the minutes written at the time after each meeting, and which he could easily find in his archives or from other comrades of the group. ...The mistake and erroneous interpretation of Cajo Brendel relative to this issue come from the fact that the aforementioned minutes, which would have been accessible to his political relations of the time, had been borrowed by an Italian comrade and were not returned until 1982.

Castoriadis did not have at his disposal complete archives on this period—he did not even have a complete collection of the review—and tried at the time to obtain the minutes of the meetings from the only former members with whom he had remained in contact who might have had them—but who did not have them. Yet, it seems, certain things were easy for Castoriadis but impossible for Brendel (and for Simon). The brochure includes a particularly venomous note on Castoriadis in which some truly slanderous statements appear (*Devant la guerre* [Facing war] is said to contain “more overtly pro-Western capitalist stands” and to “conclude implicitly that it was necessary to support the military policy of the United States”). We will do proper justice to such statements in our republication of *DG*. [T/E: But first we present the first-ever transcription of the recently uncovered draft of Pannekoek’s August 10, 1954 letter to Chaulieu (Castoriadis) and then a full translation of Chaulieu/Castoriadis’s August 22, 1954 response to Pannekoek’s second and third letters.]

*First published in [EPI](#), 121-26.

¹T/E: [Pierre Chaulieu \(Cornélius \[sic\] Castoriadis\), Anton Pannekoek, Correspondance 1953-1954. Présentation et commentaire d’Henri Simon \(Paris: Échanges et Mouvement \[BP 241, 75866 Paris Cedex 18, France; Printemps 2001\]\).](#)

²T/E: [The web-based version of Henri Simon’s aforementioned brochure](#) about this correspondence is dated “May 15, 2007.”

Pannekoek's Third Letter to Comrade Chaulieu*

[August 10, 1954]

Dear Comrade Chaulieu,

I suppose that your review *Socialisme ou Barbarie* does extend its realm also to problems of Marxian theory.^{^Such}
a problem is treated in the accompanying article.^ That socialism is founded or should be founded on ethics is a ~~common~~ wide^{^spread^} belief among intellectual sympathizers, usually combined with a ~~xxx~~ critical mood toward ~~xxx~~ its scientific basis laid down by Marx. On the other hand several authors have tried to combine them and to make ethics an essential part or the basis of Marxism. This is not simply a theoretical question, because modern discussions of the future of socialism are connected with it. You know that comrade Maxime [*sic*] Rubel—well

T/E: “[T]wo versions of an unpublished manuscript” are referenced in Dutch at: <http://aaap.be/Pages/Pannekoek-Letters.html>. Until recently, however, the [first scanned version alone](#) was posted, twice, in the [Antonie Pannekoek Archives](#). This version’s title, “Marx éthicien? [Marx an ethicist?],” is in French, but the body of this text is composed in German, with a few phrases appearing in French; seven handwritten pages in length, this draft references both [Maximilien Rubel](#)’s dissertation defense and *Le Monde*’s account thereof (see note 8 of “Chaulieu’s [Castoriadis’s] Response to Pannekoek’s Second and Third Letters”) while examining Marx’s pre-1848 writings. [A full German transcription of this version is now available online](#). The [second scanned version](#), now posted, *in fact contains, on the fourth scanned page, a draft of Pannekoek’s August 10, 1954 letter to Chaulieu*, which is *now transcribed here for the first time*, using the same conventions as the first-ever transcription of the “Second Letter from Anton Pannekoek” to Chaulieu (see above in the present volume). This second scan contains another, perhaps earlier version of “Marx éthicien?” that is also composed mostly in German, with additional material and quotations written directly in French. It, too, references both Rubel’s dissertation defense and *Le Monde*’s account thereof.

English-language readers may read Rubel’s 1982 summary essay, “The Ethical Work of Karl Marx,” which was written for the Socialist Party of Great Britain’s journal, [Socialist Standard](#), but was never published there and is now transcribed and has been made available at: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/rubel/1982/marx-ethics.htm>.

known by his bibliographic work on Marx—strongly defended this point of view in his “Pages choisies,”¹ and lately made it the subject of his Doctor Thesis at the Sorbonne.² It induced me to take up again the study of Marx’ earliest works, where we can see ^{^find^} the genesis of his theory; and I think ^{^that on that basis^} we can refute the opinion that ethics in any way played a part in it. † Since you kindly offered me your hospitality and since ~~xxx~~ Rubel’s work was published in ~~xxx~~ French, I prepared an article on this question which I hope you will find suitable for your review. I wrote it in German, because this is easiest for arguments of Marx’ theory; I trust you will find it ~~possible to~~ ^{^no difficulty in^} having it translated.

BETA

¹T/E: Maximilien Rubel, *Karl Marx. Pages choisies pour une éthique socialiste*, textes réunis, traduits et annotés, précédés d’une Introduction à l’éthique marxienne (Paris: M. Rivière, 1948). This book was reprinted in two volumes in 1970 by Payot and then in 2008 by Payot & Rivages as *Révolution et socialisme* and *Sociologie critique*, with each volume subtitled *Karl Marx. Pages choisies*.

²T/E: See note 8 of “Chaulieu’s Response to Pannekoek’s Second and Third Letters.”

Chaulieu's Response to Pannekoek's Second and Third Letters*

Paris, August 22, 1954

Dear Comrade Pannekoek,

Please excuse my somewhat tardy response to your letter of June 15; I was absent from Paris and wanted to answer you only after discussing it with the comrades from our group. In the meantime, I also received your letter of August 10,¹ with the article on Marxist "ethics," which we also discussed.

Concerning your letter of June 15, we have unanimously decided to publish it in the upcoming issue (15)²

¹T/E: This letter is available in box 11 of the Antonie Pannekoek Archives; see: <http://www.aaap.be/Pdf/IISG-Archief-Pannekoek/Map-011.pdf> for the scan. We have on occasion consulted an earlier, partial translation, available in [Marcel van der Linden's "Did Castoriadis Suppress a Letter from Pannekoek? A Note on the Debate regarding the 'Organizational Question' in the 1950s,"](#) *A Usable Collection: Essays in Honour of Jaap Kloosterman on Collecting Social History*, ed. Aad Blok, Jan Lucassen and Huub Sanders (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2014): 252-62; see: "Letter from Castoriadis to Pannekoek, 22 August, 1954," *ibid.*, 260-61. The present version is the *first full and fully accurate translation of Castoriadis's response in French to Pannekoek's June 15, 1954 letter*, as it also takes into account the English-language wording of the first-ever transcription of the "Second Letter from Anton Pannekoek."

²T/E: See above the newly uncovered and recently scanned transcription, "Pannekoek's Third Letter to Comrade Chaulieu."

²T/E: Actually, this was ultimately a double issue, listed as "[Nos. 15-16](#)" and published for "October-December 1954." Linden's transcription of a *fourth* Pannekoek letter—"Draft reply from Pannekoek to Castoriadis, 3 September 1954"—appears in *ibid.*, 261-62. Linden notes (*ibid.*, p. 258) that, in this "draft version of a fourth letter from Pannekoek to Castoriadis, dated 3 September 1954, ...Pannekoek writes that his [second letter](#) was 'not written with great care' and was not intended for publication." Thus, it was *after reading Chaulieu's August 22 private criticism of a gaping hole in Pannekoek's argument*—see below in the body of the present letter about the confusion or conflation between all organization and a "Stalinist-

of “Socialisme ou Barbarie.” It certainly will help readers to understand your point of view better, both on the party question and on that of the character of the Russian Revolution. For my part, I do not think that I personally have anything of importance to add to what I wrote in [issue 14](#). To you alone I would like to point out that I have never thought that “we can defeat the CP...by copying its methods” and that I have always said that the working class—or its vanguard—needed a new mode of organization, one that meets the needs of the struggle against the bureaucracy, not only the outside and already attained bureaucracy (that of the CP) but also the potential bureaucracy from within. I am saying: The working class needs an organization before Councils are set up, —and you reply to me: It does not need a Stalinist-type organization. We are in agreement, but your thesis requires that you show that a Stalinist-type organization is the sole organization attainable. I think, moreover, that on this terrain the discussion cannot advance much; I intend to take up the question again on the basis of the “intellectuals and workers” text that was published in [issue 14 of “Socialisme ou Barbarie,”](#)³ and I hope to be able to publish an article about that in issue 16. I dare to think that at that moment we will be

type organization”—that Pannekoek wrote back to say that he did not want his second letter published in full in *S. ou B.* (This is perhaps the first time, in all the polemics surrounding the Pannekoek-Chaulieu correspondence, that this crucial point has been brought forward—crucial, for the bulk of the controversies leading to the 1958 split within *S. ou B.* and to the departure of Henri Simon, Claude Lefort, and others from the group had, as their background, this confusion or conflation of organization/bureaucracy, which was colored by the experience of Stalinist and Trotskyist groups.)

³T/E: See “Intellectuels et ouvriers: Un article de ‘Correspondance,’” which appeared on pp. 74-77 of that issue. This is *S. ou B.*’s translation of all but the first two sentences of [“The Real Trouble: We Solve This or Fail,” in the “Special Supplement” to Correspondence, 14 \(April 3, 1954\): S1 and S4.](#) The identity of the author, “R. M.,” is probably untraceable.

able to resume the discussion in a more fruitful way.⁴

As for your article against [\[Maximilien\] Rubel](#),⁵ we thought that it would be quite difficult to publish a critique of a book that has not yet been published.⁶ Indeed, Rubel’s thesis exists only in typescript form; the public (and we ourselves) know about it only on the basis of an account thereof in *Le Monde* written by Jean Lacroix, if I’m not mistaken,⁷ who

⁴T/E: As mentioned in note 2, above, *S. ou B.* issues 15 and 16 were folded into a [single, delayed issue](#). No such article by Castoriadis appeared there or afterward, though he often addressed the need to integrate manual and intellectual labor and laborers within a revolutionary organization as well as into a future socialist society. In [issue 17](#), published in July of the following year, Castoriadis emphasized that “Workers’ management is possible...only if from the outset it starts moving in the direction of overcoming this division [of manual and intellectual labor], in particular with respect to intellectual labor as it relates to the production process” (“On the Content of Socialism, I,” in [PSWI](#), 308).

⁵T/E: Scans of two draft versions, written mainly in German, of Pannekoek’s critique of Rubel, with both bearing the French title “Marx éthicien? [Marx an ethicist?]” and both referencing Rubel’s dissertation defense and *Le Monde*’s account thereof (see note 7, below), are available online. [The first](#) appears to be a more extensive draft; [the second](#) also contains, interspersed, the (recently discovered and now-transcribed) handwritten draft in English of “Pannekoek’s Third Letter to Comrade Chaulieu,” dated August 10, 1954, which proposes that *Socialisme ou Barbarie* translate and publish this (now-transcribed) Pannekoek review of the unread and not yet published Rubel dissertation.

⁶The book version of Rubel’s dissertation was published by Rivière in 1956 as *Bibliographie des œuvres de Karl Marx*.

⁷T/E: Accompanying the scan of Castoriadis’s typewritten letter sent in an envelope postmarked “rue du Chaillot, 3PM August 24, 1954” and listing on the back as return address ““Socialisme ou Barbarie’/9, rue de Savoie/Paris 6” (S. ou B. member Georges Petit’s home address)—is [a clipping of an article from page 9 of *Le Monde*’s May 26, 1954 issue: “À la recherche d’un Marx au delà du marxisme.”](#) The author of this review of Rubel’s dissertation defense at the Sorbonne is listed not as Jean Lacroix but as “J. Piatier”—the journalist [Jacqueline Piatier](#), who created *Le Monde*’s weekly book review supplement, *Le Monde des Livres*, in 1967. ([Jean Lacroix](#), who cofounded the “non-conformist” Christian “personalist” review *Esprit* with [Emmanuel Mounier](#) in 1932, also

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must have simply attended the oral presentation of this dissertation on the day of its defense, and in all likelihood did not read it. In any case, it seems to me difficult to critique a book on the basis of a newspaper account.⁸ True, Rubel had

chronicled philosophical topics in *Le Monde*.) When the scan was accessed May 1, 2019, the first page of Castoriadis's letter and the clipping, while in the file, had not yet been scanned. It is unclear whether the now-scanned clipping is the one Pannekoek mentioned receiving from a third party (see next note) or a second copy Castoriadis himself might have sent in this envelope.

⁸T/E: In a [letter written to Rubel on June 23rd](#), Pannekoek states that he had received from "[\[Henk\] Canne Meijer](#)" a clipping of this *Le Monde* article, apropos of which he writes (as translated from the original German):

From the article in *Le Monde* I believe I can see that you have also defended your thesis...of ethics as the basis [*Grundlage*] of Marxian theory. You know that I do not agree, and we have argued about it enough in our correspondence. I suppose that you are now arguing the matter exactly as you did in the "Pages Choisi[e]s" [on this earlier Rubel volume, see note 1 of "Pannekoek's Third Letter to Comrade Chaulieu"].

At the end of this same letter, Pannekoek adds:

[T]his question of ethics drove me to read through all of the earlier (i.e., pre-1848) articles and writings of Marx. His development was now much clearer to me; but not only did I not find a single sentence that could confirm your view, but the whole of the exposition appeared to me to stand in complete opposition to it more than before.

In, for example, [a letter also written in German to Rubel a year earlier \(July 19, 1953\)](#), Pannekoek the Dutch astronomer had argued, in a heavily scientific and reductionist way, that

Marxism is first of all a science; a science of society which draws conclusions from the study of phenomena (i.e., history here), i.e., establishes rules (e.g., previous history is a history of class struggles, etc.) and applies these rules to the present and the future. He therefore says: the exploited class will fight against the exploiter class (it already is). So he is not saying: The working class should do this or that; And still less does he say: You should act like this. ...It is therefore not the case that Marx

already expounded his view, which as you quite rightly say is not new, in his Introduction to Marx’s Pages Choiesies.⁹ But, since he is making the effort to write a book on the topic, people will rightly think that we could wait to see the development of his position and the accompanying argument. For, we are for the moment pretty much in the process of struggling with a term.... We therefore kindly ask that you await the publication of Rubel’s book; we will send you a copy as soon as it comes out, and perhaps you will note that there is no call to change anything whatsoever in your article—but we will have been in compliance with the rules of good literary manners [*la correction littéraire*].

Faternally,

[signed Pierre Chaulieu]

P.S.: Due to a misunderstanding, you believe that an error slipped into the translation of your [first] letter.¹⁰ The phrase (p. 40, line 13, of [issue 14](#)) “*nous n’avons que faire d’un parti révolutionnaire*” is a Gallicism that means “we do not need, we cannot make any use of a revolutionary party [*nous n’avons pas besoin, nous ne pouvons pas nous servir d’un parti révolutionnaire*]”—this translation is rather close to your English: “We have no use for....”

presents socialism only as a material possibility; he says: The workers will realize socialism; and not because it is an ethical necessity, but because it is a material, social necessity to secure their lives...if everything in the world is strictly causal, a certain event will either happen or not happen. In the first case it is certain [*sicher*], in the second it is impossible, and there is no third. So if you say that it is not certain, you say that it is impossible.

⁹T/E: See again note 1 of “Pannekoek’s Third Letter to Comrade Chaulieu.”

¹⁰T/E: Previously (in a [May 29, 1954 letter](#)), Pannekoek had checked with Rubel about this controversial (for him) *S. ou B.* translation.

1. Cajo Brendel's Letter to Castoriadis

CAJO BRENDEL
Berliozstr. 23^a
3816 VM Amersfoort
Holland

M[onsieur] C. Castoriadis
31, quai Anatole-France
75007 PARIS

AMERSFOORT, mid-December 1982

Dear Comrade,

In [issue eight of *Cahiers du Communisme de Conseils* \(May 1971\)](#) appeared an article signed by Cajo Brendel concerning an exchange of correspondence between the late Anton Pannekoek and Pierre Chaulieu; two of those letters had been published by the review [Socialisme ou Barbarie \(no. 14 \[April-June 1954\]\)](#), others were not. During discussions with Pannekoek, Cajo Brendel had been able to obtain access to the second letter sent by Pannekoek to the S. ou B. group in response to Chaulieu's letter, a second letter that was not published in the *S. ou B.* review.¹ The aforesaid issue of the [Cahiers du Communisme des Conseils](#) contained the two letters by Pannekoek and the one by Chaulieu; Brendel presented them with some general commentaries about the S. ou B. group while insisting on the reasons that could have led to Pannekoek's second letter being kept quiet. Accepting information furnished by some former *Socialisme ou Barbarie* members, including Henri Simon, Brendel challenged the behavior of Chaulieu within the S. ou B. group, notably in the following passage: "The reason why Pierre Chaulieu suppressed Pannekoek's second letter, in the

¹T/E: See now the transcription of the English-language original draft of the "Second Letter from Anton Pannekoek," above.

same way Stalin suppressed Lenin's testament, is strikingly evident to the reader."

In the Éditions 10/18 series republication, beneath the heading "Socialisme ou Barbarie," of articles you had published in the [S.ou B. review](#) under various pseudonyms or that were unsigned, you reprinted the three letters in question (that is to say, including Pannekoek's second letter) while refuting Brendel's assertions.

During the era in which the Pannekoek-Chaulieu exchange was situated, minutes had, since a recent date, been kept for subscribers from the provinces and for those absent from the meetings (decision of July 22, 1954). Simon was, to begin with, in charge of keeping these minutes, the text of which, reread during the next meeting, was then typed up and distributed.

The file preserved by Simon of all (or almost all) the minutes from July 1954 to 1958 had been entrusted by him to an Italian comrade who was preparing a thesis on *S. ou B.* in the Fall of 1968 and, since that date, despite a good number of complaints, had not been able to be recovered and were considered lost. It is only relatively recently, during an international meeting, that the aforementioned file was returned and that it was possible to verify how the Pannekoek-Chaulieu polemic had unfolded within the *S. ou B.* group. The text appearing as an appendix provides excerpts from the summary accounts on this point.

The reading of these excerpts from the necessarily brief and incomplete minutes nevertheless allow one to think that, contrary to what Brendel wrote in the above-mentioned text, Chaulieu did not "suppress" Pannekoek's second letter but that it was not inserted into the *S. ou B.* review in accordance with the true opinion of the majority of group members present at the September 9, 1954 meeting.²

²T/E: The portion of the minutes made available below by Brendel and Simon do *not* indicate that a vote was taken; the minutes simply state: "A letter from Pannekoek responding to Chaulieu's specifies that his letter was not meant for publication. This intention will be respected...." Brendel and Simon seem to want to insinuate that a principled minority still wanted to...what? Disrespect Pannekoek's own wishes and publish

Therefore, while the polemic begun on this topic remains valid on the level of the discussion and the nonpublication of Pannekoek's second letter, on the other hand it has to free you of all suspicion as to the manipulation of S. ou B. or intrigues undertaken without the knowledge of the group on this specific point.

Henri Simon and the undersigned, deeming ourselves responsible for the personal turn this polemic has taken, and for the consequences that this could have for you, would hope that a correction—based on a text we would agree to beforehand—might be published in a publication that could eventually reach the readers of the various publications mentioned in the aforesaid polemic.

Fraternal greetings, and the same in the name of Simon.

BETA [signed: Cajo Brendel]

“these expositions” the author had already described in his second letter as “contain[ing] no new arguments,” and then [wrote, on September 3](#), that this second letter was “not written with great care” and that “it was not my intention that it should be printed”? Whether Pannekoek's suggestion that the group might select and publish certain passages from the second letter (which would have required additional decisions and work shortly before this issue was to be put to bed) might have been brought to a vote proposed by an indignant Simonian minority but nixed by a censorious “majority” cannot independently be verified, just as we cannot know whether members of this minority actually took any concrete steps to translate into French selections from Pannekoek's *Workers' Councils*, as per the author's other suggestion. We only have [Simon's complaints, lodged in hindsight four and a half decades later](#). For, having finally recovered in 1982 the 1954-1958 S. ou B. minutes, Simon has still not, by the start of the third decade of the third millennium, made these minutes publicly available as a whole for examination, review, and use by all.

Appendix:
Text of the Minutes—Excerpts
(Pannekoek’s First Letter is called L1
and Chaulieu’s Response R1)

July 22, 1954 Meeting...

Discussions on the content of [issue 15](#)¹...publication of Pannekoek’s letter (L2)... This same July 22 meeting was attended by a Dutch comrade, Theo Maassen, who “clarified certain points from Pannekoek’s letter (L2) responding to Chaulieu’s (R1)...a letter that will be published in [issue 15](#).” The minutes then specify that, on account of the difficulties of carrying out a discussion due to Theo’s poor knowledge of French, the latter will write a letter specifying his point of view.

July 29, 1954 Meeting

Entirely devoted to [Tribune Ouvrière](#); nothing about the content of [issue 15](#) of the review.

August 12, 1954 Meeting

Contains the minutes of a separate meeting with Cajo Brendel, a sort of clarification of the discussion with Theo. The discussion that follows rejects the publication of various texts presented by the Dutch group Spartacus with a view to their translation and eventual publication in *S. ou B.* No mention of Pannekoek’s letter (L2).

September 2, 1954 Meeting

Chaulieu read his response (R2) to Pannekoek’s letter

¹T/E: Actually, this was ultimately a double issue, listed as “[Nos. 15-16](#)” and published for “October-December 1954”; [issue 14](#) was for “April-June 1954.” Thus, no Summer issue appeared that year and the [next issue](#) did not appear until the following Summer.

(L2) which will be published. ...This response notes our recommendation against publication of [\[Maximilien\] Rubel](#)'s article dealing with Marxist ethics, this thesis only being known through the press [*sic*; one must no doubt read here: "of an article on Rubel²..., the latter's thesis³..."].

September 9, 1954 Meeting

A letter from Pannekoek (L3) responding to Chaulieu's (R2) specifies that his letter was not meant for publication. This intention will be respected, but the review will publish shortly some excerpts from [Pannekoek's work on workers' councils](#)....

(The R2 and L3 letters were never published and perhaps are to be found among Pannekoek's correspondence deposited at the [International Institute of Social History](#) in Amsterdam.⁴ [Issue 15-16 of S. ou B. \(October-December 1954\)](#) came out in early October and did not contain Pannekoek's letter. On the other hand, Theo Maassen sent his promised letter and, at the insistence of a few comrades, this letter was published in [issue 18 \(March 1956\) of S. ou B.](#), preceded by an introductory note from Chaulieu. The minutes deciding on this publication and introductory note are lost.)

—Excerpts prepared by Henri Simon

²T/E: The scan of a clipping of this May 26, 1954 *Le Monde* article (J. Piatier's "À la recherche d'un Marx au delà du marxisme") is available at <http://www.aaap.be/Pdf/IISG-Archief-Pannekoek/Map-011.pdf>, along with a scan of Chaulieu's August 22, 1954 letter to Pannekoek. See note 7 of "Chaulieu's Response to Pannekoek's Second and Third Letters," above.

³T/E: *Le Monde*'s article, mentioned in the previous note, reviews Rubel's "complementary thesis," *Bibliographie des oeuvres des Karl Marx*, along with his main dissertation, *Biographie intellectuelle de Karl Marx*. Marcel Rivière & Cie published *Bibliographie des oeuvres des Karl Marx avec en appendice un Répertoire des Oeuvres de Friedrich Engels* as a book in 1956. Rubel's *Supplément à la Bibliographie des œuvres de Karl Marx* appeared from the same publisher in 1960.

⁴T/E: See now "Pannekoek's Third Letter to Comrade Chaulieu" and "Chaulieu's Response to Pannekoek's Second and Third Letters," above.

2. Castoriadis's Letter to Brendel

Paris, March 6, 1983
1, rue de l'Alboni
75016 Paris

To: Cajo Brendel
Berliozstr. 23 a
3816 VM Amersfoort

Dear Comrade,

I thank you for your mid-December 1982 letter and ask you to forgive the tardiness of my response.

I gladly acknowledge, to yourself and to Henri Simon, your letter and the good faith and honesty you are showing (even if, for me, it continues to remain incomprehensible how you could have thought that I would have suppressed any letter, not to mention a letter from Pannekoek: I note, moreover, with amusement I have to say, that your phrase: "...it has to free you of all suspicion as to the manipulation of S. ou B. or intrigues undertaken without the knowledge of the group *on this specific point*" [my emphasis] is deeply ambiguous: the prosecutor retains his right to indict over any other affair that might be brought up!).

As for the publication of a clarification—or, more exactly a correction—I do think that that would be a good thing. But it is obviously up to you and Simon to take the initiative; moreover, for my part, at present I do not have access to any publication in which such a text could be inserted.

With my fraternal greetings, to you and to Simon.

Cornelius Castoriadis

Wildcat Strikes in the American Automobile Industry*

[French Editors: The following three texts belong to one and the same set of articles (“Workers’ Struggles in 1955”) from [issue 18](#) of the review, but only the third one was signed Pierre Chaulieu, the introductory presentation of this issue specifying that the first two (unsigned) texts were based, in the case of the first one, on “firsthand testimony published by two American working-class journals,”¹ and, in the case of the second one, “also in good part [on] information coming from comrades in England.”² The presentation concluded thus: “The existence of traits common to these struggles [in France, the United States, and England] is incontestable; their great import is just as much so. Interpretations may diverge. The one Pierre Chaulieu upholds in his text ‘[Workers Confront the Bureaucracy](#)’ may raise some questions and challenges but by that very fact may serve as point of departure for a discussion that, in another connection, merges, at a certain level, with the general discussion about the problem of the organization of the proletariat which has already been going on in *Socialisme ou Barbarie* for several issues.” Despite the in fact mainly documentary character of the two texts, the author reckoned in 1974 that the three texts shed light on one another and merited being reprinted together.]

See: http://libcom.org/files/cc_psw_v2.pdf
and: <http://soubrtrans.org/SouBA.pdf>

*Originally published as “Les Grèves sauvages de l’industrie automobile américaine,” *S. ou B.*, 18 (January 1956): 49-60. Reprinted in *EMOI*, 279-303, and *EPI*, 127-42. Translated in *PSW2*, 3-13, and reprinted in *SouBA*, 123-35.

¹T/E: See p. 13 n. 7 of “Wildcat Strikes in the American Automobile Industry,” in *PSW2*.

²T/E: See p. 151, n. 4 of “The English Dockers’ Strikes,” in *SouBA*.

The English Dockers' Strikes*

See: <http://soubtrans.org/SouBA.pdf>

T/E: Because the translation of this text, as presented in [SouBA](#), purposely reflected the original *S. ou B.* text while omitting all additions Castoriadis had made for the republication of his *S. ou B.* writings in the Éditions 10/18 series (1973-1979), a footnote, appearing after the paragraph ending with the phrase “in a series of big strikes.” (*EMOI*, 312 and 331, note a, and [EPI](#), 148, note 1; see the top of p. 140 of the [Anthology](#)), was not translated. It is now translated as follows:

1974 note: See now, on this point, M[aurice] Brinton, “[Theory and Practice, 1945-1971](#),” *Solidarity*, 3:4 (1964): 1-13, which was republished as an offprint under the title: [The Labour Government versus the Dockers 1945-1951](#) (London, 1965).

BETA

*Originally published as “Les grèves des dockers anglais,” *S. ou B.*, 18 ([January–March 1956](#)): 61-74. Reprinted in *EMOI*, 305-32, and in [EPI](#), 143-60. Translated in [SouBA](#), 136-52.

Workers Confront the Bureaucracy*

See: http://libcom.org/files/cc_psw_v2.pdf

BETA

*Originally published as “Les Ouvriers face à la bureaucratie,” *S. ou B.*, 18 (January 1956): 75-86. Reprinted in *EMOI*, 333-55, and in *EPI*, 161-75. Translated in *PSW2*, 14-25.

Automation Strikes in England*

See: http://libcom.org/files/cc_psw_v2.pdf
and: <http://soubtrans.org/SouBA.pdf>

BETA

*Originally published as “Les Grèves de l’automatisation en Angleterre,” *S. ou B.*, 19 (July 1956): 101-15. Reprinted in *EMO1*, 357-82, and *EPI*, 177-93. Translated in *PSW2*, 26-37, and reprinted in *SouBA*, 153-68.

Results, Prospects, Tasks*

The first issue of *Socialisme ou Barbarie* is dated March-April 1949. With this issue, the twenty-first, the review begins the ninth year of its existence. It is not, however, this anniversary that prompts us today to draw up a brief appraisal [*bilan*] of our work, to try to peer into the future, and to define new tasks. No, what renders this look back possible and imposes new projects upon us is that, between 1949 and 1957, there is much more than eight times twelve months; it is that a new era has just begun. Between these two dates, there are the crisis of Stalinism and the first proletarian revolutions against the bureaucracy.

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In March 1949, circumstances hardly appeared propitious for the publication of an organ of critique and revolutionary orientation. The struggle between the two blocs seemed to impose on all events and all acts a single prospect [*perspective*], that of the third world war. The antagonism between Russia and America was inextricably mixed up with the class struggle. After many long years of degeneration and reformist and Stalinist mystification, revolutionary thought and ideology were left in a state of catastrophic devastation. Increasingly perceiving the bureaucracy and its policy as a foreign body, the workers withdrew into silence and into a refusal to organize themselves and to act.

The tasks we have set for ourselves in undertaking the publication of *Socialisme ou Barbarie* corresponded to this appreciation of the situation. It was clear to us that the most important *practical* objective was the reconstruction of revolutionary *theory*, that, before jumping into any “action,” it was urgent to clarify our ideas and thereby allow others to do so. This clarification had to begin with an analysis of society’s development in general, and with a critique of the experience

*Originally published as “Bilan, perspectives, tâches,” *S. ou B.*, 21 (March 1957): 1-14. Reprinted in *EMOI*, 383-408, and *EPI*, 195-211.

of the workers' movement in particular, since 1917.

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Let us recall briefly the principal conclusions of this effort. Russian society is not a socialist society; neither is it a workers' State, however "degenerated" one might wish. It is an exploitative society, wherein the proletariat, defrauded of the products of its labor, expropriated from the direction of its own activity, is subjected to the same fate as under private capitalism. The Russian bureaucracy is not a passing formation or a "parasitic" stratum. It is an exploiting class whose structure, ideology, and mode of economic and political domination organically correspond to total capital concentration in the hands of the "State." The degeneration of the Russian Revolution and its culmination, the total power of the bureaucracy, are neither the result of chance or of Stalin's character, nor of "factors" linked to the current climate, like the isolation of the revolution and the backward character of the country. With similar modes and style, things could have unfolded similarly even if the revolution had spread to several advanced countries. Helped along by circumstances, the Russian Revolution's degeneration nonetheless was deeply rooted in the total concentration of economic and political power in the hands of the Bolshevik Party, which gradually reduced the Soviets to an auxiliary role and then to an ornament for an unchecked power that, in the name of efficiency, did away with the attempts of the Russian workers, from 1917 to 1919, to seize for themselves the management of the factories. Nor is this attitude on the part of the Bolshevik Party the product of the personal peculiarities of the rulers [*dirigeants*] or of their errors on a theoretical level. It has its corollary in a corresponding attitude on the part of the proletariat. Taken together, these two attitudes express this stage of evolution, during which the proletariat believes it can liberate itself by delegating its historic role, the leadership [*direction*] of its movement, and the direction of society to a party raising itself above the class—a stage that, when it reaches its limit, is transformed straight away into its

opposite under Stalinism, which makes the proletariat see the face of the dominant party as an exploitative stratum.

This analysis of the bureaucracy holds not only for Russia. Subject to the necessary qualifying statements, it applies to all the countries in which the bureaucracy has taken power. And bureaucratic capitalism does not concern only the countries in which the Stalinist party dominates. Far from being an exclusively political phenomenon, the preponderant role of the bureaucracy is just as much an economic phenomenon. It expresses the deep-seated tendencies of modern capitalist production: concentration of the forces of production and disappearance or a consequential limitation of private property as basis for the power of the dominant class; appearance, within major business enterprises, of enormous bureaucratic managerial apparatuses; merger of monopolies and the State; state regulation of the economy. In all essentials, the division of contemporary (Western or Eastern) societies into classes no longer corresponds at this point to the division between owners and nonowners but, instead, to the division, which is much more deep-seated and much more difficult to eliminate, between *directors and executants* within the production process.

Socialism is therefore not “nationalization” and the abolition of private property, which exploitative regimes tend to achieve by themselves; nor is it the abolition of “the anarchy of the market.” Such anarchy, understood in the superficial sense, is being abolished more and more by private capitalism in the West, and, understood in the profound sense of the irrationality of the organization of the economy, the “planning” involved in bureaucratic capitalism brings it to its point of paroxysm. Socialism is the abolition of the division of society into directors and executants, which signifies both *workers' management* at all levels—the factory, the economy, society—and *power of the masses' bodies*—Soviets, factory committees, or councils. Nor can socialism ever be the *power of a party*, whatever its ideology or its structure might be. Revolutionary organization is not and cannot be a governmental organ. The sole governmental organs in a socialist society are soviet-type bodies embracing laboring people in their totality. The bureaucratic character of present-

day “working-class” organizations is not expressed only in their ultimate program, which, under cover of a mystificatory phraseology, aims only at modifying the forms of exploitation, the better to preserve its basic substance [*fond*]. It is expressed just as much both in their own structure and in the type of relations they maintain with the working masses: whether one is talking of parties or trade unions, these organizations form or try to form leadership groups [*directions*] separate from the masses, reducing the latter to a passive role while trying to dominate them, and they reproduce within themselves a deep-seated division between leaders [*dirigeants*] and militants (or dues payers).

This conception of socialism would be doubly utopian if the masses’ experience did not lead them to it. For, the role of the proletariat, for the proletariat itself, is not to “support” a socialist organization and provide it with impact force, the necessary infantry, but itself to construct consciously and on the basis of its own experience the new society. It must not even be said that socialism is “impossible without” the autonomous action of the proletariat; it is nothing other than this autonomous action itself. Autonomous: itself directing itself, conscious of itself, of its goals, and of its means. While during an entire period bureaucratic regimes and parties find the basis for their existence in the proletariat, they also ultimately find therein the germ of their death. For, far from resolving the crisis of capitalist society, the bureaucratic regime simply reduces this crisis to its most naked form. It renders visible the fact that this crisis flows only from the society’s mode of organization and not from some natural or metaphysical inevitability, and far from transforming proletarians into impotent slaves, it obliges them to complete their experience of exploitative regimes. It removes the veils of private property, of the market, and of money at the same time as those of nationalized property, of the plan, and of the leaders’ genius, and it lays bare before laboring people the most elevated problem, the mystery of human history, in the form of a practical and concrete alternative: direction and domination of society by a particular stratum—or men taking back direction of their lives, reorganization of society on the basis of institutions men understand and dominate.

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It is up to those who read us to judge to what extent this conception has as a whole been confirmed by the events of the last three years, the crisis of Stalinism, the revolutionary movements of the countries of Eastern Europe, the demands and the program of the Hungarian Councils, and up to and including the present development of the situation in Poland. On the other hand, it is up to us to reexamine briefly the main error contained in our analyses from the 1949-1953 period: the idea that the third world war was inevitable. The maturation of the proletariat, we thought, could not, outside of war, gain sufficient breadth and intensity to transform the course of events. As early as June 1953, the revolt of East Germany's proletariat showed that this was in no way the case. The strikes of August 1953 in France, those of 1955 in England, in the United States, and again in France, Poznan, Poland, and Hungary broadened and deepened this historical turning point. We had underestimated the acuteness of the contradictions and crises that were smoldering beneath the bureaucratic system, the rapidity of the Eastern European proletariat's maturation process, and the accelerated wearing away of the "working-class" (Stalinist or reformist) bureaucracy's hold over the workers of the Western countries.

We have tried to reconsider the prospects this new phase of proletarian struggles was bringing about as the events were occurring. The overall direction of this reconsideration is clear: the revolutionary movement finds itself at the beginning of a long period of ascent. That certainly does not mean that it will be able to be spared of difficulties, detours, and temporary defeats or that the working class is not encountering, before itself and *within* itself, some enormous obstacles. Confronted with the Algerian War, the French proletariat does not succeed in reacting in an organized way. The Russian bureaucracy was able to crush in blood the Hungarian Revolution without the Russian, Polish, Czech, or German proletariat intervening. Yet we are only at the beginning, and a comparison with 1949 may allow even those with the hastiest of glances to grasp the

new traits of the current situation. The wear and tear on all apparatuses of domination are enormous. Their inability to confront the problems of organization of the modern world—whether we are talking about the economy, politics, or international relations—at once plunges them into perpetually renewed crises and exposes them to the pitiless criticism of the exploited. Their attempts at ideological mystification receive less and less of an echo. The present-day situation of the Stalinist bureaucracy, in Russia as well as elsewhere, illustrates most strikingly the failure of the exploiters. Unable to continue to live as it did under Stalin, incapable at the same time of changing anything at all that is essential to its system of domination, obliged to make concessions that are seized upon by the populations subject to its power in order to demand more, and having itself ruined its ideology without being able to put anything in the place thereof, this bureaucracy is no longer able to resolve any of its contradictions and is reduced to camouflaging them through the use of brute force, which resolves nothing and is turned round against it. Faced with the decomposition of the exploiters, the proletariat is beginning to affirm its own goals and to seek the means to effect its liberation. Workers' struggles have mutual repercussions. The echo of Berlin is Poznan; that of Poznan is Budapest. The lesson of Hungary was heard [in the Renault automobile factory] at Billancourt—as well as in Stalingrad. At the same time as their strength grows, the *content* of these struggles is broadened. No presently identifiable factor seems to be up to the task of reversing this process for many long years to come.

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In this new period, the definition of our tasks is altered of its own account. What was until now of prime importance was theoretical clarification. It remains indispensable, and nothing is more absurd than the idea that a theory might ever be complete or that the urgency of practical tasks would allow one for long to postpone the development thereof. Yet within this very effort, the accent has to be shifted. It is no longer

possible to limit oneself to the analysis and critique of existing regimes of exploitation or even to affirm the fundamental principles of socialism. We must speak concretely of socialist society; we must show the immense possibilities it would offer to the flourishing of men's lives; we must discuss in precise terms its organization, its problems, and its difficulties. We are not proposing to reintroduce a utopian socialism. But trying to speak of socialism today is nothing less than utopian.

To define in the most concrete terms possible the socialist program and the organization of social life by the proletariat, freed of oppression, is to try to respond to the problems the Hungarian Workers' Councils posed on a factual level, or the ones that were entailed by their action, or those that would unavoidably have arisen had the Russian bureaucracy not crushed the Hungarian Revolution. It is to respond to the problems that the vanguard of the Polish proletariat in the factories and the core of revolutionaries existing within the Polish party are posing or will ineluctably pose to themselves. It is to respond to the problems the Russian proletariat will pose tomorrow, and perhaps the French proletariat the day thereafter.

What is socialism? What is workers' power? Can the Councils of laboring people—workers, employees, intellectuals, peasants—take on all the administrative and managerial tasks of social life? How? How can a socialist economy function? What exactly does workers' management of the factories signify? How can a factory managed by the workers function? How can the indispensable centralization of social life in modern production operate? What is genuine socialist planning? Does it need a specific corps of "planners"—or can and must the Councils of laboring people take on planning-related tasks? Is it possible that there might be a hierarchy of wages, or piece-wages in a socialist economy—or does such an economy imply, from the outset, an absolute equality of incomes? How can one integrate into a planned socialist economy the "backward" (nonindustrialized) sectors of the economy—peasantry, craft workers, services, and so on? What does a Government of Councils signify? What are the relations between this

Government and the local or enterprise-based Councils? What is the role of political organizations? Are there limitations on freedom, and if so, by whom are they determined and by whom are they implemented? Are there “transitional societies”—or does the power of the Councils tend immediately to implement the socialist program while adapting it to the specific circumstances in which it finds itself? What can and must such a power do at the outset when instaurated in a single country? What are the relations among several socialist countries? Do they necessarily have to federate together—or are they simply bound by treaties of alliance and commerce?

Utopian are those today who do not see the absolute urgency of these problems—along with those who want to respond thereto *outside of* the living experience of the workers’ movement of the last forty years, the attempts on the part of the proletariat aimed at resolving those problems, and the obstacles these attempts have run up against.

Our first task for the coming period is to analyze and to discuss the constitution, the functioning, and the problems of socialist society.¹

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Between this society and the life and struggles of the proletariat under exploitative regimes, there is the revolution—but there is not an abyss. The proletariat would not be capable of constructing a socialist society were it not the bearer of socialist tendencies here and now. This is not a postulate of the sort, “Socialism is possible only if the proletariat already bears within itself socialist tendencies—*therefore*, such tendencies must necessarily exist.” This is the result to which the analysis and study of the life and struggles of the proletariat in exploitative societies lead, if this analysis

¹1974 note: These problems have been discussed in the text “On the Content of Socialism,” *S. ou B.*, 17 and 22 and will be reproduced in a coming volume of this republication series. [T/E: See now the first two parts of “On the Content of Socialism” in *PSW1* and *PSW2*, respectively.]

is conducted from a revolutionary perspective. This perspective is, if one wishes, a "postulate"—but outside of this postulate, one cannot *do* anything rational, and one cannot *understand* anything in the history not only of the proletariat but of society as a whole for the past one hundred and fifty years.

The proletariat is not, certainly, *only* tendency toward socialism; it is just as much, and at the same time, object of capitalist alienation, which is not external to it—a cardboard mask stuck on an intact face, the tearing off of which could then be performed with childlike simplicity—but instead penetrates and deeply determines its life, its consciousness, and its struggles. The proletariat's struggle for socialism is not simply a struggle against external enemies—the capitalists and the bureaucrats; it is just as much and even more so a struggle of the proletariat against itself, a struggle for consciousness, for solidarity, for creative passion, for initiative, and against obscurity, mystification, apathy, discouragement, and the individualism to which life in capitalist society ever anew gives rise in the workers' hearts. The bureaucracy did not fall from heaven, nor was it purely and simply "imposed" upon the proletariat by the abstract operation of the capitalist economy. It has also risen up from the proletariat's own activity, from the problems it has encountered on its organizational path, from the fact that, at a certain stage of its history, it has been able to resolve these problems only by "delegating" the functions of leadership [*direction*] to a specific managerial stratum [*une couche spécifique de dirigeants*].

And this is why the sole valid *critique* of the bureaucracy is the one that results from the workers' tendency to organize themselves and to direct themselves on their own. The sole historically important *crisis* of the bureaucracy is the one that results from this same tendency; otherwise, the bureaucracy could comfortably just rot away [*se décomposer*] and become besotted for centuries to come without any other result but society's regression as a whole toward barbarism. It is only inasmuch as the proletariat tends to reorganize social life on socialist bases that the decomposition of capitalist and bureaucratic society is transformed into a revolutionary crisis of this society that is pregnant with a new world.

It is therefore from this angle, too, that workers' struggles under an exploitative regime are to be viewed. And the content of these struggles, for a few years now, as we have tried to show in this review, also mark a new stage of the workers' movement. The workers are detaching themselves from the bureaucracy—no longer by taking refuge in a rejection of its slogans and watchwords but by acting *for* their own slogans and watchwords and by trying to organize themselves and struggle *outside of* the bureaucracy. Struggles involving economic demands [*lutttes* “*revendicatives*”] thereby take on a socialist content and become incomprehensible outside of such content. The Hungarian workers demanded that a ceiling be placed on salaries and that wages be raised in an antihierarchical way. Yet a year earlier, the Nantes metalworkers had demanded, in contravention of all trade-union watchwords, [an hourly raise of] “40 francs for all.” The Hungarian workers set up Councils. The Nantes workers did not go that far, but, during the culminating phase of their struggle, they accepted no outside leadership, they conducted their business themselves, 15,000 of them ever present in the streets. Alongside the official trade-union organization, which is no longer anything more than a cog in the administrative machinery of English capitalism, the English workers are in fact organized around shop stewards elected at the point of production and revocable at any moment—a mode of organization whose content is clearly soviet in nature. The Hungarian workers demanded the abolition of work norms and workers' management of production. But the English dockers struggled in fact for the right to organize their work themselves, and the American automobile workers, in 1955, while pushing back against Reuther-Ford's “guaranteed annual wage,” put forward demands that plainly signified the following: Production is to be organized around the needs of men at work—and not men around production. The problem is not whether or not such demands are “achievable” within the framework of the present-day regime; the problem is, in the first place, to understand that when the working class struggles not for objectives imposed upon it but for objectives that flow from its own needs, it puts forward demands with socialist content.

There are no “economic” or “minimum” demands that aim at defending the worker as seller of labor power, and at preserving his biological existence, and, at the other end, a “maximum” socialist program centered almost exclusively around the problem of power. Likewise, there is no abyss between the problem of the organization of the workers now, in order to conduct a strike for example, and that of their organization for managing factories and society. In both cases—through a host of enormous differences only a fool could ignore—the basis for the question is the same: it is only if the workers are themselves organizing themselves and directing themselves that their action will serve their interests and their needs; it is only if the workers themselves organize themselves and direct themselves that their action will, even on a material level, be effective. A strike directed by the bureaucracy is doomed to failure—under the same heading as and for the same ultimate reasons that a factory directed by the bureaucracy is doomed to chaos, that an economy directed by the bureaucracy is doomed to crisis, and that a culture directed by the bureaucracy is doomed to cretinization.

A second series of questions, just as important as those concerning the socialist program, results therefrom. Such questions are determinative for the coming years, and we have to clarify them. What will be the form of workers' struggles in the period now opening up? What is to be their mode of organization? What will be the content of the demands? Is the working class to restrict itself to demanding an amelioration of its standard of living—or does it have to undertake, right now, a struggle against hierarchy? Is it to limit itself to struggling against the acceleration of the pace of work—or is it, each time possible, to attack labor conditions prevailing within the capitalist factory, the very existence of work norms, the thousand aspects in which are expressed the enslavement and dehumanization of the worker eight hours a day, and about which the trade-union bureaucracy could not care less? As a general rule, does the transformation of the trade unions into profoundly bureaucratic bodies whose function is to integrate the workers into the machinery of exploitation signify that any massive form of class organization of the workers within the framework of the

regime is impossible—or else that organizations new in form and content are to be created? In this regard, what is the import of workers' newspapers—like *Tribune Ouvrière*, at Renault—of bodies like the *Personnel Council* at the Assurances Générales-Vie life-insurance company, and of the English shop stewards?²

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While the tasks of elaboration and clarification remain of prime importance, their *content* has to undergo an extensive transformation. We must broach head on the problems of the new society; we must broach head on the problems of the organization and the struggles of the proletariat in exploitative society. Yet the same factor that determines this change of content equally has to determine a change in the *method* of elaboration. What separates yesterday from today, what forces us to examine new problems, is not our theoretical maturation, our intellectual evolution; it is the activity of the proletariat. This activity does not just show the true problems; it alone can also furnish a response thereto. It is therefore ruled out that we might broach these questions on the basis of uniquely theoretical premises, however “complete” they might be. They must also be broached on the basis of the living experience of workers' struggles. And that, in turn, does not signify only that accounts of past struggles must be looked into closely and that events must be transformed into documents, with one then trying to rediscover in those documents the traces of action and life. Living working-class experience must be integrated organically into the effort at theoretical elaboration; the problems must be posed *in front of* the workers, the problems

²See “Le problème du journal ouvrier,” *S. ou B.*, 17; “Une expérience d'organisation ouvrière: le *Conseil de Personnel* des A.G.-Vie,” *S. ou B.*, 20; “Les grèves des dockers anglais,” *S. ou B.*, 18; “Les grèves de l'automation en Angleterre,” *S. ou B.*, 19. (1974 addition: These last two texts are [linked] above in the present volume [T/E: and translated as “Automation Strikes in England” in *PSW2*, 26-37 (and reprinted in *SouBA*, 153-68) and as “The English Dockers' Strikes” in *SouBA*, 136-52].)

of the workers must pose *themselves*, the most elevated questions must become capable of being posed in terms that have a meaning for those who are laboring on an assembly line; the seed [*germe*] of all the crises and of all the solutions must become capable of being seen in the everyday life of the factory. We who have done “theory” for 10 years, and who will continue to do so, do not fear saying that, in the domain we call *politics*, when workers “do not understand” a problem or “are incapable of responding,” there are in principle nine chances in ten that the problem is ill posed, does not mean anything, or does not exist. For ten years, the French philosophers have kept on writing about the working class, socialism, Stalinism, the party, the contradictions and the noncontradictions. In Hungary, the workers took up arms, formed Councils—and reduced to nothing the pseudoproblems of the philosophers. Certainly, they have not resolved everything—far from it. Nevertheless, from the purely philosophical point of view, the Hungarian Councils have supplied more, and are situated at an incomparably more elevated level, than the philosophers hoisted with difficulty upon 25 centuries of culture.

Organically integrating working-class experience into the theoretical elaboration thereof signifies changing one’s way of seeing, one’s way of speaking, one’s way of thinking, even. But that signifies, too, creating a living setting [*milieu vivant*] within which the two currents and those embodying them—workers and revolutionary intellectuals—might meet and unite. The organization and the life of capitalist society constantly tend to move intellectuals and workers away from one another and to create an insurmountable gap between them. Bureaucratic “working-class” organizations, and quite particularly Stalinism, push this tendency to its limit. There, workers and intellectuals are separated by a total divide; both sides are prevented from expressing themselves; workers are transformed into pure and simple executants of the leadership’s instructions, shutting their mouths in the name of the “theory” the leadership is alone said to possess; intellectuals are transformed into flunkies of the brilliant heads [*chefs geniaux*], shutting their mouths in the name of exigencies of the “working-class base,” which the leadership

alone would be able to understand and to gauge; neither can the workers manifest themselves therein and be creative *qua* workers, nor intellectuals *qua* intellectuals; still less can they cross-fertilize and enrich one another.

This living setting in which the merger of theory and experience, of intellectuals and workers, can be achieved is nothing other than the revolutionary organization. The achievement of the effort defined above, and the exploitation of its results in the interests of the workers' struggle, will depend directly on the possibility of constructing such an organization during the coming period. The principles upon which the revolutionary organization will have to be constructed are clear: the organic union of workers and intellectuals, of experience and theory, in and through the expression and the activity, at once free and coordinated, of both; the abolition of the distinction between directors and executants within the organization; the transformation of the relations between the organization and the working class, the former considering its role to be not to dominate the latter or to speak in its name but to contribute to its development, to furnish it the means to express itself, to help it to coordinate its action—while at the same time placing before the working class the organization's own ideas and its own example. These principles flow both from the experience of the bureaucratic degeneration of the traditional "working-class" parties and from the analysis of the exigencies and actual needs of vanguard workers. Yet just as we must give concrete form to the idea of workers' management as the basis of socialism, so must we give concrete form to these ideas concerning organization. Much more, even, must be said. For, in the end, the real solutions to the problem of socialism will be given—and can only be given—by the working class itself. Yet revolutionaries have to begin to furnish the solution to the problem of organization, right now, in terms of their experience and of the circumstances in which they find themselves placed.

We therefore find ourselves faced with a third group of problems. How can one genuinely integrate the workers and the intellectuals into an organization? How can one promote the synthesis between revolutionary theory and the

practical experience of the workers? What is the necessary degree of centralization for a revolutionary organization? How can such centralization be reconciled with democracy as soon as one goes beyond the frameworks of a locality or the business enterprise? Is there a problem of "chiefs [*chefs*]," and can one get beyond it? In the absence of bureaucratic discipline, how does one reconcile the freedom of militants with the coherence of the organization? What is the terrain for action of the organization? How can one define and organize its relations with the class? What are the paths through which the constitution of an organization located at present in France can pass?

It is clear that these problems can be resolved neither on the basis of theoretical considerations nor even solely in terms of the experience of workers' struggles. Such theoretical considerations can shed light on the general features of those problems; the experience of the workers can show how they are trying to resolve problems that are at once analogous and profoundly different. Yet the problems of the constitution and functioning of the revolutionary organization can be posed on a concrete terrain and receive concrete solutions only as a function of the *concrete activity* of this organization. One can validly discuss the problem of organization only as one *organizes* something. And since what is at issue here is a revolutionary *workers'* organization, one can organize only to the extent that some fractions of the workers' vanguard in business enterprises, in opposing the bureaucracy, tend to organize themselves in order to struggle. Divergencies over the antinomy, whether true or false, between centralization and democracy can remain completely abstract so long as one confines oneself to discussing it; such divergencies take on another content, and their implications appear plainly if what is at issue is organizing coherent action of several groups dispersed over various localities and business enterprises.

We therefore are faced with the following two inseparable aspects of the problem: defining what a revolutionary organization can be—and showing that it is possible, by beginning to construct it.

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Our efforts, which for two or three years have been flowing beyond the framework of the review, will have to be enlarged and find new forms in the coming period. One of these forms will be the publication of a series of brochures dealing with the fundamental questions of the present-day period in connection with working-class experience. The first subjects retained are: "Socialism and Workers' Management," "Workers' Struggles," "The Trade Unions," "Hierarchy," and "Capitalism and Human Relations in Industry." The writing of these brochures will be elaborated with the largest possible participation from the comrades and laboring people who are close to us; preliminary mimeographed drafts will be circulated and discussed over one or several meetings, and the final text will be the product of this collective discussion.

The review itself will have to reflect the modification of our tasks. It will grant a preponderant place to texts on socialism, workers' struggles, and the problems of organization. On the other hand, we want, in accord with everything that has been said above, to transform the very character of the review: we want, to the greatest extent possible, to go beyond the present-day situation in which there is, on the one side, a group of comrades who publish *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, on the other, the readers who passively receive the publication and read it without expressing themselves and keep their reactions to themselves. We want to associate the readers as much as possible with the various aspects of the labor to put out the review—and, ultimately, to make of the review just as much the instrument for a living public's expression as an instrument of a coherent ideology.

Readers can join in our work in multiple forms—and undoubtedly they will find other ones, beyond those we are proposing to them today. In the meantime, *we beseech each reader to consider the proposals laid out below as addressed to him personally:*

1. Individually, we invite each reader to write to us—about the content of the review, about the problems he

desires to see treated therein, about events, and about movements or workers' struggles with which he is familiar. We shall publish regularly, in a "Correspondence" column that we would like to be ample as possible, all the letters that have even the slightest bit of general interest. We are also inviting readers to send us longer texts, which we will publish in a "Contributions and Discussions" column—or beyond any specific column.

2. Collectively, we invite our readers to form *Readers' Committees* or, better, *Working Groups*. The tasks of such committees or groups could be: to discuss and to criticize the content of the review; to make *Socialisme ou Barbarie* known and to circulate it; to propose subjects to be treated; to prepare texts for the review themselves; to organize discussions among themselves about the problems dealt with in the review, or about other ones; to participate in the preparation and in the discussion of the above-mentioned brochures; to organize conferences and public discussions in their locality; to take the initiative to publish enterprise-based newspapers like *Tribune Ouvrière* or to form autonomous groupings of laboring people, like the *Personnel Council* of the Assurances Générales-Vie life-insurance company; to discuss and to take a position on the problems of trade-union or political life in business enterprises or the localities where their members are to be found.³ Readers who desire to work in this direction can write us while communicating to us their address; we will make sure to put them in contact with one another. When these Groups are set up, we will be at their disposal to help them to the fullest extent of our forces we are able (documentation, sending out comrades for discussions,

³A first working group was already set up in Paris in January. It is meeting twice a month. It has set for itself a working program that includes, on the one hand, a series of discussions introduced by talks about the following subjects: contemporary capitalism, Stalinism, socialism, workers' struggles and demands, the revolutionary organization, backward countries and the colonial revolution, and French society. On the other hand, it is to collaborate in the drafting of the brochures spoken about above. It is from comrades from this group that came the idea of a brochure on "Capitalism and 'Human Relations' in Industry."

communication of the results and of the experience of the other groups, etc.).

If such Working Groups are created in sufficient numbers, if they succeed in functioning effectively, in clarifying their ideas, and in becoming integrated into the life of their local community, this movement as a whole will be able to set itself other tasks. A national conference of delegates from these groups, of other currents that are close to us, and of enterprise-based organizations would then be able to meet, after a preparatory discussion, in order to envisage the consolidation of their organization and the extension of their field of activity. One must have this prospect in mind. But “sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof,”⁴ and at present the first task that is set is to achieve a grouping of readers of the Review, based on precise and achievable working objectives.

BETA

If the ideas *Socialisme ou Barbarie* has been defending for the last eight years have some value, if its readers see in it something other than and more than an interesting theory, the task of spreading these ideas, of criticizing them in a constructive fashion, and of helping along with their development and enrichment belong to all those who share these ideas. By the very nature of its conceptions, *Socialisme ou Barbarie* cannot and is not to remain the exclusive work of a restricted group of militants. It increasingly has to belong to its readers and to give expression to them. And the readers can make *Socialisme ou Barbarie* their own business; they can appropriate it for themselves, in the sole way in which one can appropriate for oneself a movement of ideas: by participating in the ongoing labor and ongoing creation it represents.

⁴T/E: Matthew 6:34.

How to Struggle?*

Three Months of Failures

Since the start of the school year,¹ numerous strike movements have appeared, one after another. Laboring people had returned from vacation ready to struggle against the decline in their purchasing power, which has been accompanied by an increase in output, work pace, and fatigue. On several occasions, sometimes spontaneously, sometimes upon the order of the trade unions, workers, employees, and governmental staff have stopped work. In certain sectors, they manifested an extraordinary amount of combativeness: in Nantes, staggered strikes lasted several weeks. In Saint-Nazaire, violent clashes with the state riot police [[CRS](#)] took place. The 24-hour strikes at the state-run electric and gas companies on October 16, at the national railroad company [[SNCF](#)] on October 25, and among civil servants on November 17 were followed with a unanimity rarely attained in the past.

However, it must very well be noted that all these movements came to nothing or almost nothing. On the contrary, the situation is simply worsening. Not only did the few wage increases obtained here and there remain largely inferior to price hikes that had previously occurred but these price hikes continued and, in early December, the Government of [[Prime Minister Félix](#)] [Gaillard](#) [[d'Aimé](#)] dared to decree major price hikes affecting a series of essential items.

What were the reasons for this failure?

The strike movements of these last three months, which were sporadic, limited, and uncoordinated, have not been genuine struggles. Laboring people did not go on strike *until they attained complete satisfaction of their demands, employing all the means necessary to bring their action to a*

*Originally published as "Comment lutter?", [S. ou B., 23 \(January 1958\)](#): 1-20. Reprinted in *EMOI*, 409-44, and [EPI](#), 213-37.

¹1974 note: That is, the Fall of 1957.

successful conclusion. Limited in most cases to a few hours or to one day, the strikes remained mere manifestations of discontent or, at the very most, “means for applying pressure.” The trade-union leadership groups [*Les directions syndicales*], which almost always retained control of these strikes, clearly were inclined neither to conduct them seriously as genuine struggles nor to extend them, coordinate them, and let them become widespread [*les généraliser*]. One day, a work stoppage in the metalworking industry or in construction, another day a work stoppage at the state-run electric and gas companies, then on the national railroad network, then again in the metalworking industry, then in the public-service sector. Each time, everything had to be started all over again. The sole tangible results were irritation and discouragement on the part of laboring people.

In the Present-Day Situation, “Protest” and “Pressure” Lead Nowhere

Do the French trade-union federations think that mere “pressure” can lead to the satisfaction of laboring people’s demands? Might the bosses and its Government give in to mere manifestations of discontent?

No one can believe so, for no one is unaware of what is causing the current attack against laboring people’s living standard. The French bourgeoisie can conduct the Algerian War only by reducing the purchasing power of wage earners. Just the expenditures occasioned *directly* by this war—and which far from represent the total cost—amounted, around the middle of 1957, to 700-800 billion [old French francs] per annum, and they keep on going up. In early October, in the midst of the cabinet crisis, the National Defense was demanding another hundred billion in supplementary credits. These sums represent around 15 per cent of the wage mass in France—15 per cent that employers want to levy on wages, through uncompensated price increases. For, there is no question, of course, of reducing profits, which are increasing several hundred billion per annum. And with each passing week, the situation worsens. On the one hand, war

expenditures are increasing. On the other, the temporary palliative the Government has utilized since 1956, which consists in eating into the Bank of France's gold and dollar reserves, can no longer work. Those reserves have now almost completely dried up, and the Government has been obliged to set quotas on imports and to devalue the franc. Fewer commodities coming from abroad, bought at a higher exchange rate, is another cause of the price hikes that are already making themselves felt.

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Do laboring people have to suffer passively such a spoliation while waiting for the bourgeoisie to end its Algerian War? But when will that war end? And how? The Algerian War has no military outcome. It has gone on for three years, but the "pacification" [\[French Algeria's Governor General\] Robert Lacoste](#) had been promising for the next quarter hour is long overdue. While it seems impossible that the Algerian nationalists will win militarily, it is just as much out of the question that one will succeed in taming the revolt of a people made up of ten million individuals, short of exterminating it.

The French bourgeoisie is just as incapable of finding a peaceful solution to the conflict. If it abandons Algeria, it fears losing all of Africa. Achieve a compromise? It has itself gotten rid of all Algerian proponents of compromise. It fears that that would open the way to total independence for Algeria. Lastly and especially, the capitalists and colonists of Algiers, closely tied to metropolitan capital and supported by large portions of the European population over there, absolutely reject each and every concession. With enormous fortunes at their disposal, they buy as many legislators as is necessary and impose their policy on the French bourgeoisie as a whole.

The latter has indeed become absolutely incapable of managing its own affairs. Its Parliament, long sunk into a state of total irresponsibility, has in six months succeeded in making itself look ridiculous before the entire world. What

are these parties that stick their program in their pocket as soon as they are in power, that spend all their time maneuvering and scheming, that are wholly incapable of saying to the country anything whatsoever about the way to exit from the present crisis? What are these governments, the number of which one has lost count of, that never have a majority in the Parliament, let alone in the country, and that are ready to do anything in order to gain ten votes here, fifteen votes there? This regime is rotten to the core; it continues along its path only through the force of inertia.

For the three years the war has lasted, laboring people have barely hindered governmental policy at all. The bourgeoisie has had its hands free. What has it done to resolve its problems? Nothing. It has only worsened them, plunging the entire country into a situation that becomes more and more intolerable each day.

The Trade-Union Leadership Groups Reject Any Serious Coordinated Struggle

What are the trade-union leadership groups doing when faced with this situation?

In reality, they are trying to do nothing at all.

Yet the problems are clear to see. The purchasing power of laboring people is falling month by month. A complete restoration of its value must be demanded and obtained. Price hikes are the same for everyone. A uniform increase for all must therefore be demanded. This involves obtaining a major raise. Therefore, one does not see how a single business enterprise or a single corporation could grant it while others reject it. It is the employing class and the Government as a whole that must be made to give in. But they are furiously opposed thereto, for this is a vital question for them. It is therefore only a general and serious struggle, bringing in the greatest number of companies and sectors, and obstinately pursued to the end, that alone will be able to make the bosses back down.

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Instead of that, what are the trade-union leadership groups asking for?

They are asking for wage increases, but they are asking for one figure in Nantes, another in Paris, one figure for the construction industry, another for the metalworking industry—and so on and so forth. They are giving the strike call for September 27 at Renault, but not in the other automobile factories; in the metalworking and construction industries, for October 3, but not in the other sectors. They are getting people to strike against the state-run electric and gas companies on October 16, without worrying about what is happening elsewhere and for demands that leave aside the problem of restoring wages in the face of price hikes. They are doing the same thing for the state-run railroad company and the metalworking industry on October 25 and for the public-service sector on November 17.

However, if there are trade-union federations and not just unions by trade, this is because laboring people have common interests, independent of their belonging to this or that corporation. Under what other circumstance better than today's could one bring out these common interests and the common demand that results therefrom? Under what circumstance could one discern more clearly the necessity of a widespread and coordinated struggle against an attack all categories of laboring people are suffering to the same degree?

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The attitude of the trade-union leadership groups at Renault is absolutely characteristic of this overall situation.

Faced with the workers' growing agitation, the FO [Force Ouvrière ([Workers' Force labor federation](#))] launched, for Friday, September 27, a call for a five-hour strike at different hours for different shifts; fearing that they might let themselves be outdistanced, the CGT [Confédération Générale du Travail ([General Confederation of Labor](#))] and

the CFTC [Confédération française des travailleurs chrétiens (French Confederation of Christian Workers)] then published a tract criticizing the FO's instructions, among other reasons because this order is getting people to strike separately in different shifts, and, for their part, called a two-hour strike for this same Friday, September 27...by shift.

Just about everywhere in the factory, workers went about criticizing these strike orders, saying that it was out of the question that one could obtain anything at all through these types of "demonstrations." Indeed, all that was obtained was an insolent letter from the CEO of this French national company, [Pierre] Dreyfus, in which he stated that he was unable to give a penny more and reminded the unions that, in signing the much-talked-about "Renault contract," they had committed themselves to not disrupting production.

The following week, discussions were rife in the shops. Everyone was deeply irritated by the attitude of the trade-union leadership groups. Most expressed their conviction that, without a serious brawl, nothing would be obtained. In one shop, workers meeting together during the stoppage had voted a resolution stating that this was the last time that they would participate in limited and ineffective movements of this kind and that they were ready to commit themselves fully to the only effective kind of struggle: an unlimited strike with occupations of the premises. But the trade unions launched another strike call for October 3...for four hours—this time for the entire metalworking industry. Then, nothing. Then again, for October 25, a strike—this time for 24 hours.

As had to be expected, that strike was followed only quite partially. On the one hand, the workers felt that this was just one additional show of discontent that did not seriously disturb Management and would certainly not make it give in. On the other hand, no serious strike preparations had been made, no discussion in the workshops had preceded the strike either about the objectives or about the means of action. A bureaucratic order had simply been given to the workers: Go out on strike for 24 hours. No surprise that the workers did not follow.

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Still more characteristic is the experience the workers of Nantes and Saint-Nazaire had.

Coming back from vacation, shipyard workers and workers from the metalworking factories of the Loire-Atlantique region were ready to join the struggle. They were as determined as they were during their magnificent movement from the Summer of 1955. Several had taken almost no vacation at all in order to be able to hold up financially during the struggles they foresaw for the postvacation period. Yet the trade-union leadership groups, perfectly united among themselves, urged calm and a wait-and-see attitude. Finally, in order to hold off the workers, they launched an order for shop-by-shop "staggered strikes." For more than a month, those instructions were applied. They generally did not disrupt companies: Management and the supervisory staff, knowing the moment and the place where the work stoppage was going to take place, arranged production so as to minimize losses. The only cases where these work stoppages were able to have some effectiveness were the cases where the workers themselves triggered them by wringing out of the union an open-ended strike and by choosing, on their own, the time and place. Yet these cases necessarily remained limited—and in any case, ultimately the bosses began locking out the workers. Thus, the trade unions, which forbade genuine strikes and recommended staggered strikes under the pretext that such strikes are "more economical," placed them in a position where they had to face bosses' lockouts and ultimately obliged them simply to go back to work. During that time, the trade-union leadership groups in Paris chattered on about the magnificent unity achieved in Nantes and about the effectiveness of the staggered strike that allowed workers to do without [*faire l'économie de*] a real strike!

The Nantes workers were nevertheless convinced from the outset of the ineffectiveness of staggered strikes. But what could they do? They understood that launching a strike in the metalworking sector, but limited to Nantes and Saint-Nazaire, would lead nowhere. Such a strike could not win out were it

to remain isolated, and the Government had amassed thousands of state riot policemen in the two cities. The sole way out was to get the strike movement to spread throughout the metalworking industry across the country. On several occasions, workers who were in the minority in the trade unions spoke out in public during meetings that were held to spread the strike. Even local trade-union officials launched appeals, during these meetings, to all the metalworkers of France and in particular Parisian metalworkers. But the trade-union organizations never spread these desperate appeals.

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What is the result of these movements? Are they making the employers give in? The facts speak for themselves. But what they can bring laboring people are weariness and a sense of being worn down. This is in fact what the trade-union leadership groups are seeking. For some time now, the base no longer importunes them by demanding them to act. And indeed, since the end of the staggered strikes, the Nantes metalworkers have been overcome with disgust—as has happened, since October 25, with workers at Renault, too. A similar phenomenon may be noted in most other corporations. The trade-union leadership groups can thus say: What do you want us to do? The workers are apathetic. And yet, they are mistaken. While the workers seem apathetic, they are just silently drawing conclusions about the policy of the trade-union leadership groups and reflecting on the effective means of action.

What Does the Attitude of the Trade-Union Leadership Groups Signify?

The experience of the last three months, like that of the preceding years, shows that the trade-union leadership groups have been taking laboring people for a ride, that they are trying by all means to channel discontent into inconsequential skirmishes. That does not mean that they are necessarily and always opposed to action: they are even

capable sometimes of taking preemptive action, and of launching a strike, should they feel that the pressure is too strong and that there risks being an explosion. In those cases, and this is what happened with the state-run electric and gas companies on October 16, they will take lead of the movement, the better to control it and limit it. But their general line is clear: Create the impression that they are “trying to do something” and, at the same time, wear down laboring people through the weariness and discouragement that result from these absolutely ineffective forms of action. In a word, *they want at all cost to avoid major struggles taking place.*

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There are several reasons for this attitude on the part of the trade-union leadership groups.

First of all, some political reasons: the FO and CFTC work hand in glove with parties that are in the government or have supported it for years. They are seeking to make things easier for these parties by avoiding and limiting “social unrest.” For its part, the CGT, being subordinated to the French Communist Party (PCF), serves as its instrument for achieving “unity of action” with the Socialists, a prelude to a Popular Front that would allow the PCF to reenter the Government. And for this it is ready to commit whatever vile deeds—like voting emergency powers for Guy Mollet² in 1956 and allowing Lacoste and the paratroopers to massacre Algerians as they please.

But there is especially the ever-deepening connection that exists between the trade unions, on the one hand, the State and business enterprises, on the other. The trade unions sit with the representatives of the employers and of the government on the Economic Council, whose function is to advise the government on the best means of managing the

²T/E: [Guy Mollet](#) (1905-1975), head of the socialist [French Section of the Workers' International](#) (SFIO) from 1946 to 1969, was the French Prime Minister from 1956 to 1957, during which time his government was voted special powers to deal with the situation of the Algerian War.

French economy³—that is to say, the interests of capital. They participate in “the effort to develop productivity”—that is to say, to increase output and exploit laboring people. They play an ever-greater role in all questions concerning the fate of personnel and, in particular, their promotion. In several factories, the possibility of promotion depends on “string-pulling” or trade-union support: to sew up some faithful people among the laborers, the trade union has at its disposal the favors of management, which it does not obtain for free. The CGT seems in general to be less drenched in collaboration with the bosses, but this is because the PCF is in the opposition; between 1945 and 1947, it did not act otherwise than the FO and CFTC are doing today, and it would not act differently tomorrow. At Renault, all the trade unions—including the CGT—signed the agreement with management committing themselves to make every effort they can to develop production and recognizing the illegality of every strike that is not announced to management eight days in advance.

The trade unions are no longer anything but “middle men” between laboring people and the employers, and their role is to calm these laboring people down, to keep them attached to production, and to avoid having any struggles break out—while obtaining, from time to time and when this does not disturb the employers too much, a few concessions. That does not prevent them, of course, from indulging among themselves in the usual game of [inter-federation] competition and mutual denunciation.

Trade-Union Unity or Unity of Laboring People?

Some laboring people still think that the root of the evil is trade-union division. If the trade unions acted together or were unified, they say, the situation would be different.

³T/E: France’s [Conseil économique](#) (Economic council) was created in 1946 as an official institution of the Fourth Republic, with 146 members.

Experience proves that there is nothing of the sort. In England, in Germany, and in the United States, there is no division among trade unions. The attitude of the trade unions in these countries is nevertheless the same as in France: by means of minor concessions negotiated with the employers, their aim is to calm laboring people down and to keep major struggles from taking place. In Russia and in the "People's Democracies," there is but a single union; its essential function is to push for greater output and in no way does it defend laboring people.

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But let us talk about trade-union unity in France. In the aftermath of the War, the CGT was unified.⁴ That did not prevent it, until the Summer of 1947, from violently opposing every struggle on the part of laboring people. Its watchword was "produce first," while inflation was reducing wage earners' purchasing power day after day.

Unity of action among various trade unions was achieved on several occasions recently in various sectors. What did it bring?

Last July a bank strike took place. A magnificent movement, triggered spontaneously by the laboring people of a guild considered until then as "lagging" and "not very combative." The huge majority of bank employees—with the exception of executive staff—participated enthusiastically in the strike and supported it with robust street demonstrations. The rapid spread of the movement and the combativeness of the strikers should undoubtedly have allowed one to obtain a total victory. If the strike had been prolonged until July 31, the end-of-month settlement date, it would have led to a complete paralysis of the economy. The employers were going to be obliged to give in all along the line.

The trade-union leadership groups had taken no part in triggering the strike. They hastily achieved their "unity of action" once the strike had begun. In order to do what? In

⁴T/E: FO was formed in 1948 from a split within the CGT.

order to impose arbitrarily some strike committees that were made up of their own representatives and not of delegates elected by the strikers. In order to delay systematically the Bank of France from going on strike. If the Bank of France had gone on strike, the strikers would have been able to obtain what they wanted at the end of a few days. And finally, in order to give the order for a return to work four days before the decisive settlement date of July 31, by negotiating with the employers an agreement that abandoned the key features of the strikers' demand, thus profiting above all the executive staff (who, let us repeat, had not gone on strike) and barely at all the mass of employees who had struggled for 15 days.

Those who still think that the unity of the trade unions can bring something to laboring people have only to ask bank employees about their strike last July.

More recently, at the state-run railroad company, the state-run electric and gas companies, and the French Civil Service, the major groups of affiliated trade unions achieved their "unity of action." In all those cases, such unity served solely as a way of better controlling the movement, and as a way of limiting it. All these strikes brought nothing to the laboring people of these sectors.

One must not confuse the unity of laboring people with the unity of the trade-union apparatuses. The unity of laboring people is the indispensable condition for every serious struggle. It is achieved on its own as soon as laboring people decide to act in favor of their genuine interests; for, those interests are fundamentally the same. Opposed to such genuine unity are, precisely, the trade-union apparatuses. Their opposition is expressed first through each one of them launching different orders. Their opposition comes, next, from their support for the most fortunate categories and for hierarchy in general, which the employers systematically maintain in order to divide wage earners. The unity of the trade-union apparatuses, when it is achieved, has but one function: to better box in a movement in order to control laboring people more effectively and to bring them back into the fold.

The Trade-Union Leadership and the Base

The trade unions can act in this way because, for a long time now, they are no longer directed by the mass of their members. The bureaucracy that leads them, being made up of privileged paid officials, entirely escapes from the control of the base. There are certainly many occupations, localities, or business enterprises where the union locals remain connected with their members and try to express their aspirations. And certainly the great majority of grass-roots [*de base*] trade-union militants are sincere and honest working-class militants. But neither these militants nor the locals they sustain can influence the attitude of the Federations or the Confederations. The closer one comes to the summits of the trade-union organization, the more one notices that this organization leads a life of its own, following its own policy independently of its base. The trade-union leadership groups are in fact irremovable and beyond control. Despite comedies like “lists of demands” and “referenda” organized from time to time to give a semblance of democracy to the trade union’s actions, in the end its line barely takes into any account the will of its members—in any case, barely any more than is strictly indispensable for it not to lose its influence completely. What effectively actual control do the laboring people in a business enterprise have over the designation of union reps [*des délégués du personnel*]? The trade union nominates the candidates, and the personnel of the firm is left to elect them by plebiscite or abstain from voting. What laborer has the feeling that he and his comrades can truly have an influence over the trade union’s line?

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It is this situation that explains the huge loss of interest in the trade unions, a movement of disaffection that has continued for a decade in France and that is expressed by a considerable decline in trade-union membership; the laboring people who remain therein pay their dues, but they never appear at trade-union meetings, quite simply because they have noted that what could be said there or even decided

barely had any influence upon the organization's real policy. Yet even where trade-union locals remain full of life, they can do nothing as soon as even remotely general problems are posed. They are really obliged, most of the time, to submit to the line of the trade-union leadership—but they can never have any influence over it. If the militants from these locals question the union's instructions, they risk exclusion. They are in fact deprived of the means to express themselves: in the trade-union press, only the official line of the leadership is expressed. These comrades ultimately find themselves in a paradoxical situation: they are in the union because, in theory, the union was to allow them and enable them to have contacts with all the laboring people in their business enterprise, their corporation, their locality. Yet in fact, they are just as isolated as any unorganized person. They can enter into contact with the rest of their class only through and under the control of the trade-union bureaucracy. They are connected to their company's local, but as soon as they want to go any further they encounter an insurmountable barrier. The prime concern of the trade-union leadership is, moreover, to close off and to isolate these grass-roots locals from one another, to prevent the ideas, initiatives, and experiences that come to light there from spreading throughout the organization. Here is one example among a thousand.

In Renault's Department 11, in mid-September, the workers of the CGT local met and discussed the demands for which they wanted to struggle. They finally ended up, almost unanimously, with the following resolution:

1. For everyone, an hourly increase of 40 francs, turning down a percentage increase;
2. A 45-hour work week, as first stage toward the return to 40 hours, without a reduction of wages or an increase in the pace of work;
3. Incorporation of all bonuses into the hourly wage, considering that those bonuses are a wage that no longer should be subject to all sorts of restrictions. The unionized laborers of Department 11 mandate their union to examine in the automobile sector a new coefficient for Semiskilled Workers [OS] that would

draw closer to that of Skilled Workers [*professionnels*] and would take into account that the OS is working on sophisticated machine tools that demand much greater precision and ever more parts. They propose a coefficient of 140.

Finally, the resolution demands the elimination of the category of Unskilled Maintenance Worker [*Manœuvre gros travaux*] and its incorporation within the OS category.

Did the CGT take up these demands? No. Did it try to get the workers from other departments to express what they thought about these demands, to accept them, reject them, or formulate other ones? No. Did it try to broadcast them in the factory? No. It was just this Department 11 that published the resolution in its own Bulletin, meant in principle for the very workers of the Department, who, of course, knew of the resolution since they had prepared it. The CGT continues simply to advance the demands defined by its committees [*les bureaux*].

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Criticized above was the fact that the trade unions are at present putting forward different demands for different places and occupations, when faced with a decline in purchasing power that is the same for everyone. To this, the trade unions sometimes respond: This is because laboring people put forward differing demands. Yet, when they are reproached for not taking into account laboring people's opinions about demands, they answer: One cannot take those opinions into account, for they differ from one another; the union has to have a coherent and unified line. In fact, the two arguments cancel each other out. It is indeed possible that, at the outset, laboring people put forward different demands from one place to another, but this diversity can be overcome only through a genuine collective discussion, where different positions are made known and where an enlightened opinion is formed. Instead of that, the trade unions as a matter of fact prevent all confrontation of views and impose their own line, which is no one's line. Such an arbitrary and dictatorial

unification is, obviously, absolutely incapable of creating a genuine unanimity among laboring people and therefore also their solidarity and their cohesion in combat.

Would perhaps the CGT not have the time and the means to fulfill what should be its main function, that is to say, to inform the inhabitants of this city that is the Renault factory about what their comrades think? But instead of organizing meetings like those of September 27 and October 3, where [\[Roger\] Linet](#), a CGT leader at Renault, came to teach the workers that they are in a difficult situation—they needed Linet to know that—the CGT perfectly well could have used the work stoppage to invite the workers to discuss and to decide democratically about what their demands should be and what action to take. Linet taught the workers nothing, but he could have learned a lot from them. Yet, if the trade unions agreed to submit their instructions to discussion among laboring people, where would one end up? If, by some unlikely chance, it turned out that laboring people knew what they needed and how to obtain it—what purpose would their brilliant chiefs henceforth serve?

Laboring People Can Do Without Trade-Union Bureaucrats

Faced with this situation and this attitude on the part of the trade unions, what can laboring people do?

First, they can understand that they have nothing to expect from anyone but themselves. The employing class and its Government are not inclined to let up—and they will not let up unless forced to do so through the action of laboring people. The trade unions will pass the time with demonstrations, petitions, never-ending discussions, and they will be ready to sign rotten compromises each time they have the occasion to do so.

It is completely wrong to believe that laboring people cannot act outside the trade-union organizations. Quite the contrary. The entire history of working-class struggles shows that the most important and effective actions have been conducted outside the existing organizations. The trade unions were not responsible for [the general strike of] June

1936; it was laboring people themselves who organized their strike and occupied business enterprises. Closer to us, in 1955, in Nantes, it was not from the trade unions, but rather from the workers, that the initiative as well as the key demand of 40 francs an hour for all came, and this is what galvanized and unified the movement. It was not the trade unions, but rather the workers, that forced the bosses to capitulate. It was again the workers that themselves organized themselves in order to struggle against the state riot police. The trade-union militants who participated in this movement were able to act effectively insofar as they stood alongside the workers, insofar as they tried to serve the autonomous movement of laboring people and not to impose on it the trade unions' instructions—and as a result, they found themselves as a matter of fact in opposition to these unions. During the bank strike, in July 1957, it was the employees that triggered the strike and that fought, and the trade unions that scuttled it.

As soon as the situation and their experience lead them to unanimous conclusions on key questions, laboring people acting collectively reveal themselves to be the greatest organized force on earth. Now, it is easy to note that each day a growing number of laboring people are drawing essentially identical conclusions from the experience of the last few months. These conclusions can be summarized as follows:

- Nonhierarchized demands;*
- Democratic election of Strike Committees;*
- Spreading [Généralisation] of struggles.*

Demands

The objectives relating to demands capable of achieving unanimity among laboring people are at present obvious. The problem that is posed is the same for all business enterprises, all corporations, all localities: the rapid deterioration of purchasing power. Faced with such deterioration, the *specific* demands of this or that sector, without disappearing, cannot but take a backseat. As for demands separated by *categories of workers*, and especially

demands favoring an enlargement or even mere maintenance of the hierarchy of existing wages, laboring people absolutely have to condemn such demands. This hierarchy, systematically maintained and broadened by the employing class and the State with the help of the trade unions in order to divide laboring people and line them up against one another, no longer corresponds at all to the labor performed in contemporary business enterprises, which is becoming increasingly similar for all categories.

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Demands like those of Renault's Department 11, mentioned above (uniform 40-franc-an-hour increase for everyone and incorporation of all bonuses into wages; return to the 45-hour work week; shrinking of hierarchy) undoubtedly correspond to the current situation and probably to aspirations in all sectors. Yet the best demands in the world are worthless if they do not express the freely formed opinion of those who are to defend them. It is up to laboring people themselves, in their shops, their offices, their business enterprises, to define their demands and to bring them to the awareness of their comrades.

The Means and Organization of Struggle

Are there effective means of struggle?

Yes, there is incontestably one and only one: the unlimited strike until full satisfaction of demands.

For years, the trade unions have surpassed themselves in ingenuity for inventing totally ineffective ways of striking. Work stoppages of a quarter of an hour or an hour, or two hours, strikes at different hours for different shifts, strikes where one shop or one factory is left to fight all alone and return to work exhausted in order to launch a strike the next day in another shop or another factory. These parodies of struggle in no way disturb the employing class. They just wear down laboring people, who gain nothing therefrom and lose some wages.

The trade unions have gone about this so well that

laboring people have, so to speak, almost forgotten what a real strike signifies. Going on strike does not mean going home or playing cards or organizing talent shows. The conditions for a strike to be effective are:

•*First, leadership [direction] of the strike by the strikers themselves.* What is at issue are the demands of the strikers, not those of the trade unions. It is the strikers that will pay if the strike fails, not the trade union's paid officials. It is therefore the strikers that are to direct their strike. For that, a Strike Committee is certainly indispensable. Yet under no pretext is this Committee to be named arbitrarily by the trade unions. Without barring anyone, the Strike Committee has to be elected by the strikers. Its members have to be revocable at any moment, that is to say that laboring people have to be able to replace on the spot every delegated rep who no longer has their confidence. The Strike Committee has to provide regular accounts of their activity before the General Assembly of strikers. In no case should it be able to conclude agreements with the boss but instead must always submit every proposal to the General Assembly of strikers, which will discuss it and vote on it. One must be done with agreements negotiated in secret by the trade unions and then imposed on the strikers. One must also be done with the comedy of "referenda," which in reality place the strikers before a fait accompli without them having the possibility of discussing it, that is, before a take-it-or-leave-it agreement.

•*Occupation of the premises by the strikers.* Only such an occupation allows the strikers to remain united, to keep their action under their own control, to thwart the employers' maneuvers, and to prevent gradual disintegration and demoralization.

•*Extension of the strike to other business enterprises.* Employers can resist laboring people's action all the better when such action is fragmented. Extension of the struggle is especially indispensable under present circumstances, where no boss can give in separately without creating for himself enormous difficulties. Isolated business enterprises will

concede only some crumbs; only a widespread struggle can oblige the employing class to accept major demands. This spreading of the struggle does not happen on its own; still less can it be expected that the trade unions will order it. The trade unions do not even inform the laboring people of a business enterprise about what is happening at another company. At Renault, in 1956, the laborers from one shop went on strike for a week, and the rest of the factory learned about it when the strike had ended. There will be an extension of the movement only if the laboring people make it their business—by sending, for example, massive delegations into the other companies of their occupation or of the locality in order to explain their action and their objectives to their comrades.

The Preparation of the Strike

But how can such a strike be organized? How, in large business enterprises employing thousands of people, in localities where those enterprises are dispersed, to go beyond the compartmentalization that separates each shop, each office, each company from the other ones? How is one to come to an agreement about an action, about its objectives and its means?

Those are the questions that at present are holding up laboring people. The majority sees what are the key demands and sees, too, that serious struggle alone would be able to satisfy those demands. And they even see, most of the time, that not much is to be expected from the trade unions. But the majority does not see how this struggle could be prepared, organized, and directed outside the trade unions.

There is only one answer to the problem of who is to direct the strike: it is to be directed by those who go on strike. The General Assembly of strikers, the Strike Committees organized by shop or by office and for the whole of the company, the meeting of representatives of those Committees forming a Strike Committee for one's occupation or for the locality—those are the organizational forms, and they are the sole ones perfectly adapted to the needs of the struggle to be conducted. They are necessary; they are sufficient. They are

the only effective means of organization capable of leading the struggle to victory.

True, such forms can exist only once the action is underway. And it is precisely the triggering of such action that is being curbed by the trade unions. And it is when faced with this obstacle that laboring people hesitate. There is the problem of preparing for the strike, which to many seems insoluble.

Here the answer is, at bottom, the same: the most effective way to prepare the action is to get the greatest possible number of laboring people to join in this preparation. In many places, moreover, such collective preparation is now done spontaneously and unofficially. In shops, in offices, the unionized and the nonunionized discuss the situation, the demands, and possible action. Such discussions, which prove to be extremely fruitful, can easily become widespread, take on an organized form, and culminate in precise conclusions that can be laid down on paper. It is from such discussions in workplaces that the ideas that will guide their action will emerge. Once formulated clearly and precisely, these ideas can be communicated to the other shops, offices, and companies.

If, for example, a resolution like the above-mentioned one from Renault's Department 11 is approved, the laboring people who took the initiative have to make their comrades aware of it. They can circulate the text, sending delegates to make contact with the other sectors of the business enterprise and establishing ongoing communications with them. If the majority of shops or offices appoint such delegates, if these delegates gather to clear the way and get others to go out on strike, if next a General Assembly of the personnel is held that discusses and decides on the list of demands and the modes of action—the strike will have been prepared infinitely better than any trade union would have ever been able to do. For, it will have been prepared by the very people who will have to conduct it, who will know why they are fighting because they will have decided about it themselves, and the ones for whom this struggle will be but the freely chosen means for bringing their needs to the forefront and imposing their ideas.

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Thus did some comrades in a Renault shop propose to the shop the appeal printed below to the other workers in the factory. This resolution was adopted in the course of a discussion begun during a work stoppage undertaken for this very purpose:

1. We demand that *all workers* from all shops decide together, without any discrimination based on political or trade-union allegiance, on demands and on possible actions;
2. That the workers send large delegations in order to bring together a General Assembly of all shops at the Works Council [*Comité d'entreprise*] in order to coordinate and implement decisions made in the shops. We demand that the greatest possible number of workers come to this assembly to express themselves.

After having adopted as their own the aforementioned demands of the factory's Department 11, the authors of the appeal go on to say:

In order to obtain these demands, we propose:

1. That this General Assembly decide to launch the strike order in the factory and simultaneously, through tracts and through the press, call upon all factories to go out at the same time as Renault;
2. That during the strike, each shop that would not yet have appointed a strike committee designate one that is *elected and revocable before everyone* in order to go on strike with an occupation of the factory. Each shop would have to furnish a rotation of strike picketers proportionate to the size of the workforce in the shop;
3. Organize contacts with other factories:
 - by sending large delegations that will go *en masse* to ask the workers in other factories to follow the movement;

- through joint meetings with the strike committees of other factories;
- through the constitution of a regional strike committee and of a national strike committee.

We also propose that payment for strike days be included among the demands.

The signatories commit to circulating these proposals as broadly as possible and to contributing to the payment of the printing costs.

One must not have any illusions about the attitude the trade-union leadership groups will adopt toward every attempt by laboring people to prepare their action and to direct it themselves. They will be opposed thereto by all means: violence and trickery, sweet talk and calumny, blunt rejection and delaying tactics. Often, laboring people who want to act autonomously will in the first place run up against the dictatorship of the trade unions. In this struggle, the most determined comrades, who see the problems most clearly, can play a decisive role by thwarting the maneuvers of the trade unions, by responding systematically to their arguments, by becoming the conduit for information about what is happening elsewhere (information the trade unions aim only to block), by organizing collective discussions, and by insisting that everyone express himself. If some small groups of comrades are constituted on this basis in the shops and offices, with, as their sole preoccupation, breaking the monopoly the trade unions currently exercise over information and communication among laboring people, and allowing these people to express freely their needs, their thought, and their will, they will quickly have the support of the great majority of laboring people in their effort. As much as laboring people are now mistrustful of professional agitators importing slogans manufactured elsewhere, to that extent will they be open to a few of their own who act only in order to allow them to bring out the common will.

Such minoritarian groupings, bringing together comrades who are conscious of the need for laboring people to take the leadership [*direction*] of their struggles into their own hands, exist right now in several companies. Sometimes

made up of comrades who have left the trade unions, sometimes bringing together the unionized and the nonunionized, they are all essentially aiming at the same goal: to inform laboring people about their situation in their business enterprise as well as the struggles of other enterprises and to promote a broad democratic discussion about the objectives and means of struggles. The action of these groupings has always been met with a favorable echo among laboring people. There is thus, at the Renault factories, a group of comrades who have been publishing for four years *Tribune Ouvrière*; at the Assurances Générales-Vie life-insurance company in Paris, comrades grouped around an “Employee bulletin [*Bulletin employé*]”; at Paris’s Bréguet factory, a group of unionized and nonunionized workers have been publishing jointly since last Spring a “Free Tribune [*Tribune libre*]”; and, quite recently, some comrades who are teachers have begun the publication of a “Teachers’ Tribune [*Tribune des enseignants*].” The multiplication of such manifestations in the recent period shows that an increasing number of laboring people are becoming aware of the fact that *a democratic preparation of every struggle is the first condition for its effectiveness.*

Can One Achieve a Lasting Victory?

Prepared, organized, and directed in this way by the participants, the struggle can be victorious. Yet, in the minds of many, another question is posed.

Assuming that we impose our demands and extract substantial increases, what will happen afterward? Will the bourgeoisie not try to take back, through new price hikes, what it will have given away? What will one have ultimately won in this affair if one obtains a 40-franc increase and then prices rise again 10 or 15 percent?

This question is absolutely justified. The bourgeoisie may react to a wage increase with a new hike in prices—as it did between 1945 and 1949. That is not inevitable, but it is nonetheless likely. Contrary to the 1952-1955 period, the bourgeoisie presently has little leeway. It cannot maintain its profits, balance its accounts abroad, and continue the Algerian

War without attacking the workers' standard of living. If it were beaten on the wage front, it would attack again on prices.

Can the workers defend themselves against that by demanding and forcing a sliding scale of wages based on prices? This "sliding scale" has existed since 1952; has it functioned when the price hikes came in 1956? No, one merely manipulated and falsified the price indices. There is a sliding scale in the Renault contract. It has never functioned.

Let it not be said that it would just be a matter of obtaining a "better" sliding scale. Every sliding scale has to be based on a price index—and this index is in the hands of the bosses, the government, and the trade-union bureaucrats. Laboring people have no control over it and cannot turn themselves into statisticians. When the problem of wages and prices becomes vital, the sliding scale no longer functions except if one fights to make it function. For, if the purchasing power of wage earners was to be maintained by the functioning of the sliding scale, other national expense items would have to be reduced. The bourgeoisie would have to agree to stop the Algerian War, or lower its profits, or both at once. And that does not depend on a law about the sliding scale but on the capacity of laboring people to impose such changes through struggle—for, the bourgeoisie and its government will resist such changes with all their might.

What is to be done, then? It is, of course, out of the question for laboring people to suffer passively the overexploitation the employing class wants to impose on them in order to conduct its war. Yet there is no magical solution. The outcome of the current crisis will be determined by the degree of force, consciousness, and cohesion laboring people will show.

If laboring people organize themselves in business enterprises around democratically elected Committees that express their aspirations and remain under their control; if they struggle on a widespread scale, utilizing all the means capable of bringing their demands to a successful conclusion; if, in the course of this struggle, they oblige the employing class and its government to back down, the problem of prices and wages could really be overcome. The consequences of

such a struggle could be of extraordinary import. Such a movement, similar in breadth to that of June 1936, would be capable of going much further than the latter, because it could take place only by creating along the way some forms of organization that group together the mass of laboring people and express their will, over which the maneuvers of the bureaucracy would have infinitely less of a hold than those of [\[the French Popular Front's Socialist Prime Minister Léon Blum\]](#) and [\[French CP leader Maurice Thorez\]](#), who ultimately shunted aside the movement of '36. Under such conditions, a strike coordinated by Factory Committees and going to full term would pose the question of the management of production and of the country by laboring people.

Yet it would be wrong to think that, for lack of such an upheaval, laboring people would once again find themselves at the mercy of the policy of the employers and the government. If laboring people, after having forced a full restoration of their purchasing power, manifest their determination to give an immediate riposte to every attempt on the part of the bourgeoisie to take back with the left hand what will have been given with the right hand, they can make the bourgeoisie back down. For that, however, such determination must take on a materially concrete form; the force and the cohesion of laboring people must be manifested in a visible and ongoing way; the organs of struggle created by laboring people, and in particular democratically elected Strike Committees, are not to be disbanded once the demands are satisfied. These organs must be maintained, they must organize ongoing company-to-company and locality-to-locality contacts; they must proclaim publicly their intention to control how the situation in general and purchasing power in particular evolve; and they must call again upon laboring people to enter into struggle at the slightest attempt, wherever it may come from, to attack their standard of living.

The trade unions will say that such ongoing organs exist already and that they are them. Laboring people have several years of experience that allow them to respond.

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If we expect a result from trade-union negotiations; if we limit ourselves to following the instructions for one-time two-hour strikes; if we allow the trade unions to direct the strike and we just go home; if, after being beaten, we leave the final fate of the struggle in the hands of the trade unions that will negotiate a rotten compromise with the employers—our situation will worsen and we will be the only ones responsible for that. In this comedy, each one of them—the employing class, the Government, the parties, the trade unions—is playing its own game and pursuing its own interests. Nobody cares about ours, and we have nothing to expect from anyone. We can be saved only by ourselves.⁵

BETA

⁵1974 note: A first draft of this text, written in September 1957, had been the subject of several discussions within the *S. ou B.* group. These discussions led to modifications, thanks to the contributions of comrades from the group, in particular Henri Simon, Daniel Mothé, and other comrades from the Renault state-owned corporation. The modified version had been circulated in late October 1957 to several dozen laboring people from the Paris region who, invited to a meeting for this purpose, discussed it at length. The final text, which took into account the viewpoints expressed during this meeting, was, in addition to its publication in *S. ou B.*, offprinted and circulated in several business enterprises.

**PART TWO:
THE FRENCH SITUATION**

BETA

FRENCH EDITORS: This second part includes texts that were published between 1954 and 1961 in [Socialisme ou Barbarie](#) and were reprinted by the author under the (perhaps somewhat overly vast) title *La Société française* (SF, French society), 53-164 (with 15-51 reprinted here in the Appendixes). The other Castoriadis texts also reprinted in this Éditions 10/18 volume are published in the *What Democracy?* volume of our edition.

In a “Note liminaire” (introductory note) dated May 1979, it was said, “Beyond the texts contained in this volume, numerous other texts from this [Éditions 10/18] publication are devoted totally or in part to analyses of the situation and evolution of postwar France, particularly as concerns workers’ struggles.” Mentioned were a few texts from 1947-1954 (“[La crise du capitalisme mondial et l’intervention du parti dans les luttes](#)” [The crisis of world capitalism and the Party’s intervention in struggles; excerpted translation published as “Stalinism in France” in [PSW1](#)], “[Rapport politique pour le V^e Congrès, présenté par les camarades Chaulieu, Fabre, Marc, Marchesin, Mercier, Montal, Paget, Seurel, Tève](#)” [Political Report for the Fifth Congress of the Parti Communiste Internationaliste, presented by comrades Chaulieu, Fabre, Marc, Marchesin, Mercier, Montal, Paget, Seurel, Tève], “Situation of Imperialism and Proletarian Perspectives” [translated in [PSW1](#)]), which will be included in the *On the Dynamic of Capitalism* volume, and other texts from our edition, as well as other ones from 1953 to 1963 (“Sartre, Stalinism, and the Workers” [translated in [PSW1](#)], “Workers Confront the Bureaucracy” [translated in [PSW2](#)], “How to Struggle” [now above], “Results” [also now above], “The Miners’ Strike” [translated in [PSW3](#)], “Student Youth” [translated in [PSW3](#)]), which are found in the present [double volume] and in *What Democracy?*

Castoriadis added that, “for criticism of the oldest texts, particularly those of the 1946-1954 period, and of the traditional conceptions they still bear, the reader is invited to refer to ‘Modern Capitalism and Revolution’ [translated in [PSW2](#)], to ‘Recommencing the Revolution’ [translated in [PSW3](#)], to the General Introduction [translated in [PSW1](#)], and to ‘Socialism and Autonomous Society’ [translated in [PSW3](#)].”

Mendès France: Vague Desires for Independence and an Attempt at Makeshift Repairs*

Nothing is more characteristic of the impotence and ridiculousness of the French “Left” than the triumphant clamors let out upon [\[Pierre\] Mendès France](#)’s becoming President of the Council.¹ As Monsieur [\[editor-in chief of the France Observateur Gilles\] Martinet](#) explained in his newsweekly, it was well known that Mendès France’s government could not but be a bourgeois government and that its task could not but be to try to consolidate French capitalism—but, as a matter of fact, the “Left” has a duty to support a “good” bourgeois government; only such a government can dispel the present confusion, which is preventing the people’s movement from advancing. True, the rest of us, the French Left, are pathetic losers, as Monsieur Martinet pretty much says, but is this our fault? Look at the rottenness of bourgeois politics, and recall that a country can have only the Left of its Right. The conclusion of this eminent tactician, formulated in Archimedean style, would roughly be as follows: Give me a good right-wing government, and I will move the earth of France.

This nitwit scribbler’s [\[de Gribouille\]](#) argument in fact expresses the genuine ideology of the “left-wing” intellectuals in France. Those ideologists do not reproach French capitalism for its capitalism but for being a bad sort of capitalism, incoherent, rotten, stagnant, and servile to the Americans. Moreover, this is the motivation also active among a host of pro-Stalinist intellectuals. Might the Russian

*Originally published as “Mendès France: Velléités d’indépendance et tentative de rafistolage” [S. ou B., 15-16 \(October 1954\)](#): 1-21. Reprinted in *SF*, 82-87, and [EPI](#), 243-66, along with an account of the meeting of readers published in [no. 17](#) (July 1955): 78-82, and in [EPI](#), 267-70.

¹T/E: The head of government (equivalent to a prime minister) in France at the time was called “President of the Council of Ministers.” Mendès France served in this role from June 18, 1954 to February 23, 1955.

bureaucracy be an exploiting class? Perhaps, but it is developing production—whereas French production is stagnating. Might its foreign policy be brutal, imposing imperialist tutelage upon a series of countries? So be it, but it does so in accordance with a long-term policy—whereas the French bourgeoisie is incapable of having even a momentary policy. Might it be exercising a police-state dictatorship that crushes all opposition? Granted, but it is run by iron-willed men [*hommes de fer*], whereas French ministers are “weak-nerved girls” [*nerfs de fille*] “fainting at the rostrum.”²

One can therefore understand the springtime of hope that arose in people's hearts when Mendès France's nomination seemed to them to open up a prospect of renewal for French capitalism. One finally had “a reformist bourgeois current, which is not devoid of dynamism and effectiveness,”³ and, despite or rather because of the “contradictions” inherent in this current, one had to “make every effort so that the Mendès France experiment might not be cut short; so that the social strata it has revealed...might participate fully in its necessary enlargement, in its necessary evolution.” This is nested-doll politics: the government is trying to reform French capitalism, the government's left wing is trying to reform its right wing, while *France-Observateur*, employing popular pressure, will reform the government's left wing. Missing from this ingenious apparatus, for it to be able to be presented at a competition of inventors [*concours Lépine*], were just one or two pins that in truth were of little importance: the support of the masses and the objective possibility of tracing back to French capitalism the current of its historical decadence.

²Jean-Paul Sartre, *Les Temps Modernes*, April 1954, p. 1734 [[“The Communists and the Peace,” trans. Martha H. Fletcher, in *The Communists and the Peace* \(New York: George Braziller, 1968\), p. 136](#)]. In Sartre's new argument in favor of Stalin, one key consideration ushers in all the others: the French bourgeoisie is letting production stagnate. As to the majority of the other capitalist countries, which are doing all they can to develop production, that's an “abstraction”: I'm French, says Sartre, and am interested in my country. The idea that “his country” might be an abstraction, and the worst one, does not cross the mind of this philosopher.

³G[illes] Martinet in *France-Observateur*, September 30, 1954.

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The decadence of French capitalism is expressed by the relative stagnation of production, the multiplication of interclass conflicts that do not culminate in any clear-cut solution, and the decomposition of the political and state apparatus. This decadence takes on its full meaning only when placed within the organic context of the development of world capitalism. From the end of the last century, the real might of the French bourgeoisie, relative to that of its rivals, began to decline and corresponded less and less to the extent of its colonial empire and to the role it wanted to continue to play in world politics. While it was still able, owing to its victory in 1918, to maintain a certain amount of authority for a dozen years and to experience, through a series of crises, economic expansion until 1929, the period from 1930 to 1939 revealed its irremediable weakness. Its industrial production, which was never able during this period to regain the level it had in 1929, was, on the eve of the War, 20 percent lower than that level; its currency had been devalued on several occasions; its domination over the workers could be saved only thanks to [\[Socialist leader Léon\] Blum](#) and [\[French CP leader Maurice\] Thorez](#). The war of 1939-1940 consummated its downfall.

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It is impossible to analyze here the complex roots of this decline [*décadence*], but it is indispensable, on account of their present-day importance, to mention two factors that have played a determining role: the policy of the French bourgeoisie toward the peasantry and the particular form monopolistic concentration has taken in France. As early as the mid-nineteenth century, and especially since 1871, the French bourgeoisie sought in the countryside a support against the urban proletariat. In this regard, the contrast between how France evolved and how England evolved is characteristic. The English bourgeoisie allowed its agriculture to wither under pressure from the competition of cheap grain imports; doing so, on the one hand it obliged the peasants to

swell the ranks of the industrial reserve army in the towns, on the other it profited from the drop in the cost of food for its workers and was able to maintain lower nominal wages than would otherwise have been possible. Anticipating with terror the day of being "alone at last," one on one with the most revolutionary proletariat of its age, the French bourgeoisie quickly turned toward intense protection of its agriculture, maintaining the prosperity of a solid layer of rich and middle peasants and keeping the rest of the peasantry in its small-property illusions. In thus slowing down enormously the peasant exodus toward the towns, it was in the short term protecting its social and economic stability; the maintenance of a large agricultural sector guaranteed industrial products a more stable outlet than the export markets while the weak level of permanent unemployment rendered fluctuations in industrial employment during crises less grave. Yet these results, which were favorable in the immediate term, were becoming catastrophic in the long term. The relative stability of outlets was slowing down accumulation, the rationalization of production, and the concentration of business enterprises; the absence of a large industrial reserve army was tending, sooner than elsewhere, to put a brake on the expansion phases of the industrial cycle. Finally, the protection of agriculture, insofar as it was achieving its goal—maintaining higher agricultural prices in France than on the world market—signified that, for a same degree of labor exploitation in real terms, nominal wages and the level of prices tended to be higher in France than abroad, whence the tendency toward the chronic competitive weakness of French production on the international markets. (Insofar as agricultural protection aims at ensuring that agriculture has a higher revenue in real terms than the one that corresponds to its productivity as compared to the productivity of the countries that export agricultural products, the balance in trade can be achieved only if French capitalism can take back what it is losing to its agriculture from someone else—and particularly from the industrial proletariat. With a large but not very productive agricultural sector, the competitive strength of French industry on the international markets can be maintained only if real wages are lower for the same productivity of industrial labor. Insofar as

the proletariat does not accept that level of wages, the problem is insoluble.)

This tendency explains the particularly high degree of protection in France for *the whole* of production and also, in part, the other phenomenon typical of French capitalism, namely, that monopolistic competition has taken on there much more the form of organizing the business enterprises of each sector into cartels, combines, or syndicates [*“comptoirs”*], fixing prices and sometimes divvying up orders, and much less the form of a merger of business enterprises (which, in general, goes hand in hand with rationalization and cost reduction, if not price reductions). The very slow concentration of business enterprises in France (where the average number of workers per industrial establishment went from six in 1901 to 10 in 1936, the corresponding figures for the United States being 24 and 56) expresses this state of affairs.⁴ It was accompanied by a feeble accumulation of capital, the capitalists not being highly subject to the pressure of competition and gradually transforming themselves into industrial *rentiers*, whereas a good part of the profits were being invested abroad, in investments that, often, later vanished into thin air.

Thus, France's contribution to world industrial production fell from 10.3 percent in 1870 to 6.4 percent in 1931, 4.5 percent in 1936-1938, and 3.3 percent in 1952, whereas French exports, which represented 10.9 percent of world exports in 1876-1880, no longer represented but 7 percent in 1911-1913 and 4.1 percent in 1936-1938.⁵

The collapse of 1939-1940 was the logical result of

⁴See Madame [Lucienne] Cahen's article "La concentration des établissements en France de 1896 à 1930" (*Études et conjoncture*, September 1954, pp. 840[-81], and especially pp. 856-57 and 874) for France and *Statistical Abstracts of the United States from 1951* (p. 739) for the United States.

⁵See *Industrialisation et commerce extérieur* (Geneva: S[ociété] d[es] N[at]ions], 1945), pp. 14 and 187-97. The percentage of French industrial production compared to world industrial production in 1952 was calculated by us on the basis of indices published in the United Nations' *Monthly Bulletin of Statistics* (New York, October 1953), pp. xv and 21.

this evolution. And far from resolving anything, the “victory” of 1945 set French capitalism before the most difficult problems ever posed to a dominant class, and this at a moment when the apparatus of leadership [*de direction*] and domination of the bourgeoisie, the State and the political parties, had completely broken down [*décomposé*] and had practically no hold over a society that was in revolt against the capitalist system.

The situation of the French bourgeoisie at the end of the War is well known: its production plants were half destroyed, its colonial empire cracking all over, its proletariat capable of being kept within existing social bounds thanks only to the Stalinist party, its pretensions to maintaining the place and prerogatives of a victorious “great power” reduced to nothing by the nonexistence of any military and economic potential.

Theoretically, all these problems included their solution. On the economic level, reconstruction—that is to say, accumulation of capital at an accelerated pace—entailed, on the one hand, a reduction in real wages—which really did take place in the end—and, on the other, the rational redirection of investments and the limitation of all forms of unproductive consumption. On the colonial level, it was a matter of understanding that the collapse of the economic and military power of French capitalism and the awakening of colonial peoples no longer allowed in certain places—Indochina—the maintenance of French domination, or they forced in other places—North Africa—major concessions in order to avoid losing everything. A certain amount of influence on the international level could have been regained only as a function of the breadth of the economic reconstruction and of the abandonment of the irrecoverable parts of the old colonial empire.

These solutions did not remain theoretical because they were in themselves unrealizable. In other countries, they were achieved, as matter of fact, after that war: English capitalism was able, on the colonial level, to maintain the necessary flexibility in order to avoid losing everything, just as, along different paths, England again, Belgium, and Italy were able to carry out their reconstruction at lesser cost. Yet

the French bourgeoisie was lacking the social and political conditions for their achievement. The quantitatively and qualitatively largest fraction of the French proletariat was under the control of the Stalinist party, and that party, far from setting the defense of the established order above all else, had its own objectives in relation to which collaboration with the bourgeoisie on the backs of the workers represented only a transitory tactic. "Social peace" had to be bought at the price of a condominium with the French CP whose duration and outcome were uncertain. And these were all the more uncertain as, faced with the monolithism of the Stalinist party backed by Moscow, the political and state apparatus of the French bourgeoisie displayed an unprecedented level of incoherency and disintegration.

The fragmentation of the political personnel of the bourgeoisie in France is an old phenomenon. As opposed to the other great capitalist countries, France has for a long time not enjoyed having a large homogeneous and disciplined bourgeois party. Yet under the Third Republic, while the fragmentation of the bourgeoisie's political organizations (or the brittleness of the existing ones) was reflected in the almost quarterly changes in government, such fragmentation did not prevent the pursuit of a relatively coherent policy. The quasi-occupational quarrels among political personnel did not affect the solution to the key problems of French capitalism. That solution seemed and was in this era relatively clear, only rarely implied a limitation on the interests of this or that capitalist group in the name of the general interests of the system, and left a comfortable margin for the quarrels and the demagoguery of the bourgeoisie's electoral agencies. None of that remained after the War. Problems of all kinds were being posed on a hitherto unknown scale, and the means for facing up to them were sorely lacking; the strength of the Stalinist party was making it extremely difficult to apply any policy to which that party would not rally, that is to say, in which it would not see its own interest; it was therefore a matter of trying to please everyone. Even supposing that such a solution could be found, a correct solution to the problems of the bourgeoisie would therefore have necessarily consisted in a form of tightrope walking and could have been applied only

if the bourgeoisie were capable of endowing itself with a unitary organ for the elaboration and application of a policy, imposing upon itself total discipline and even “sacrifices,” ruthlessly crushing every tendency of any bourgeois group to put its own interests ahead of the general interests of the preservation of capitalism.

Now, under the conditions of social and political decomposition resulting from defeat and occupation, division within the bourgeoisie, bankruptcy of the majority of its political personnel, and malfunction of the normal mechanisms of the capitalist economy, such a body could arise *ex nihilo* neither after a few days nor after a few months. The extreme solution, which would be the abolition of parliamentary government, was ruled out both in the form of fascism—the birth of a fascist ideology being at this moment impossible—and in the form of a Bonapartist coup d'état, which could not rely on a dislocated state apparatus; in both cases, moreover, this “solution” would not have done anything but trigger a civil war, which in turn is pregnant with an international war.

Thus, the bourgeoisie has been able to govern only by means of four or five parties and twice as many groups and crossparty parliamentary joint committees, whose existence was tied both to coalitions of particular interests within the bourgeoisie itself and to a form of demagoguery addressed to specific economic, occupational, and ideological categories of the population. Added to the debris of the prewar parties—Socialists, Radicals, and moderates—are formations that have tried to renovate the shabby liberal bourgeois ideology by donning some religious rags (MRP [Mouvement républicain populaire ([the Christian Democrats' Popular Republican Movement](#))] or national ones (RPF [Rassemblement du Peuple Français, [the Gaullists' Rally of the French People](#)]]) but always, of course, upon the “social” background mandated by the era.

This has resulted in a political instability and incoherency that would have been serious even in normal times, but that, under the given circumstances, have been catastrophic. For, even when it succeeded, thanks to the internal contradictions of the policy of the Stalinist party, in

ridding itself of that party (1947), and when the stepped-up loosening of the active grip (insofar as this is to be distinguished from its electoral grip) of Stalinism over the proletariat removed all immediate effectiveness from the CP's action (starting in 1948), the bourgeoisie has been able neither to find nor to apply the policy that could have provided it with a way out of the crisis it is undergoing. While it was able to impose on the working class a reduction in real wages, which was necessary in order to rebuild its capital, this reconstruction effort was carried out in the midst of immense waste, accompanied by permanent inflation and successive devaluations despite the large quantities of dollars received from the United States. Incapable of imposing an "interventionist [*dirigiste*]" discipline upon itself, as the English bourgeoisie has done, or a "liberal" one, as the Belgian and Italian bourgeoisies have done, it has left its members to fill their pockets at the expense of the general interests of their own class; it almost succeeded in transforming the capitalist exploitation of France into a system of short-term pillaging of the economy by interest groups, of which political "lobbies," each controlling a sector of the state apparatus, are the vassals. All that no longer happens just behind the scenes: it is impossible to enumerate the "legal" measures that grant subsidies, exemptions, privileges, and special protections to this or that group of capitalists or to all of them together.

This situation is what has, at the very least at the outset, determined the bourgeoisie's colonial policy. The Indochina affair, that spiral in which French capitalism left its chance for recovering some amount of international power after the War, was from the outset a hopeless enterprise that the fraction of French capitalism with interests in Vietnam, and supported by a swarm of wheelerdealers, literally illegal smugglers, and crooked politicians, was, despite what it might cost French capitalism as a whole, able to impose. Only much later was the continuation of the Indochinese War dictated by American imperialism as part of its struggle against the extension of Stalinism in Asia. No different in its essence was the policy applied in North Africa, where what would have been able, through concessions, to preserve French capitalism

as a whole was jeopardized by the intransigence of groups with local interests that were unwilling to concede anything.

The interaction between these two problems, the economic one and the colonial one, is obvious. Equally obvious is the deterioration of the situation of French capitalism on the level of international relations, which resulted from its inability to put its economy in any sort of order and to liquidate in timely fashion the most costly and most absurd colonial expedition in its history. Incapable of resolving its own problems, it sank into becoming the Americans' vassal, the dollars it had begged for from Washington plugging only with difficulty the holes dug in its budget and the balance of foreign payments by the Indochinese War, waste, fraud, and the maintenance of excessive rates of profit. Doing so, not only did it garner the understandable contempt of the Americans for the needy valet but it made them see that they could not expect much from it when making their military plans and led them to bet on the restoration of German power as its "European shield." Thus, in large part by itself did French capitalism bring about its being replaced by its traditional enemy, Germany, as the third great power of the Atlantic coalition. Its politicians believe that they could escape this danger by proposing a mechanism—the [European Defence Community \(EDC\)](#)—which was intended to make Germany be "controlled" by France; in fact, given the real relation of forces between the two nations, the EDC risked ending up with France being controlled by Germany. Having glimpsed their blunder, they did not dare ask their Parliament to ratify the treaty they had signed and confined themselves to inaction, each day more untenable, when faced with the threats and the blackmail of the Americans.

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The [Joseph Laniel](#) government marked the apogee of the incoherency and inaction characteristic of all [French] governments since 1945. It began by lining up against itself all wage earners in the public sector by trying to achieve some ridiculous "savings" on their backs, whereas, without even

speaking about military expenses, the subsidies, privileges, and all sorts of instances of fraud from which the capitalists profit add up to hundreds of billions [of old francs] in the budget. Having got its fingers burnt in this initial attempt, it confined itself to playing the role of economic backseat driver, [[Minister of Finance and Economic Affairs](#)] [Edgar Faure](#) having presented, in the form of an “economic recovery plan,” what was in the process of happening (just as that other great man of the bourgeoisie, [[ex-Prime Minister Antoine Pinay](#)], vigorously took on rising prices three months after those price hikes had stopped on their own). Its sole initiative was to grant a slight increase in the minimum wage, in order to avoid the outbreak of strikes, of which those of August 1953 had given a foretaste. Having committed to winning Parliament’s ratification of the EDC, the government did not dare for a year to put this treaty to a vote. In North Africa, it let the conflict between the populations and the French administration take on each day a graver form, without daring either to have recourse to a total crackdown or to make concessions. Witnessing day after day the scattering of French military positions in Indochina, it knew how to profit therefrom in order to extort a few additional dollars from the Americans but closed its eyes until the last minute to the following dilemma: withdraw from Vietnam in one form or another or fully commit itself in the war. When it agreed to “negotiations” with the [Viet Minh](#), it entered into them with pretensions and demands that bore no relation to its real strength. An armistice not being able to be concluded on that utopian basis, it tried to drag the Americans into actively intervening at [Dien Bien Phu](#), thus anticipating a generalization of the conflict with criminal frivolousness from the standpoint of the interests of French capitalism that was shared, moreover, by the Radford clan in the United States;⁶ the intervention *in extremis* of the English was required to save the Western bloc from a mad adventure that might have

⁶FRENCH EDITORS: [Admiral Arthur \[W.\] Radford](#), who was Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff under President [Dwight David] Eisenhower, advocated a policy of direct military intervention, on the part of the United States, in the conflict.

turned into a disaster.

In conjunction with the impasse of the [Geneva Conference](#), the fall of Dien Bien Phu abruptly woke up the members of Parliament. They were forced to realize that the problems could no longer be postponed indefinitely; that, in not wanting to give in, one was in the process of losing everything; and, most seriously, that now their own fate was in play. One had to try to transform the bankruptcy into receivership, and it was shrewd to put someone "new" in charge of this receivership, thus preserving the "consular" personnel of the Fourth Republic from the need to take some unpleasant measures and reserving for themselves, should the need arise, the possibility of presenting as a gravedigger he who would have paid the bill.

Thus, Mendès France came to power, borne aloft by the emptiness of the political space, the forces that had hitherto dominated the scene being worn out, corrupt, frightened, and obliged to recognize implicitly their bankrupt failure and to withdraw temporarily before the edifice collapses upon them.

Yet beyond the ruin of the politicians, the constitution of the present government has expressed something deeper: the big bourgeoisie's growing awareness that it could not keep going along in the same rut; that concessions had to be made in the colonial domain; that a certain rationalization of the economy was inevitable, under penalty of a total collapse of the system; and that, at the same time, one could try to limit the Americans' grip on the conduct of French affairs. The awareness of the need for an attempt at makeshift repairs and vague desires for independence had made some headway among the [French] bourgeoisie over the past year. This bourgeoisie might very well definitively be the vassal of the Americans in all important aspects; it is naturally trying—just like, for example, the English bourgeoisie—to limit their domination each time that domination goes directly against its interests. The novelty in the situation has been in the recognition that a certain amount of effective limitation on American domination could occur only insofar as the French bourgeoisie would itself accept a dose of discipline and certain "sacrifices."

Here, in the end, we have the “mission” of the Mendès France government: taking measures toward rationalization that have become indispensable and winning acceptance of those measures among the bourgeoisie as a whole and among the rest of the population; relying on this effort to put things in order, the “mission” here is also to reduce the degree of the Americans’ grip on French capitalism. Yet what as a matter of fact shows the limits of such action is that the government, obliged as it is in certain domains to deal with the most pressing issues, can act only through amputation, through total or partial acts of abandonment, and that, in other domains, it can proceed only through taking minor measures that do not affect the decadent structure of French capitalism.

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The character of the “solution” given in Indochina is clear. This is in fact a solution that involves total capitulation, masked simply by the existence of the “independent” State of South Vietnam. The leftover interests and influence of French capitalism in Indochina have in practice been sacrificed. On the other hand, the agreement with the Viet Minh leaves hanging the future fate of the country; the elections set for 1956, had they taken place, would certainly have delivered the whole of Vietnam to Ho Chi Minh, and for this very good reason those elections no more took place there than in Korea. No more than in Korea is a “stabilization” of the South Vietnamese regime conceivable, and, still less than in Korea or in Germany does the indefinite maintenance of the present situation represent a “solution.” Indochina remains a smoldering ignition source not only on account of the artificial division of the country in two—this artificiality has become natural in the present age—but because the South Vietnamese regime is totally lacking in consistency. The decomposition of the privileged local strata is such that not only is it impossible, with or without the support of French and American imperialists, to set up a parliamentary system, as in West Germany, but it is even very difficult to maintain there an effective dictatorship at least on the policing level, as in South Korea.

The comparison with Germany allows one to see one of the most important reasons for the weakness of regimes like that of [\[first South Korean President\] Syngman Ree](#) and [\[ex-Emperor and first South Vietnamese Chief of State\] Bao Dai](#). One of the strengths of the bureaucratic ideology is the call for the development of production, industrialization, and so on. By definition, this works only in backward countries or in those capitalist countries whose decadence has put a halt to economic development (France). It can be explained for some time to the Chinese peasant that he is perhaps just as miserable as before but that now factories and roads are being built. But that is something it is impossible to get the German worker to grant: exploiting in order to construct factories and still more factories is what his bosses have done for centuries, and he sees nothing new in that. All other things being equal, Stalinism will therefore have much greater attractiveness and force in the case of a backward country, which it is actually transforming, playing there a “historical role” the late bourgeoisie was incapable of fulfilling, than in an advanced country, where that role has been carried out and continues to be so. In the case of partitioning a country, it is understood that the comparison of the development of the two halves reinforces the Stalinist party in South Korea or in South Vietnam, and that such a comparison would be totally meaningless for the worker in the Ruhr valley. The Viet Minh is for this reason called upon to play an increasingly influential role in South Vietnam, against which Bao Dai and his puppets are organically incapable of struggling.

It is, moreover, important to note that this total capitulation on the part of French capitalism is not a total capitulation for American imperialism. The latter has preserved what mainly interested it in the Indochinese affair—the territory of South Vietnam can be used as a base in case of a war in the Far East.

Equally clear is the character of the “solutions” being given in North Africa. In Tunisia, under pressure of increasing agitation and guerrilla warfare, which risked turning into a real war, Mendès France was obliged, in order to save the essential thing—namely, the economic and military interests of French imperialism—to cede a portion of the political

control of the country to the local bourgeoisie, hoping that the latter would be obliged to rely on it each time the movement of the masses might risk posing the problem on a more radical level. Here again, the essential problems are not in fact settled and will not be so by “domestic autonomy.”

In Morocco, nothing could be done, the situation there being so inextricable. The absence of a local bourgeoisie upon which French capitalism could for a time rely, as in Tunisia, renders impossible any concessions that would safeguard its interests, and it is unlikely that the few crumbs otherwise thrown to the population might contain for long its struggle against French domination.

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In relation to the EDC and German disarmament, the task of the Mendès France government was to pull French capitalism at least cost out of the trap into which it had landed itself on its own. Beyond the stupid mythology of the construction of Europe and of supranationality, the essence of the German problem is clear: not only is German rearmament inevitable, because it has been firmly decided upon by the Americans, but, beyond the rearmament question, equally inevitable is Germany's return to the place its might confers upon it within the Western bloc. In other words, it is a matter of overtly consecrating France's retreat and Germany's accession to its place as the Atlantic bloc's “third great power.” It is a matter of recognizing the reality that results from the effectively actual relation of forces between the two rival capitalisms and that brings the ridiculous “tragedy” of the EDC back to its true proportions. For, the expression of this relation of forces could for some time be masked or limited by legalistic artifices but not essentially altered by some scraps of paper.

The question was posed, as one knows, as early as 1950, and in fact the French bourgeoisie was never able to arrive at a solution acceptable to all its members. The ideal solution for French capitalism would have been the reunification and neutralization of Germany; guaranteed by the Americans, that solution would allow France to continue

to play the role of the Continent's principal military power. Yet this solution is absolutely unacceptable for the three main parties concerned: the Russians, who will never peacefully abandon their zone; the Americans, who not only are counting on German divisions but in no way desire letting this extraordinary token that would be a unified and disarmed Germany come within the Russians' reach; finally, the Germans, who aspire to occupy, within the Atlantic bloc, the place that corresponds to their strength.

The EDC was presented by the French politicians who invented it as a lesser evil on account of the "limits" it set on German rearmament, the preponderant position it would bestow upon France (a higher number of votes granted to France in relation to Germany flowing from their respective number of divisions, lack of direct participation by Germany in NATO, abiding hopes on France's part to be able to maneuver Germany while relying on the other four countries),⁷ and finally the advantages accorded to France on the Sarre question. Yet in reality, the effectively actual possibilities of exercising some control over Germany through the EDC mechanism were minuscule from the outset. And the struggle, among bourgeois politicians between proponents and opponents of the EDC reflected both differing assessments of these possibilities and more deep-seated oppositions between "well-placed" capitalist sectors and groups of business enterprises, which viewed with keen relish an enlargement of their market to six countries, and the "ill-placed" ones that feared German competition and the gradual dismantling of the system of protection that surrounds French production. Other factors came to be grafted thereupon, for example the prospects the likely Christian-Democratic domination of the "European" Parliament opened for the MRP's Catholic clique.

Shifting forces within the French bourgeoisie and among its politicians between 1951 and 1954 increasingly favored the opponents of the EDC. The genuine reason for

⁷T/E: Besides France and Germany, the European Defense Community's other signatories were the three Benelux countries and Italy.

this was not the sudden discovery by [\[Mendès France's Minister of Defense\] General \[Marie-Pierre\] Koenig](#) of the ravages of militarism or by [\[Mendès France's Radical-Socialist Party patron\] Monsieur \[Édouard\] Daladier](#) of the possibilities of peaceful coexistence with Russia but, rather, the relative development of the situation of French and German capitalism. While the former was trudging through its crisis for those three years, the latter experienced an extraordinary expansion, enlarging its industrial production by 26 percent and its exports by 55 percent.⁸ It was becoming clearer and clearer that the EDC mechanism would objectively serve much more to subject French capitalism to Germany than to establish the former's control over the latter.

It is basically this argument—reinforced by the results of the Brussels conference, where [\[German Chancellor Konrad\] Adenauer](#) showed that he knew how to be the master of the situation—that led to the rejection of the EDC. This rejection did not settle anything in itself, except that in the immediate term it avoided the worst for French capitalism, namely, the loss of new scraps of its independence. Yet Germany, holding all the real trump cards in its hand, inevitably was going to impose its solution, despite the stupid exultations of the French journalists who spoke of Adenauer's "gaffe" in Brussels. Mendès France's clever tricks [*astuces*]⁹ were unable to prevent the [1953] [London Debt Agreement](#) from bestowing upon Germany much more than it had obtained with the EDC (an independent Wehrmacht, less limitation on the manufacture of weapons, participation in

⁸These figures result from a comparison between the first quarters of 1951 and 1954.

⁹Mendès France's "intelligence" is not being challenged, even when accounting for the loosening of criteria that resulted from Pinay's, Laniel's, and others' succession to power. Yet a historical situation like that of decadent capitalism ensures that, in the domain of action, "intelligence" can lead at the very most only to some clever tricks; for, the conditions for political creativity are not objectively given for a bourgeois politician. The difference in comparison with [\[MRP Honorary President and former French Minister of Foreign Affairs Georges\] Bidault](#) is that the latter will commit gaffes, whatever the historical situation.

NATO, reopening of the Sarre issue). The key thing the French bourgeoisie had wanted to avoid via the EDC has now been realized, and neither the English commitment to maintain four divisions in Germany (which would have been kept in any case) nor the phantomlike control to be exerted over the European armies within the framework of the [Brussels Pact](#) changes anything essential about it.

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The problem that will serve as a test for the degree of decomposition of the French bourgeoisie is the economic problem. Let us leave aside Mendès France's rhetoric about the objective, which consists in making the French economy "the economy of a great modern nation." Here we have a task that exceeds both the duration and the means of action of a parliamentary capitalist government, and such a government can aid in its achievement only if the key factors for it are otherwise given.

In reality, there are three precise tasks that are currently set for the government. The first is to avoid the explosion of economic demands on the part of wage earners when the trade unions' grip over them is becoming less and less effective. The second is to restore the solvency of French capitalism abroad. The third, to rationalize the operation of the system of exploitation and in particular to limit, in the general interest of capitalism, the abusive privileges of certain groups.

The creation of a "good social climate" was the result aimed at by the promises to revise wages periodically as a function of the level of production and price levels. Now, the measures taken in October show that this was just a mystification and that Mendès France is doing nothing more than what Laniel and Faure had done at the start of the year—in reality, less. First of all, the increase that was granted concerned only the minimum monthly wage (raised to the ridiculous figure of 24,300 [old] francs), just like the previous one. This last one represented a nominal increase of 15 percent; taking into account the hike in the cost of living between September 1951—the date when the legal minimum wage had been set at 100 francs per hour—and December

1953, it was equivalent to a raise of 7.5 percent of the real minimum wage. From the second quarter of 1952 to the fourth quarter of 1953, industrial production had increased 1.5 percent, the total number of worker-hours had decreased by 3 percent, and hourly output had increased by 5 percent. The increase in real terms in the minimum wage granted in January 1954 was somewhat higher than the increase in labor productivity during the period under consideration—which was obviously but a tiny drop in relation to the enormous reduction of real wages that had taken place since the end of the War. Yet, from the third quarter of 1953 to the second quarter of 1954, industrial production has increased 9 percent, the total number of worker-hours hardly varied at all (+0.3 percent), the workers' hourly output therefore also increased around 9 percent; in conclusion, Mendès France, president of a government "of laboring people,"¹⁰ agreed to a 5.6 percent increase in the minimum wage (the increase in real terms is even somewhat less, on account of a slight hike in the cost of living since December 1953).¹¹ In the second place, the revised minimum wage concerns only a minority of wage earners; for the others, the repercussions of the increase will be proportionately less than this increase, should they even take place. As for the call to conclude collective agreements, the workers had no need of the government in order to think of that. Yet they know that the content of such agreements depends solely on their own combativeness and on their capacity to impose by force some concessions on the employing class and on the trade unions.

¹⁰Mendès France's speech in Louviers on October 10.

¹¹See the indices resulting from the *Bulletin Mensuel* of INSEE [Institut national de la statistique et des études économiques ([French National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies](#))], for the second quarter of 1951 (before the setting of the minimum wage), the fourth quarter of 1953 (before the increase in this wage by Faure), and the second quarter of 1954 (before Mendès France's "revision"):

Industrial Production	144	147	159
Worker-Hours	131.2	127.6	127.8
Output per Worker-Hour	109.8	115.2	124.4
Cost of Living in Paris	128.1	141.5	143.5

Thus, Mendès France's promises about tying wages to production have revealed themselves to be, as one had to expect, mere demagoguery. Even supposing, moreover, that the government would have kept them, or that it might do so in the future, the mystification would hardly be less great. The real average hourly wage in industry is presently 15 to 30 percent lower than that of 1938 (according to whether or not one takes into account the employers' contributions to Social Security), and this even though labor output has increased by at least 20 percent.¹² Therefore, there was an enormous redistribution of national income in favor of capital and to labor's detriment since the War. In tying future wage increases to the growth in production, even an "honest" periodic revision of wages would just ratify permanently the immense spoliation of workers and the nullification of the victories of 1938 by the French bourgeoisie, with the Stalinists' complicity, have been able to perpetrate since 1945 under the pretext of "reconstruction."

The second task is to restore the solvency of French capitalism abroad. The present situation of the French economy is better than it has ever been for a quarter century. Prices have been stable for two and a half years, the recession of 1952-1953 has been overcome, and, since the Spring, industrial production is beating all records, this Summer's harvest (as opposed to what has happened in most other

¹²In order to avoid some long discussions about statistics, it suffices to cite the report of the France National Assembly's Commission of Economic Affairs (*Le Monde*, August 31, 1954): "Even if one takes into account all benefits [*avantages sociaux*] and the lengthening of labor time, it is not certain that the buying power of the average wage had regained its prewar level." Let us suppose that this is certain. If the worker's total wage is the same now, with an average workweek of 44.5 hours, as it was in 1938, when this workweek was 38.8 hours, the current real hourly wage is equal to $38.8/44.5$, or 87 percent of that of 1938, with this including therein "benefits." If those benefits are taken out, it represents only 72 percent of that of the prewar period (nonwage labor costs have gone from 15 percent to 40 percent of the direct wage from 1938 until now). On the other hand, from 1938 to the first quarter of 1954, industrial production (excluding the building trades) increased by 55 percent, the total number of worker-hours by 27.5 percent, therefore output per worker-hour by 21 percent (figures calculated according to INSEE's August 1954 *Bulletin Mensuel*).

countries) was very good, and labor productivity in industry is growing rapidly, while the trade unions are succeeding in silencing worker's demands. The black mark on this picture is the external payments deficit. Despite a major increase in exports, this deficit still remains high and is covered only thanks to the "aid" received from the United States (on the order of one billion dollars a year). Now, on the one hand, such aid is to decrease rapidly following the halt of the Indochinese War and the decrease in armament orders placed on behalf of the United States for French industry. On the other hand, the deficit is what it is at present only through the action of a series of factors that are to disappear more or less rapidly: subsidies granted by the State to exports and the near-complete maintenance of quantitative restrictions on imports. The government will be obliged to abrogate in large part those restrictions, not through faith in ["free-market"] liberalism but because it risks bringing on reprisals that may cost it dearly.¹³ It is not even certain that it will be able to maintain subsidies on exports. In any case, the elimination of quantitative restrictions would both result in the growth of imports, therefore the external deficit, and create a crisis for numerous French industries or business enterprises that cannot, at the present exchange rate, withstand international competition.

The technical way out is devaluation. It is likely that at 400 or 420 francs per dollar, the French economy would be able to balance its external accounts. However, a devaluation does not involve simply monetary manipulation; it includes a real aspect, for an external deficit signifies that the economy under consideration is spending abroad more than it is earning therefrom. The elimination of the deficit via a devaluation signifies that henceforth it will have to give more, receive less, or both at once. If national production cannot increase in the short term, and in the desired directions (which very well seems to be the case today for France), balance can be attained only through real sacrifice, by the fact that the economy in question will give up a part of its total

¹³One of the reasons for the expansion of French exports over the last two years is that the other European capitalist countries have in the main eliminated their quantitative restrictions on imports.

expenditures that corresponds to this deficit. That always boils down in practice to limiting the consumption of wage earners, the hike in domestic prices normally following the devaluation being compensated only in part by wage increases. The success of the devaluation (that is to say, the fact that all prices and domestic costs do not regain after the operation the same level, in foreign currency terms, as before) presupposes therefore that the working class is accepting the resulting reduction in real wages. Such acceptance depends in turn upon a host of factors, which obviously go beyond the economic level. At the present time in France, it seems that it will be hard for the proletariat not to react to a reduction in its real wages on the order of 3 to 5 percent, which the "success" of the devaluation would require. With its relative "popularity," Mendès France's government would be the best placed to slide this reduction down the workers' throats.

The third problem the government faces, the limitation of the privileges of various capitalist groups in the interest of the system as a whole, is much more complex and offers several features.

First of all: privileges in the strict sense, whereby the state budget becomes the source of profits for certain groups, profits that would have been impossible in a normal functioning of the capitalist economy. The typical (but in no way unique) example is that of the sugar beet growers. There is little to say about this case, for everything here depends on the relation of forces among the various privileged groups and among their political and parliamentary agents. Substantial are the guarantees Mendès France has given to them to proceed by stages and to continue to bear, via the budget, the costs of the "stabilization" operations, but even in this way it has not been ruled out that he might be overturned on an issue of this nature.¹⁴

Next: the system of protection of French industry as a

¹⁴1979 note: This is indeed what happened.

whole, now assured by particularly high customs duties and by quantitative restrictions on imports, and supplemented on the domestic level by the cartelization of almost all sectors of production. As has been seen, French capitalism is obliged at present to accept a reduction of this degree of protection, and in particular to eliminate the bulk of the quantitative restrictions. That poses a challenge to the profits and in certain cases to the existence of less modern business enterprises, even if the freeing up of imports were accompanied by a devaluation on the order envisioned above. For the large business enterprises, it will not be too strong a shock. They have generally profited from the postwar years in order to broaden their production capacity while modernizing and rationalizing their manufacturing processes; even if they did not increase the volume of their sales, the drops in unit cost they thus achieved were expressed for them through rising unit profits. If imports were freed up and low productivity business enterprises were eliminated, the sales of the latter would be shared between imports and large French business enterprises, which could compensate, through an expansion of their sales revenue, the slight price drops that might result from a certain degree of foreign competition.

In this domain, too, Mendès France's policy aims at smoothening the transition and at limiting to the minimum the losses the most ill-positioned capitalists might suffer. In sum, the "Restructuring Fund" instituted by the government charges to the budget—that is to say, to the population as a whole—the costs of rescuing capitalists who are not worthy of being saved, according to the very law of their system, and who should have purely and simply been eliminated. In most cases, moreover, it is not even a question of that: the equipment of these business enterprises was long ago amortized, their profits have been invested elsewhere, the business enterprises have continued to operate thanks to customs duties and quantitative protections. Subsidies for modernization will in this case be a gift to the second degree, allowing these capitalists to upgrade old firms they had consciously and in their own interest left to wither away.

Finally, as concerns agriculture, some of the most flagrant absurdities of the present-day situation (surpluses of

wine, for example) can be mended. Yet the rationalization of the agrarian structure of the country and, in general, the creation of a "great modern economy" would entail much more radical transformations (among others, transferring a good half of the peasant population to industry) than those the government has the possibility of achieving, let alone the desire to do so.

The solutions offered up till now by the Mendès France government to the various problems that were posed have consisted in giving up totally (Indochina, German rearmament) or partially, while leaving the substantive issues up in the air (Tunisia) or with an attempt at makeshift repairs that does not fundamentally break with the line followed by previous governments (economic measures). As such, however, were it only on account of the fact that these solutions consecrate the real situation of French capitalism, they represent a certain degree of rationalization.

Is there a question of going further?

The objective limits set for Mendès France's action are clearly sketched out: it is obviously not a matter of the fundamental limits that are those of a capitalist government (we'll leave it up to Monsieur Martinet to explore them) but of those, much narrower, that flow from the situation of French capitalism, a third-rate power living in dependence to American imperialism, trying to alter a bit the degree of such dependency but being neither willing nor able to change the nature thereof, and having at its disposal a narrow economic base that can be fixed up a bit though it is ruled out that it might now be made into "a great modern economy." It is this final frame that determines objectively the maximum extent of what Mendès France might be able to do.

Yet this in no way guarantees that this maximum will actually be attained. Much more narrow limits are set upon Mendès France's action by political and parliamentary conditions and in particular by the political decomposition of the French bourgeoisie. It is historically possible and in conformity with the general interests of French capitalism to limit the privileges of the sugar beet growers or textile manufacturers, but it is not certain that the latter's agents in the Parliament will allow Mendès France or anyone else to do

so. This is, moreover, but another way of expressing the following fundamental fact, that the Mendès France government rests on no political force of its own, either in Parliament or in the country. Its kaleidoscopic majority is bound neither by an ideology nor by an organization. The various parties have participated in this government only with diametrically opposed ulterior motives. For the CP, it is a matter of offering passing support so long as Mendès France was led to oppose American policy (Indochina, the EDC); it will evidently turn against it apropos of German rearmament and economic problems. The disarray and confusion of the bourgeois parties and of the Socialists have been able to play in favor of Mendès France for a certain amount of time but will go on while diminishing and risk, moreover, playing just as well against it. In the country, Mendès France exerts no influence over the working class. He is trying to create for himself a political base by appealing to the petty bourgeoisie and, in fact, his sole possible support would be, in the Belle Époque sense, a “radical-socialist” petty-bourgeois current. Yet it is too late in the season for such a current to be able at present to gain some prominence, still less to organize itself into a coherent political force. The hold the existing parties have over the electoral body cannot be broken by weekly chats. A new party around Mendès France would only add to the political erosion of the bourgeoisie without being able to generate a regrouping of the breadth required to guarantee governmental stability. Whether the government falls in November or July, it will have been an interlude in the comedy of the Fourth Republic.¹⁵

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Let us summarize. The Mendès France government represents an attempt on the part of French capitalism to reduce the degree of its dependence upon the United States and, at the same time, to rationalize to a certain extent the organization of its economy and its colonial domain. This

¹⁵1979 note: It did indeed fall in February (1955).

attempt could take place (as the failed nomination of Mendès France in 1953 proves) only under threat of catastrophe. The government will not long be able to survive the solution of the problems that displayed an extreme urgency. No need to reexamine the content of these “solutions”: where it is not a matter of amputations, they are but an attempt at makeshift repairs.

As for the working class, while it was in part influenced by Stalinist propaganda about the EDC, it knows that it does not have more to expect from Mendès France than from Laniel or [\[former French Prime Minister René\] Pleven](#). The few wage increases it has been able to obtain since last year have been smaller than the growth in its output. The periodic revision of wages, promised by the government, has been revealed to be a mystification and would, in the best of cases, be destined only to consecrate permanently (by tying every subsequent increase in wages to the increase in production) the redistribution of social income to capital's benefit and the extinguishing of the reforms of 1936 that has taken place since the war. Capitalist domination does not change with the name of the President of the Council; it can only display a greater or lesser degree of internal anarchy, a more brutal or more refined visage.

This text became the object of discussion during the meeting of *S. ou B.* readers. The review published the following account of that meeting in [issue 17](#) (July 1955).

Meeting of *Socialisme ou Barbarie* Readers

The publication of [the previous issue of the review](#) was followed, as usual, by a meeting of readers. That meeting, which occurred last December 3 [1954] with the participation of around forty comrades, was devoted to the policy of the Mendès France government. Chaulieu [Castoriadis] attempted in his talk, as he had done in his article, to provide a picture of the decadence of French capitalism, a decadence that does not only fit into that of world capitalism but has specific characteristics and is manifested by a constant decline in French industrial production in comparison to that of the

other great powers. He brought out the irrationality of the political-economic management of the French bourgeoisie, which, incapable of raising itself up to the level of its collective interests, has let its various factions pursue, each on its own, maximum immediate profit. It is this wasteful conduct that kept the Indochinese War going and led the State to bear burdens incommensurate with the profits a capitalist faction would gain from the situation. It is this wasteful conduct that has led the bourgeoisie to the edge of catastrophe and that has justified the ultimate recourse to Mendès France, the man for a conscious and organized kind of capitalism, the champion of a sort of management that is based on long-term plans and on the discipline of the ruling groups. What Chaulieu has striven to show is the extreme precariousness of the Mendès France experiment. On the one hand, Mendès France does not rely on the support of any real force in the Parliament; he is profiting from a "catastrophic" set of circumstances that renders his presence necessary in the view of different parties and political lobbies, but the situation that reigned before his accession remains unchanged, and people are waiting only for the end of this "attempt at makeshift repairs" to resume the traditional game. On the other hand, Mendès France himself is constrained to the very extent that he wishes to continually give up on any undertaking that would seriously damage a wing of the bourgeoisie; he is incapable of setting up and carrying out an economic recovery program and adopts only minor measures aimed at rationalization. Chaulieu then shows the genuine character of Mendès's policy as regards wages. The workers glimpse that the promises are not being kept, the increase in wages has been ridiculously small, and the government cannot last without the illusions being dispelled. Yet to what extent have there been illusions? Have the workers really expected something from the government? To what extent do the policy of peace in Indochina, the promises about North Africa, and the (relative) manifestations of independence with regard to the United States resonate with the proletariat? Should it not rather be recognized that the workers have only a very superficial interest in Mendésisme, that the problems that are paralyzing the class and the vanguard have but little

to do with the political personnel in place? These are the questions Chaulieu has posed to the comrades present at the meeting while urging them to share their own experiences.

A certain number of comrades spoke during the discussion, and the very way in which this discussion was oriented should have sufficed to show what the concerns of the vanguard were. For, very quickly people went beyond the subject of the meeting. It was not Mendès's policy that was treated, its chances, or even its immediate effects on the buying power of the working class or on economic demands; it was the relation of the class and of its vanguard, of the very nature of this vanguard, of the possibilities for autonomous forms of organization.

One must nevertheless mention the speeches, quite different from the other ones, made by two Trotskyist comrades who, no doubt enticed by the subject of the meeting, seized the occasion to proclaim that the revolution was imminent (that it was already embracing North Africa), that the regime question was going to be posed any second now, and more strongly still than in 1953 [*sic*], that once again the future depended on the attitude of the CP, of the degree of treason it was going to manifest, that, as for the proletariat, the proletariat no longer wanted anything but a general struggle, and so on. In short, they said nothing other than what the definition of Trotskyism requires them to say, whatever might be the place or circumstance.

Comrade [\[Raymond\] Bourt](#) [\[Raymond Hirzel AKA Gaspard\]](#) brought the discussion back onto solid ground by showing the difficulties faced daily by the workers in the factory and the militants or the elements of the vanguard each time they try to stir up some action, however minimal it might be. According to Bourt, the crushing of the workers has never been so complete, the passivity never so hard to shake off; at Renault, for example, management dares to engage in formerly impossible measures of harassment, and militants succeed in foiling them only by deploying disproportionate efforts in order to awaken protests from their comrades. Bourt notes that the workers who are disgusted by Stalinism rebel against all organization. What must be done, according to him, is to make the most of all circumstances—even the ones

that concern only the details of everyday life—in order to teach politics again to the workers; those who have an education are to teach the others the history of the workers' movement and tie everything back to the central fact of exploitation. Comrade Henri notes, for his part, that the class is extremely heterogeneous; there is a minority that is seeking to become integrated into the system of exploitation—some via individual ways of getting by [*débrouillardise*],¹⁶ the search for improvements in wages through additional work, some through participation in the Stalinist bureaucracy. The majority is passive, uncertain as to the future, unaware of the class's past struggles, and devoid of all socialist culture. It would indeed be wrong to believe that reformist, even nationalistic, illusions no longer weigh down upon the masses: the workers have let themselves be taken advantage of by the Stalinist campaign against the EDC; they have not truly struggled against the Indochinese War; they have given some credit to Mendès France. Yet the key thing, according to Henri, is the workers' discouragement, the feeling they have of being political and professional "nobodies." It is this discouragement that must be vanquished by patiently and obstinately resuming the labor of education and organization that was conducted in the past by revolutionary parties.

What Chaulieu and Montal [Claude Lefort] reproach Henri for is his confidence in the traditional organizational methods that have, however, been put in check for a long time now. If it sufficed for militants of good will to gather together in order to spread patiently the grand ideas of Marxism, it would be incomprehensible why various groups, and the PCI [Parti Communiste Internationaliste ([France's Trotskyist Internationalist Communist Party](#))] in particular, have been and remain so widely ineffective. It is their will to indoctrinate the workers, to bring them socialism, to play the role Stalinism plays better than they do, and not their theoretical errors—for example on the USSR—that primarily lead to their condemnation in the eyes of the vanguard. The

¹⁶T/E: On this term, see the Translator/Editor's Introduction to [SouBA](#), 29-30.

workers' resistance to political indoctrination does not stem solely from their passivity; it signifies, too, that the relations between militants and the vanguard, between the vanguard and the class, between politics and men's lives in production can no longer be the same. In this regard, Henri does not describe well the heterogeneity of the class. In the sense he intends it, such heterogeneity has indeed always existed; there has always been a lag between the masses and the vanguard, and always, too, currents that are more or less accused, depending upon the period, of individual escapism and bureaucratism. If there is one characteristic of the present-day situation, it is that the vanguard has a new physiognomy. It does not simply bring together the most combative workers: those people are often Stalinists; this characteristic of combativeness manifests itself through those who are most conscious of the danger of bureaucracy. Those who have seen the true face of Stalinism and who feel, too, that this is no mere accident and that it pertains to the essential difficulties the proletariat has had in getting organized within exploitative society—those people quite evidently are also the ones who most resist new forms of organization. This diffuse vanguard must be recognized and must be allowed to recognize itself. The best means for doing so is not an effort of traditional "politicization." One must bring out all the reactions of the workers who, within the very framework of production, bear witness to the rejection of exploitation and to the tendency toward autonomy. To make these reactions evident is first of all to get the workers to speak, to give a voice to a silent mass whose problems are often masked by political slogans. Militants too often have a tendency to think that their task is to bring to the class political truths, whereas that task is to help the class to express its true immediate and historical demands, to give form certainly, to anticipate to a certain degree, but to find the very program in the vanguard's experience.

The comrades underscore, in conclusion, the importance of a [monthly] journal like *Tribune Ouvrière*, which, at Renault, is trying on a modest scale to achieve this objective.

The French Elections*

In dissolving the National Assembly and in decreeing that elections will be held January 2 [1956] under the existing, widely contested electoral law, the goals behind the maneuver of the “outgoing majority” and of its handyman [\[French Prime Minister\] Edgar Faure](#) were clear: on the one hand, to prevent the “innovative” wing of bourgeois politicians led by [\[former Prime Minister Pierre\] Mendès France](#) from developing its propaganda, and thus to minimize its own inevitable loss of votes; and, on the other, to be the sole wing able to use the trickery of proportional-voting electoral-list groupings—the constitution of “Popular Front” lists being excluded, and the constitution of “Republican Front” lists being at once difficult and highly unprofitable—and thus to transform a minority of votes into a parliamentary majority, as in 1951.

This calculation was not wrong, and it must be said that Faurisme has made the most of the situation. Having lost Indochina and done everything to lose North Africa, having contributed to the reestablishment of Germany as soon the “Third Great Power” of the Western bloc to the detriment of French imperialism, having left a budget deficit of a trillion [old francs], the country without housing, the sugar beet growers and the home distillers intact, and receiving in exchange 200 deputy seats instead of 300 garrotes, this is an indisputable success. Yet there are some facts against which all the clever tricks of a lawyer can do nothing. Four hundred thousand votes shifted to Mendès could hardly change the parliamentary constellation, but the 2.4 million votes collected by [\[right-wing populist candidate Pierre\] Poujade](#)—coming basically from a new crystallization of the antiparliamentary Right that had in 1951 rallied around de Gaulle—take away from Faure-[\[ex-Prime Minister Antoine\] Pinay](#) more than fifty deputies as well as the possibility of “governing” for one or two years.

What is the import of these elections? As limited and

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superficial as the electoral level may be, the signification of the results of the January 2 vote is nonnegligible. These results are the expression of the stagnation of French bourgeois politics, its contradictions and its incoherencies, its incapacity to respond within the framework of the normal functioning of the parliamentary regime to the vital problems posed to French capitalism by its relations with the proletariat, the development of its economy, the crisis of its colonial empire, and its gradual ousting as a great power on the international level. These results even add to those problems: the arrival of fifty Poujadiste deputies increases the fragmentation of the bourgeoisie's political representation as well as the acuteness of its internal conflicts, even if those conflicts are in the end to let themselves be absorbed, as is likely, by the system. As before, French capitalism remains ungovernable.

The fate of Mendésisme is quite instructive in this regard. Having governed for eight months, taken "spectacular" initiatives in Indochina and then in Tunisia, having at its disposal an old party and a new newspaper, been praised to the skies by some and presented as the devil by others, and been surrounded by [François Mauriac](#), [Albert Camus](#), and [\[TV news presenter\] Jacqueline Joubert](#), Mendès France apparently was bringing together the conditions required for attracting petty-bourgeois public opinion and creating a strong current for "renewal [*rénovation*]." It was nothing of the sort. Given the considerable increase in the number of voters—almost two million—the increase in the percentage of Radical voters signifies a net shift in votes toward this party of less than 400,000. Less than 2 percent of the electorate in addition to the traditional Radical voters came to the Joan of Arc of Monsieur Mauriac [Catholic Nobel Prize in Literature winner]. True, his Socialist allies experienced a nonnegligible increase in their votes, and there were some voters who, in voting Socialist, wanted to vote for Mendès, yet the main portion of the new votes for the SFIO [[the Socialist French Section of the Workers' International](#)] represents without any possible doubt a certain amount of renewed influence for this party among circles of workers and employees. The vote in Nantes leaves no doubt in this regard.

On the other hand, Mendès's backing has not prevented the erosion of the UDSR [the anti-Communist [Democratic and Socialist Union of the Resistance](#) party, a member of the [Liberal International](#)] and still less the "left-wing" of the RPF [the [Gaullist Rally of the French People](#)] from undergoing a debacle as spectacular as their landslide victory of 1947-1951.

What is indeed still more characteristic is that, outside of the SFIO deputies, half of the "Mendésiste" elected officials are so in name only. The election of the President of the French National Assembly has shown that in large part they are already pretty shaky.¹ We mention this fact not only because it sketches out in advance the fate of Mendésisme in the new National Assembly but because this fact also indicates its fundamental and ultimate limit. The modern political universe is a universe of parties, in the strong sense of the term. Mendès has no party and will not be able to have one. [Radical-Socialism](#) is not a party but an electoral machine; in trying to seize hold of it more fully, Mendès perhaps might ruin it; he will not be able to make it into something else.

If one is to speak of "innovators [*novateurs*]," the true victor of the elections is not Mendès; it is indisputably Pujade. Claude Montal's article, which may be read below,² brings out the signification and the limits of his success. Yet one cannot help but be struck by the figures: as against the 400,000 votes Mendès France and his top advisors were able to shift, two and a half million collected by a bunch of

¹Monsieur [\[André\] Le Troquer](#) was elected on the third round with 280 votes, of which 145 were Communist, and probably 90 to 95 Socialist; he therefore had 40 to 45 Radical votes out of the 100 deputies other than Socialist ones claimed by the "Republican Front" (58 Radicals, 19 UDSR and RDA [\[the African Democratic Rally, from the French colonies\]](#), 21 URAS [\[the \(Gaullist\) Union of Republicans for Social Action\]](#)). Counting the twenty or so deputies missing from the total, there were thus at least a good forty Radicals, UDSR, and URAS who voted for the [MRP \[the Christian Democrats' Popular Republican Movement\]](#) candidate!

²1979 note: Claude Montal [Claude Lefort], "Le poujadisme," [S. ou B., 18 \(January 1956\)](#): 103-108 [FRENCH EDITORS: reprinted in Lefort's *Le Temps présent. Écrits 1945-2005* (Paris: Belin, 2007), pp. 137-45].

loudmouths and former collaborationists show the extent of the decomposition of French bourgeois politics.

And yet, through the quirks of parliamentary arithmetic, it is precisely Pujade's success that, in taking around fifty seats away from the outgoing majority, is going to allow the "Republican Front" to accede to governmental power while waiting for half the Mendésistes to swing over and for Pinay to discover that nothing fundamental separates him from Pujade. The right-wing majority, with which the National Assembly is pregnant, will need some time to sift itself out. Absent some critical events outside Parliament, such a majority is nevertheless the most likely one at term.

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Indeed, neither the litanies of *France-Observateur* nor the French CP's bizarrely lukewarm campaign in favor of the Popular Front can keep this Front from being inconceivable under present circumstances. It is not domestic policy that is in this regard the insurmountable obstacle; without abandoning the pursuit of their ultimate objective—seizing the state apparatus—the Stalinists are able to practice and know how to practice, over a given period, a policy of alliance and compromise. When it comes to wages, they could very well fall back on a 3 percent increase after having demanded 10 percent; as for Algeria, their position—"negotiation with the qualified representatives of the Algerian people"—perhaps has other merits, certainly not that of implacable originality: Monsieur [\[and Governor General of Algeria\] Jacques Soustelle](#) himself shared this position for a while. No, it is on the international level that one finds the factors that rule out the CP from entering into the government, which is incompatible with France's integration into the American Atlantic bloc. Do you see a Stalinist minister taking part in NATO's deliberations?

Certainly, things would be different if a very strong shove from the working class forced the bourgeoisie to seek at all cost a protective shield. Yet in that case, a host of other factors would equally be transformed, both as to the attitude of the CP and as to that of the masses.

For the time being, the CP desperately lacks a policy. It falls back on its propaganda about the “Popular Front,” trying to dangle the “conquests of 1936” in front of laboring people’s eyes, yet it is happy at the same time that this Front is unrealizable. Its position is not easy: its line obliges it to support a Radical-Socialist cabinet, at the very least at the outset. However, such support is not without repercussions on its own base; supported by the Stalinists or not, such a cabinet would in no way modify laboring people’s situation, and who could be convinced that three or four Communist portfolios would change everything? Certain categories of workers can still be for the “Popular Front,” insofar as they associate it with the hope for a radical change. Yet as soon as [\[André\] Le Troquer](#) was elected to the Presidency of the National Assembly, Stalinist workers at Renault were expressing their disgust at the parliamentary maneuvers to which the whole “Popular Front” policy was being reduced.

The Stalinist party will therefore be unable to do anything better than support, for a certain amount of time, a “Republican Front” government and find, when the time comes, the most profitable breaking point.

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It is likely that the Stalinists’ entrance into the majority will not prevent the MRP [Mouvement Républicain Populaire [\(the Christian Democrats’ Popular Republican Movement\)](#)] from voting to nominate [\[head of the Socialist SFIO\] Guy Mollet](#)³ or another candidate of the same kind. The life of such a cabinet will be no less extremely precarious. On the economic level, it is true that it will be able for a certain amount of time to dare to do nothing, but the problems are already being posed right now. The budget deficit is huge, the situation in Algeria requires a new increase in military expenditures, the antitax agitation that has just received its parliamentary consecration with the entrance of the Poujadistes into the Chamber of Deputies renders a tax

³T/E: Mollet became France’s 94th Prime Minister on February 1, 1956.

increase more than difficult, wage demands are not easy to dismiss outright just after the demagogic electoral debauchery, the employers are obviously not disposed to allow their profit margins to be affected, and the balance of external accounts, which is extremely precarious, would be destroyed by even a moderate hike in prices. Characteristic is the fact that Mendès France, the sole politician with some idea of how the economy operates, has already shied away from the offer to become Finance Minister, though it is true that this allows him to avoid having to reveal his economic "program" and, still more, to apply it.

If, nonetheless, it is conceivable that certain patch-up operations might allow the government to postpone the solution of economic problems, the same does not hold for North Africa. The article by F[rança]is Laborde,⁴ published in the present issue, shows why the Algerian crisis is not destined to have a quick solution. It must be added that the recent aggravation of the struggle between [[champion of "internal autonomy" for Tunisia Habib\] Bourgiba](#) and [[his arch rival and champion of independence for Tunisia\] Salah Ben Youssef](#) and the legal proceedings begun against the latter in late January indicate how little consistency there is to the Tunisian "settlement," portend some difficulties for finding a solution in Morocco, and allow one to foresee in Algeria only the continuation of military operations. Without orientation, without genuine means of action, and without a majority on the Algerian question, the next government will be able only to let that question rot while awaiting its fall.

⁴1979 note: François Laborde [Jean-François Lyotard], "La situation en Afrique du Nord," [S. ou B., 18 \(January 1956\)](#): 87-94 [translated in Lyotard's [Political Writings](#) (1989), trans. Bill Readings and Kevin Paul Geiman (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), pp. 171-78].

The French Situation*

It would be wrong to believe that the “governmental crisis” opened by the fall of [[Prime Minister](#)] [Guy Mollet](#) (and not resolved by the formation of the [[Maurice](#)] [Bourgès-Maunoury](#) government) is but one more gag in the endless farce of the Fourth Republic. The French bourgeoisie has dismissed Mollet with the recklessness characteristic of a class of parasites in full decay [*décomposition*]. Yet to chase out the [Sganarelle](#) whose bad checks suppliers now reject does not cancel the overdraft or dispense with having to pay up. For soon going on three years, the French bourgeoisie has been kiting its checks [*vit de la “cavalerie”*]. Whether it is a matter of Algeria, public finances, the economy and the foreign trade balance, its social problems, or international diplomacy, it bluffs and it cheats. Toppling Mollet while refusing to pay a—very small—part of the bill signifies wanting to keep on cheating. Yet such cheating will soon have run its course. Mollet’s departure opens a new phase in the history of postwar France: the one where the Algerian War and its consequences will become a daily and direct preoccupation for society.

Since November 1954, when it suddenly had to face up to the Algerian problem, the French bourgeoisie, incapable of offering a solution, persisted in denying reality. It must be recognized that the Algerian insurrection set it before some inextricable contradictions incommensurate with those of the Indochinese War. A handover was—and still is—a catastrophe. Algeria is not just another colony; after the loss of Morocco and Tunisia, this is the last bastion protecting French imperialist exploitation in Africa. The discovery of Saharan oil only reinforces its importance. A major stratum of French exploiters has taken root there, closely bound to the dominant circles of metropolitan capital and politics and leaning locally on large fractions of the privileged European population. No local base exists to arrive at a “reasonable” compromise, and one has seen, indeed, in Morocco and

*Originally published as “La situation française” [S. ou B., 22 \(July 1957\)](#): 145-48. Reprinted in *SF*, 97-104, and [EPI](#), 277-82.

Tunisia, what such compromises signify in the more or less short term. Yet on the other hand, how is one to rule by force of arms over a population of 10 million individuals, for which the "French presence" has become enemy number one? How is one to finance this long, major war against which the Americans are growing hostile? How is one to get the French population to swallow it, this French population that was able not to react if it was a matter, as in Indochina, of an expedition of a professional army financed by the Americans but that was disposed neither to pay for nor to get killed for the interests of Messieurs [\[Henri\] Borgeaud \[a Senator and large landowner in Algeria\]](#) and [\[former Deputy from Algiers Georges\] Blachette](#)?

Faced with these contradictions, and amid the incoherency and anarchy that prevail at the level of the "political" management [*direction*] of the affairs of the French bourgeoisie, no genuine solution could be worked out. Powerfully backed in France, circles in Algiers will impose their policy of "pacification," that is to say, of war. But how is this war to be conducted?

The January 1956 elections showed that the majority of the population was opposed thereto. The demonstrations of recalled reservists and in factories, three months later, which were unprecedented in French history during "normal" times, show, moreover, that it would have been wrong to count on a general state of indifference. A right-wing government could, at that moment, have precipitated a serious crisis.

The sole possible solution was the one the Socialists, the trusty servants of French imperialism, were able to furnish. Offering the best possible "cover on the left" for the conduct of the war, they at the same time indirectly brought to the imperialist policy in Algeria the Stalinist votes. Concerned above all with its schemes of "united action" with the Socialists, the CP voted Mollet special powers. Reformists and Stalinists together succeeded in curbing the movements that, in the Spring of 1956, were taking shape against the call up.

However, the single word *socialist* does not suffice. Faced with the population in general and with its salaried clientele—basically, employees and civil servants—in

particular, the SFIO [the socialist [French Section of the Workers' International](#)] could maintain some influence—and therefore be useful to the bourgeoisie—only if it was giving or seemed to be giving something. Whence the “old-age fund,” the third week of paid vacation, and the much-talked-about “rejection of a period of social peace [*pause sociale*].” Whence, especially, the refusal to truly finance the war, as a war is to be financed in good capitalist logic: by imposing a levy on the population’s standard of living.

Laborde’s article, which one will read below,¹ shows the genuine import of Mollet’s “social” policy. The War has been financed anyhow in large part by increased exploitation. Yet it is key that this increase would not take the form of a pure and simple reduction in buying power; output increased without compensation, but there was no dent in real wages.

That did not suffice. The war continued to absorb hundreds of billions [of old francs], and there appeared to be no way out. [[Mollet’s Minister of Finance Paul](#)] [Ramadier](#) tried to persuade people that the falsification of price indices could take the place of economic policy—but that was a difficult task. Indeed, each falsification cost the State tens of billions. The coffers were being emptied in order not to have to refill them. Yet swindling is easier on the domestic level than on the international level. A growing share of production being soaked up by the war, exports were continually decreasing while imports were doing nothing but swelling. Added to the domestic crisis was a crisis of external payments, and one saw—and one still sees—the day approaching when imports could no longer be paid for.

In May, Mollet was obliged to ask the bourgeoisie to pay a small part of the bill. His taxes were ridiculously insufficient and were hitting the population much more than the capitalists. The latter, however, did not want to hear about that.

Yet the Right, which overturned Mollet, henceforth

¹1979 note: François Laborde (Jean-François Lyotard), “Les comptes du ‘gérant loyal,’” [S. ou B., 22 \(July 1957\)](#): 148-52 [reprinted in *La Guerre des Algériens. Écrits 1956-1963* (Paris: Galilée, 1989), pp. 79-86; T/E: not translated in Lyotard’s [Political Writings](#)].

has to face its real situation. It continues to nourish some illusions, and Bourguès-Maunoury is nothing but these illusions in their gaseous state. The Summer will perhaps be once again the season of dreams but starting in the Fall the true problems will be posed in extremely acute fashion.

Briefly speaking: the Algerian War can be continued only with a right-wing government. Such a government, in itself both through the policy that will give it its *raison d'être* and through the means it will increasingly be forced to adopt, contains a high risk of lining up the population against itself and provoking a social crisis. [\[Former French Prime Ministers Antoine\] Pinay](#) and [\[René\] Pleven](#) know this very well and they have refused the job of President of the Council.²

How can the Algerian War be continued?

On the military level, there is no possible way out. It is almost impossible for the ALN [[Armée de libération nationale \(Algerian National Liberation Army\)](#)] to win militarily, but it is out of the question for the policy of “pacification” to succeed—with or without some “reform” gravy.

If the war continues, it will have to be paid for. Bourguès's taxes constitute an attack on the population's standard of living. They are, moreover, absolutely insufficient. When [\[Minister of Economy and Finance Félix\] Gaillard \[d'Aimé\]](#) promises France to emerge, in 1959, “in mid air,” he is lying—and he knows it. There will be no miracle between now and 1959. With the war continuing, the state of public finances being what it is, and French capital continuing to refuse to pay the overhead costs for its regime, Gaillard would open in 1959 only onto galloping inflation. The fact that the economic expansion is continuing is one thing—and the fact that the French bourgeoisie is at a degree of political, institutional, and even mental decomposition that precludes it from putting its affairs in order is another. The war will be able to be financed only through a growing increase in the state deficit, which, under the present-day conditions of full employment, signifies inflation, rising

²T/E: The head of government (equivalent to a prime minister) in France at the time was called “President of the Council of Ministers.”

prices, and strikes. That signifies, too, the continuation of the external deficit, with restrictions on imports hardly offering any remedy. French protectionism is such that, in normal times, one imports only what cannot be produced in France, so that restrictions on imports either will have no effect or risk affecting supplies that are essential to production or market equilibrium. During that time, French exports are disappearing from foreign markets, thwarted by the hike in French prices and absorbed by the State's military orders.

American aid is more than problematic. The Indochina precedent is mentioned. Yet in Indochina, the Americans were paying for the war to be conducted; they might possibly pay in the case of Algeria, but for the war to be ended. The United States' "Arab policy" goes directly against the maintenance of imperialism in North Africa. The way things are evolving—or not evolving—in Algeria reinforces each day American hostility to French policy. All factors are working in the same direction: the conciliatory figure the FLN [[Front de libération nationale \(Algerian National Liberation Front\)](#)] is cutting with its latest declarations from [Yazid \[Zerhouni\]](#) in New York, the growing reaction of the other Atlantic countries against French policy, and the cynical disclaimer the Government's actions provided regarding the promises made by [\[French Foreign Minister Christian\] Pineau](#) during the last session of the UN. On the international level, the French bourgeoisie will have to face an all-out offensive during the UN session in the Fall.

Everything would therefore be forcing the French bourgeoisie to find a solution to the Algerian question. And, despite the remonstrances of Messieurs Laugier and Aron,³ everything indicates that it will continue to reject this solution.

This is not mere blindness. For the reasons indicated at the start of our note, a compromise is almost impossible to

³T/E: The journalist and intellectual [Raymond Aron](#) had just published his pamphlet *La Tragédie algérienne* (Paris: Plon). Given the *literary* context, the Laugier mentioned here perhaps would be the French *poet* [Jean Laugier](#) instead of the physiologist and high-ranking civil servant [Henri Laugier](#), involved in drafting the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#).

achieve—in any case, it has been rendered almost impossible by the policy being followed until now. Withdrawal pure and simple is inconceivable. One does not lose Algeria like one loses Indochina. An army defeated overtly or implicitly that returns to France, hundreds of thousands of refugees, major amounts of lost capital, and almost immediate repercussions in Black Africa. French capitalism has placed itself in an impasse, and one hardly sees a way out.

During this time, a polarization of political forces in the country has begun. The Algerian War has created a stirring of fascist elements that can only become more pronounced, whatever the outcome of the Algerian question in itself. The *continuation* of the war will crystallize more and more the idea of a “strong State.” We are already at the point where people “on the Left” are calling for de Gaulle’s return to power. The *cessation* of the war would make masses of praetorian and fascistic elements available and would trigger nationalistic rage in the petty bourgeoisie.

For its part, the proletariat will undoubtedly not accept the deterioration of its standard of living connected with the pursuit of the war. As early as the Fall, the problem of wages will be posed, and Bourguès will no longer profit from the socialist mask. Will the bureaucratic apparatuses of the trade unions and “working-class” parties be able to channel working-class struggles, keeping them within the framework of the existing regime? The bourgeoisie rejoiced at the wear and tear on the Stalinists after the Hungarian events, but such a wearing down risks turning against it. The Stalinist apparatus is at its lowest level of influence since the Liberation: if [\[French CP leader Maurice\] Thorez](#) is talking about “strengthening the ties with the masses,” it is to be understood that he does not have many ties left with them.

All the elements for a profound crisis are brewing within the present situation. And once again, everything depends on the workers. The bourgeoisie will be able to exit even from this impasse—perhaps the most serious in its entire history—despite its incapacity and its decomposition, should the proletariat let things happen [*se laissez faire*] or let itself be dominated by the bureaucratic apparatuses.

Prospects for the French Crisis*

The events that have unfolded since [May 13 \[1958\]](#) in Algeria and in France are the expression of a deep-seated structural crisis of French society. At the same time, they aggravate this crisis and open up a transformational period for the capitalist system which, whatever the outcome, will leave intact few things from postwar France.

Many saw in de Gaulle's arrival in power after the [Algiers coup](#) only the result of a peripheral process: the Algerian War and the bourgeoisie's incapacity to resolve the problems posed to it during four years of this war. But what is the origin of this incapacity? Why has the French bourgeoisie found it impossible to find any solution whatsoever to the Algerian problem and to impose some solution on its particular factions, beginning with the colonists and the military caste of Algiers? However slight the effort one makes to deepen one's analysis, one is obliged to note that this situation expresses a deep-seated crisis of the political institutions of French capitalism, which has constantly been manifesting itself since 1945.¹ Faced with the serious problems successively posed by reconstruction, Indochina, the European Defense Community, Tunisia, Morocco, and, finally, Algeria, the bourgeoisie has been unable, through its normal political authorities—Parliament and parties—to define a coherent policy expressing the general interests of French capitalism or to subordinate the special interests of its various factions to the system's general operational needs.

The crisis of political institutions involves the fact that the bourgeoisie no longer succeeds in managing society to its benefit in a relatively efficient and coherent fashion through the parliamentary republic. Yet this crisis, in turn, is not autonomous: it is but the expression, on the political plane, of

*Originally published as "Perspectives de la crise française," [S. ou B.](#), 25 (July 1958): 41-66. Reprinted in *SF*, 105-39, and [EPI](#), 283-309.

¹See "Mendès France: Vellétés d'indépendance et tentative de rafistolage," in [nos. 15-16 of S. ou B.](#), 1-21 [see "Mendès France: Vague Desires for Independence and an Attempt at Makeshift Repairs," above].

a much more general and deep-seated crisis, of a genuine structural crisis affecting all aspects of the organization of French capitalist society.

Every modern capitalist society is torn by a fundamental contradiction that flows from its division into classes. The exploitation of the laboring population by a minority constantly creates an irreducible opposition of interests between classes. The management of production and of society by a minority gives rise, whatever may be the form of the regime, to permanent anarchy and irrationality. The operation of the capitalist system is therefore constantly being called into question, be it by overt or hidden struggle of men against the organization of society; be it by their withdrawal from and apathy and indifference toward activities and institutions that were to embody social life: the business enterprise, the local collectivity, political parties, the system of government, ideology itself. The capitalist system is doomed to roll about from crisis to crisis and from conflict to conflict because, far from integrating men into society, it constantly forces them both to struggle against the organization of society and to abandon it to its fate. Such is, ultimately, the situation in England as well as in Russia, in the United States as well as in Poland, in China as well as in Sweden.

Such is also the situation in France. Here, however, this fundamental contradiction is complicated by a contradiction specific to French capitalism, leading to an additional level of crisis. This second aspect of the crisis of French capitalism can be summarized by saying that there exists, side by side, two Frances: a France of 1958 and a France of 1858. This involves the coexistence, on the one hand, of large modern industrial production, a trend toward technical innovation, rationalization, and concentration that is increasingly penetrating various strata of economic and social life—and, on the other hand, a host of backward if not archaic sectors, methods, forms, structures, and institutions, crystallized relics of bygone eras that stifle and strangle French capitalism's transition to the modern type required by the conditions of the second half of the twentieth century.

There is the *Atar Volant*² and the corner bistro, world records set by [SNCF](#) locomotives and the major role played by Monsieur Gingembre,³ the automated machine tools at Renault and the quarter of the population active in agriculture that does not even succeed in feeding the country, the electronic computers that have been put into widespread use in large companies and the millions of small storekeepers who do not keep accounts.

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Indeed, after a long period of relative backwardness relative to the other industrial powers, French capitalism has ended up taking part in the accelerated development characteristic of the world capitalist economy. Since the end of the War, French industry offers one of the strongest instances of expansion on the international level. Despite dreadful mismanagement [*gabegie*] by its political leadership, the domestic conflicts, the colonial wars, and the enormous overhead costs occasioned by subsidies to unproductive sectors, French capitalism has been able to make up for a part of the lost ground from the previous period. From 1948—the year when reconstruction was achieved, in the sense that production returned to its 1937 level—to 1957, French industrial production increased by 75 percent; from 1953 to the first quarter of 1958, it increased 57 percent, as against 52 percent in West Germany and only 33 percent for the whole

²T/E: The *Atar Volant* turbine engine was developed by [Sneema Moteurs](#) for a [coleopter](#) (a [vertical take-off and landing aircraft](#)). Its “single prototype crashed..., resulting in the abandoning of...the project” a year after Castoriadis treated it as an example of modern French technology.

³FRENCH EDITORS: [Léon Gingembre](#), who created in 1944 and presided in 1958 over the [Confédération Générale des Petites et Moyennes Entreprises \(CGPME\)](#) small business owners’ association.

of Western European countries.⁴

This evolution of the situation does not affect only the material volume of production. The increase in production has been possible only as a function of a powerful trend toward modernization, which has altered production techniques, organizational methods, the structure of business enterprises, and up to and including the attitudes of big business. The movement toward concentration in business enterprises has accelerated; new regions of the country have been subjected to industrialization. The most "advanced" sectors of employers are adopting an "Americanizing" attitude toward the problem of wages; the evolution of nominal and real wages from 1953 to 1956 shows that, in "normal" times, employers are trying to prevent labor conflicts by giving in on pay and that they of course are making wage earners pay through an even greater increase in output.

This considerable expansion of production has been able, indeed, to come about only thanks to a very large rise in labor productivity. From 1950 to 1957, output per worker-hour in manufacturing industries has increased almost 50 percent—or 6 percent per annum on average, at one of the highest rates of increase internationally. Let us note in passing that, during the same period, real hourly wages in the same industries were increasing at most only 40 percent (if one accepts the official and officially rigged indices of the cost of living).⁵

⁴Percentages calculated on the basis of the indices provided by V. Paretti and G. Bloch, "[La production industrielle en Europe Occidentale et aux Etats-Unis de 1901 à 1955](#)," in *Moneta e Credito* (Rome), vol. 9, no. 36 (1956) and those of the United Nations' *Monthly Bulletin of Statistics* (New York), May 1958.

⁵From 1950 to 1957, the production index for manufacturing industries has increased by 64 percent, that of total work-hours by 10 percent, as a function of a 7 percent increase in employment and a 2.7 percent lengthening of working time. On the other hand, the average hourly wage rate in these same industries has gone from 81.40 francs in 1950 to 164.50 francs in 1957, an increase of 102 percent; but the price index for household consumption in Paris increased by 33 percent between 1950 and 1956, which is certainly an underestimation; for, in 1956, the manipulation of the index

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Yet this trend toward expansion, modernization, concentration, and rationalization constantly collides against the “other France” whose existence it menaces, and which at the same time prevents it from developing. Several particular contradictions give concrete expression to this conflict.

The rapid development of large modern industry is in the long run incompatible with the maintenance of entire sectors of the economy (agriculture, small businesses, small industries) in their present-day anachronistic form and with the preservation of the corresponding strata of the population. The existence of these sectors and of these strata, with the numerical strength they retain in France, puts an enormous strain on the economy’s and society’s overhead costs, reduces the possible pace of capital accumulation, and limits the pool of “free” labor to be exploited by big capital. Maintained by protective measures systematically and consciously adopted by the French bourgeoisie in order to preserve the country’s “social equilibrium,” these strata have ended up blocking the economic and political operation of the system. It is not simply a matter of sugar beet growers and home distillers; at least half of French agriculture fits this case.⁶ Small business

by [\[French Minister of Finance Paul\] Ramadier](#) was already underway. In order to take into account this factor, and also the major price hike that took place in 1958, one must raise the percentage indicated above by at least 3 percent for 1956 and 8 percent for 1957 (see G. Mathieu’s *Le Monde* article of June 17, 1958). The real rise in prices from 1950 to 1957 would therefore be at least 48 percent and the real hourly wage would have increased at most by 37 percent during the same period, or substantially less than the workers’ hourly output. Percentages calculated according to indices published in the [Organization for European Economic Co-operation](#)’s *Bulletin of General Statistics*, May 1958, pp. 11 and 110-11.

⁶In 1955, the proportion of the civil population active in agriculture was 27 percent; this percentage can be compared to that of the countries whose agricultural production is *relatively* far higher than that of France, like Denmark (24 percent), Canada (20 percent), the Netherlands (13 percent), not to mention the United States (11 percent). See the [Organization for European Economic Co-operation](#)’s *Bulletin of General Statistics*, September 1957, p. 52.

enjoys exorbitant fiscal privileges, whereas existing legislation in fact penalizes department stores and chain stores. Tariff protections that are among the highest in the world allow a host of small industrialists to live lavish lives—and ensure at the same time, for a given level of wages, that the level of prices is perhaps 10 or 20 percent higher than they should have been.

This social structure is directly reflected on the political plane and tends to render French capitalism ungovernable when serious problems are posed to its political leadership. The sustained survival of backward strata, their exceptional numerical weight in a modern capitalist society has, beyond its harmful economic effects, contributed to the blockage of the parliamentary system. It has, indeed, maintained and aggravated the fragmentation of the bourgeois political parties and, thereby, it has constantly subordinated the existence of a government to the maintenance of the *status quo* or to the augmentation of the privileges and the protection this or that special category enjoys. What was thus happening at the level of the central government contributed to the greater reinforcement of the retrograde features of the economic and social structure. Instead of being in the final analysis authoritative instances of rationalization and coordination charged with ensuring that the general interests of capitalism would prevail over the special interests of this or that bourgeois or petty-bourgeois faction, parliament and government have become almost exclusively the instruments of those special interests. The absence of a large reformist party, the fragmentation of the political representation of the wage-earning strata between the SFIO [the Socialist [French Section of the Workers' International](#)] and the French CP have, in turn, powerfully fostered this situation; no political pressure from reformists obliged the bourgeoisie to discipline itself and its political representation to group together in a major conservative party. Half of a parliamentary “opposition”—the French CP—being excluded from the game, the bourgeois and “socialist” politicians have been able, without running an electoral risk, to indulge up to their necks in various schemes.

This situation has had its repercussions on the state

apparatus, which itself has been colonized by a variety of economic and political factions. The problems created by such colonization served only to aggravate the ones posed by the urgent need for a renewal of this apparatus. The necessities involved in central management of a modern economy, of which the State is at once the pivot and the most important unit, have indeed become incompatible with the current outmoded, incoherent, contradictory structure of the French State, which is drowning in regulations that never posit a single principle without immediately opposing thereto four exceptions, each one accompanied by sixteen restrictions. They are quite particularly incompatible with the antediluvian structure of public finances and central economic institutions, a tax system based essentially on indirect taxes, tax exemptions granted in practice to upper incomes, a credit system that was extremely modern under Napoleon III, and a central bank whose governor is mentally the contemporary of [the early nineteenth-century economist] [Jean-Baptiste Say](#).

Under such conditions, French capitalism since 1945 has not been able to work out and apply any coherent policy to the serious problems it was facing, including to the most serious one of all, the problem of the fate of its former colonial empire. The same type of contradiction as the one defined above apropos of the economy, of politics, and so on also crops up in this domain. The modern conditions for capitalist exploitation, on the economic plane, as well as the awakening of colonial peoples, on the political plane, are henceforth incompatible with the maintenance of nineteenth-century colonial structures. Even if they are expressed through profits that are essential to this or that capitalist group, those structures ultimately entail a heavy burden for French capitalism as a whole. And the bid to maintain colonial domination becomes, from the capitalist standpoint itself, a total loss as soon as it comes to conducting a war like the one in Indochina or in Algeria. Yet the incapacity to impose discipline, yesterday on the profiteers of Indochina, today on the colonists of Algeria—and, at the same time, the incapacity to conceive a more long-term policy that would preserve what can really be preserved from the former positions of French imperialism have resulted in French imperialism rolling along

from one defeat to the next and from one “abandonment” to the next, while ruining itself in colonial wars with no way out. Those wars, in turn, have aggravated economic difficulties as well as political decomposition in France itself.

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Of course, to a certain degree these problems exist for every modern form of capitalism, for they result, in the final analysis, from a phenomenon that is characteristic of every capitalist society, the coexistence of advanced sectors and backward sectors, the slowness of this or that sector of social life in relation to the other ones, and the incapacity to resolve rationally and without crisis the conflicts that are born therein. American capitalism is obliged to “protect” its farmers, whose political importance bears no relation to their weight in society; British imperialism has to face up to the enormous problems posed by the gradual demolition of its former colonial empire. Yet in no other large modern country does one observe the set of such contradictions being driven to such an acute degree and conditioning one another to such a point, and ultimately leaving such a reduced margin for partial and gradual reform solutions.

It is the well-organized totality of these contradictions that goes to form this inextricable jungle wherein the French parliamentary republic was finally devoured on June 1, 1958.

The Algerian War was the condensed expression of all these contradictions at the same time as it brought them to the point of paroxysm.⁷ Strong enough to avoid a straight-out military defeat, French imperialism was not strong enough to

⁷See the articles by F. Laborde [Jean-François Lyotard] devoted to the Algerian question in issues [18](#), [20](#), [21](#), and [24](#) of *S. ou B.* [reprinted in *La Guerre des algériens. Écrits 1956-1963*, ed. Mohammed Ramdani (Paris: Galilée, 1989)]. T/E: some of Lyotard's *S. ou B.* articles appear in his [Political Writings](#), trans. Bill Readings and Kevin Paul Geiman (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), and an excerpt from his article for [issue 24](#) was translated in [SouBA](#) as “Algerian Contradictions Exposed”], along with the Editorial for no. [24](#), “Prolétariat français et nationalisme algérien.”

have the war end in a victory. Its political decomposition, the ceaselessly growing weight of the colonists and of the military in Algiers opposite the state apparatus, which was melting down, constantly prevented it not only from imposing but even from imagining a “compromise” solution. It must be added, moreover, that the objective difficulties for reaching such a solution are almost insurmountable. The war thus perpetuated had completely outsized repercussions on the economic situation. A genuine war policy required war financing. In itself, such financing was perfectly possible; for a country whose national product is increasing 800 million to one billion [old] francs per year and where all those who have money constitute a never-yet-utilized tax source, one should be able, without any major difficulty, to finance a war twice as costly. But no one could discipline the bourgeoisie in order to make it bear a part of the costs of its war—all the more so as the bourgeoisie itself ultimately does not know whether or not it wants this war. In this way, a war financed exclusively by increasing the exploitation of wage earners helped to create a social situation in France that was at every moment close to explosion. Yet that was not enough; the incapacity and wasteful mismanagement of the bourgeois political leadership had to plunge the economy for a year into an acute external-finance crisis, adding to the more or less permanent imbalance of France’s international trade since the world war. And the decomposition of the central government in France still had to allow and actively favor the constitution, in Algeria, of a totalitarian form of domination on the part of colonists, with the military erecting itself into a State within the State and imposing its will upon the Paris government regarding everything that concerned North Africa long before May 13. And so, when some vague desires for getting out of the Algerian impasse manifested themselves among some factions of the metropolitan bourgeoisie and its political personnel, the Algiers rebellion broke out, bringing brutally into the open the collapse of the central government in Paris, of the Parliament, of the Administration, and of the parties.

The objective of the Algiers rebellion was obviously to continue and to intensify the Algerian War, to be imposed, if need be, by force on the factions of the metropolitan

bourgeoisie that might be opposed thereto. According to the logic of this operation, suppression of all opposition in France and the need to impose a new reduction on wage earners' standard of living constitute the unavoidable consequences. The Algiers movement could not help but tend—and is still tending—toward the instauration of a totalitarian regime in France.

The conditions, however, were not given in France itself, neither from the standpoint of a fascist or fascistic mass movement nor from the standpoint of big business making it a definite option to head in that direction. Big business was and remains still far removed from making Algiers' objectives completely its own; still less was it disposed to risk a civil war in order to make these objectives prevail. With much prudence at the outset, but with increasing astuteness and boldness as the crisis evolved, de Gaulle was pushed into the foreground. Through him, big business seized upon the open crisis in Algiers and tried at the same time to profit therefrom in order to begin "sorting things out" and "bringing order" to the problems involved in its overall management. It was a matter of putting first things first, restoring the unity of the State and of capitalist power and of its last resort, the army. Yet at the same time, it was a matter of liquidating the ungovernable parliamentary republic, of preparing a "solution" to the Algerian problem, and ultimately, in the longer term, of proceeding to rationalize to a certain extent the economic, political, social, and colonial structures.

The first part of the operation succeeded brilliantly. Making the most of the Algiers rebellion, the landing on Corsica,⁸ the widespread confusion, the Socialist rot, the incapacity and impotence of the Stalinists, and the workers' disgust while adroitly combining the blackmail of civil war with assurances of republicanism, de Gaulle arrived in power in every way, shape, and form and even allowed himself the luxury of participating in the games at the [Bourbon Palace](#) [home of the [French National Assembly](#)] and seducing

⁸T/E: "On 24 May, French paratroopers from the Algerian corps landed on Corsica by aircraft, taking the French island in a bloodless action called 'Operation Corse'" ([English Wikipedia, s.v.](#)).

[French Communist Resistance leader and Deputy Maurice Kriegel-Valrimont]. Serious journalists jabbered on about the new talents that had been discovered in him, members of the petty bourgeoisie who had been flabbergasted to see the Assembly led by drumbeat to suicide finally felt themselves governed, and a celestial shiver went up and down the backs of all those had upheld a certain image of France.

Three days later, the trip to Algiers showed that the miracle man offered some disturbing resemblances to [Radical Party member and short-lived French Prime Minister] Félix Gaillard: his speeches were ratifying more and more openly the policy of the colonists while his ministers, locked in a closet, bore damning testimony about the restoration of governmental power. With the parliamentary fog dispersed, it appeared that the true problems remained posed, more fully than ever.

BETA

Understanding the contradiction before which the de Gaulle regime henceforth finds itself placed demands that one understand the tasks that *objectively*—i.e., independently of the ideas and intentions of individuals and groups—are posed to French capitalism. In order to exit from its crisis, French capitalism henceforth has to achieve its “final bourgeois revolution.” It has to pass from its present-day structures to a modern structure, one that corresponds to the conditions of the age, the model of which is given by the United States, England, and West Germany. It has to liquidate its backward features, rationalize its overall organization, and endow itself with a State and a government. This profound mutation will have to be carried out on several planes at once. Of course, the various problems at issue display neither the same difficulties nor the same level of importance nor the same urgency for finding a solution; the currency crisis and the political problem have to be resolved in three months, the Algerian question in the coming year, Black Africa can wait longer, and agriculture longer still. Yet the problems that, taken in isolation, “could wait” demand a solution to those that cannot: the Algerian question dominates the political

situation in the immediate term and each day brings closer the African day of reckoning.

There incontestably is, in the de Gaulle regime, one side that could be called "authoritarian Mendésisme," which corresponds, objectively, to the need for transformation defined above and, subjectively, to an ever-clearer awareness of this need within big business circles. It is equally incontestable that there exists, theoretically, a possibility that this transformation might be carried out "from a cold start" and that a set of "rational" solutions (rational from the standpoint of the dominant class) could be put forward. In reality, however, the obstacles in the path of such a transformation, the oppositions it would arouse on all sides, and the intrinsic weakness of the de Gaulle regime in its current form are such that the country's entry into a period of deep social crisis and open conflict between classes appears to be the most likely eventuality. The problems of managing society are not, indeed, geometry problems, and "rational" solutions are worthless if they are not accompanied by the force needed to impose them.

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Thus, in the colonial domain, French imperialism "ought" to be oriented, as England and the Netherlands have done without crumbling, toward the sole logical solution: the gradual liquidation of its colonies *qua* colonies. It could set as its objective the preservation of a greater or lesser part of its economic, political, and military positions—but it can no longer continue to play, either in Algeria or soon in Black Africa, with independence within interdependence, integration within disintegration, and other pipe dreams pursued until now by its realist statesmen. In itself, the choice is simple and clear: either give in each time on what has to be given in, while trying to retain what can be retained and while henceforth doing without the colonies, as Italy, Germany, the Netherlands, England, and so on have done or are in the process of doing; or else continue to plunge oneself into a series of ruinous conflicts, leading to an ultimate result that is worse than any compromise (Indochina and even, in practice,

Tunisia and Morocco).

It suffices to look at what had happened in Algeria since June 1 [1958] in order to understand that the practical chances of a “logical” solution are negligible. De Gaulle came to power surrounded by a mysterious halo; he was unobtrusively presented as the man of pacification, liberal solutions, and so on. Yet once in Algiers, he was obliged purely and simply to ratify the solutions of the military and the colonists. Journalists indulged in interminable exegeses in order to determine whether de Gaulle was for or against “integration,” when he was refusing to employ the term, what exactly that signified, and so on. One thing, however, is clear: de Gaulle pronounced himself unconditionally for the maintenance of French imperialist domination in Algeria—and he confirmed this repeatedly thereafter. His intentions or his mental reservations have no real importance. On the contrary: were they to diverge fully from what he has said, that would only further demonstrate what we want to demonstrate. The colonists and the military of Algiers follow de Gaulle only to the extent that he seems to support *their* solutions. Let a *real* divergency appear, and Algiers will behave toward de Gaulle as they did toward Pflimlin.⁹ The reason for this is the one that forced de Gaulle to say what those in Algiers wanted to hear: it is that de Gaulle has no force of his own in Algiers. So long as the Algerian resistance lasts—and even were this resistance to collapse—Algeria will be able to be held only by this fascist-military apparatus that has been forged over the past two years, that has enrolled the population in a totalitarian manner, and that has no reason to submit to directives coming from Paris. Paris will be able to make Algiers comply only by *breaking* this apparatus, which is strictly inconceivable; for, that would mean breaking the Army, French capitalism’s last resort—that is, absorbing it into a larger apparatus of the same nature that has instaurated its domination in France.

This Algerian reality will determine just as inevitably

⁹T/E: [Christian Democrat politician Pierre Pflimlin](#) was France’s 97th Prime Minister, from May 14 until June 1, 1958, when de Gaulle came to power.

the genuine nature of integration. The spokesmen for the colonists are already mentioning, apropos of the [*collège unique*](#) [a single electoral college for all], the need to “domesticate the law of the majority” and are manifesting their horror at the “crassly materialistic” aspects of integration; de Gaulle obligatorily echoes them by nobly stressing the “integration of souls.” Integrating a minimum wage [[*SMIG*](#)], aid to families with dependent children [[*allocations familiales*](#)], and school enrollment are obviously a sordid bit of pettiness coming from those who have understood nothing about the spiritual regeneration of May 13. Whatever its legal definition may be, integration will in fact be implemented by the colonels and [*L'Écho d'Alger*](#) newspaper publisher Alain de] Sérigny. [\[French Army General Raoul\] Salan](#) has already shown with quite military-like laconism what integration means when he answered a journalist who asked him whether it would be possible to organize municipal elections in a month: “All that is needed is to double the military dragnet operation [*le quadrillage*].”¹⁰

It is therefore almost certain that the end of military operations in Algeria is still more remote after the Algiers trip than before. Whatever might have been the proportion of the Muslim masses mystified by the name de Gaulle, the colonists and the paratroopers will speedily make it their business to complete their political education. Under such circumstances, an isolation and weakening of the FLN [[Front de libération nationale \(Algerian National Liberation Front\)](#)] appear highly improbable.

On the Algerian problem, the situation of de Gaulle's government therefore is quite clear. The obvious result of the Algiers trip and of the “solution” he furnished will be, as soon

¹⁰*Le Monde*, June 11, 1958. [T/E: On p. 5 of his 2011 Marine Corps University Master of Military Studies research paper [“Battle of Algiers: Counter Insurgency Success.”](#) Lou H. Royer, Major USMC defines *quadrillage* as “the French tactic of dividing of the country into sectors with permanent troops stationed in each to systematically wipe out the rebels and counter the rebel strategy of an inverted *tache d'huile* by concentrating French forces within the population providing the Muslim population with security.”]

as an initial phase of wavering comes to an end, to become buried in the war, to consecrate the policy of the colonists and the Army as governmental policy—in short, to evolve in an irreversible way that cannot help but accentuate further the explosive character of the Algerian problem.

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The Algerian War exerts direct control over critical aspects of the economic situation in France. On the one hand, the continuation of the war and the prolongation of military service to 27 months, on the other, integration, even if it is but a simulacrum, will create increased burdens for the French economy at a moment when that economy urgently has to free up some resources to make up for the foreign-trade deficit.¹¹ French capitalism is faced with combined problems of its overall economic management in two areas that pertain directly to the State: public finances and international finances. These problems urgently have to be resolved. The issue of French capitalism's integration into the world economy, a "long-term" issue, is becoming a "short-term" issue in the form of the absolute need to balance foreign trade in the coming months, for there no longer is any money to pay the deficit. It is just as clear that, in the long run, a thoroughgoing reform of public finances is indispensable. The economic size of the modern capitalist State as well as the fact that it consumes a quarter of the national product and that it handles in one form or another almost half of it render imperative the rationalization of its financial management; indeed, it will be impossible for French capitalism to struggle successfully on the world markets and to lower social tensions domestically so long as its fiscal system creates exorbitant inequalities between companies and sectors of the economy, so long as it favors the most backward and least concentrated

¹¹The 600 or so million dollars borrowed abroad at the beginning of the year, which were to allow the financing of this deficit until the end of 1958, will be, according to current official estimates, exhausted around early Autumn.

branches at the expense of the most modern ones, and so long as it allows the bourgeoisie to remain exempt from financing the overhead costs of its own regime. Yet such a reform of public finances, while necessary "in the long run," also is becoming today an immediate problem; for, with today's structure, financing of the war can occur only in an inflationist way, and inflation aggravates the crisis of external payments.

Here again, a theoretical solution is not lacking: it would consist in devaluing the franc in order to balance foreign trade and in taxing capitalist income to the degree necessary to balance the budget, while at the same time lowering indirect taxes in order to compensate for the hike in prices that might result from this devaluation and to minimize the risks of social conflicts. Yet the mere presence of [\[Antoine\] Pinay](#), that county-fair illusionist, in the Ministry of Finance shows already that Gaullism is not counting on imposing any economic discipline on capital; Pinay's initial measures and declarations may be characterized by their strict continuity with the financial mess of the Fourth Republic. The "balancing" of the French capitalist economy, which will have to be achieved at any cost, still risks being done through inflation, price hikes, and the reduction of the buying power of wage earners.

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In the third place, it is a matter, in the coming months, of effecting a complete transformation of political structures. Even if de Gaulle's government were to succeed in offering any kind of response to the other problems that are posed in the immediate term, French capitalism has to, urgently and imperatively, exit from its prior state of political anarchy. We have here not a "logical" necessity but an established fact. Whatever may be the ideas, intentions, and attitudes of persons, groups, and classes, one thing is certain: the political regime of the Fourth Republic is dead; its parliamentary superstructures are broken up and the large majority of parties no longer have barely any consistency and hold over society. In one form or another, French capitalism has to, in the

coming months, try to give itself the political institutions appropriate to its domination.

Even when it is not “parliamentary” in the strict sense of the term (as in the United States), the modern capitalist republic, in order to function normally, involves the existence of two main parties, a “right-wing” party (Conservatives, Republicans, Christian Democrats) and a “left-wing” party (supporters of Labour, Democrats, Social Democrats). The “right-wing” party is the directly capitalist party, the “left-wing” party, most often “working-class reformist,” is dominated by a bureaucracy that, while pursuing its own special interests and trying to use the State to increase its economic and political power, is no less integrated into the capitalist system. Even when there is no changeover of power between parties [*alternance au pouvoir*], the existence of a “left-wing” party forces “right-wing” politicians to group themselves around a relatively coherent political organization and forces the bourgeoisie to accept a minimum of collective discipline to maintain the basic elements of its domination. The pressure exerted by a powerful and unified reformist trade-union bureaucracy plays a similar role.

We have seen above the reasons why such a structure cannot be achieved in France. The fragmentation of “right-wing” parties has deep social roots; its maintenance is facilitated by the fact that there is not and cannot be any big “left-wing” reformist-type party, the existence and electoral influence of the French CP creating an insurmountable obstacle along this path.

Whatever may be the solution de Gaulle may give to the problem of what institutions to adopt (direct election of the head of the executive branch or his designation by a college of “notables,” etc.), that solution will have a hard time functioning if the issue of parties is not resolved. Now, while it is true that the old structure of parties has more or less been broken up, nothing exists that could take its place. A large “rally of Gaullists” that would limit itself to bringing together the old political personnel would be a ragbag, not a party capable of governing; in order to create one worthy of this name, de Gaulle would have to turn squarely against and liquidate such personnel, find some cadres, and provide them

with an ideology. All that cannot be done overnight and is not in the process of being done.

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Two key characteristics make the present-day French situation a situation pregnant with a crisis. On the one hand, some problems which are by their nature "long-term" problems—relationships with the colonies, overall economic management, political structures—have reached the point where they require a rapid solution. On the other hand, the interdependency between the problems and their solutions has become direct and immediate. For example, French imperialism might still be able, with or without integration, to settle in for years of war in Algeria if it succeeded in resolving, among other problems, that of the financing of this war, yet the political situation precludes it from doing so. For this reason, its economic difficulties are becoming much graver than was theoretically necessary—and this in turn aggravates the political situation. As a consequence, the colonized people of Algeria find their will to resistance reinforced, and other colonized peoples, like those in Black Africa, are becoming bolder and are beginning to demand their own independence.

Now, all the solutions that could—and should—be given to these problems imply that the government is capable of striking more or less harshly all strata of the population. If one wants to stop the Algerian War, one must strike the colonists and the military caste; if one wants to continue it, one must further reduce the standard of living of wage earners; if one is unwilling or unable to do so, one must strike the lower middle class and the middle class [*la petite et moyenne bourgeoisie*]. The old parties and their political personnel will have to be liquidated; the trade-union bureaucracy will have to be in part domesticated, in part disintegrated.

De Gaulle's government has at its disposal no force of its own to impose such solutions. And it is ultimately possible that it might do nothing and that de Gaulle might be another Gaillard. This is, at the very least, what until this point in time

he in fact is. Yet while de Gaulle can bear being a Gaillard, the situation cannot. If the government continues to drag its feet without responding to the problems French capitalism is facing, the crisis will only barely be postponed and quite certainly it will be aggravated.

Conversely, if the de Gaulle government is to begin to impose some solutions, it will have to create for itself the social forces it does not yet have at its disposal. It will have to spark a rallying of reactionary and fascistic elements capable of railroading through a new constitution, securing a majority among the elected authorities of the new Fifth Republic, terrorizing its opponents, and perhaps attacking strikers.

A certain sort of fascism is already in power in Algiers. Yet the constitution of a fascistic movement in France runs up against some considerable difficulties. On the one hand, the economic situation of the petty bourgeoisie is not at present pushing it toward a totalitarian organization that uses violent methods of political struggle. At the same time, the upper middle class [*la grande bourgeoisie*] continues to be oriented toward a peaceful and legal way of "sorting things out" and "bringing order" to its regime and it wants to avoid international difficulties as well as domestic conflicts that an attempt to instaurate a totalitarian regime would provoke. Economic determinations, however, are not the only ones, and class struggle is not a game of checkers. Major strata of the petty bourgeoisie are more and more attracted to the idea of a "strong State" and the nationalistic myth. As in all modern societies, youth, and in particular petty-bourgeois youth, is entirely available and alert [*disponible*]. It pokes fun at the republic, traditional "politics," and parties. Of course, class determinations play a role among youth, too, but to a considerably lesser degree than for adults, for, at the same time as it is influenced by its immediate milieu, it is in most cases in revolt against that social setting. A large portion of youth could swing in one direction or another overnight if it thought it glimpsed an outlet or quite simply some reasons for living that established society has, for a long time now, been incapable of furnishing it. Big business's orientation toward a peaceful transformation will no longer make much sense if difficulties carry on and social conflicts develop.

Rallyings of people already beginning to take shape whose appearance at the outset is innocuous, and even frankly ridiculous in the person of the brave [\[pro-“French Algeria” General \[Lionel-Max\] Chassin\]](#), no less exhibit a clearly fascistic look. The already constituted “Committees of Public Safety” network forms the lineament of a movement of the same type that could become structured and crystallize, with the help of military and paramilitary elements, should the situation worsen. And one absolutely cannot exclude the possibility that this movement might, as it develops, outstrip and shove aside de Gaulle, too soft and too “old France” to fully express it.

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Yet what really matters in the current situation is neither the psychology of de Gaulle nor even the chances for and the exact definition of a fascist movement in France. It is the structural crisis facing French capitalism and thereby the whole of society. The parliamentary republic is already dead. Yet this death resolves no problem; on the contrary, it ensures that all problems are posed overtly and bluntly and that they require a massive and rapid solution.

Algeria has been neither pacified nor integrated and quite likely it will be neither the one nor the other. The pursuit and the intensification of the war, as well as the recovery of external finances that has to take effect within a period of a few months, will be able to occur only on the backs of wage earners, through a new reduction in the standard of living. The political scaffolding of Gaullism, barely put in place, is cracking on various sides. If de Gaulle, faced with the enormous objective difficulties and contradictions that undermine his own power—rather, for the moment, his absence of power—continues to hesitate and to equivocate, the crisis will be only graver still at a barely delayed date. If de Gaulle tries to provide some “solutions” to the problems of French capitalism, he will be able to achieve them only by cutting into the flesh of all of society’s strata (save, of course,

for Rothschild¹² and a few others of the same ilk). To do this, he has no real force at his disposal. The Army *is not* with him; Algiers *is not* with him—save to the extent that he, de Gaulle, is with Algiers. At any rate, neither Algeria nor the Army can govern France, which is not Venezuela. Whether it be de Gaulle or someone else, he who will put forward solutions that are indispensable for the continuation of French capitalism will have to have at his disposal a real force in France itself. That force can no longer be that of yesterday's discredited, broken down, now practically nonexistent parliamentary parties.

Everyone in France knows that one will not be able to continue to live tomorrow as one lived yesterday. Everyone knows that one is witnessing a thoroughgoing mutation of French society. Yet such a mutation will not be able to occur without a crisis. One cannot at present specify either its rhythms or the exact forms it will take. Yet it would be almost inconceivable that there might take place a cool transition from yesterday's situation toward the "hardline Republic" of Rothschild and de Gaulle. By far the most likely prospect is that the liquidation of yesterday's situation will be able to take place only through the attempt to instaurate an authoritarian if not totalitarian regime and that this attempt will not go ahead without a profound social crisis and without struggles.

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As a class, the working class has remained outside the crisis opened May 13. In its immense majority, it has refused to follow the instructions of the French CP and the CGT [the Communist-aligned Confédération Générale du Travail (General Confederation of Labor)]. Those instructions were in themselves ridiculous—calling upon it to foil the paratroopers via some two-hour strikes. It participated but

¹²T/E: Castoriadis may be referring to [Guy de Rothschild](#), who at the time ran the family's banking business and who had appointed [Georges Pompidou](#) as the bank's general manager in 1956, a position Pompidou held until he became de Gaulle's Prime Minister in 1962.

very little in the May 28 demonstration. In the large Parisian factories, the proportion of laboring people who came to the demonstration can be estimated as five to ten percent; this percentage was perhaps higher in small factories, but in total the Parisian workers furnished only a third of the demonstrators at the very most. What matters even more is that the workers did not go there as workers; they dissolved into the democratic population in general. Slogans, expressions, and bids situated on a class terrain that were observed during the demonstration were extremely rare.

The reasons for this attitude become clearly apparent through the discussions that have taken place during this period in the workplace. The workers' attitudes in no way express a "depoliticization," or apathy pure and simple, as politicians on the Left think and want to make others think. Since May 13, there was but one topic of conversation in the workplace: politics.¹³ But what politics? Well, a politics that is extremely elevated from a revolutionary standpoint. The workers and most wage earners in general *loathe the capitalist republic*. They have explicitly refused to give in to antics, like the demonstrations at which one sings *La Marseillaise* in unison or the telegrams sent to the [French National Assembly \[Palais Bourbon\]](#) to defend a regime whose rottenness and total breakdown they have long perceived. This is not invalidated but, on the contrary, confirmed by the fact that a fraction of wage-earning strata, though certainly quite limited at present,¹⁴ is undergoing the influence of Gaullism; this attitude expresses an awareness of the impossibility of continuing on with the previous regime, the transposition within the working class of the dilemma before which French society in its entirety finds itself placed.

The response of virtually all organizations and politicians on the Left (we are not speaking here of the French CP and the SFIO [the Socialist French Section of the

¹³See Daniel Mothé's article, "Le fascisme ne passera pas (?)," in *L'Express*, June 5, 1958.

¹⁴See some testimony to this effect published in [the present issue \[25\] of S. ou B.](#)

Workers' International], but of the small organizations and individual militants who place themselves on a class terrain) to this attitude on the part of the working class is pure intellectual acrobatics. It ultimately boils down to distinguishing the idea of the republic from its reality, to inviting workers to comprehend properly the distinction between the republican principle and its embodiment in Pinay-Pflimlin-Mollet-Thorez¹⁵ at the same time as the distinction between the whole and its parts: You are demonstrating for freedom of the press, the rights of assembly and association, and so on—not for the state riot police [[CRS](#)], [[French President René Coty](#)], the Indochina War and the Algerian War, slums, Broussac,¹⁶ and [protectionist] sugar beet growers. The workers were being invited to become voluntary schizophrenics: You are going to shout “Love live the Republic” while thinking within: “Down with the Republic.” That is how [[anticolonialist journalist Claude Bourdet](#)] and [[Brigadier General Jacques\] Massu](#) [victor of the [Battle of Algiers](#) and leader of the [Algiers putsch](#)] can sing *La Marseillaise* in unison; one bawls out louder “Against us, tyranny,” the other, “The day of glory has arrived!”, and both, *fortissimo*, “To arms, citizens!”—except that Massu, more republican than Bourdet, *really does* take up arms at that moment.

Faced with these “Marxists” distilling the pure essence of the republic from such vulgar phenomena as sugar beets, [[Governor General of Algeria Robert\] Lacoste](#), and so on, the workers have shown themselves, as usual, to be robust dialecticians. The idea of the Republic is its reality—and its reality forms a whole. This whole does not hold unless one gets oneself killed maintaining its existence. Faced with politicians and intellectuals who in practice returned to the most vulgar form of antifascism and who invited the workers to join the following monstrous absurdity—a purely *negative* struggle—

¹⁵T/E: Leaders, respectively, of the Liberal-Center, Christian Democrat, Socialist, and Communist parties at the time.

¹⁶T/E: The wealthy textile industrialist and horse breeder [Marcel Broussac](#) diversified after the War into luxury goods ([house of Dior](#)) and publishing (the pro-Algerian War newspaper [L'Aurore](#)).

the workers have let themselves be guided by this elementary truth, that every negation is an affirmation and that simply struggling against de Gaulle means (whatever one thinks at night in one's bed) struggling *for* Pinay, Pflimlin, and so on. Not through their "apathy," but explicitly, in their discussions, the workers have undertaken the *critique of the regime*.

Given the circumstances, this critique has not and could not have led them to engage in some positive action. The objective pressure being exerted upon the working class was not enough to force it to act at any price. The great majority of workers have not thought—and they were right—that, with de Gaulle taking power, everything was achieved; they thought and continue to think, rather, that everything is beginning. They remain in a state of expectation. At the same time, they perceive that, under present circumstances, a mobilization of the working class cannot be and will not be directed toward partial objectives; if it comes to struggling against de Gaulle, one will not be able to do so through petitions, nor in order to restore the prior republic. Through what means? And toward what objectives? This is an enormous leap the working class will have to accomplish, and the working class is at present looking pensively at the precipice, asking itself whether it is capable of jumping over it and what it will find on the other side. The problem objectively posed to itself, which it takes up under one form or under another consciousness, is the problem of socialism and workers' power.

Now, no organization with any audience whatsoever is posing this problem. The Algiers coup and de Gaulle's arrival in power could have become the point of departure for a workers' counteroffensive if a large revolutionary organization had existed that would have helped the mass of laboring people to go beyond their hesitations, that would have shown that there exists another path beyond the Pflimlin-de Gaulle dilemma, and that would have allowed initiatives and actions from diverse sectors of the class to communicate among themselves and to coordinate with one another. It is tautological to say that the conditions that have prevailed since 1945 in France—and in the world—have not allowed the constitution of such an organization. It is less so

to say that since 1953, with the changed situation that took place on the international scale as well as on the scale of France, one could have done much more than has been done along this path and that we bear our heavy load of responsibility in this matter.

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While there is no sense in speaking of a “defeat” of the working class on June 1, 1958, or in describing its current situation as a “setback,” it is certain that the changes in the objective situation that have already arisen and that will not cease to pile up will set the possibilities for working-class struggle in the coming period upon an entirely new terrain.

Two major factors will characterize the new situation.

First of all, a renewed worsening of people’s living conditions. Whatever measures that may or may not otherwise be taken, the reestablishment of economic equilibrium is an urgent necessity for French capitalism. The military or civilian expenditures in Algeria (and probably both at once) are going to increase. The foreign trade balance has to be restored at all cost in the coming months: the effects of the Gaillard devaluation have already been completely cancelled out by domestic price hikes, and the continuation of the American recession makes an adequate increase in exports even more difficult. Whatever form it might take, the major part of the recovery operation will fall on the backs of wage earners.

In the second place, the working class is going to find itself more separated than ever from “its” organizations. Trade-union or political organizations, which have long been seeing their real influence over the working class dwindle, have been discredited in the eyes of all during the three weeks of “republican struggle.” Right now, a part of the ruling apparatus of the FO [Force Ouvrière ([Workers’ Force labor federation](#))] and the CFTC [Confédération française des travailleurs chrétiens ([French Confederation of Christian Workers](#))] is in the process of being overtly integrated into Gaullism. The French CP and the CGT, which have been undergoing a profound crisis for two years and are even further discredited during this crisis in which they have

appeared only—and still!—as the loudest defenders of the Pflimlin government, are already in the process of consciously and loyally playing the role of “His Majesty’s opposition.” Observed ironically from all sides, each awaiting the moment when Moscow will tell them to place their anti-Gaullism on mute, they are now discovering that a problem of wages exists for the working class! Yet they do not undertake, nor are they capable of undertaking, to organize struggles around economic demands; right now, they center all their activity on preparations for the constitutional referendum, a substitute for the parliamentarism that for years has constituted the main feature of their activity.

The reactions from the mass of laboring people in the coming period will obviously be determined first of all by how the objective situation evolves. If de Gaulle succeeds in establishing unity in the bourgeois camp, in imposing discipline on the various economic and political factions (beginning with Algiers, the military, and the colonists); if the Muslim masses of Algeria, crushed by four years of war and lured by “integration,” little by little abandon the FLN [Front de libération nationale ([Algerian National Liberation Front](#))]; if Russo-American competition for the favors of de Gaulle facilitates his international position and allows him to find some foreign loans, the pressure exerted upon the French proletariat would be reduced accordingly, and the transition toward a “Republic of notables” could take place without violent conflicts breaking out.

If these conditions are not brought together, the situation will worsen on the economic level as well as on the political level. We have stated above the reasons why this is to be thought to be at present the most likely prospect. Of course, even in this case, there is no automatic guarantee that the masses will enter into action. In October-November 1957, faced with a rapid worsening of its living conditions, the working class was unable to go beyond the organizational and orientational problems posed to it if it wanted to act. Will this be repeated in the coming months? The problems are going to be posed in a more brutal and urgent fashion, but will the working class find the strength to draw from within itself all the responses to a situation that is posing all the problems of

modern society?

No one but the working class itself can settle this question—and our role, as revolutionaries, is not to speculate about the working class's capacity to create its response to the present situation but to help it to do so.

This sets some considerable and urgent tasks for all revolutionary militants.

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The first one of all is to help the working class to achieve its own forms of autonomous organization. *Autonomous* signifies quite precisely this: breaking in actual fact with all dependency on the trade-union or political bureaucracy, situating itself exclusively on the terrain of the interests of laboring people, and taking as its principle that the workers themselves are to decide sovereignly on their own affairs.

In the coming period, if one is successful in forming such bodies, they will no doubt at the outset be able to be but minoritarian bodies, Struggle Committees grouping together some laboring people who have become aware of the nature and the role of the “working-class” political and trade-union bureaucracy, as well as of the deep-seated connection between demands based on economic demands and political problems, and who are determined to work in common in order to prepare the struggles to come.

This effort may take various forms, but it can begin with the publication of *company newspapers*, organs of free expression of all laboring people who situate themselves on the terrain of defending the interests of their class. Such newspapers, published specifically by minoritarian groupings outside all trade-union or political allegiances, have existed in certain sectors for some years now and have performed some fruitful work: we are talking about Renault's *Tribune Ouvrière*, *Tribune des cheminots* [among railroad workers], the *Bulletin Employé* at the Assurances Générales-Vie life insurance company, *Tribune ouvrière Morse* [at the [Morse telegraph factory](#)], the *Tribune libre Bréguet* [at the [Bréguet Aviation factory](#)], [the teachers'] *Tribune des Enseignants*,

and so on. An effort to regroup these comrades at the Parisian and national levels is underway.¹⁷

Such autonomous committees are to be set up with unorganized laboring people as well as with those who will continue to belong to unions. Without any dogmatism on the question, one must no longer trouble oneself about considerations relating to the trade-union problem. From no standpoint can this problem be considered from now on as important: neither from the standpoint of organizational structure, the summits of the trade-union apparatus having clearly demonstrated that they have become integrated into the political system of the Fourth Republic and the “base” having shown that it absolutely no longer follows their instructions, nor from the standpoint of the terrain where trade unionism is situated and of the objectives it sets out for itself, economic demands appearing more and more clearly as being connected to political problems. Where local trade unions or guilds or trade-union minorities situated on a healthy basis do exist—for example, the FO’s union in the *département* in and around Nantes, the metalworkers’ union of Bordeaux, the Paris region’s CGT steel fitters’ union, the [École émancipée](#) (Emancipated school) tendency within FEN [[Fédération de l’Education nationale \(the Federation for National Education teachers’ union\)](#)], in part the FNSA [[the Fédération nationale syndicat autonome \(Autonomous national trade-union federation\)](#)] of the PTT [[Postes, Télégraphes et Téléphones \(French Postal, Telegraph, and Telephone service\)](#)], and so on—a form must be found that links them with groups of comrades organizing themselves on an autonomous basis. The moment has come for revolutionary trade-union members to show that they place solidarity with the interests of the working class and with the comrades who are organizing themselves to defend those interests above the fetish of the trade-union form, starting from the moment when that form *in actual fact* risks ending up in solidarity with the apparatuses whose total complicity with the capitalist system no longer needs to be demonstrated.

¹⁷See [no. 24](#) of *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, p. 160.

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The other task before us in the coming period is the construction of a revolutionary organization. The possibilities for such a construction exist now for the first time in postwar France on a sizeable scale. One of the most striking characteristics of the last few weeks has been the extreme political consciousness-raising [*sensibilisation*] of large masses of laboring people, but also, on the part of a host of vanguard elements, an understanding of the need to organize themselves in order to act. Among the militants who have broken with the bureaucratic organizations, but who did not see the necessity, the possibility, or the forms of some action to undertake; among those who had steered clear because they saw these organizations' bureaucratic nature; and last but not least, among the young, whom no organization until now has been able to attract, there exist thousands of virtual militants who are rid of mystifying patterns and who have understood that the more one "reforms" it, the more capitalism remains the same, that socialism is not the power of the bureaucracy but the power of the masses of laboring people, that a revolutionary political organization should exist in order to aid the proletariat in its action and not in order to give the proletariat commands or to substitute itself for the proletariat.

This diffuse vanguard will be ready, in the coming months, to organize itself, on the condition that the organization being proposed to it is drawing out all the lessons of the historical period that has elapsed since 1917, as regards the *program* as well as its *organizational structure* and its *working methods*, and, finally, its *relations with the proletariat*. The program of this organization has to be socialism embodied by workers' power, the total power of the Councils of laboring people achieving workers' management of the business enterprise and of society. Its structure has to be a democratic proletarian structure that expresses grassroots' domination over all aspects of the organization's life and activity and that eliminates within itself the distinction between directors and executives.

Its working methods have to grant primacy to grassroots' initiative, to allow the militants as a whole to

understand what the organization is in the process of doing, and to *check and control* it. Its relations with the class are to be based on the principle that the first and final source of socialism is the proletariat itself, that the task of the organization is to complement and aid in the expression of the living experience of the society that is being formed within the proletariat and not to impose on it at all costs a line of action worked out by the organization apart from the class. In other words: that the organization is but a moment and an instrument of the proletariat's struggle for socialism; it has, of course, its own active role to play and it is to take its initiatives under its own responsibility and to advance its own ideas, whether or not they are shared by the majority of the class, but in the end it takes totally seriously in all its acts and all its manifestations the idea that socialism can be achieved only through the conscious and autonomous activity of the laboring masses and that socialism *is* nothing other than this activity.

These are ideas we have been defending for ten years in this review and they are at the basis of an organization that has been set up in Paris during the latest events.¹⁸

Finally, a task of capital importance, one whose fulfillment would enormously facilitate regroupings of laboring people in business enterprises as well as the constitution of an organization is the publication, in the shortest possible time, of a *nationwide workers' newspaper* that is open to all those who, in breaking with the capitalist regime as well as with the "working-class" bureaucratic apparatuses, place on the front line of their concerns the defense of the interests of laboring people through the action of laboring people themselves. This newspaper will have to perform, simultaneously, two functions:

- on the one hand, to analyze and interpret events, to lay bare the role of the bureaucratic organizations, to pose clearly the problem of the regime, and to show that it is possible to have a workers' solution to the current

¹⁸See below, in this [issue \[25\] of *S. ou B.*](#), the tract signed by *Pouvoir Ouvrier* [see now the next text in the present volume].

crisis of French society and a socialist response as embodied by workers' power;

- on the other, *to give a voice to laboring people*, to allow all those to whom capitalist society and its bureaucratic appendages, inside and outside the trade unions, have denied the means of expression to give expression to their experience, their needs, their ideas, and thereby to allow the communication of ideas and experiences within the working class—whom the trade-union and political bureaucracy has made it its mission to fragment and compartmentalize—and the elaboration of a shared response to the problems that are posed to laboring people.

This newspaper will immediately and fully be at the disposal of all the autonomous groupings that are being formed within the working class, of every category of laboring people as they enter into struggle, in order to disseminate their appeals, make their objectives known, and so on.

Beyond its capital importance from the standpoint of the dissemination and clarification of ideas, such a newspaper will be a collective organizer of great effectiveness. Open to all laboring people who want to struggle for the objectives of their class, this newspaper will allow them to group together in order to provide it with their collaboration, to circulate it, to get it discussed around them, and to control its line.

We are inviting all readers of the review to contact us in order to help us to produce this newspaper. It would be of key importance for the first issue to appear in September.¹⁹

¹⁹1979 note: The [first issue](#) of [Pouvoir Ouvrier](#) did indeed appear in the Autumn of 1958.

May 27 Tract Circulated by *Pouvoir Ouvrier**

The masquerade that lasted for fifteen days is over. The ministerial waffling, the parties' merry-go-rounds, the homage unanimously voted by the French National Assembly, Communists included, to "the Army and its chiefs," the whole parliamentary farce laboring people have witnessed, sometimes ironically, sometimes with exasperation, now ends with drama: the rebellion of the colonists and the militarists of Algiers is spreading to France.

Laboring people are the ones who will still have to pay the costs of this drama. Their first interest, their first duty is to try to have a clear view in the situation, beyond the deceptive discourses of ministers, generals, and parties.

What Do the Colonists and the "Committees of Public Safety" of Algiers Want?

The colonists and the generals of Algiers want to force an intensification of the Algerian War. For them, this is the sole means of maintaining their monstrous privileges and their domination over the Algerian people who do not want anything of it.

The war has been going on for four years and each year it swallows up hundreds of billions of [old] francs. To step up [*intensifier*] this war, still more money and men are needed. The war now requires that the standard of living of wage earners be reduced still further and that military service be extended. In order to implement this policy, all opposition to the war must be abolished, public opinion must be kept from being informed, and strikes must be banned. In a word, in order to conduct all-out war, the colonists of Algiers want

*Originally published as "Tract diffusé le 27 mai par le groupe *Pouvoir Ouvrier*," *S. ou B.*, 25 (July 1958): 92-96. Reprinted in *SF*, 141-49, and *EPI*, 311-18.

to impose a “strong government” on France, that is to say, a dictatorship.

For the two weeks his government lasted, [\[French Prime Minister Pierre\] Pflimlin](#) did everything he could to satisfy the rebels: new military credits, extension of military service to 27 months, granting of dictatorial powers to the government via the “state of emergency,” voting of special powers for Algeria, and so on. Socialists and Communists joyously joined in on all these reactionary measures.

Yet, faced with rebellion Pflimlin had and has no real force, as his acts have constantly shown. He used the dictatorial powers he had voted for himself in order to “defend the Republic” only to ban meetings and demonstrations of those who were opposed to the dictatorship. Apart from that, he invested the rebel [\[and French Army General Raoul\] Salan](#) with all powers in Algeria, let [\[former Governor General of Algeria and partisan of “French Algeria” who joined in the May 1958 Algiers revolt\] Jacques Soustelle](#) run away, and he constantly gave in to the colonists. He thus displayed his impotence to all and made it clear to the rebels that one needs but 150 paratroopers to conquer a *département*.

Emboldened by the obvious weakness of the government and by the absence of any real reaction on the part of “working-class” organizations (parties and trade unions), the rebellion seized Corsica and is preparing to set foot in France itself. Will there be a coup in Paris itself, or else will Pflimlin, “in order to avoid bloodshed,” go away “voluntarily” when faced with de Gaulle, after having made his bed? This is not something that can be predicted, but one thing is certain: the rebellion is not inclined to compromise; it will attempt to go all the way, that is to say, to seize power in the country as a whole and to impose the dictatorship of de Gaulle.

Until now, the true master of France, the big employers, have held back. They were asking themselves whether de Gaulle’s arrival in power did not risk provoking a violent conflict they would have preferred to avoid. The groveling cowardice of the Socialist and Communist chiefs and the absence of a spontaneous reaction on the part of the

laboring masses reassured them. Henceforth, de Gaulle has the green light from the big employers.

What de Gaulle's Power Will Signify

Indifference or illusions about de Gaulle exist in all social settings. After all, people say, anything rather than the present mess. De Gaulle will set things in order.

The order de Gaulle will set is the order of the employing class and the order of war. The employers are turning today toward de Gaulle because he is the sole person capable of rallying all the fascistic elements and the partisans of a "strong power." This is because, amid the incoherency, the rottenness, and the decomposition of the bourgeois parliamentary regime, such a power alone can govern effectively—for the *employing class*. That means: intensifying the Algerian War, making the laboring classes pay, and binding them hand and foot so that they will not be able to defend themselves. De Gaulle's order will signify that the bosses will be even more bosses and the workers even more workers, the generals even more generals, and the soldiers even more soldiers.

People are also deluding themselves into thinking that de Gaulle will put an end to the Algerian War. Yet de Gaulle has up his sleeve no magic trick to put an end to the war. Illusions about "fraternization" in Algiers are already dissipating, when one sees that the Muslims who have agreed to participate in Algiers's Committee of Public Safety are less numerous than those who were already collaborating with the mayor of Algiers.

And even in the unlikely case in which de Gaulle would negotiate a compromise with the FLN [Front de libération nationale ([Algerian National Liberation Front](#))], the laboring people of France would have first been bound head and foot and they would remain so. The employing class would then try, through increased exploitation, to recover, on their backs, both the loss of Algeria and the huge waste created by four years of war.

The “Working-Class” Parties Associated with the War Policy

Since 1956, the “working-class” parties have directly or indirectly been the indispensable pillars of the war policy. It was the government of the [“Socialist” Guy Mollet](#) that recalled the reservists in order to step up the war, that organized the repression in Algeria with [\[Brigadier General Jacques\] Massu](#), and that mounted an attack on laboring people’s standard of living.

It was the “Communist” Party that in 1956 voted the special powers for Mollet, as was just done again for Pflimlin, that opposed the spontaneous demonstrations of recalled reservists and workers against the war in the Spring of 1956, and that constantly refused to take a position actively against the war, for the independence of the Algerian people, and for the defense of wage earners’ standard of living.

Today, Socialists and Communists join the Radicals, the MRP [[Mouvement Républicain Populaire \(the prowar Christian Democratic Popular Republican Movement\)](#)], and independents by voting in favor of all the government’s reactionary measures. Under the pretext of “defending the Republic,” they continue to dodge all the true problems that are being posed:

- the defense of laboring people’s standard of living;
- the end of the Algerian War.

No one is talking about these problems, which preoccupy laboring people. Apparently, that is of no interest to the “working-class” parties. All they can do is launch whiny appeals to “vigilance” asking the workers to “stand ready” to defend the Republic.

What Is the Republic for the Workers?

Yet one must be blind not to see that the workers are not mobilizing to “defend the Republic.” Why?

The workers are, of course, against dictatorship, for they know that it will bring about a worsening of their living and working conditions. Yet the experience they have had of

the capitalist Republic for the past fourteen years in no way induces them to get themselves killed defending it. They have seen this Republic send the state riot police to kill their comrades in Nantes because they were demanding a raise of a few francs. They have seen the Republic cast trillions [of old francs], taken away from their purchasing power, into the bottomless pit of the wars of Indochina and Algeria. They have seen the majority they sent to Parliament in January 1956, which had promised to stop the war in Algeria, becoming turncoats overnight and stepping up this war.

When Socialists and Communists call upon laboring people to defend the "rights and liberties" granted by the Republic, laboring people have a tendency, rather, to snigger. For, it was the Socialists and the Communists that abolished what might remain of these rights and liberties by voting dictatorial powers to Pflimlin, which will be used tomorrow by de Gaulle.

The true strength of de Gaulle lies, for the moment, not in the bands of fascists or in the generals; it is to be found in the rottenness of the regime, about which everyone is aware. No one in France feels like lifting their little finger to defend that regime, the regime of scheming and torture, of [\[right-wing former French Prime Minister Joseph\] Laniel](#) and [\[Socialist MP and Governor General of Algeria Robert\] Lacoste](#). The "working-class" parties are in reality playing into the hands of de Gaulle and are demoralizing people when those parties try to persuade them that the sole alternative is between *that* Republic and the dictatorship of de Gaulle. For, laboring people know that between Pflimlin and de Gaulle there is only a difference in degree and their policies are essentially the same: a policy of war and exploitation.

There Is Another Power Besides That of the Bosses and the Parties

There is, however, another policy [*politique*], one opposed to Pflimlin's, to those of de Gaulle, [\[Socialist Guy\] Mollet](#), and [\[Communist Maurice\] Thorez](#), one that would express the interests of laboring people and would win the

backing of the great majority of the population. This is a policy that would abolish capitalist exploitation, would entrust the total management of business enterprises to the wage earners, would orient production toward the satisfaction of the population's needs and not toward war, would make laboring people's democratic bodies the sole bodies of power. This is a policy that would give all power and all rights to laboring people and would abolish the power and the rights of the employing class, its generals, its high-ranking officials, and its politicians.

It is not the current so-called working-class parties, the French CP and the [Socialists'] SFIO [[French Section of the Workers' International](#)] that are going to propose this policy. Well ensconced in their cushy parliamentary seats, they never talk about it.

Such a policy can be imposed only through the action and the organization of laboring people themselves. It will be able to be achieved only when, in all companies and all sectors, the workers, the employees, the low-level civil servants, and the students organize themselves; when they set up their own Councils, made up of delegates from each shop and each office, democratically elected and able to be recalled at any moment; when these Councils, federated on the national scale, show that they represent the great majority of the nation, the immense power of laboring people, and that they are capable of imposing the interests of laboring people, *such as these people themselves judge those interests and define those interests*, as the supreme goal of all politics [*politique*].

As long as laboring people do not organize themselves in order to impose *their* solution, society will just seesaw between the rotten Republic and dictatorship, without being able to exit from the crisis it is undergoing.

Laboring People Can Struggle Against What Is Being Prepared for Them

Yet at the present time, laboring people are plunged into disarray. They understand that heavier exploitation, complete subservience is being prepared for them. Yet they

do not see how to organize themselves and to struggle. The majority of them do not follow the instructions of the current political and trade-union organizations because thirteen years of experience have shown them that those organizations are not defending their interests and because, at present, those organizations are offering them nothing other than “defense of the Republic.”

Nevertheless, the force of laboring people is immense. A general strike could sweep away both Pflimlin and de Gaulle. And to get themselves organized and to struggle, the workers do not need to wait for instructions from the current organizations—*instructions that will not come*. The big strikes of the Summer of 1953 were triggered by laboring people from the public sector without any order coming from the trade unions. In 1955, in Nantes and Saint-Nazaire, laboring people conducted their struggle while leaving aside the trade-union organizations. In July 1957, it was bank employees that went on strike and the trade unions that made no effort except to betray them.

The sole effective riposte against the war policy, against exploitation, and against dictatorship comes neither from “petitions” nor from “vigilance” nor from the Thorez-Mollet alliance with [\[French Foreign Minister René\] Pleven](#) and [\[conservative French politician and former French Prime Minister Antoine\] Pinay](#). It is the real struggle of laboring people through their decisive weapon: *the strike*.

On the objectives of this struggle, there can today be no hesitation:

- immediate peace in Algeria, through the recognition of the *independence* of the Algerian people;
- defense of living and working conditions, full restoration of wage earners' *purchasing power*;
- defense of the *rights* and *liberties* of laboring people, of their right to assembly, to demonstrate, to publish newspapers, to strike.

Real struggle for these objectives is capable of uniting the laboring classes in unanimity. The comrades who refuse to sign petitions in defense of the cushy situation of legislators will march enthusiastically if it is a matter of a real and effective struggle in defense of their genuine interests.

Yet it is evident that this struggle will be organized neither by the parties nor by the trade unions. It therefore must be prepared by laboring people themselves. For that, there is but one means:

- in each shop, each office, each company, the most determined comrades must take the initiative to set up *Workers' Strike Committees for Immediate Peace in Algeria, for the Defense of Laboring People's Wages and Liberties*;
- these Committees must establish regular connections [*liaisons*] among themselves, company to company and locality to locality.
- these Committees must call upon all the workers in their company to express their ideas, the objectives for which they want to struggle, and the means they consider the most appropriate.

It is no longer a matter of signing petitions, of sending delegations, or of "being prepared" like boy scouts. *It is a matter of getting prepared as soon as possible for a real and effective struggle and of associating all laboring people with these preparations.*

Only such an initiative can bring laboring people out of their present disarray, allow them to overcome their fragmentation, and give them confidence in their endless strength. If a few Struggle Committees, determined to act effectively, set themselves up and address themselves to other laboring people, France would be covered tomorrow with similar Committees.

This text was drafted and printed by working-class comrades, employees, students, and intellectuals who have gathered together to define their position in the face of events and who have decided to organize themselves in a group for:

WORKERS' POWER¹

¹T/E: In French: *POUVOIR OUVRIER*—which became [the title of the monthly newspaper](#) the Socialisme ou Barbarie group began publishing in [December 1958](#).

Crisis of Gaullism and Crisis of the “Left”*

Strange country. In mid-September, a well-prepared assassination attempt against de Gaulle failed. Had it succeeded, it is the French Fifth Republic that would have exploded. Three weeks later, de Gaulle’s troupe, on tour in the poorest *départements* of France, was a big success, and the main player mingled with the crowd. And yet, those same peasants who acclaim him, or else their brothers, had been blocking routes for the previous two months in order to protest against his agricultural policy. In Paris and elsewhere, plastic-bomb explosions followed one after another. They could have blown up entire blocks of homes; they broke only windows. In Algeria, the outlaw [\[retired French Army General, former Commander-in-Chief in French Algeria, and coorganizer of the Algiers Putsch Raoul\] Salan](#) addressed the population on the wavelength of the previously sabotaged official radio station. Is the OAS [\[Organisation armée secrète \(Secret Army Organization\)\]](#) going to try its luck? [Monsieur \[Philippe\] Marçais](#), an ultraright *[ultra]* deputy from Algiers, told it in [\[the pro-OAS weekly\] Carrefour](#) that this “would be very inopportune.” And with imperturbable seriousness, the newspaper *Le Monde* published the following headline: “The Government Intends to Ward off a New Putsch.” Should it then be thought that this does not go without saying? Perhaps. In any case, in order to ward it off, the French Council of Ministers is confining itself to conducting, “week in, week out, a clinical examination of the situation in Algeria.”

This is perhaps, too, all that is in its power. The OAS could not do what it does, in Algeria, and even in France, without solid connivance *[complicités]* within the Army, the police, the administration, and ministerial circles. So, what authority is the machinery of the state obeying? That depends: “For two years now, the most wanted activists

*Originally published as “Crise du gaullisme et crise de la ‘gauche,’” [S. ou B., 33 \(December 1961\)](#): 1-9. Reprinted in *SF*, 151-64, and *EPI*, 319-29. [T/E: Signed under the Castoriadis pseudonym “Jean Delvaux.”]

are rarely discovered; if they are kind enough to turn themselves in, it is difficult to find judges to sentence them, and if by some miracle they are imprisoned, it is quite natural for them to be released. The roads are safe only for escapees, and the borders are like sieves." This admirably stylistic description comes from [*Le Monde's* associate editor] Jacques Fauvet (*Le Monde*, October 1-2, 1961). Only, what is called "the spinelessness of the established power" should be given its true name: the decomposition of the state apparatus.

Everyone is talking about an imminent putsch, but no one seems to be overly worried about it. The professional politicians have declared that the country is in danger; they have proclaimed the need to regroup and unite the democrats and even the republicans—and then they return to their card playing [*belotes*]. [\[Former French Prime Minister\] Monsieur \[Pierre\] Mendès France](#) called a press conference in order to let it be known that the country was on the brink of civil war, after which he left for Italy. As for average Frenchmen, they are working, allowing themselves to be exploited, watching TV, and sleeping as if the potential putsch was of absolutely no concern to them. A few appeals to prepare the struggle against the activists have fallen flat; the constitution of an antifascist committee in Saint-Brieuc, another one in Albi have been announced.

Two key conditions therefore seem to have been brought together for a new putsch to break out and even to succeed. If the generals and the prefects, the police captains and the investigating judges, before combating a coup, are waiting to be sure that the coup will not gain the upper hand, and if the population absolutely refuses to take any interest therein—then indeed a solid organization of conspirators could seize power.

Yet what would such an organization actually do? The success of an OAS putsch would be, *ipso facto*, its failure. Say there is some sort of Salan "in power," in Paris. Would he reverse the current Algerian policy? Let us grant that. He nevertheless would, if he wanted to conduct the war in an all-out way, have to make French society work [*marcher*] in all senses of the word. Now, beyond a minuscule fringe group of ultrarightists, no one in France wants the war to continue. The

bourgeoisie wants to be done with it, for the war yields nothing and risks, in being prolonged, seriously disturbing the pursuit of its affairs. Laboring people have, until now, remained apathetic for many reasons, but also because they believed that de Gaulle would make peace. This apathy would not continue for long if what was proposed to them was an endless pursuit of the war. Draftees have already shown, on April 22 [1961, the date of the [Algiers Putsch](#)], that they will not passively accept just any fate. Finally, all Western governments would unite against a policy that would push the FLN [Front de libération nationale ([Algerian National Liberation Front](#))] into the arms of the USSR and China.

Salan, or whoever, therefore could not reverse policy on Algeria without himself being overthrown [*renversé*] in a few weeks. Might the putsch be but the point of departure for the instauration of a quasi-Fascism, would the OAS people be aiming at the instauration of a new regime in France itself, and, come what may, in Algeria? This prospect has as little merit as the previous one. Neither a fascist or similar regime nor even a movement is at present possible in France, for they would have neither a program nor an ideology nor a base in any section of the masses, nor, even and especially, any support from the dominant strata, who find themselves quite happy with the present-day situation and have no reason to embark upon an adventure that would end very badly anyway.

Yet, it will be said, granted all that, that the OAS people are not obliged to see this. After all, the situation was not so different on April 22.

Indeed. And one cannot rule out an attempt on the part of the activists to seize power in Algeria or secede there. What can be ruled out is that the activists, in power or not, might impose their policy. And what is more than unlikely is that they ever arrive in power in France. The situation is certainly different in Algeria, but there again, as Jean-François Lyotard shows in an article that will be read below,¹

¹1979 note: "L'Algérie, sept ans après," [S. ou B., 33: 10-16](#) [T/E: translated as "Algeria: Seven Years After," in Lyotard's [Political Writings](#), trans. Bill Readings with Kevin Paul Geiman, Foreword and Notes Bill Readings (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1993), pp. 286-92].

the prospects for an OAS being installed in power are strictly nil. Let us add that, in case of a limited coup in Algeria, the OAS would have to confront not only and not so much the "loyalist" party of the Administration and the Army but the draftees and the Muslim masses, whose attitude will be determined, much more than by the official instructions of the FLN, by the unquenchable hatred of the racist colonists, which the atmosphere and racist attacks of the last few months have done nothing to quell.

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If the idea of a putsch is in the view of many taking shape in a way that it would not have taken on its own, that is because it arises upon a background of another observed fact that is infinitely more serious and incontestable: the decomposition of the state apparatus and the collapse of the political institutions of capitalism, Parliament and parties.

This decomposition and this collapse are not new: they are what have already rendered [\[the 1958 Algiers military coup of\] May 13](#) possible—that other putsch that had both succeeded and failed. As an attempt by the most backward elements of French society, from [the 1940 World War II French defeat at] Dunkerque to [the first French nuclear test, which took place February 13, 1960 south of the Algerian oasis city of] Tamanrasset, to impose the utopian and anachronistic policy of "French Algeria," that putsch succeeded in overthrowing France's Fourth Republic only by failing to meet its own objectives; coopted by the dominant classes from the home country, it was placed into the service of ends that are absolutely contrary to those of the colonists and of the activist officers of Algiers. In the short term, what was at issue was to put things in order amid the widespread chaos created during the final period of the Fourth Republic; in a longer term, it was a matter of rationalizing the economic, social, and political structures of capitalism, of resolving the contradiction between the growth of a modern industrial sector and the enormous weight of the archaic features in the economy, politics, and the State, and of liquidating on the best terms possible the colonial empire and the Algerian War.

The balance sheet [*bilan*] for the new regime, from the standpoint of French capitalism, cannot be calculated in a simple way. The immediate economic situation of French capitalism, which in the Spring of 1958 was on the verge of bankruptcy, has been straightened out. The budget has been balanced, inflation eliminated, the balance of external payments, now in the black, has allowed almost two billion dollars in debt to be reimbursed and gold and dollar reserves to grow from 370 million dollars at the end of 1958 to 2.85 trillion at the end of September 1961. The secret of this recovery is quite simple: while rationalization of production, new investments, and an accelerated pace of work increased industrial production by 20 percent between 1957 and 1960, the real wages of laboring people, after a substantial drop in 1958 and especially in 1959, barely returned, at the end of 1960, to their 1957 level. It was only in 1961 that an increase in real wages roughly parallel to increased productivity resumed.

While nothing positive has been done about the major structural problems (agriculture, distribution, education, housing, and urban planning), at least the effects of the "spontaneous" movement of capitalism have not been impeded as in the past; they have even been favored by the acceleration of the Common Market and the heightened integration of French production into the world market. The absorption of peasants by cities and industry has intensified, the factories are going to seek cheap and docile manpower in the depths of the provinces, and labor agreements about specialization have transformed several sectors of industry.

The decolonization of Black Africa was inevitable, but with the way in which it was carried out by de Gaulle it ended in a frantic retreat. Without recalling the farce of [the French "Community,"](#) it suffices to note that the "French presence" in Black Africa is henceforth a function solely of subsidies paid by Paris to the local governments and will last as long as those subsidies do.

Yet everyone is noting the failure of Gaullism in Algeria and its inability to reconstitute the state apparatus. These are evidently two phenomena that are mutually conditioned, but their deep-seated and common cause is ultimately the very

nature of the regime, its mode of social and political existence. The regime was born, and could only be born, of an operation at the top. It was not brought to power, nor was it maintained there, by a genuine political movement, which would have entailed active adherence on the part of some sector of society. Its strategy has therefore naturally consisted in an attempt to restore and consolidate the state apparatus from the top, profiting from the purely passive and plebiscitary support of the great majority of the population. To do this, it first had to bring the Army of Algeria back under Paris's authority. This process, broached in September 1958, has never been able to be brought to a conclusion. De Gaulle has not been able to exit from this vicious circle; he has, rather, miserably become tangled up in it: in order to liquidate the Army's pretensions to a political role, the basis for such pretensions, the Algerian War, had to be eliminated; and in order to end the war, one had to be able to force the officers into silence. In fact, the prolongation of the war was constantly reviving the potential for dissidence on the part of the activist officers, and such dissidence rendered still more difficult the conclusion of an agreement with the FLN. It must be recognized that the implausible absurdities characteristic of the conduct of the Algerian affair for three years—the prevarications, the recantations, the postponements, the refusals to negotiate followed by the unilateral and uncompensated granting of what had fiercely been refused—do not result only from the personal incapacity of de Gaulle and his lack of realism but reflect, as well, this objective situation.

In this regard, plebiscites could be of no assistance. The vicious circle could have been broken only by a real political force in the home country, which would have inspired and impelled the state apparatus, brought some strata of the population to support Gaullist policy, and furnished the staff [*cadres*] who would have carried through this policy. Now, the French bourgeoisie has been and remains incapable of producing such a political force. Nothing is more striking than the contrast between the diligence with which the members of the French bourgeoisie and French "executives [*cadres*]" go about managing their private affairs and this mixture of incapacity and indifference that characterizes them

as soon as it comes to “politics”—that is to say, their collective affairs; nothing is more striking than the contradiction between the flourishing economic state of French capitalism and its dilapidation on the state and political levels. From the failure of Mendésisme to this frog pond of shady dealings that is the UNR [[Union pour la nouvelle République](#)] ([Gaullist Union for the New Republic](#)), and passing by way of the ridiculous “neo-right” of [[French Senator Roger](#)] [Duchet](#) and the pitiful “left Gaullists,” the history of the last ten years provides a sufficient illustration thereof. The explanation for this fact is to be sought in the social and political history of France for many long years,² but also and especially in the most deep-seated traits of the present period. A new, and essentially conservative, political movement could not be constituted in the context of capitalist society’s general depoliticization and collapse of values. One does not see where it might find the ideas, staff, enthusiasm, and power to mystify any, ever-so-slight sector of the population.

The bourgeoisie has therefore supported the Gaullist regime; it has not been able to nourish that regime and turn it into a force capable of regenerating the decayed state apparatus, still less to impose new orientations where what was needed was an effort of political creation. The regime has certain and solid social bases in all the privileged or even modestly well-to-do strata, which see in it the sole force capable of saving the country from “chaos.” It does not have political bases; it rests on a mixture of imaginary and negative elements: the myth of de Gaulle and widespread political apathy. This would suffice if the times were tranquil, the Army disciplined, and the police loyal. This is not the case.

It is under these conditions that the myth of de Gaulle is called upon to fulfill a function that swells as the established power’s grip on reality dwindles, that is to say, as demonstrations of lack of foresight, incompetence, incapacity, incoherency, and total emptiness of the regime and its head

²See, in [issue 25 of *S. ou B.*](#), the set of texts published under the heading *La Crise française et le gaullisme* (The French crisis and Gaullism).

pile up. When an era does not have great men, it invents them, and for French society it is so key for de Gaulle to be a great statesman that a sort of unconscious conspiracy makes itself felt even among the regime's opponents in order to preserve the myth. Worse than the Hans Christian Andersen tale, recognizing that the King is naked would be unbearable because that would be to recognize the nullity of the entire political universe and of oneself. The failures can keep on piling up,³ but through them and because of them a de Gaulle entity is constituted apart from and above all the acts of the regime, which escapes criticism and even appraisal. One deems inadequate, false, stupid, catastrophic everything in particular that de Gaulle does—the General in general is always preserved. And this will be so for as long as the myth retains its vital importance for the system's survival—therefore, for as long as de Gaulle remains in power.

Thus, there has been no solution to the political problem of French capitalism, and this means that the present regime remains at the mercy of a serious internal or external crisis, of an attitudinal change on the part of the population, and even that it hangs on the survival of de Gaulle (that the fate of a regime might depend on the accident of the death of an individual is in no way accidental, for that expresses precisely the incapacity of the society under consideration to resolve the problem of its political leadership). Under this heading, whatever might be the degree of the economy's modernization in the coming years, a key difference will remain between French capitalism and the other modern capitalist countries: a fundamental fragility of the state system and the political system. Reforms of the Constitution will not change anything, so long as the institution and the life of new "right-wing" and "left-wing" political organizations remain impossible.

³Let us mention, without choosing between them, the rickety Constitution of France's Fifth Republic; the ever shrinking [\[French\] "Community"](#); the exploit of turning [\[the first President of Ivory Coast Félix\] Houphouët-Boigny](#) into an ultranationalist; the Algerian mess; the fissures introduced into Western policy toward the Russians; the dictatorial powers used for five months to transfer two sergeants and three gendarmes, etc.

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The ridiculousness of the established power obviously has its counterpart in the ridiculousness of the “opposition.” A censure motion, tabled when it was to be declared inadmissible, is no longer tabled when it could have been put to a vote. A prior question tabled with great fanfare is quickly withdrawn upon the request of the Government. What then are the heroes of the Fourth Republic seeking? To remind people that they exist. Visibly without believing in it themselves, they brandish the threat of a fascist putsch; the kinds of regroupings they propose in order to face up to that threat are limited to one ninety-minute meeting between Mendès France and Guy Mollet. Mollet? The mind boggles. So, who installed [\[Governor General of Algeria Robert Lacoste\]](#) in Algiers, retained Salan and [\[Brigadier General Jacques\] Massu](#), recalled the reserve troops to service, and attacked Suez? And who was one of de Gaulle’s senior ministers from May to November 1958?⁴ They are talking about regrouping, but how many people would these chiefs be capable of mobilizing for any sort of action? And what are they proposing? Nothing; the most explicit, Mendès France, is demanding carte blanche for two months to make peace in Algeria and “to propose new institutions to the country,” which the country would without any doubt have to approve by referendum (one must not lose good habits). What kind of institutions? No doubt is allowed on this score, when one sees the coalition taking shape that is to prepare them: a rehash of the Fourth Republic is all that those parties will be capable of producing, if they are given the opportunity to do so.

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One therefore cannot be surprised at the absolute indifference displayed by the population toward these

⁴T/E: The answer to all these questions is the Socialist Guy Mollet, who served as “one of four Secretaries of State in [de Gaulle’s] first cabinet” (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guy_Mollet#Supporter_of_de_Gaulle).

haunting ghosts. The great majority of laboring people do not believe in the fascist threat, about which they are not wrong, and do not see how the company of Monsieur Mollet would help them to combat that threat, about which they are right. But there are obviously some much more deep-seated and long-lasting factors involved in this attitude. There is, as the fruit of longstanding experience,⁵ the contempt for traditional politics and politicians, rightly seen as crooks gathered in a circus; the conviction that, in any case, such agitations will change nothing essential about living and working conditions; the discouragement about the possibility of changing the way society is organized; finally, the loss of the idea that laboring people can have another kind of action, autonomous action that is not situated on the terrain of traditional politics but aims at destroying traditional politics as well as the society from which such a politics proceeds. Here we have the traits that are common to all modern capitalist countries.

Yet in France, the negative traits of this situation have been accentuated still further by another factor: the prostration of laboring people when it comes to making demands. The French proletariat has, without reacting, suffered a reduction in its standard of living, an acceleration of the pace of work, savings made on personnel costs, and a hardening of "discipline" in production that were imposed on it in 1958-1959. Reinforced by some temporary factors—political events, the threat of firings at the time of the recession of 1959 and as a function of the rationalization of business enterprises, the increased discredit the trade unions have undergone, the very impression that this was just a passing phase—such inaction, which contrasts with the combativeness, on the *industrial* level, of the English and American proletariat, for example, expresses some key features of the postwar situation of the French proletariat. The quite deep political and trade-union division since 1947-1948; the peculiar traits of the trade-union bureaucracy, which is in part the near-direct vassal of successive governments, in part subordinated, via the French

⁵An analysis of this experience was provided in "Bilan," in *S. ou B.*, 26 (November 1958): 3-12. [Reprinted in *EMO2*, 89-116, and *EP2*, 249-67. T/E: See "Results," above in the present volume.]

CP, to Russian foreign policy; the intergenerational gulf [*la rupture entre les générations*]⁶ and young workers' rejection of the old forms of organization for some years now;⁷ subsidiarily, the entrance of a large number of peasants into industry and the large-scale importation of foreign laborers, who thereby attain a substantially higher level of pay—these are the factors that explain the feeble combativeness of the French proletariat over the past thirteen years, as well as its numerous failures. Those factors equally explain the ease with which the trade-union bureaucracies have been able to erase even the memory of working-class forms of struggle and explain the fact that picket lines, solidarity actions, and fund-raising collections for strikers have become so rare in France.

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For three years, laboring people have had to wrestle against the very tough conditions of their existence. To the decline in the standard of living were added job insecurity and a hardening of working conditions. On the collective level, they found before them only division, threadbare organizations, and dead traditions. Now, they are beginning to get out of that. The slow revival of struggles, begun more than a year ago, is becoming more pronounced, as can be seen in the repeated successes of the latest strikes in the public sector. Another characteristic fact, alongside some wage demands, is that one is witnessing the appearance of demands concerning working conditions and living conditions within the business enterprise.

The heroic demonstrations of the Algerians protesting against the ghetto life that is their official lot in the Paris of 1961 arrive at the same moment to remind the French population in a brutal way that thousands of men living

⁶T/E: The English-language term *generation gap* was not formally coined until later in the decade of the Sixties.

⁷See Daniel Mothé's article, "Les jeunes générations ouvrières," published in *S. ou B.*, 33 (December 1961-November 1962): 17-42.

alongside it are ready to face combat and death in order to bring an end to oppression. These demonstrations also come to reveal, once again, the unspeakable ignominy of all the "left-wing" organizations that protest in words against the way in which the Algerians are treated, though not for a second do they envisage any *effective* solidarity, in the street, with the Algerians who are demonstrating; for [\[French Communist leader\] Thorez](#) and his people, no less than for Monsieur Robinet,⁸ the Algerians are untouchable pariahs.

The coming putsch; what de Gaulle is thinking, and what he will say on his next trip; the grouping together of the PSU [Parti Socialiste Unifié ([Unified Socialist Party](#))] and the SFIO [[French Section of the Workers' International](#)]; the regime's succession—such unreal trivialities are these: here we have the "realistic" concerns of a good number of nevertheless sincere militants. The struggle of the Algerian people for freedom over there and here; the struggles of French laboring people against exploitation, which are recommencing—here we have what is *real* at present. It is on the basis of this *reality* that a new workers' movement worthy of the name will be able to be reconstructed in France—not on the basis of empty agitation against an imaginary fascism. And the task of militants is not to mystify laboring people and to mystify themselves by calling for regroupings that are at once impossible, sterile, and shameful. The task is to settle down patiently to carrying out this reconstruction of the workers' movement by aiding laboring people in their struggles, by bringing about a rebirth of a socialist consciousness among the members of the proletariat, by fostering understanding of the nature of the Algerian War, and by arousing the active solidarity of French laboring people with the Algerians engaged in struggle.

The task of militants is not a confused antifascism or preparation for de Gaulle's succession. It is the construction of a revolutionary organization engaged in struggle, with and for laboring people.

⁸T/E: Presumably, the journalist [Louis-Gabriel Robinet \(1909-1975\)](#), who would become the editor of the conservative daily *Le Figaro* in 1965.

APPENDIXES

BETA

The French Situation and the Policy of the PCI*

The international political situation is characterized by the existence of three principal factors: imperialism, Stalinism, and the revolutionary proletariat, among which all conciliation is impossible, and which find themselves, since the end of the War, in extremely unstable relationships. None of these three factors exits from the War with a clearly defined and determined status; none comes out definitively crushed or totally victorious; and none can yield anything essential to another without thereby annihilating itself.

The political instability of capitalism, an expression of its economic crisis but also of its political decomposition, is expressed, in the countries of Western Europe, by another fact: *the incapacity of the bourgeoisie to govern through its own parties*, and its recourse to class-collaborationist governments. The cause for this is clear: following the bankruptcy of the traditional bourgeois parties and the disintegration of the state apparatus caused by the War and following its economic collapse, which prevented it from satisfying even the most elementary needs of the masses, the bourgeoisie has no other way out but that of overt dictatorship. However, its political impotence and the general rise of the workers' movement forbid it, at the present hour, from having recourse thereto. This is why it is obliged to accept class-collaborationist governments. Despite the

*1979 note: Text drafted in April 1947 and published in issue 42 of the *Bulletin intérieur* of the Parti Communiste Internationaliste (October 1947). I reprint here only the final part, which deals specifically with the French situation at the time. The first part of the text was reworked and considerably developed in the report presented to the PCI's Fourth Congress, "La crise du capitalisme mondial et l'intervention du parti dans les luttes," which was reprinted in *CMRI*, 15-118. [FRENCH EDITORS: This text will be reprinted in the *On the Dynamic of Capitalism* volume of our edition. "La situation française et la politique du PCI" appeared in *SF*, 15-51, and was reprinted in *EPI*, 333-62. T/E: For "La crise du capitalisme mondial..." signed by "Chaulieu (Castoriadis), [\(Laurent Marchesin\)](#), Mercier, Montal (Claude Lefort), and Robert," see the excerpted translation "Stalinism in France" in [PSWI](#).]

bourgeoisie's pressing economic as well as political need to instaurate authoritarian regimes, and despite all the betrayals of "working-class" parties, such regimes cannot yet be installed.

Consequently, from the objective standpoint the situation remains that of a profound crisis of the capitalist regime, one whose outcome is not apparent, and it can in this sense be defined as an objectively revolutionary situation.

Yet, while the objective situation appears relatively clear, the subjective situation is infinitely more complicated and cannot be grasped solely with the aid of traditional schemata. This is what has provoked, within the Party,¹ this veritable dialogue of the deaf about the "rise" and the "retreat" of the workers' movement. We cannot but sketch here a certain number of fundamental traits of the situation and refer to a special text we will be publishing shortly:

1. In comparison to the prewar years, the proletariat offers an infinitely heightened potential for combat. This combat potential has actively manifested itself in a series of big conflicts, going all the way to armed struggle, which have taken place since 1943 (Italy, Greece, Belgium, the colonies, strikes in the USA, etc.) and which continue to explode.

2. The momentaneous failures of the proletarian offensive are due everywhere to Stalinist betrayal and not to the bourgeoisie's own strength. That is true even in the case in which the intervention of the bourgeoisie has taken the

¹FRENCH EDITORS: Let us recall that it is a question here of the (Trotskyist) "Parti Communiste Internationaliste" [PCI, [the Internationalist Communist Party](#)], from which Castoriadis distanced himself in order to found S. ou B. As concerns the analysis of the economic and political situation, it can easily be seen that the text remains within a perspective from which Castoriadis would gradually break between 1953 and 1959, then in an entirely explicit fashion in "Modern Capitalism and Revolution" (translated in [PSW2](#)). The vocabulary ("traitorous parties," "idealist and typically petty-bourgeois theory," etc.) and the ideas ("general crisis of capitalism," "crisis of revolutionary leadership"), and even certain typographical peculiarities like the abuse of capitalization may today be cause for irritation: they are those of the era, within certain milieux. If one does not linger over them, one will see that a certain number of insights justify this republication, though in an appendix.

form of a military offensive by modern armies against a small, ill-armed people, as in Greece, where the English would have quickly been thrown into the sea without the policy of the CP. Nothing further is required to condemn irremediably the whole mythology of a general “retreat,” which has been put forward by the party’s right wing.

3. It is wrong to consider in general the moment of “Liberation” in various countries as the culminating point of the crisis triggered by the War. The way events have evolved has demonstrated the following thing—which, for us, was easy to foresee—that, at the moment of “Liberation,” there existed, alongside some factors that might appear to a superficial analysis to be simply positive factors for the situation—patriotic militias, “popular committees”—some very weighty negative factors, which have essentially determined how the situation has developed. Principally: the strength of Stalinist parties, the ideological confusion of “National Liberation,” of the “Resistance,” and of the “ongoing antifascist war,” the extreme weakness of the revolutionary vanguard. Furthermore, the bodies that came out of the “Resistance”—militias and committees—were, on account of their social composition, the confusion of their ideological base, and the totalitarian bureaucratic grip of the Stalinists, in their immense majority incapable of playing an autonomous role in the concrete circumstances of the era. This situation could, in the most “favorable” of cases, have evolved only toward a Stalinist dictatorship, such as has been seen in the countries of the glaxis. It is easily understood why, with its idealization of the “Resistance,” the Party’s right wing also idealized the situation of August 1944 by presenting it as an authentically revolutionary situation; it is also understood why, in placing itself on this false foundation, it has since been plotting a chart of constant retreat.

4. The period from 1944 until today is characterized on the international level by a standstill that includes partial advances and retreats devoid, however, of decisive significance, with abrupt local explosions that do not succeed in becoming internationally widespread [*se généraliser internationalement*] or in attaining some clear forms of class struggle—and always on a subjective level without possible

comparison to that of the prewar period. We must be done with the oversimplifications [*schématisme*] of the [Pierre Frank](#) tendency, which allowed the Party's right wing to win out at the Third Congress by exploiting the righteous indignation a certain number of comrades felt against the mythology of "permanent radicalization." We must rid ourselves of *a priori* schemata and open our eyes to reality. The masses have escaped from the direct political and ideological grip of the bourgeoisie, and on this point one observes no retreat (even when taking as a basis the test, highly disadvantageous for the "working-class" parties, of the electoral results in all the countries of Europe). However, we are not observing any widespread offensive that would attain clear forms of class struggle. We are seeing local explosions, which continue with neither victory nor decisive defeat (for example, Greece, Indochina) and which place themselves under the total grip of Stalinism—which itself has not been outflanked, even partially, anywhere. The general aspects of the situation remain, in general, without any great change. This situation can be characterized as a standstill.

5. On the subjective level, the key problem remains that of the appraisal of the masses' consciousness, of the character of the illusions they place in the traitorous parties, and of the nature and effects of their connection with those parties. This is the most complex point of the problem, and on this the Party's two main tendencies, with the "low level of consciousness of the masses" or "pure revolutionary consciousness," have contributed to the discussion only the proof of the bankruptcy of their own consciousness.

The facts are there: (a) in almost all European countries, the masses are rid of the direct political and ideological grip of the bourgeoisie; (b) in moving to the left, the masses find along their path the "working-class" parties and especially the CPs, which are themselves much further "to the right" than before the War; (c) these parties have succeeded until now in capturing the masses' energy, and their connection with the masses does not remain without influence on the consciousness of these masses. The illusions the masses are nourishing with regard to the traitorous parties are not comparable to the prewar illusions, especially as

concerns the Stalinist party. We will explain ourselves below at length about Stalinism, but let us say right away that, far from simply expressing “a pure revolutionary consciousness and illusions about the revolutionary character of Stalinism” —as comrade Frank would have it—or a “profound drop in consciousness and a depoliticization of the proletariat,” as the vulgar anti-Stalinism of Lucien and [\[Daniel\] Guérin](#) would have it, the masses’ movement toward the CPs has a twofold signification. It expresses the overcoming of capitalism and its bankruptcy within the masses’ consciousness but also the fact that the masses not only do not turn immediately toward revolutionary solutions but put up, it could be said, with Stalinism and constantly undergo its ideological influence, with all that such influence entails.

To sum up: The objective situation still remains that of a fundamental crisis of capitalism. Yet, onto an objectively revolutionary solution a subjectively revolutionary situation is not automatically grafted. There is not a straightforward relationship between economics and politics; there is no sort of automatic functioning in history. If the proletariat’s situation from the subjective standpoint is infinitely more favorable than that of the final years of the prewar period, it would be disastrous to hide—as the Frank tendency does—the dark features of the picture that reside mainly in Stalinism. The fundamental factor of “disruption” is Stalinism, and the struggle, not through adjectives but through an assiduous policy against Stalinism, has become the most urgent task of the revolutionary proletariat.

The French Situation

The Economy

We will not dwell here on the general factors of the economic crisis of French capitalism, which are well known: aging equipment, lack of raw materials and manpower, lack of capital, usurious character of French capitalism since 1900, loss of almost all of its outlets, colonial crisis, and so on. Nor shall we dwell on the fact that the postwar “recovery” of the French economy was extremely slow, that since Autumn 1946

it topped out at a level 10 to 15 percent lower than that of 1938, itself lower than that of 1913. Nor will we insist on the fact that, after three years of "reconstruction," French capitalism has not succeeded in ensuring the normal operation of its domestic market. Let us underscore just two basic points:

1. Among the various capitalisms that entered the War, French capitalism was put to the severest test. We know that its prewar economic and political position no longer corresponded to its real strength but rather to an artificial distension. The War burst this situation apart, and French capitalism today appears in its constitutively weakened state, which forever prevents it not only from regaining its previous rank but even from appearing as relatively "autonomous." The factors involved in the general crisis of capitalism play out with especial violence on the French plane, and there one has what prevents one from foreseeing a genuine "recovery" of production in France.

2. The basic need of French capitalism at present is to build its capital back up, and such rebuilding is possible only by favorably anticipating some political factors, like the attitude of the USA and that of the French proletariat and of colonial peoples. The French economy is consequently at the mercy of political developments, and until now such developments have far from been favorable to it (colonial wars, weak American assistance, etc.). French capitalism is trying to face up to this situation though "accelerated accumulation," that is to say, through constant increase in the exploitation of the proletariat, which is its last hope. The fact that, despite the possibility it had until now to exploit the proletariat to an ever-greater extent, it has not been able to enter into a phase of genuine recovery constitutes the best proof of its weakness and the most pertinent refutation of all the idle talk about "stabilization." It also allows us to see that the French economic system is at the mercy of the first slightly serious proletarian offensive; this is what explains the stability of tripartism.²

²T/E: *Tripartisme* refers to "a three-party alliance of communists, socialists and Christian democrats" ([English Wikipedia, s.v.](#)) that began in 1944 and ended in May 1947, just a month after Castoriadis drafted this text.

The Political Situation

Despite the bourgeoisie's urgent need to go on the attack in order to instaurate an authoritarian regime, such an attack remains for it precluded for a long time, because:

- a) of its political erosion, which it has still not succeeded in overcoming,
- b) of the power of the "working-class" parties and mainly of the Stalinist party,
- c) especially, of the working class's great potential for combat.

This situation has forced tripartism, and in general class-collaborationist governments, on the bourgeoisie. Under these conditions, the only meaning of the Gaullist campaign is that of a long-term preparatory effort and that campaign does not constitute an immediate threat.³

For us, however, the most important factor in the situation is the state of the working class, in connection with the grip of the traitorous "working-class" parties, which is the main brake on struggles at the present hour.

It must be underscored, first of all, that we cannot live on while "eating up" the theoretical and political capital bequeathed to us by Marx, Lenin, and Trotsky. More particularly, as concerns the "working-class" parties, the obvious change in their character as compared to 1918-1939,

Castoriadis began his article "Sartre, Stalinism, and the Workers" (*S. ou B.*, 12 [August 1953]; translated in *PSWI*) by explaining: "In the spring of 1947 the Stalinist party left the government. It was forced to by the revolt of workers who no longer would swallow its 'produce first' line (which brought with it more and more misery) and also by the fact that it no longer could continue playing its double game on the Indochina question. The year 1947 had been marked by great working-class struggles. The Stalinists spent the time readjusting their policies. Openly against the strikes when they began, the Stalinists later tried to curtail them from within, but the rapidly deepening rift between the Soviet Union and the United States and France's ultimate passage over to the American side obliged them to totally change their strategy and their tactics."

³T/E: De Gaulle, who had resigned as head of the French government on January 20, 1946, did indeed remain out of power until June 1, 1958.

which was readied by long-term developments, renders necessary a new appraisal of the nature of these parties and, as a consequence, a reorientation of our policy.

As concerns French Social Democracy, two observations immediately come to the fore:

a) The change in its social composition. The SFIO [[French Section of the Workers' International](#)] has lost the major part of its working-class base, to the benefit of the French CP. The majority of "socialist" "militants," and as is all the more the case for their voters, belong today to the petty bourgeoisie.

b) In terms of this fact, and of the policy it has constantly implemented for many long years, it has become wrong to characterize the SFIO as a "reformist workers' party." The SFIO is today a "radical," that is to say, in fact conservative, petty-bourgeois party.⁴

For these reasons, and for more general reasons that concern the overall situation of French capitalism, the SFIO, despite its electoral collapse—which will no doubt become more pronounced—will constitute, so long as a radical change in the situation does not intervene, the master plank of the bourgeois political scaffold—either in the form of a "coalition" with bourgeois parties or in the form of homogeneous "socialist" governments. This role of savior of the capitalist system will become more pronounced in a period of revolutionary crisis, when the role of strangler of the revolution will without any doubt be conferred by the bourgeoisie upon an SP-CP government.

Yet the main key to the French situation still remains Stalinism. That is why we broach right away an analysis thereof.

Stalinism in France

1. The brief picture we have just drawn of the international situation and of French capitalism had no other

⁴T/E: Founded in 1901, the [Radical Party in France](#) had by this time long been made up of centrists divided into a mildly left and mildly right party.

goal but to render more concrete our analysis of Stalinism in France.

Certainly, Stalinism in France does not have specific properties. There is a worldwide reality of the Stalinist phenomenon that expresses the same tendency in the USSR, in the countries of the glaxis, in Italy, in France, or in the colonial countries, though to different degrees.

We have discussed in another text the character of Russian bureaucratic society (see the *BI* of the IS⁵ on the USSR, no. 3)⁶ and the historic nature of Stalinism. We now want to analyze the case of France, to understand how Stalinism was able to implant itself here with the strength we know it to have and how we will be able to combat it.

France is one of the countries where Stalinism weighs most heavily on the working class. We have spoken of the decisive counterrevolutionary role it has played throughout the world. Yet perhaps it has nowhere else—the USSR excepted—manifested itself as profoundly and dangerously as in France. Stalinism has not had here the support of the Russian Army, as in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe; it has played in full its destructive role as a domestic force within the country.

Let us go back to 1944: the imperialist war “had to” degenerate into civil war. Indeed, one saw the popular masses set themselves in motion, the workers occupy the factories, an embryonic dual power be instaurated, and the bourgeoisie be incapable of putting the state apparatus back on its feet. However, the situation did not develop; it did not “fail,” it aborted. The class struggle appeared only through an ambiguous movement. The situation was not going to reach the point of culmination so as to come undone for lack of a revolutionary leadership [*direction révolutionnaire*], as had happened for example in Germany just after the other war. Nothing like that. The situation had no possible revolutionary

⁵FRENCH EDITORS: *Bulletin intérieur* of the International Secretariat (of the Fourth International).

⁶1979 note: Now in *SBI*, 73-85 [T/E: “The Problem of the USSR and the Possibility of a Third Historical Solution,” *PSWI*, 44-55].

future; it was a "false" situation in which the proletariat was ill engaged and had no initiative, although it did try to express itself in class forms. The cause? Stalinism. Yet it still must be understood. Stalinism did not play only the role of "brake," as one has the habit of repeating. The image is insufficient. Its order for the militias to dissolve was but a secondary episode. Stalinism succeeded in deforming the very nature of the movement and, most surprisingly, in keeping complete control of the situation. When its treason had never been more striking, not only was it not noticeable but, more than that, it coincided with a regrouping of forces toward Stalinism of a hitherto unknown breadth. In fact, the "new style" of Stalinist betrayal and the extraordinary swelling of the CP's ranks are two phenomena that stand out. It is because the CP was biting into new strata of the population that it was possible for it to periodically transform to its benefit the movement that had issued from the War.

This fact is important enough for us to grant it our full interest. The questions pose themselves on their own for anyone who wants to reflect. What are the roots of Stalinism in France? Or, if one prefers, whence comes its force? Why do the immense majority of laboring people follow it? And of what are its illusions made? How is one to combat this enemy that is infinitely more powerful than reformism ever was? *Is it not troubling that there would be nothing in our policy that takes this new counterrevolutionary factor into account?* Nothing other than what had been worked out before 1923 in the face of Social Democracy, in an age when Stalinism did not yet exist in its present-day form?

2. *What, then, does Stalinism in France represent?* According to the "official" explanations, Stalinism is in France but a consequence of Russian Stalinist policy. Its leadership is but an emissary of the Kremlin: it is consciously counterrevolutionary in this sense, that it wants to protect the "shaky" power of the Russian bureaucracy and that it conducts here the policy that is most appropriate for such protection. Why does Stalinism have the laboring masses behind it? Because, one says in response, the defeats of the workers' movement lead to discouragement and favor in general the traitorous leadership groups. Because the Third

International enjoys the prestige of the October Revolution. It is on that basis that the deluded masses carry toward Stalinism their revolutionary illusions.

As impoverished as it appears, such is nevertheless the sole analysis being proposed to us for Stalinism in the capitalist countries: an imported policy, directed by Machiavellians, of pure and tenacious—and how!—illusions that are not mysterious since it is—everyone knows—the characteristic feature of the masses to confer upon traitorous leadership groups the concern to achieve their objectives. These “ideas,” common among the Party’s cadres, seem to us as puerile in their simplisticness as dangerous in their superficiality. Surely, if there exists some illusions about Stalinism, let us seek them first in the Party itself. We think that such an analysis is superficial, because it is not possible for a movement to be rooted in a given country without it expressing particular social tendencies, without it responding to the interests of certain strata of the population. We think that this analysis is dangerous; for, if one imagines that Stalinism rests only upon the revolutionary illusions of the masses, one will impute to it a great deal of fragility and one will always expect an easy and automatic outflanking as soon as a revolutionary situation presents itself.

It is not wrong to explain the breadth of Stalinism by the defeat of the world revolution and the degeneration of the USSR. But this is only a partial explanation. It is a historical explanation that shows how the phenomenon happened, and it says nothing about what it is. It is, furthermore, a typically idealist mode of thought to interpret Stalinist policy in France solely on the basis of the will of the Kremlin’s bureaucrats. Not to seek to see how the interests of the Russian bureaucracy come to overlap, to diverse degrees in different countries, with the interests of well-defined social strata is as undialectical a way of proceeding as possible. One must join to the historical description the sociological explanation: such is the elementary Marxist method.

When analyzing reformism, Lenin was not content just to judge it historically, seeing in it, for example, the sign of a lack of maturity on the part of the workers’ movement. He asked himself what were its social roots. We know the

answer. In an age when imperialism is still rather robust (particularly thanks to the exploitation of the colonized countries), it is possible for it to give some crumbs to the upper strata of the proletariat, to attract them into its orbit while corrupting them. Thus is constituted a labor aristocracy which puts up with the regime because it sees therein some possibilities for development for itself. It contents itself with some reforms. What was the advantage of Lenin's analysis? Instead of being content with considering reformism as a weakness of the workers' movement and using overblown language about the *treacherousness* of Social Democracy, he denounced, in front of the proletariat, its *social* character. Social Democracy, he said, is a *bourgeois* working-class party despite its working-class composition; the goal of Social Democracy is to preserve the bourgeois regime. It is, without a doubt, thanks to this theoretical clarity that the Third International was able to set itself up and break, not only in words but organically, with the Second International.

Reformism still exists, particularly in the most resistant imperialist countries today. It nonetheless can be said that, on a worldwide scale, its mission is over. Furthermore, where it does exist its social composition has a tendency to be transformed; it is oriented more and more toward petty-bourgeois strata and is becoming politically the pale imitation of petty-bourgeois "democratic" parties. Is this to say that in other countries the privileged social strata of the proletariat and the "intermediate" strata are disappearing? And that an increased radicalization is leaving, face to face, an equally exploited proletariat and capitalism? Quite the contrary. As it decays, capitalism multiplies the number of technicians, administrators, and bureaucrats of all kinds who, at the very least for those last two groups, are a product of the State's growing intervention in the economy. To that is added the conscious policy of the bourgeois State, which tends—as Trotsky had already noted—to maintain, to the best of its ability, the largest possible differentiation within the proletariat. While itself severely tested by the crisis of the regime, though still relatively privileged, a labor aristocracy remains.

These social strata, whose situation is special in

relation to the proletariat—we are talking about skilled workers, political and trade-union bureaucrats, technicians—have their own interests. They might have been reformist yesterday, during the phase of rising capitalism; today, they can no longer put up with capitalism and its crumbs and their interests convey them toward the constitution of an original society. Besides, these strata are, by their origin, to be distinguished from the properly capitalist class. They are much more closely involved with the production process, participating in the life of the business enterprise and playing a role therein, even though a parasitic one. They are becoming aware of the fact that they could direct production without the capitalists. And this, not in order to inaugurate socialism but in order to confirm their own privileges. The society toward which their interests carry them is a society that would confirm those privileges and would offer them a stability that would be ensured by a “rationalization” of the economy. That is to say: statist pseudo-“collectivization,” the nationalization of the means of production, planning, the “rationalization” of the economy, and so on.

3. Without any doubt, the existence in France of these social strata with interests of their own that are opposed to those of capitalism as well as to those of the revolutionary proletariat does not date back to just yesterday. Yet their crystallization and their awakening of consciousness are recent phenomena. The USSR, which offers to the world the spectacle of class exploitation, of a society set up on a bureaucratic mode, has allowed these strata to recognize their aspirations and to base them on a reality. In this sense, the end of World War II marked a decisive date. Previously, the social strata that formed the “real” base of Stalinism had not clearly understood their interests. Numerous elements of these strata, moreover, had not seen in Stalinism the promoter of a new society. The War, however, simplified the antagonisms and ended up posing the global and historical aspect of the social and political problem. Right after the War, the prospects were made clearer, and the historical tendencies stood out in a more near-term and more certain future.

Imperialism, under cover of the USA, and bureaucratism, under cover of the USSR, are the great forces

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around which all the privileged elements of society tend to be attracted.

The sudden swelling up of Stalinism in France is expressive of the following fact: the irruption of world politics on the national political level. Everyone who has detached himself from the proletariat and who takes note of capitalism's fundamental incapacity to resolve the economic problem is focused on the idea of a new society, of a "rationalized" society, though one grounded upon exploitation.

Without this analysis, nothing can be understood about the broad recruitment efforts the CP has carried out in the peripheral strata of the proletariat and the "intermediate" strata. The immense majority of those who, beyond the proletariat, have rallied to the CP have done so because they have recognized in it the defender of their interests and the promoter of a new type of society. It is simply childish to state that those who voted Radical yesterday are voting Communist today inasmuch as the CP is taking up the Radicals' policy. The CP clearly appears as the enemy of capitalism, without being for all that the defender of the working class. It is because of this original function that it gathers around itself all those who have privileges needing to be confirmed and affirmed and those who want to go beyond capitalist chaos. Obviously, the general historical condition for the crystallization, awakening of consciousness, and reinforcement of these strata was the delay in the proletarian revolution. Starting from this appraisal of the situation, one can understand the French CP's strategy. Its dominant features are as follows.

On the political plane, partial and progressive conquest of the State. In its most immediate aspect, the goal of such conquest, as has already been said in the Party, is to prevent France from taking sides on the international level against the USSR. It is true that, in laying hold of the ministries that are key to production, the French CP is attempting to oppose any decisive economic intervention on the part of the United States.

Yet this is not the only aspect. It is not solely on the political plane, but also on the social one, that conquest of the

State takes on its genuine meaning. Stalinism is really TENDING to lay hold of the bourgeois State in order to make that State serve its own ends. Even when judging, as we do, that it is impossible for it here and now—that is to say, without the assistance of the Russian Army—to dispossess the bourgeoisie for its own benefit, at the expense of the proletariat, we nonetheless have to understand that here lies its basic strategy, its essential tendency, and that our task is to reveal it.

With regard to this strategy of penetrating the state apparatus, a policy of governmental participation is applied at all costs. In order to implement the economic policy that is favorable to them and to orient France's position in relation to the other great powers, the CP is bound to cling to the government. We have already said that, to this end, it is ready to endure the worst conditions. Here, however, there is a limit set by the fact that, so long as Stalinism has not succeeded in totally dominating the State, it cannot oblige the bourgeoisie to admit it INTO the management of the State unless it continues to dispose of a decisive amount of influence over the proletariat and is able at every moment to set the latter in motion. This is why, facing the working class, it tries to preserve its credit as long as possible through a sort of "Marxist" demagoguery. While it is radically opposed to that class in all its demands, this tactic itself also has to be interpreted in two ways. On the one hand, participation at any price in the government, its "produce first" policy, implies an opposition to all struggle on the part of the proletariat. On the other, because of its social bases, the CP is driven to maintain a large differential in wages; it seeks to consolidate the strata that are behind it by accentuating their privileges. The opening up of wage spreads, the attempts to favor civil service staff over workers on the national level, and, in a much clearer and more palpable manner, the attempts on the factory level to create a separate stratum (trade-union or simply political bureaucrats, workers faithful to the CP who are taken off production by conferring upon them tasks relating to "checking production and output," which make them genuine enemies of their class brothers) are to be understood in this sense. French Stalinism, which has

succeeded little by little in becoming aware of its goals as its social makeup has evolved, today seeks in turn to firm up its social nature and multiply the number of bureaucrats it can order about. We are in the process of witnessing the birth of a new social class, through a sort of "step-by-step propagation."

4. While the illusions the working class is harboring with regard to the CP do not suffice to explain the immense weight with which the CP presses down upon it and while such illusions are but the result of this weight, it nonetheless remains incontestable that those illusions are today the ones that render Stalinism dangerous, historically as well as in the immediate future. For a Marxist way of looking at things, the illusions of individuals and especially of the masses are not born on their own AND CAN HAVE A HISTORICAL INFLUENCE ONLY IF THEY SERVE AN ALREADY CONSTITUTED HISTORICAL FACTOR. Thus, the illusions the workers placed in Social Democracy had the importance they could have had only because the Second International, and the social stratum that supported it, had placed itself at the critical moment in the service of capitalist reaction. Thus, the power of the illusions placed in Stalinism today, their "effectiveness" if it may be put that way, is not the cause of Stalinism's strength but its effect. The masses' illusions are not what can create history, as the idealist and typically petty-bourgeois theory today professed by the leadership of the Fourth International would have it; social and historical factors are what can give some importance to those illusions. And it does not suffice to say that those factors are to be found in the proletariat's defeats. For, we know that, in 90 percent of cases, those defeats have been caused directly by the policy of the "working-class" leadership groups [*directions*]. Why do those leadership groups commit such betrayal? Certainly not through wickedness. The Second International committed betrayal owing to its decisive social connection with capitalism. The Third International did so owing to its connection with the bureaucratic class in the USSR and with the embryos of that class in the other countries. It is to the extent that they are in this way acting in the service of a new historical factor that the illusions the

masses have in Stalinism have an importance today.

What is the content of those illusions? Basically, it can be characterized by the following two traits: the masses believe that the CP wants to overthrow capitalism; they more or less believe in a new “tactic” that is defined in harmony with the USSR and while taking into account an international perspective. It is obvious that here we are speaking only of a habitual type of “average” illusions, which one encounters among sincere Stalinist workers.

One sees right away how absurd is the myth of the “low level of the masses’ consciousness,” which is being put forward by the opportunist wing of the Party. In reality, there is a low level of consciousness only on the part of those comrades themselves. The same thing is true for comrades Lucien and [\[Daniel\] Guérin](#). Never have the masses had to such a point an *international* awareness [*conscience*] of problems. All the Stalinist workers in all parts of the world reason and discuss things in terms of the antagonism between the USSR and the USA. Nor are there illusions relative to parliamentary methods. No Stalinist believes in the effectiveness of parliamentary methods. All think that this is a temporary tactic, imposed by the international relation of forces (intervention of the USA and triggering of war at a moment that would be unfavorable for the USSR, which would be provoked by an “untimely” revolution in France). Of course, for us the issue is to show that here it is a matter of a tactic that is opposed to the revolutionary tactic and that flows from a class strategy that is opposed to our own, the goal of which is not proletarian dictatorship but bureaucratic dictatorship. In doing this, we do not have to swallow the declarations of [\[French CP leader Maurice\] Thorez](#) for use among the frightened petty bourgeoisie (“peaceful transition”), as the main tendencies of the Party do, but to explain what such a tactic ends up in.

The influence of the Stalinists does not remain without results upon the masses’ consciousness. The myth of the “pure revolutionary consciousness of the masses at the present hour,” dear to [\[Pierre\] Lambert](#) [\[Pierre Bousset\]](#) and his tendency, also has to be denounced. If the workers are Stalinist and follow the CP, that entails some consequences.

Despite the anticapitalist character of the CP's policy, following the latter in no way signifies being an authentic revolutionary. The CP weighs down upon the proletariat and teaches it that it has to obey, that it has to leave things to the Party and to the Party's leadership in order to overthrow capitalism. Furthermore, Stalinism is preparing the proletariat almost explicitly for a new class society. Whatever it says to itself about this in public discussions, there are no Stalinist workers today who believe that the USSR is a paradise. They think that capitalist chaos has been overcome there, that there no longer are any crises, no more unemployment, that the fate of the poor classes has been much ameliorated, that privileges rest not on inheritance or fortunes but on "labor" and "merit"; they believe that everyone can rise socially according to their value and that, in order to obtain that, one can make little of such secondary things as democracy. It is for such a society that they believe it is worthwhile fighting.

One sees that, far from being of no consequence, and far from being able to burst from one day to the next, such illusions are, precisely because of their nonparliamentary character, endlessly dangerous. This is why we are insisting on the fact that IN THE MOVEMENT OF THE WORKERS TOWARD STALINISM, THERE IS NOT ONLY A SIGN OF RADICALIZATION, AS THE FRANK TENDENCY'S STUPID SIMPLISTICNESS WOULD HAVE IT, BUT A BASIC AMBIGUITY, A TWOFOLD CONTENT: on the one hand, a conscious overcoming [*dépassement*] of the capitalist regime and a more or less clear will to be done with it; on the other, an acceptance, at the outset unconscious, of the bureaucracy, which becomes increasingly conscious and consequently dangerous as these workers' stay in the CP drags on and as a revolutionary party with a coherent policy that would respond to the problems they are posing to themselves is slow in arriving.

It is to these illusions, much more dangerous than the traditional reformist ones, that the Party has to respond today through its propaganda and through its policy while denouncing the class character of Stalinist policy and of the society that would eventually result therefrom.

The Party's Policy

The Party's entire policy ought for a long time to have been oriented in terms of the following strikingly obvious fundamental observation: *The struggle against capitalism is impossible if one does not loosen the working class from the grip of Stalinism; on the other hand, the struggle against Stalinism absolutely cannot be identified with the struggle against reformism or be the mechanical copy thereof. IT IS A MATTER NOT ONLY OF UNMASKING A TRAITOROUS LEADERSHIP GROUP; IT IS A MATTER OF STRUGGLING AGAINST A GENUINE SOCIAL BODY; IT IS A MATTER OF FINDING THE SLOGANS AND MEANS OF STRUGGLE THAT WOULD ALLOW ONE TO LINE UP THE WORKING CLASS AGAINST STALINISM AND THAT WOULD NOT BE ABLE TO BE TAKEN BACK UP AND DISTORTED BY THE LATTER; IT IS A MATTER OF CREATING THE BREACH BETWEEN THE PROLETARIAT AND THE BUREAUCRATIC STRATUM, OF MAKING THE IRREDUCIBLE OPPOSITION OF INTERESTS THAT SEPARATE THEM APPARENT.*

This work cannot be the task of a single tendency. It is the party as a whole and especially its proletarian elements that have to participate in the elaboration of a new tactic on the basis of their experience in the factories. We are but tracing here the main lines of the new orientation.

A New Orientation of Our Propaganda Is Imperative

The analysis of Stalinism we have just traced out does not have only an abstract value. Nor is it just the theoretical premise that is known solely by people in the Party and that allows them to deduce a tactic. Its practical character is immediate and direct, *BECAUSE ONLY THIS ANALYSIS ALLOWS US TO ACHIEVE TOTAL CLARITY ABOUT STALINIST POLICY AND ITS SOCIAL BASE.* So long as our propaganda will be but a denunciation of "bad" Stalinist chiefs, of their "foolishness" or their "softness," it will inevitably be devoid of all practical result; and this is what is happening at the present hour. The Party's policy presents Stalinist chiefs

as Machiavellis who commit betrayal, one knows not too much why, and often even as imbeciles who do not understand that their very policy is leading to the proletariat's defeat. One must be done with these childish formulas that are not persuading anyone. The masses never believe in the stupidity of their chiefs and with great difficulty in a betrayal lacking material roots. In this, they are much more Marxist than the leaders of the Party. It must be explained that the Stalinist party in France and the Stalinist bureaucracy on an international scale represent separate interests, that they lean on a social stratum whose interests are irreducibly opposed to those of the proletariat. The class nature of the Stalinist bureaucracy in the USSR and its material foundations in other countries must be explained clearly. Abandoning the facetious jokes about the defense of the USSR in a better manner than Stalin's own defense thereof, which just makes the Party look ridiculous, it must be explained that the USSR, far from being progressive in character, is but a new exploitative and oppressive society and that its leaders deceitfully exploit the mythology of the "workers' State." It must be understood that, at the present hour, the workers who follow Stalinism do so on the basis of a very coherent international consciousness and swallow betrayals only on account of the halo of the "progressive economy" and of the "classless society." It must be UNDERSTOOD THAT THE PROBLEM OF THE USSR IS A FRENCH PROBLEM AND THAT AT THE PRESENT HOUR THERE IS NO REVOLUTIONARY POLITICS IN FRANCE, OR IN ANY OTHER COUNTRY IN THE WORLD, OPPOSITE STALINISM, WITHOUT A CLEAR DENUNCIATION OF THE SOCIAL REGIME OF THE USSR. On all these points, and principally on the problem of Stalinism in France, our militants and our sympathizers must be armed by showing them and allowing them to show to the proletariat as a whole that it is a genuine class cleavage that separates the proletarians from Stalinism.

On this point as well as on all the others, the Party's two main tendencies are simply showing their fundamental opportunism and their fundamental policy of confusionism. We are in agreement with Frank when he denounces the capitulation before Stalinism that characterizes the present

leadership of the Party. But what is he proposing in its place? Apart from some verbal demagogy, what will be found in Frank's arsenal is at the very most a more virulent vocabulary. Yet the struggle against Stalinism is not a question of vocabulary. What is at issue is not to say "the infamous traitor [\[Benoît\] Frachon](#)" instead of saying "the nasty Franchon," but to explain why the just-named Frachon [who was, from 1945 to 1947, Secretary-General of the *Confédération Générale du Travail* (CGT), the Communist-affiliated [General Confederation of Labor](#)] is and remains an irreducible enemy of workers' demands. And that is impossible with the nudity and the theoretical nullity that characterizes these tendencies on the problem of Stalinism.

The Party's Policy on Economic Demands Should Set the Proletariat Against Stalinism

Before broaching concretely the question of the Party's concrete slogans for the struggle against Stalinism, it must be noted that one of the fundamental causes of the Party's crisis is a certain fetishism for slogans, a certain belief in the magical virtues of slogans in themselves. If a slogan is right—and every slogan contained in the classic repertory is so by definition, the others not being so, also by definition—it is, at the end of a certain period of time, necessarily picked up again by the masses who enter into struggle, and, by virtue of the slogan, end up glimpsing the betrayal on the part of their traditional leadership groups and chucking them overboard. It is pretty much this conception that conditions the Party's present-day policy. Instead of understanding that there are no slogans that could not be transformed into opportunist slipknots, instead of learning the lesson from the fact that a large part of our slogans has been taken up and distorted by the Stalinists for their own best advantage and without there resulting any awakening of the masses' consciousness—works councils, workers' control, living wage, and, almost, the sliding scale—one sleeps soundly while trusting in the Transitional Program, which has the incontestable merit of having been formulated by Trotsky, but for the use of a revolutionary Party and not for a school of Marxologists.

Consequently, transitional slogans must be connected to one another, be accompanied by other ones that allow no equivocation, and connect everything to the program of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

Our general orientation being to create the breach between the proletariat and Stalinism, and for that very reason *to address the most disadvantaged and most exploited strata of the proletariat*, how can one fit this orientation into the policy of the Party as regards economic demands?

1. *By immediately taking a clear position on the problem of wage spreads.* The Party has to explain to the working class why the privileged [*favorisées*] Stalinist strata behave the way they do on issues relating to economic demands and especially on the problem of wage spreads. It also has to begin agitation immediately around slogans relating to economic demands that unite the great mass of workers and set them against the bureaucrats.

It is obvious that these slogans cannot be invented from one day to the next by a few comrades. Here, the collaboration of the Party's proletarian base, calling upon its experience in the factories, is indispensable. It is a matter of expressing through clear agitational phrases the following general idea: wage differentials today, having gone greatly beyond their economic and technical basis, express only a stratification of relative privileges within the factory for the benefit of certain strata, such stratification being accepted and pushed further by the Stalinists who get something out of it themselves. The Stalinists thus deepen the division of immediate interests within the proletariat. In order to reestablish the unity of the proletariat, one must struggle for a *limitation on wage differentials* by raising the wages of the least favored categories of workers. It also goes without saying that we are explaining to the more privileged strata that, if they want an improvement in their situation, they have to struggle, along with the least favored categories, against the employers' mass of profit, and not to create better conditions for themselves on the backs of their comrades. Such an explanation is possible both in propaganda and in struggle and has a real basis because, like that of the classic petty

bourgeoisie, the apparent autonomy of the new intermediate strata is but a result of the proletariat's nonentry into struggle under its own flag. Consequently, it is still possible for the proletariat, when it does enter into struggle, to bring along with it these strata, *upon the condition that it would struggle all the more intensely against their ideology and would show that the sole path is the revolutionary path.*

In applying this general orientation:

a) one must establish a limited number of categories, whose wage differentials correspond to a real basis, formulate the question clearly, and make it into a central theme of our propaganda and our agitation.

b) in struggles relating to economic demands, one must put forward the slogan: FOR REGRESSIVE WAGE RAISES, explaining that it is up to the workers to determine among themselves how to share out the increase in the mass of wages snatched from the employer, and that this sharing out is to be regressive, that is to say, is to favor especially the lowest categories.

But the most important application of this orientation relates to the *living wage*.

2. *By applying immediately a clear-cut and intransigent policy on the issue of the living wage.* It must be said right away, without mincing words, that the Party *AS A WHOLE* (both the opportunist leadership and the trade-union official) has had, on the issue of the living wage—which for a few months is the central problem relating to economic demands—*A SHAMEFUL POSITION OF TOTAL CAPITULATION TO THE CGT AND HAS SIMPLY PROVIDED A COVER FOR IT ON THE LEFT.* It is impossible to unmask Stalinist betrayal on this point *WITHOUT PROPOSING A FIGURE.* [[The French Trotskyist newspaper](#)] *La Vérité* has to, *EACH WEEK AND ON THE FRONT PAGE*, so long as the problem remains posed, publish a brief table showing purchasing power as it was in 1938, the minimum set in 1945, the huge fall in the standard of living since then, show how ridiculous are the figures being proposed and abandoned one after the other by the CGT, explain this abandonment with a brief phrase (They don't give a damn about the living wage?)

Of course not: Those guys eat—and they are paid to!) *AND PROPOSE A FIGURE*. The arguments one hears from the Frankiste leaders against setting a figure are as ridiculous as their opposite position of yesteryear: “No crumbs.” They protest by saying that one would have to set a figure anew each time the cost of living increases! For these comrades, does the sliding scale therefore mean nothing? And they are willing accomplices to the constant worsening of the living conditions of laboring people imposed by capitalism with the collaboration of the French CP and also, objectively, to the extent of their strength, the PCI? *ONE MUST, ON THE CONTRARY, AND WITH THE AID OF CONCRETE FIGURES, SOUND THE TOCSIN AGAINST THE CONSTANT OFFENSIVE BEING CONDUCTED BY CAPITALISM AND THE CGT AGAINST THE WORKERS' STANDARD OF LIVING FOR SOON GOING ON THREE YEARS*. The argument that we do not have the strength to impose some figure on the working class comes under the heading of pure opportunism. Show us a single one of our most immediate agitational slogans that we have *today* the strength to get adopted by the working class!

It is well understood that in the factories we are not posing any ultimatum: we participate in all struggles, however minimum they may be, and on this point, we are trying to get the struggle started even, for example, on advance tax payments.⁷ Yet we would be the worst opportunists were we to be content with that, *ESPECIALLY IN THE PARTY'S NEWSPAPER*. And that is what we have done until now.

What is this figure to be? In terms of the orientation we have previously defined, it has to take as its basis the actual wage of the privileged strata in the factory (skilled workers). It must be shown that today in reality only these strata benefit from a genuine living wage, and *this* is the level that must be demanded. Our slogan has to be: *EQUAL RIGHT*

⁷T/E: “Income taxes underwent a series of spectacular hikes between 1947 and 1949 and, in order to give the State some resources, advance payments [*acomptes provisionnels*] were instituted in 1947” (Serge Berstein and Pierre Milza, *Histoire de la France au XXe siècle*, vol. II, 1930-1958 [Paris: Éditions Complexe, 1991, and 1999], p. 121).

TO THE LIVING WAGE, accompanied by this explanation.

The living wage slogan has to be accompanied by that of *THE SLIDING SCALE*: we have to show that, separated from the latter, the former has no meaning.

3. *The notion of workers' control must be revived.* It first must be explained that workers' control resolves nothing definitively; that it does not prevent the employer from raising prices, nor does it take away his supremacy within the factory. It must be shown that, for us, workers' control is a *concrete weapon of struggle*, which allows factory workers to explain themselves before the laboring population in general, to show why they are demanding a raise, to prove to the other layers (small shopkeepers, farmers, etc.) how they, too, are exploited by monopoly capitalism. Yet one must especially *struggle against the distortion this slogan has suffered when applied by Stalinists* and revive it for working-class consciousness. Despite the pirouettes of the Party in its propaganda on this score, there is today no doubt that "workers' control" is *outwardly* achieved. The delegates to the Works Councils have the powers of auditors. It must be shown that if, despite that, workers' control has yielded nothing and that it presently constitutes a farce, that is because the Works Councils are in the hands of the Stalinists; and that this is not due to the Machiavellianism of the Stalinists but, rather, to the bureaucratic character these Works Councils inevitably take on so long as they remain separate, as is the case today, from the factory workers as a whole. It must be shown that workers' control has meaning only if it is carried out *by the factory workers as a whole*, each section controlling their respective part of production (storemen controlling the supplies, the workers controlling output, the accounting employees controlling the books and referring everything to the factory's General Assembly). Thus, all fraud and complacency or corruption on the part of a limited body becomes impossible. One sees as a consequence that this slogan, when correctly explained, forms another point of transition toward *Factory Committees*.

Here we have the grassroots slogans relating to economic demands that immediately raise the problem of organizational forms.

4. *For a clear-cut attitude opposite the CGT-For Struggle Committees.* Without abandoning the CGT, insofar as it is the mass organization of the proletariat,⁸ the Party first has to understand itself and then explain to the workers as a whole the reasons why the CGT is at the present hour nothing but the worst brake on struggles, and that inevitably such struggles pass above the trade-union branches. The party immediately has to center its agitation and its propaganda around the popularization of the experience of the Struggle Committees and to take the initiative to constitute such Committees, as well as their interfactory liaison. It has to be explained that the Struggle Committee is neither a delegation nor a second trade union but a body created on its own initiative, the workers' vanguard grouping together *ALL WORKERS WHO WANT TO TRIGGER THE STRUGGLE*. Those workers gather together as often as is necessary and elect delegations only for determinate missions that are limited in time. For the constitution of Struggle Committees, we do not have to, as we did at Renault, address ourselves to the "leaders" of other organizations but to the working-class base. To the extent that the Struggle Committee attains its objective, it will transform itself into a democratically elected *Strike Committee*. However, precisely because we are characterizing the present period as a period of great struggles, because we are saying that these struggles will increasingly tend to take on a *permanent* character, it follows that the Struggle Committees themselves have a "permanent" character, too, that is to say, do not automatically disband after the strike, whether victorious or vanquished, but, whatever might be the arithmetic variations they might undergo, continue to exist, draw lessons from the previous battle, and prepare for the battle to come. To deduce from this, as Frank does, that this signifies the creation of a second trade union is to avow that one has never understood anything about either trade unions or Struggle Committees.

⁸FRENCH EDITORS: The "reunified" CGT, before the December 1947 split that saw the birth of the CGT-FO [Force Ouvrière ([Workers' Force](#))].

5. *Forms of struggle.* The *strike* remains our central slogan. *Enlargement and generalization* of strikes, crowned with the slogan of the general strike, still forms the basis of our orientation and is to be put forward as soon as even a partial movement is triggered. *Workers' management during a factory strike by the strikers* is a fundamental token of the strikers' capacities and of their victory. This slogan will lead us to pose the question of *workers' militias*.

Our Political Slogans

1. *Crush Gaullism.* Nascent Gaullist agitation offers us the opportunity to appear as the sole party conducting a proletarian struggle by class means against the fascist threat. Without exhausting ourselves in the “sterile game” of United Front proposals, which at the present hour can have but a polemical character, the Party's cells have to, as much as possible, take the initiative in the struggle against the RPF [Rassemblement du Peuple Français, the [Gaullist Rally of the French People](#)] through meetings, signups, and tracts while calling upon the population to join in counterdemonstrations and engage in active sabotage of fascist meetings in order to nip Gaullist agitation in the bud. This whole campaign, like our policy regarding economic demands, is to be crowned by the slogan *FOR A WORKER AND PEASANT GOVERNMENT*.

2. *For a Worker and Peasant Government.* We will explain our position in a special text on the question of a worker and peasant government and the Frank minority's opportunist expression thereof through the slogan “For a PC-PS-CGT Government” (see the astounding article of [Privas \[Jacques Grinblat\]](#) in issue 37 of the *Bulletin Intérieur*).⁹ One is obliged to remind some Party “leaders” of a few basic truths—like, for example, that between open or

⁹T/E: See “Stalinism in France,” [PSWI](#), 63, and, especially, 66 n. 3, which includes Privas's and Castoriadis's respective retrospective statements about Privas's article and about the strategy of the Frank tendency.

camouflaged bourgeois dictatorship and the dictatorship of the proletariat there exists no middle term; that there is no sort of "government taking progressive measures and breaking with the bourgeoisie," apart from a Proletarian Government; that the traitorous parties do not commit betrayal through lack of understanding, chance, or stupidity but because powerful interests bind them to the existing order and especially set them implacably against every mass movement; that we already have had a broad experience of those parties, though that may or may not be the case for Privas and his tendency, and that one can expect nothing from them but the crushing of the revolution; that the counterrevolutionary character of those parties will not be diminished but monstrously inflated during a revolutionary period, as all historical experience has shown; that the masses will enter into so decisive a fight only to the extent that the process of outflanking those parties, which will inevitably be opposed to the movement from its initial stage, will already be largely underway; that a "PC-PS Government" will be the slogan of the big bourgeoisie, its last rescue board and its final hope; that in this process of outflanking, our task will not be to burnish the image of traitors, as Privas does while explaining that if they go down the path of anticapitalist (!) struggle, they must be supported in the Government and that Trotskyist participation in that Government is not ruled out, but that, on the contrary, our most elementary duty will be to denounce them mercilessly from the beginning as gravediggers of the Revolution, to back the spontaneous actions of the masses, who will manifest themselves in the form of dual-power bodies, while demanding all power for those bodies and while struggling against the forces of reaction that will manifest themselves within those bodies (Committees) themselves beneath the mask of "working-class" parties.

What then, under such conditions, is the meaning of the slogan "For a Worker and Peasant Government"? And how can this slogan be given concrete form?

The sole *revolutionary*—and not reformist—content of the "For a Worker and Peasant Government" slogan is that of a Government of Committees. This does not mean that the Worker and Peasant Government is to be identified with the

dictatorship of the proletariat, for the Government of Committees is not yet the dictatorship of the proletariat. The dictatorship of the proletariat is achieved only when the Committees take all power on the basis of the revolutionary program. That is possible in fact only if the Revolutionary Party has the majority within the dual-power bodies. Yet the revolutionary party will obtain this majority only at the end of the dual-power period. Yet we go through the dual-power period while demanding *all power to mass bodies* and while proposing a concrete program. This is so, independently of the question: Who at present has the majority within those bodies? It is possible—and this is the most likely prospect—that in the beginning the traitorous parties might have the majority within the Committees. Yet, in demanding power “For the Committees” and not for those parties as such, on the one hand we are pushing forward the masses themselves and not the bureaucratic bodies; on the other hand, we are avoiding use of a formulation that, objectively and despite all explanations, bails out the traitorous parties. We are giving concrete form to the “For a Worker and Peasant Government” formula, on the one hand through its organizational bases, by explaining that it is a matter of a Government emanating from Workers’ and Peasants’ Committees, controlled and revocable by them, on the other hand through its program, which, without yet being the complete program of the dictatorship of the proletariat, is a revolutionary transitional program (wage increases, workers’ control, expropriation of business enterprises employing a certain number of workers, workers’ management in those companies, arming of the people and permanent militias, dissolution of the bourgeois police and army, production plan through the initiative and under the control of laboring people, etc.).

We will end with a remark that holds for the Workers’ and Peasants’ Government as well as for our slogans as a whole. It is not possible to foresee all the forms of struggle and forms of organization that will arise from a revolutionary situation, especially when that situation finds itself faced with novel [*inédits*] problems, like today that of outflanking Stalinism. *Systematization of the revolutionary experience of the past has solely an educative value and not the character*

of a recipe. The Party must be well armed right now; it must solidly practice revolutionary criticism; but it must also have confidence in the creative spontaneity of the masses.

Conclusion

The goal of this analysis is to show the new dangers threatening the revolution and to help the Party to arm itself against them. While the principal political danger consists at the present hour in the underestimation of Stalinism and in the puerile and irresponsible attitude of the leaders of the Party and of the [Fourth] International toward this problem, one must guard against both a vulgar, sentimental anti-Stalinism and, especially, a demoralizing overestimation of it. True, at the present hour, the principal problem does not lie there. The Party is demoralized not because one is overestimating Stalinism but because it is being offered an image of Stalinism that in no way corresponds to reality and that, as a consequence, ensures that it will constantly smash its face up against Stalinist force. The result of this attitude will, if one persists in it, be the development of a defeatism for the revolution, as comrades glimpse that Stalinism is not the soap bubble that was described to them for twenty years. This is why the *real* contradictions of Stalinism and the possibility of outflanking it must be shown right now.

The contradictions of Stalinism are inherent in its social nature: its opposition to the proletariat as well as to capitalism. Furthermore, Stalinism is not born organically in capitalist society; the stratum on which it leans, which is heterogenous internationally, is in no case one of the fundamental classes of society. It arises as the deterioration of capitalist society persists, and as the proletarian offensive has a brake put on it. Even on a national level it is heterogeneous: not leaning on a fundamental class of society—since its connection with the proletariat is the result of a *false consciousness*—it is obliged to call upon the most varied strata (bourgeois, petty bourgeois, peasants, labor aristocracy, lumpenproletariat) depending on the economic situation and the country, and, though expressing on average the interests of those strata and powerfully welding them to its totalitarian

regime, it can achieve a genuine internal—and certainly not eternal—cohesion only in the countries where it has completely taken power. In France especially, it is constantly torn between its peasant clientele and its proletarian clientele; it is constantly faced with the dilemma that for it is agonizing: participate in the Government or try to maintain its working-class clientele? It has pulled through until now by employing some rather adroit maneuvers that, however, are becoming increasingly difficult to pull off.

Though never performed until now, the outflanking of Stalinism always remains possible. On the other hand, such outflanking will be infinitely slower and more complicated than the Frank tendency imagines. Lambert merely gave proof of his empiricism—and his sense of demagogy—when he noted (in the last Assembly of the Paris Region on March 2 [1947]) that outflanking will be much more difficult than had been said. On the basis of his conception of Stalinism, he has no right to note this, for he would have no answer were he asked: And why, then, will outflanking be difficult, if Stalinism has no material and social basis? Likewise, when Marcoux [Nicolas Spoulber] says that outflanking will be difficult because Stalinism is considered by the bourgeoisie as “a body foreign to the nation,” and consequently Stalinism enters into opposition to it, falsely radicalizing the masses, he poses the problem backwards, in a typically psychological and idealistic way: it is not because that bourgeoisie *considers* Stalinism to be a foreign body that Stalinism enters into opposition to it; it is because it is in fact in opposition to the bourgeoisie that the latter rightly considers it a foreign body.

The outflanking of Stalinism is always possible, but the main token thereof is to be found in a revolutionary policy on the part of the Party. In the elaboration of such a policy, the two major tendencies contribute only the sterility and poverty of their leaders [*leaders*]. The crisis of humanity still remains the crisis of the revolutionary leadership [*direction*].

Phenomenology of Proletarian Consciousness*

I. The Proletariat's Purely Economic In-Itself

“The proletariat in itself,” wrote Trotsky, “is only matter to be exploited.”¹ This originary moment of the being of the proletariat manifests itself historically in the first phase of its existence within capitalist society and, although abolished by its inclusion within a vaster whole during its subsequent evolution, continues to constitute the fundamental moment of the proletariat through all phases of its development. At each moment of its existence and in every period of class society, the proletarian will be, in the first place, this in-itself, matter to be exploited. And this in-itself will constitute the foundation for its active being even during moments when it seeks to overcome it, even during moments when it effectively will overcome it by raising itself to another level, the level of the political for-itself, since this political for-itself acquires its signification only in relation to the economic in-itself of which it is the negation, but a negation that contains that of which it is negation. It is only the negation of this negation and of that of which it is negation, the overcoming both of the economic in-itself and of the political for-itself, the abolition of all exploitation and of every State—ultimately the abolition of the very condition of the proletarian, *qua* specific being, within the communist

*1974 note: Originally titled “Phénoménologie de la conscience prolétarienne,” this previously unpublished text was drafted in March 1948. Reprinted in [SBI](#), 115-29, *SB(n.é.)*, 95-105, and [EPI](#), 363-77. [FRENCH EDITORS: No need to insist on the text's heavy dependence, in its vocabulary and expository method, on Hegelian phenomenology. See, on this issue, the commentaries in [EPI](#), 26; T/E: above, xxxii-xxxiii.]

T/E: This is our translation of Castoriadis's unsourced quotation. The contemporary English translation (the text was originally published in Russian, January 27, 1932) reads: “The class, taken by itself, is only material for exploitation” (“Bureaucratic Ultimatism,” from [What Next? Vital Questions for the German Proletariat, in The Militant, 5:17](#) [whole no. 113; April 23, 1932], p. 4).

totality—that will remove from the proletarian his determination as matter to be exploited, a determination he will retain until then.

In the first phase of development, this in-itself is of interest to us, however, only inasmuch as it exhausts the determination of the proletariat, only inasmuch as being proletarian does signify this and only this: being matter for exploitation. To this extent, the blind in-itself exhausts being-proletarian and this being is deprived of all consciousness. Its being-in-itself is, as a consequence, only a being-for-another, a being for the capitalist. While the capitalist is *through* the proletarian, the proletarian is *for* the capitalist during this first phase, and this being-for-another will remain a constitutive moment of being-proletarian so long as the latter continues to exist as such. The general sense or direction [*sens*] of the economic and political process in capitalist society will be to lay stress on the in-itself of the proletariat, to try at every moment to reduce being-proletarian totally to this blind in-itself, to make it purely and simply into matter to be exploited.

II. The Immediate Totality of Primitive Proletarian Consciousness: The Immediate For-Itself of Revolt

This immediate in-itself is nevertheless but an abstraction. The process of capitalist production increasingly tends to reduce the proletarian to this abstraction, but it never totally succeeds in doing so. On the one hand, in being-proletarian are contained, as abolished, all the elements of the process that led to this form and principally the moment of consciousness, the for-itself of the human being. On the other hand, the proletarian grasps his being-in-itself as a being-for-another; he perceives the negation of his being that this being-for-another constitutes; and he raises himself to the negation of this negation through revolt.

A. The point of departure for this process is to be found in the contradiction implied in the proletariat's being-for-another. This contradiction contains, from the outset,

capitalism's failure to reduce the proletariat absolutely to its in-itself. On the one hand, capitalism tries to turn the proletariat into being nothing but raw material for the economy; the proletarian is to become a mere cog of the machine. On the other hand, what constitutes the proletarian's value for the capitalist is precisely the fact that the proletarian is more than a mere cog of the machine. The foundation of capitalism is to be found in surplus value, and surplus value can result only from the absolute opposition between man and the machine, repetition and creation in the production process. The machine is the moment of identity in this process; development occurs only through the intervention of this fundamental opposite of the machine that is man. Thus, this being-in-itself of the proletariat can be a being-for-the-capitalist only to the extent that it contains an elementary for-itself. Capitalism is obliged both to affirm and to deny this for-itself; to deny it through capitalism's constant effort to reduce the proletariat to a pure and simple in-itself, to affirm it not only inasmuch as it is obliged to sustain the biological essence of the proletariat *qua* class but also inasmuch as it is obliged to maintain to a certain degree the human essence of this class, without which it loses, precisely, the value this class had for capitalism.

B. It is starting from this moment that capitalism gives rise to its own social negation. This elementary for-itself, this kernel of consciousness maintained despite itself within the proletariat, grasps as its first object the in-itself that is its basis; it thus reaches the immediate and tangible certitude of its exploitation. But this certitude is still hampered by its thinghood [*choséité*]; inasmuch as the in-itself grasped in this first consciousness is only the physical in-itself, the alienation of this in-itself appears on the physical level and the being-for-another of the proletarian is grasped by his consciousness as a being-for-a-thing—the thing that is there in the production process, that is to say, the machine. The first negation of alienation is therefore posited as negation of the machine, as attempt to destroy the machine.²

²T/E: The reference here is to [Luddism](#).

But this consciousness that denies the machine is doubly mystified. In the first place, it is mystified inasmuch as it posits a thing as its own other—whereas the other of consciousness cannot but be another consciousness—and thus lowers itself to the rank of a thing. Secondly, it is mystified inasmuch as its goal appears as a turning-back, that is to say, inasmuch as it tries not to overcome the condition of the proletariat but instead to reduce this condition again to its most primitive expression. There is therefore a twofold, internal and external, impossibility in this first negation; there is, moreover, a noncomprehension on the proletariat's part of its own strength. The foundering [*nauffrage*] in the face of this twofold impossibility, the comprehension of the proletariat's own strength, and the elevation to consciousness of alienation as alienation for the profit not of the thing but of the capitalist *qua* person determine the negation of this first negation and the passage to the totality of revolt.

C. Revolt is the first totality proletarian consciousness attains. It presupposes that alienation has been grasped as total exploitation, as attempt to reduce both the physical in-itself and the conscious for-itself of the proletariat to a being-for-another, and this other is thenceforth determined to be the capitalist. It arrives at the understanding of totality, both as concerns its own subject—which is posited not as individual or particular subject but as the totality of the dispossessed class—and as concerns its object, inasmuch as this totality of the class opposes itself to the totality of the other class and to its most general expression, which is the State. Its very content is total, since it demands the abolition of particularity, the achievement [*réalisation*] of equal participation in the economic universal, and the investment in each individual of a real parcel of political power, as expressed through the arming of the people and the [establishment of a] political commune. In this sense, revolt constitutes the first complete externalization of the proletariat for-itself.

Nonetheless, this for-itself of revolt is still an immediate for-itself. The totality it posits is an immediate totality in the sense that the total realization of the negation of the other still concerns only the external other—everything that is opposed to the proletariat outside of the proletariat

itself. The class is posited there as an immediate, simple, and direct unity—that is to say, ultimately as an abstraction that can only be defeated. The defeat of the revolt signifies the defeat of the abstraction in the face of the concrete negative of capitalism, inasmuch as the latter is opposed to the proletariat. It signifies the defeat of naive immediacy when faced with the developed mediation contained in the negative concrete. The necessary nature of this defeat signifies that one needs to pass through a series of mediations, in the course of which proletarian consciousness deepens itself by returning into itself, by developing its own other within itself, so as to grasp and to overcome its negation not only *qua* external negation realized in the capitalist but also *qua* internal negation—*qua* intrinsic opposition that must first be rendered explicit, then grasped in its explicitness, and ultimately abolished in the concrete totality of absolute revolutionary consciousness.

III. The Particularity of Protest Consciousness: The Mystification of Infinite Mediation and Reformism's Being-for-Another

The defeat of revolt, which does not abolish [*supprime*] the active for-itself of proletarian consciousness, signifies the fall into mediation, a fall that is a deepening. Mediation appears at the very outset in the moment of particularity. The immediate totality of the initial for-itself fragments itself [*se morcelle*] into a series of particular moments. This particularization of proletarian consciousness operates under two modes. In the first place, it occurs as fragmentation [*fragmentation*] of the total goal posited by revolt, which appears as inaccessible in the immediate, into a series of particular goals. Thus is the lodging of economic demands [*la revendication*] constituted as central moment of the proletarian for-itself during this phase. Secondly, it occurs as a division of labor within the class itself, within the class that seems to be persuaded by the defeat of its revolt that total action on its part is vain and dangerous and that delegates its action to one of its parts. Thus is the working-class

bureaucracy—both trade-union and political—constituted as a real support for the proletarian for-itself during this phase.

In this way, proletarian consciousness takes a great step forward. It achieves a portion of the goals that, in a primitive way, it had proposed to achieve and that, in their totality, seem to have proved unachievable. This achievement distances its being from this naked in-itself to which capitalism had tried to reduce it. It quantitatively reduces its alienation, both under the aspect of taking a greater share of surplus value and under the aspect of achieving reductions in labor time. Finally, it raises itself, in one of its parts—i.e., this working-class bureaucracy, which grows upon the soil of protest [*la revendication*]³—above the proletarian condition and seems to reach an absolute for-itself.

Beneath this external positivity increasingly is revealed, however, a mystification that is here found in germinal form. The basis for this mystification is the presentation of the particular as identical to the universal. On the one hand, protest presents itself as the necessary mediation between present alienation and future freedom and it effectively is this mediation; the mystification begins starting from the moment when this mediation presents itself as an end—or, better, starting from the moment when the passage from alienation to freedom presents itself as an infinite series of mediations whose final outcome is never given (“The goal is nothing, the movement is everything”).³

³T/E: In his January 19, 1898 *Neue Zeit* article, “The Theory of Collapse and Colonial Policy,” the German Social Democrat Eduard Bernstein, historically known for his reformist position, famously declared, “I frankly admit that I have extraordinarily little feeling for, or interest in, what is usually termed ‘the final goal of socialism.’ This goal, whatever it might be, is nothing to me, the movement is everything” (now in [*Marxism & Social Democracy: The Revisionist Debate*, ed. and trans. H. Tudor and J.M. Tudor \[Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1988\]](#), pp. 168-69). Bernstein returns to and explains this dictum in the “[Conclusion: Ultimate Aim and Tendency—Kant against Cant](#)” to his 1899 volume [*Evolutionary Socialism: A Criticism and Affirmation*, trans. Edith C. Harvey \(New York: B.W. Huebsch, 1909\)](#). In his 1961 [*International Socialism*](#) article, “Socialism and Capitalism,” reprinted by London Solidarity as “The Meaning of Socialism” (see below), Castoriadis again provided this summary version of the Bernstein quote while stating his

The totality of the goal thus appears to be capable of resulting from a simple arithmetic addition of particular fragments of this goal. Having thus decomposed a qualitative totality into quantitative parts, the consciousness involved in lodging economic demands [*conscience revendicative*] mystifies itself inasmuch as it believes that the opposite path is equally possible, leaving aside quality from the irrevocably vanished whole of its quantitative fragments. Reformism ultimately rests upon the impossible substitution of successive slices of freedom one conquers from successive slices of alienation one eliminates [*supprime*]. This quantitative conception shatters in the face of freedom, which is totality or is not at all.

On the other hand, reformism implies a personal mediation between the proletarian and the capitalist: that is, the working-class bureaucrat. The bureaucracy, too, presents itself as a necessary mediation. The mystification contained in this mediation consists, as concerns the proletariat itself, in the claim that one can eliminate one alienation by substituting for it another. Insofar as the bureaucrat presents himself as a necessary term for liberation, and insofar as his existence implies that liberation is possible only through him, part of the class is substituting itself for the whole of the class by presenting itself as this whole. But also, the bureaucracy effectively does take the place of this whole, insofar as it localizes and concentrates the for-itself, the consciousness, and the leadership [*direction*] of the class and, ultimately, insofar as it posits itself as a for-itself, as its own end within history. Thus does the proletariat become alienated anew, and this alienation is added over and above the fundamental alienation carried out by capitalism.

own view: "In fact, there is no movement except towards a goal, even if the goal has constantly to be re-defined as the movement develops; even if, for the working class movement, the goal is not something as strictly defined as the bridge an engineer is planning to build." In 1964, Castoriadis returned to his own critique of reformism: "the motto of all reformism: 'the goal is nothing, the movement is everything,' is absurd; every movement is a movement *towards*; it is something else if, since there are no pre-assigned goals in history, all the definitions of goals prove to be provisional" (see, in "Marxism and Revolutionary Theory," now the first part of [IIS](#), 87).

The for-itself of the bureaucrat is nevertheless but a false for-itself, and the bureaucrat is himself mystified. Insofar as the *raisons d'être* of the bureaucrat is protest and insofar as the objective result of protest is to distance, via the immediately graspable particular, the universal that constantly is being put off—that is to say, ultimately to maintain capitalist alienation—the objective *raison d'être* of the reformist bureaucrat becomes the maintenance of capitalism; the being-for-itself of the reformist thereby becomes a being-for-the-capitalist, and the mystifiers are themselves mystified. When the reformist bureaucrat attains consciousness of this mystification, this means that subjectively he has been transformed into an agent of capitalism within the proletariat; to this extent, the alienation of the bureaucrat himself becomes fully realized inasmuch as he detaches himself from his own class. The mystification of reformism becomes totally explicit and can be grasped, as such, by the proletariat.

IV. The Singularity of Anarchist Consciousness

At the same time as it falls, through one of its parts, into the particular, proletarian consciousness arrives, through another of its parts, at the moment of singularity. While reformist consciousness signifies the reduction of the historical end to a series of particular goals and also the real particularization of the movement's human support network, the bureaucracy substituting itself for the class, anarchist consciousness seems to maintain the totality of the goal by reducing the subject of the movement to the individual, to the singular, where the vitality of the vanquished class seems to take refuge. In reality, the anarchist consciousness serves during this period to maintain the immediate totality of the goal of revolt, a totality conjured away by reformism, in constant opposition to the latter; but this maintenance, which is but a mere repetition, contains a twofold mystification. In the first place, it is a mystification inasmuch as it substitutes the individual for the class and it itself posits the goal as individually realizable already within capitalist alienation. In the second place, even when it rids itself of its individualism

(“communist anarchism”) it still is a mystification inasmuch as it presents the goal as an immediate goal in its totality by neglecting mediation, that is to say, ultimately by trying to leap beyond the as-yet unattained for-itself—this leap being equivalent, in fact, only to a turning back toward immediate revolt.

V. The Imperfect Synthesis of Revolutionary Revolt and the “Revolutionary Party”

The maintenance of the more and more radical opposition between the proletariat and the reformist bureaucracy and the abolition of the opposition between the reformist bureaucracy and capitalism ultimately lead to [*déterminent*] an identification between capitalism and the reformist bureaucracy. Starting from the moment this identification is grasped as such by proletarian consciousness, the mystification of reformism is explicitly apparent and reformism appears as something to be abolished at the same time as, and under the same heading as, capitalism. The will to negate alienation that is contained in protest arises anew, this time rid of the mystification of infinite mediation, which had proved to be mediation for capitalism's sake. Thus does revolutionary protest—as concretization of the negation of capitalism, a negation externally incompatible with the latter, the realization of which presupposes capitalism's abolition—appear. Thus does the “revolutionary party”—as concretization, within the proletariat, of the will to eliminate capitalism and of revolutionary consciousness—appear.

In this way, the proletariat “comes to power” and destroys capitalism externally. Even in the case where it “does not come to power,” it groups itself around the “revolutionary party” with the explicit goal of destroying capitalism. This moment appears therefore as, and is in reality, a victory for revolutionary consciousness.

But this victory contains, internally, its own negation. It contains its negation inasmuch as it maintains, on the level of the subject of the revolution, the moment of particularity as an unabolished moment. This moment of particularity is constituted by the “revolutionary party,” which differentiates

itself from the totality of the class from the standpoint of structure as well as from that of content. Moreover, this particularization is founded on the maintenance of an eminently alienating principle, the principle of the division of labor, a fixed and stable division between “direction” and “execution,” intellectual labor and physical labor, and ultimately as a distinction and a division between the “consciousness of the proletariat,” localized thenceforth in the “revolutionary party,” and the body of the proletariat, which is deprived of consciousness and which this “consciousness” that is the party hastens to deprive more and more of consciousness in order to affirm itself as irreplaceable consciousness. The distinction becomes division, the division becomes opposition, and the opposition ultimately becomes contradiction between the proletariat and its own “revolutionary party.”

On the other hand, the revolutionary protest around which the attaining of revolutionary consciousness occurs during this phase does not signify only the external negation of capitalism. The synthesis is still not perfectly realized, for not only is merely the externality of alienation here denied but this negation does not yet signify the proletariat’s own self-affirmation. What is demanded [*revendiqué*] is the abolition of the power of the capitalist class, and the proletariat’s own power is affirmed therein only *qua* power of the “revolutionary party,” that is to say, ultimately *qua* negation of the proletariat’s own power.

VI. The Abstract Universality of Bureaucratism The Universal Mystification of Bureaucratic Abstraction The Absolute Being-For-Itself of the Bureaucracy is Ultimately a Being-For-No-One

Taking as its starting point the form of alienation of consciousness, the revolutionary bureaucracy rapidly achieves total alienation, so much is it true that for the proletariat the sole alternative is between total consciousness and universal power, total alienation and universal mystification. The

expropriation of consciousness for the benefit [*profit*] of the bureaucracy goes hand in hand with physical expropriation, for the monopoly on consciousness is possible only on the basis of the monopoly on the conditions for consciousness. These conditions being essentially material, exploitation reappears and with it the tendency to reduce the proletariat to its pure physical matter. This tendency can now act at a much more profound level than it did within the framework of capitalism. In capitalist exploitation is contained a contradiction that we pointed out above (II. A.). This contradiction is ultimately determined by the quest for profit under its capitalist form. Yet under domination by the bureaucracy, profit becomes abstract universal profit; competition is eliminated under its economic form; production, no longer being determined by concrete profit, can freely give itself over to the attempt to reduce the proletariat to a mere cog of the machine. It follows that the passage from the in-itself to the for-itself here becomes infinitely more difficult for the proletariat.

Due to the fact that the bureaucracy is born on the terrain where capitalism is destroyed and is born through this destruction—due to the fact, too, that the appearance of its opposition to the proletariat not only does not signify the abolition of its opposition toward capitalism, as was the case for reformism, but instead a deepening of this opposition—insofar as the bureaucracy's accession to power presupposes the proletariat's own physical struggle against capitalism and the extermination of the latter, the bureaucracy appears as the negation of capitalism. Yet this negation is but an abstract negation, just as the power of the bureaucracy is but the abstract form of the power of the proletariat, and in this sense the bureaucracy is the negative synthesis of capitalism and the proletariat. It is their negative synthesis, for it maintains, as unabolished, the total negativity of its capitalist content *qua* alienation and the negativity of the moment of proletarian consciousness that is its basis, that is to say, that of abstract universality. This abstract universality appears in the first place under the form of the economy, through the abolition of the singular or particular possession of the forces of production, and the State appears as universal

owner. Yet the State being but an abstraction, such state-run ownership is an abstract universality that covers up the bureaucracy's ownership at the same time as the bureaucracy dominates this ownership. Abstract universality appears at the same time in politics, since the State or the "people" appears as the subject of power, which is in reality the power of the bureaucracy.

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Thus does the bureaucracy achieve universal mystification. This mystification is infinitely vaster than the mystification of reformism. The latter mystification can easily be unveiled, insofar as reformism constitutes in fact only an expression of capitalism and insofar as this identification is grasped already in life within capitalist society. The object and the very being of reformism being by definition partial, its mystification can only be partial. In contrast, the object of the bureaucracy is the universal object, the State and society itself as a whole; the bureaucracy itself posits itself as universal subject for itself. Its mystification therefore cannot but be universal, a mystification of all apropos of everything. The essence of this mystification is abstraction, and the presentation of the abstract universal—which, *qua* abstract, cannot but cover over a determinate concrete—as identical to the concrete universal, the presentation of abstract negation as identical to concrete negation (which alone is a positive position). The bureaucracy thus presents to the proletariat the abolition of capitalist alienation as identical to the abolition of alienation in general and of all alienation; "nationalization" and the "state-run planning" of the economy are presented as identical to collectivization and communist planning, the destruction of capitalist power as identical to the destruction of class power, the abstract "people" as identical to the concrete people, and terror as identical to freedom.

Yet if at this stage alienation is total, and mystification universal, this signifies that they are also the alienation and mystification of the bureaucracy itself. The bureaucracy posits itself, to itself, as an absolute being-for-itself, but this for-itself collapses into the abstraction that constitutes the essence

of bureaucracy. The bureaucracy posits itself as the consciousness of history, detached from the body of history; but this bodiless consciousness cannot be but a phantomlike consciousness that vanishes on its own; deprived of a body, the bureaucracy also rapidly loses the "consciousness" on the basis of which it had formed itself. It thus becomes again a shrunken and partial body and what consciousness it retains is placed in the service of this body; it thus alienates itself for the benefit of its own naked corporeality and becomes mute. Its attempt to reduce the proletariat to a pure and simple cog of the machinery of production turns against itself, for the continuity of the social sphere—a social sphere made up of abstractions—ensures that everything that is employed against the proletariat has repercussions within the bureaucracy itself: the terror employed against the proletariat rapidly becomes universal terror; the physical expropriation of the proletarian, his reduction to an exploited-being, finds its antithetical counterpart in the expropriation of the bureaucrat by his own body, his reduction to a being-through-exploitation, his fate as social and historical parasite; the intellectual expropriation directed against the proletariat becomes cretinism and imbecility on the part of the bureaucracy itself. Ultimately, the bureaucracy itself becomes a pure and simple cog of the social machine in the service of an abstraction. Its own corporeality, which it imagines itself to be serving, becomes a pure and simple abstraction as it reveals its total absence of historical signification, since it proves that this corporeality is not there for anything else, and ultimately, within the framework of total alienation, is not even there for itself. The being-for-itself of the bureaucracy reveals itself as being a being-for-abstraction, that is to say, ultimately a being-for-no-one.

It thus seems that society is becoming totally vain and history is collapsing into the nothingness of universal abstraction. Indeed, the ambiguity that determines every moment of consciousness here becomes totally explicit: Either revolutionary consciousness will get a hold of itself again in order to pass into concrete universality, abolish bureaucratic abstraction, and realize communism or it will be vanquished by abstraction and history will give way to the

monstrous, from which it will escape only at the cost of new mediations and new ups and downs [*avatars*]. Knowledge can go this far. What comes next is no longer a matter of knowledge but of historical will, which presupposes the ambiguity of all knowledge, victory and failure, and has unilaterally abolished this ambiguity in its total identification with its reflective goal.

VII. The Passage to Concrete Universality: Absolute Revolutionary Consciousness

A. Bureaucratism tends to achieve, much more completely than capitalism, the reduction of the proletariat to its pure physical matter. The basis for this possibility is to be found in the abolition of competition, which is ultimately the abolition of the motive force for accumulation, and thus in the reduction of surplus value to an absolutely static function, the maintenance of the parasitic class. To this extent, it appears that the bureaucratic class is no longer obliged to maintain the creativity of labor. Yet the contradiction contained in the alienation of labor power reappears, though in another form: the will to abolish the for-itself of the laboring person, which manifests itself on an elementary level as creativity, and to lay stress on the in-itself—that is to say, the constant will to increase exploitation—contains a manifest contradiction that expresses itself here through the constant decrease in the product of labor power, and, consequently, through the constant decrease in surplus value itself. The more heavily the bureaucracy weighs down on the proletariat's standard of living, the more does the value of products decrease as a whole on account of the fall in quantitative productivity. To this fall the bureaucracy can respond only by augmenting the number of workers, by proletarianizing ever more completely the whole of society.

B. Though, under such conditions, the passage from the in-itself to the for-itself becomes subjectively more difficult, it becomes, by way of contrast, infinitely easier in objective terms. It becomes objectively easier because all the data of the problem and even its solution are there, explicitly posed. The parasitic role of the bureaucracy has become

manifest; every other opposition is eliminated, thus leaving room only for the opposition between exploiters and exploited; every false mediation—such as, for example, reformist demands or a special “working-class bureaucracy”—has become radically impossible; the very form of the solution is posed, since every individual relation to the means of production has been abolished, the State being the subject of all ownership; it suffices therefore to abolish this State and to replace it with the proletariat itself. Bureaucratic society poses, before the proletariat, the dilemma in its most naked, most simple, and most profound terms. It cries out to the proletariat at every turn: Either you will be all or you will be nothing;⁴ between your own power and concentration camps there is no middle term; it is up to you to decide whether you want to be the master of society or its slave.

C. By positing the most brutal and total form of exploitation, the realization of the power of the bureaucracy signifies at the same time the end of bureaucratic mystification. The essence of bureaucracy reveals itself as being the proletariat's own negation. To the extent that the proletariat grasps this negation, it grasps it as the culmination and the synthesis of all prior evolution. The proletariat can now rid itself of all mystification, not only externally but also internally. It can understand that, for it, it is not only a matter of opposing itself externally to another, that it is not a question of destroying all power that is external to it but of positively realizing its own power.

To this extent, it tends from the outset to abolish all fixed distinctions within itself, both with respect to labor and with respect to power and incomes. This consciousness of the proletariat—which is, ultimately, self-consciousness; which has posited itself as its own goal; which ultimately has arrived at positing everything that is other than it, external as well as internal to itself, under the form of SELF; and which no longer has any goal before it but to bring its own self really to power—is absolute revolutionary consciousness, which can

⁴T/E: In Charles Hope Kerr's English translation of *The Internationale*, the first stanza's last line reads: “We have been nought, we shall be all!”

realize itself only after the whole series of mediations and “extraneations” that it presupposes. But once its external goal is achieved, it at once abolishes its goal, which is power, and thereby itself abolishes itself *qua* revolutionary consciousness of the proletariat; it thereby immediately becomes absolute consciousness *tout court*, communist humanity, concrete universality infinitely differentiated within itself.

BETA

The Revolutionary Party*

1. The current crisis of the group is but the most acute expression of the permanent crisis it has been going through since it was constituted, and which has taken a more violent form each time problems concerning its relations with the outside world are posed (exit from the PCI [[Parti Communiste Internationaliste \(Internationalist Communist Party, or French Section of the Fourth International\)](#)], first discussion on the character of the review in the Fall of 1948, content of the review during the writing and editing of issue no. 1). Every time, at the root of the divergencies could be found the lack of clarification on the questions of the revolutionary party and of our strategic and tactical orientation.

2. The solution for these problems from the general theoretical standpoint as well from the standpoint of our orientation has become a vital question for the group. The attitude that consists in postponing discussion and deferring taking a position on these problems, under the pretext that the historical situation or our subjective forces do not allow us to respond thereto immediately, would, were it to win out once again, amount to the dislocation of the group. It is apparent that it is right now impossible for us to function collectively without knowing exactly what kind of activity ours is, within what framework—historical, on the one hand; immediate, on the other—such activity is inscribed, what our connection is with the working class and the struggle that, even under the most crippled forms, this class is constantly conducting; what, finally, our organizational by-laws are and what are the principles upon which those by-laws are based. By making us face up to our public responsibilities, the publication of the review is forcing us to respond to these questions concretely and immediately.

*1974 note: Originally published as “Le parti révolutionnaire (résolution),” [S. ou B.](#), 2 (May 1949): 99-107. Reprinted in *EMOI*, 121-43, and [EPI](#), 379-93. See below the “Postface” for this text. [T/E: Also excerpted in *SouBA* (French edition), 199-202. Partially translated as “The Revolutionary Party (Resolution)” in [SouBA](#), 302-306. It appears here finally in a full English-language translation.]

3. It is undeniable that the group finds itself at present before a turning point in its existence and that it has to respond to the radical dilemma before which it is placed.

This dilemma is defined by the objective ambiguity of the group in its present state as well as of the first issue of the review. The group can form the point of departure for the formation of a revolutionary proletarian organization as well as for that of a cluster [*amas*] of individuals serving as an Editorial Committee for a more or less academic review.

This signifies that the group has not succeeded in giving to its work an incontestably political character. In order to do so, it would have had to *consider itself first and foremost* to be a political organization. That would entail some theoretical, programmatic, and organizational conclusions that have not until now been drawn or applied. Now, at present, this political character of the group is objectively contested by calling into question the idea of discipline in action, the need for an effective leadership [*direction*] of the group, and the connection between the program for the revolution and its organizational forms. Were they to be adopted, such conceptions would definitely take away from the group all possibility of becoming the core of a revolutionary political organization.

4. Were such conceptions—which are objectively equivalent to the denial of the group’s political character—to prevail, the group would inevitably be led to its own disintegration. That is so because those positions are self-contradictory and because they can serve as basis and criterion for no other kind of activity but “confrontation.” It is obvious that the comrades who belong to the group (including the comrades who have formulated the conceptions criticized here) have come to the group in order to carry out some political activity and that the group will never be able to recruit except upon political bases and for political goals. The sole solution to the crisis is the politicization of the group and of its work.

5. Politics is the coherent and organized activity that aims at seizing state power in order to apply a determinate program. Neither the writing of books nor the publication of reviews nor propaganda nor agitation nor struggle on the

barricades is political; these are solely *means* that can play an enormous political role, but they become political means only insofar as they are consciously and explicitly connected to the final goal that is having state power at one's disposal with a view toward the application of a determinate program. The form as well as the content of political activity varies, obviously, according to the historical era in which such activity is placed and the social class whose interests it expresses. Thus, proletarian politics is the activity that coordinates and directs [*dirige*] the efforts of the working class in order to destroy the capitalist State, install in its place the power of the armed masses, and achieve the socialist transformation of society. This politics is the exact antithesis of all kinds of politics that have preceded it, on all points *except one*: it has as its central objective, as the point around which politics turns—precisely in order to abolish it—the State and power.¹

6. Insofar as one grants that revolutionary political activity is, in the present period, the supreme form of humanity's struggle for emancipation, one recognizes thereby that the first task that is imposed on all those who have become aware of the necessity of the socialist revolution is to group themselves together in order to prepare collectively this revolution. What inevitably flows therefrom are the basic traits of all permanent collective political action, namely: the

¹T/E: Some ambiguities here cannot easily be resolved via interpolation in translation. The text says "in order to abolish it" *in the singular*, so one would assume that "it" should refer, somewhat infelicitously, either to "the central objective" or, more likely, to "the point." But this "central objective" or "point" is then referred to a plural: "the State and power [*le pouvoir*]." Is the objective or point then to abolish not only the State (as both Marxists and anarchists have, at least theoretically, sought) but also "power"? The phrase *le pouvoir* could generically mean all power (of which some anarchists profess to seek the abolition)—or something more like "the established power," without meaning thereby that "power" itself would or should be abolished, especially since Castoriadis had just stated that proletarian politics seeks to install "the power of the armed masses." It is unclear, though, whether such a narrow and focused interpolative restriction—to "the established power"—is warranted here. He is clearer in section 14, below, envisioning "the final step toward a world power at the same time as the total transformation of the content of that power."

basis for the coherence of all collective action, that is to say, a historical and immediate program, operating by-laws, constant action oriented toward the outside world.

It is in starting from those traits that the revolutionary party can be defined. The revolutionary party is the collective body [*organisme*] that functions in accordance with determinate by-laws and on the basis of a historical and immediate program that strives to coordinate and direct the efforts of the working class, in order to destroy the capitalist State, install in its place the power of the armed masses, and achieve the socialist transformation of society.

7. The need for the revolutionary party flows simply from the fact that there exists no other body of the class capable of accomplishing these tasks of coordination and leadership in an ongoing [*permanente*] way before the revolution and that it is impossible for any other one to exist. The tasks of coordination and leadership of the revolutionary struggle on all levels are permanent, universal, and immediate tasks. Bodies capable of fulfilling these tasks, encompassing the majority of the class or recognized by the latter, and created on a factory base appear only at the moment of revolution. Still, such bodies (soviet-type organs) rise to the height of their historical tasks only as a function of the party's constant action during the revolutionary period. Other bodies, created on a factory base and bringing together only some vanguard elements (Struggle Committees), will, insofar as they envisage the achievement of these tasks in an ongoing way and on a national and international level, be party-type bodies. Yet we have already explained that, because they do not have strict boundaries and a clearly defined program, the Struggle Committees are embryos of soviet bodies and not embryos of party-type bodies.

8. The enormous value of Struggle Committees in the coming period comes not from the fact that they would replace the revolutionary party—which they cannot do and which they do not have to do—but from the fact that they represent the permanent form for grouping together workers who are becoming aware of the character and role of the bureaucracy. As an ongoing form—not in the sense that a Struggle Committee, once created, will persist until the

revolution, but in the sense that workers will want to group together around antibureaucratic positions—they will be able to do so only in the form of a Struggle Committee. Indeed, the ongoing problems class struggle poses in its most immediate and most everyday forms make it indispensable to have a workers' organization, the need for which the workers are cruelly aware of. The fact that, on the other hand, the classic mass organization created to respond to these problems—the trade union—has become, and can only increasingly be, the instrument of the bureaucracy and state-run capitalism² will oblige the workers to organize themselves independently of the bureaucracy and of the trade-union form itself. The Struggle Committees have traced out the form of this vanguard organization.

While the Struggle Committees do not resolve the question of revolutionary leadership, of the party, they are nonetheless the basic material for the construction of the party in the present period. Indeed, not only can they be for the party a vital medium for its development both from the standpoint of recruitment possibilities and from that of the audience they offer for its ideology, not only are the experiences of their fight indispensable material for the elaboration and concretization of the revolutionary program, but they also will be the key manifestations of the class's historical presence even in a period when any positive immediate prospects are lacking, as in the present period. Through them, the class will launch partial, yet extremely important, assaults against the bureaucratic and capitalist slab,

²T/E: This is one of the very rare instances where Castoriadis writes *state-run capitalism* (*capitalisme étatique*) instead of *State capitalism* (*capitalisme d'État*). Castoriadis had already written, in February 1947, that “the falsity and the superficial character of the theory of ‘State capitalism’” were “established by highly significant facts” (“The Problem of the USSR and the Possibility of a Third Historical Solution,” in *PSWJ*, 54; to appear in the fifth volume of the present series). And in “The Relations of Production in Russia” (published in the same issue as the present text), he shows how Lenin had explained “that monopoly capitalism already was transformed into State capitalism during the First World War” in Imperial Germany (*ibid.*, 117), so that bureaucratic capitalism is a new phenomenon not to be confused with State capitalism.

assaults that will be indispensable for it to retain an awareness of its possibilities for action.

Conversely, the party's existence and activity are an indispensable condition for the propagation, generalization, and completion of the Struggle Committees experience, for the party alone can elaborate and propagate the conclusions of their action.

9. The fact that, before the revolution, in order to accomplish its historical tasks, the class cannot create another body than the party not only is not the fruit of chance but responds to deep-seated traits of the social and historical situation of decaying capitalism. In an exploitative system, the class has its concrete consciousness determined by a series of powerful factors (temporal fluctuations, various local and national corporative allegiances, economic stratification), which ensure that, in its real existence, its social and historical unity is veiled by a set of particular determinations. On the other hand, the alienation it undergoes under the capitalist system renders it incapable of tackling immediately the endless tasks the preparation for revolution requires. It is only at the moment of revolution that the class overcomes its alienation and concretely affirms its social and historical unity. Before the revolution, there is only a strictly selective body, built upon a clearly defined ideology and program, that might defend the program of the revolution as a whole and collectively envisage preparation for the revolution.

10. The necessity of the revolutionary party does not cease with the appearance of autonomous mass bodies (soviet bodies). Both the experience of the past and analysis of present-day conditions show that these bodies have been and will be, at the outset, just formally autonomous while in fact dominated or influenced by ideologies and political currents historically hostile to proletarian power. These bodies become effectively autonomous only starting when their majority adopts and assimilates the revolutionary program, which, until then, the party alone uncompromisingly defends. But such adoption is never done, and never will be done, automatically; the class vanguard's constant struggle against hostile currents is an indispensable condition thereof. This struggle requires more intensive coordination and organization when the social

situation is more critical, and the party is the sole possible framework for such coordination and organization.

11. The necessity of the revolutionary party is eliminated only with the worldwide victory of the revolution. It is only when the revolutionary program and socialism have won over the majority of the world proletariat that a body defending this program, which is other than the organization of this majority of the worldwide class itself, becomes superfluous and that the party can carry out its own abolition.

12. The critique we make of Lenin's conception of "the introduction from without of political consciousness into the proletariat by the party"³ in no way entails for us the abandonment of the idea of the party. Such abandonment is equally alien to Rosa Luxemburg's position, which is nonetheless so often invoked. Here is how Rosa expressed herself on this issue:

The task of social democracy does not consist in the technical preparation and direction of mass strikes, but, first and foremost, in the political leadership of the whole movement. The social democrats are the most enlightened, most class-conscious vanguard of the proletariat. They cannot and dare not wait, in a fatalist fashion, with folded arms for the advent of the "revolutionary situation," to wait for that which in every spontaneous peoples' movement, falls from the clouds. On the contrary, they must now, as always, hasten the development of things and endeavor to accelerate events.⁴

³T/E: In [Section II of *What is To Be Done* \(1901\)](#), Lenin, quoting Karl Kautsky's statement that "socialist consciousness is something introduced into the proletarian class struggle from without" by the Social-Democratic Party, says that these words are "profoundly true and important."

⁴T/E: [Rosa Luxemburg, *The Mass Strike* \(London, Chicago, and Melbourne: Bookmarks, 1986\)](#), p. 69.

In fact, the conception of spontaneity that today frequently underlies critiques of the idea of the party is much more the anarchosyndicalist conception than Rosa's.

13. Historical analysis shows that, in the class's development, organized political currents have always played a preponderant and indispensable role. In all the decisive moments of the history of the workers' movement, forward progress has been expressed by the fact that the class, under pressure from objective conditions, has arrived at the level of the ideology and program of the most advanced political fraction and either merged with the latter—as in the Commune—or lined up behind it—as during the Russian Revolution. These organized fractions have certainly not instilled the era's highest degree of consciousness from without into the class—and that suffices to refute Lenin's conception; the class arrives there through the action of objective factors and through its own experience. Yet, without the action of those fractions, the action would never have been pushed so far; it would not have taken the form it took.

These organized political fractions have allowed stages in the workers' movement to be distinguished, the movement to be constituted at each stage on the basis of a program clearly and universally expressing the needs of the era, and proletarian experience (even when such experience was negative) to be objectified to the point that it might form the starting point for subsequent development.

It can be said, without hesitation, that every time the movement has been but pure spontaneity, with no preponderance of one organized political fraction—whether we are talking about June 1848, the Paris Commune, 1919 in Germany, the [Asturian Commune of 1934](#)—it arrived each time at the same point: the demonstration of the revolt of the workers against exploitation, of their striving toward a communist organization—and of their defeat on that basis, a defeat that expresses the lack of a clear and coherent consciousness of the goals and the means.

The opposition between the equally false conceptions of “pure spontaneity” and “consciousness inculcated from without” can be resolved only if one understands concretely, on the one hand, the relations between the part and the whole,

the fraction of the class and the class in its entirety, on the other hand, the relations between the present and the future, the vanguard that groups itself together right now around the revolutionary program and begins immediately to prepare the revolution, and the mass that enters the scene only at the decisive moment.

14. The conceptions that, taking the possibility of bureaucratization as pretext, deny the necessity of a political organization existing prior to the revolution and performing the functions of class leadership exhibit a complete ignorance of the most deep-seated traits and laws of the structure and development of modern society.

The rationalization of social life, the transformation of all historical phenomena into world phenomena, and the concentration of the forces of production and of political power are not only the dominant traits but the positive traits of modern society. Not only would the proletarian revolution be impossible without the constant deepening of these traits, but the role of the revolution will be to push to the hilt the fulfillment of these tendencies.

The accomplishment of this task, the victory of the revolution—but, already, the mere struggle against extremely rationalized and ultraconcentrated adversaries wielding world power—impose on the proletariat and its vanguard some tasks that involve rationalization, knowledge of present-day society in its full extent, accounting and inventorying, unprecedented concentration and organization. The proletariat will not be able either to vanquish or even to struggle seriously against its adversaries—adversaries who have at their disposal a formidable organization, complete knowledge of economic and social reality, educated staff, all the riches of society, of culture, and most of the time of the proletariat itself—unless it has at its disposal knowledge and an organization whose content is proletarian and is *superior* to those of its best-equipped adversaries in this respect. Just as, on the economic level, our struggle against capitalist concentration does not signify a return toward a multitude of “independent producers,” as [Pierre-Joseph] Proudhon wanted, but, instead, the last step along the path of such concentration at the same time as the radical transformation of its content—so, on the

political level, our struggle against capitalist or bureaucratic concentration in no way signifies a return toward more fragmented or more “spontaneous” forms of political action but the final step toward a world power at the same time as the total transformation of the content of that power.

The most elementary evidence shows that the fulfillment of such tasks is not to be improvised. A long and meticulous period of preparation is absolutely indispensable. One cannot imagine that the solution for these questions will be invented on the basis of nothing by fragmentary bodies, often unconnected with each other and in any case extremely loose and variable both as to their human content and as to their political and ideological content. Now, the question of the proletariat’s capacity to overthrow the domination of the exploiters and to inaugurate its own power, but already to struggle for that power, is not only the question of its physical capacity or even its political capacity, in the general and abstract sense, but also of its capacity on the level of means, of its organizational, rationalizing, and technical capacity. It is completely absurd to think that these capacities are automatically conferred upon it by the capitalist regime and that they will appear with a wave of a magic wand on some D-Day. The development of such capacities depends to a decisive extent on the permanent struggle the most conscious fractions of the exploited class are already conducting within the exploitative regime in order to raise itself to the level of the universal tasks of the revolution. Neither here nor elsewhere is there any automatic functioning in history.

15. Yet the acquisition of these universal capacities not only necessitates a long period of preparation but does not concern, cannot concern, given the social conditions of the class regime and the weight of alienation, the indistinct totality of the class, and above all it cannot concern *solely* the manual proletariat. One must clearly have awareness—and one must spread such awareness—of the huge role intellectual workers will inevitably be led to play in the social revolution and its preparation. While we have strictly demarcated ourselves from the conception present in [*What is to Be Done?*](#), which says that the intellectuals alone can and should introduce socialist consciousness into the proletariat from

without, we must with equal force line ourselves up against those who, today, want to erect a barrier—which economic reality abolished long ago—between intellectual workers and manual workers, to separate in fact the ones from the others, to propagate a fetishism for manual labor and bodies emanating “from the factories.” While Lenin said that separating workers and intellectuals signifies delivering the first to trade unionism and the latter to the bourgeoisie, we can with much more truth and force say today that separating in this way intellectuals from manual people signifies delivering the first group to the bureaucracy and the second to a revolt deprived of universality, dooming the former to prostitution, the latter to heroic defeat.

Lenin committed the error of assigning an objective limit—trade unionism—to the working class’s autonomous awakening of consciousness. He also committed the error—essentially in practice—of conceiving class leadership as a body [*corps*] organically separate from the class and crystallized on the basis of a consciousness the class could only receive from without. We line ourselves up against this conception, for historical experience shows that there is no such limit in the exploited class’s awakening of consciousness and that the essential content of the proletarian revolution is the abolition of the distinction between directors and executants. But, doing this, we refuse to erect a barrier between manual laborers and intellectuals.

This rests above all on an economic base. Lenin’s error was all the graver as in his time the intellectual was essentially a man of letters in the general sense of the term, a theorist, an “artisanal” writer, laboring in isolation and unconnected to social, intellectual, and material production. A huge transformation came about in this domain, too. Indeed, on the one hand, the methods of intellectual production are becoming increasingly collective and industrialized and, on the other, intellectual production is more and more directly connected first to material production and then to social life in general (not only in the technical domain and in the domain of the exact sciences but also in that of the economic, pedagogical, and social sciences in general, even “pure” intellectual activity being increasingly socialized).

16. Yet the attempt to separate manual people and intellectuals and its application to our group does not simply go against the grain of economic evolution; it is also contrary to our basic programmatic orientation. The abolition of the opposition between direction and execution boils down essentially to the abolition of the opposition between manual and intellectual labor. This abolition can occur neither while ignoring the problem nor while separating still more radically these two sectors of human activity and their representatives. The merger of intellectual and manual labor and of their representatives tends to come about, on the one hand, within production itself through the movement of the economy, but, on the other, it has to constitute right now a key objective of the conscious vanguard, an objective this vanguard has to begin to achieve within itself through the merger of the two categories and the universalization of tasks.

Consequently, one must resolutely set aside as archaic and retrograde every general conception that sets up an objective separation between manual people and intellectuals, and every application of this conception to our group that would try to draw from our social composition arguments about our activity, our historical or political character. It must be understood that one of the most essential functions of the party consists in this, that it is the sole prerevolutionary body in which the merger of manual people and intellectuals would be historically possible.

17. The terms of *autonomous action* and *autonomous body* of the class, which are oft utilized in our vocabulary, have to be clarified under penalty of becoming a source of errors and even an instrument of self-mystification. The mere fact that some workers, more or less spontaneously and in order to respond to some problems the class struggle poses, set themselves up in bodies or undertake determinate actions, as hugely important as that may be, does not suffice to define such bodies or such actions as “autonomous” in the full sense of this term. To be persuaded about this, it suffices to take the biggest case that presents itself with the appearance, on a large scale, of dual-power bodies (Soviets, Factory Committees, Militias, etc.). Not only the experience of the past but also the analysis of every possible future show that,

at the moment of their constitution and during an entire period, those bodies are directly or indirectly dominated or decisively influenced by political organizations that are historically hostile to proletarian power. If, within these bodies, there is no manifestation of the constant action of fractions—in the long run, of one fraction—which inevitably are at the outset in the minority and are struggling by all revolutionary political means to get those organizations to adopt the ideology and the program that, under the given circumstances, express the historical interests of the class, it is certain in advance that these bodies of the masses will be driven either to total failure or to bureaucratic degeneration.

Consequently, the question of the autonomy of the class's bodies and action is identical to the question of ideological and political content, of the programmatic basis of these bodies and of this action. While a relative degree of autonomy expresses itself in every form of proletarian organization, while Struggle Committees, in translating this antibureaucratic awakening of consciousness, represent a more developed degree of such autonomy, and while the Soviets encompass, in a consciousness that is tending to become complete, the great majority of the class, it must nevertheless never be forgotten that bodies [*organismes*] and actions that express concretely and perfectly the class's historical interests on the basis of a proletarian mode of organization are the sole ones that are autonomous in the genuine and full sense of this term. Only such bodies can validly be the class's uncontested leadership.

18. It is only in starting from this notion of *autonomy* that one can broach the problem created by the plurality of political conceptions that confront one another within the class. The fact that there is each time only one program, only one policy that expresses the historical interests of the proletariat does not prevent several contradictory conceptions from opposing one another in reality and does not stop there from being no *a priori* formal criterion, no distinctive physical sign that would allow one to recognize the organization that is defending the revolutionary orientation.

The dilemma that is posed between, *on the one hand*, the fact that there is no autonomous body or action, there is no

victory of the revolution except on the basis of a single program that expresses the class's historical interests, and, *on the other hand*, the fact that the concrete bearer of this program is never known in advance (at the very least is never *recognized* immediately by the majority of the class) and that several organizations claim to be the expression of those interests—this fundamental dilemma of all revolutionary politics cannot be resolved on the basis of an *a priori* construction. The solution, the concrete synthesis of these two terms, can only be worked out on the basis of experience and be modified in the light of that experience.

19. Two currents come forward today before history with the claim to offer an *a priori* solution to this problem: bureaucratism and anarchism. The Stalinist bureaucracy's or the Trotskyist microbureaucracy's solution is that the historical representation of the truth and of the interests of the proletariat is known and designated in advance: these are their respective organizations. There is no problem of synthesis between the single program of the revolution, the sole truth, and the multitude of different opinions within the proletariat, since their party is itself this embodied truth.

For the most consequential anarchist conception, on the other hand, there is perhaps a truth, but one never knows where it is. Several opposed and contradictory conceptions therefore take up a position on the same terrain, having practically the same value. Here, too, there is no problem: history and the spontaneity of the masses will decide. This attitude is not only the—in no way decorative—symmetrical figure of the first one; it still is its indispensable practical accomplice. On a practical level, it signifies delivering mass bodies over to the bureaucracy, or at the very least, under pretext of trusting the masses, doing nothing against it. When all is said and done, political abdication and the “sacrifice of conscience” have exactly the same value, whether they would occur before a Central Committee or before the “spontaneity of the masses.”

20. Our attitude on this fundamental question can be summarized as follows:

a) We categorically push back against the confusionism and eclecticism that are presently the trend in

anarchistic circles. For us, there is, each time, but a single program, a single ideology that expresses the class's interests; we recognize as autonomous only the bodies that stand on this program, and those alone can be recognized as the class's rightful leadership. We consider it our fundamental task to struggle for the majority of the class to accept this program and this ideology. We are certain that if that does not happen, every body, however formally "autonomous" it might be, will unavoidably become an instrument of the counterrevolution.

b) Yet this does not settle the problem of the relations between the organization that represents the program and ideology of the revolution and the other organizations invoking the working class, nor does it settle that of the relations between this organization and the class's soviet bodies. The struggle for the ascendancy of the revolutionary program within mass bodies can be carried out only through means that flow directly from the goal to be attained, which is the exercise of power by the working class; consequently, these means are directed essentially toward the development of the class's consciousness and its capacities, at each moment and on the occasion of each concrete act the party undertakes before the class. Whence flows not only proletarian democracy as indispensable means for the building of socialism but also the fact that the party can never exercise power as such and that power is always exercised by mass soviet bodies.

c) Taking these factors into account, it is completely superfluous for us—it would even be ridiculous for us—to want to demarcate ourselves specifically from the bureaucracy. One might as well want to demarcate oneself from Truman or from Mussolini. The entire content of our program is nothing other than the struggle on all levels against the bureaucracy and its manifestations. It is obvious that this content not only cannot be separated from the methods through which it will promote itself but is identical to those methods. To think that one can struggle against the bureaucracy through bureaucratic means is an absurdity that reveals that one has understood very little about the bureaucracy as well as about the struggle against it. Struggle and victory against the bureaucracy will be possible only if

the great majority of the proletariat itself mobilizes itself, doing so on the basis of an antibureaucratic program down to the minutest details. The universality of our era—and of our program, whose deepest aspect lies there—is that objectives of the revolution and proletarian modes of organization have become not “deeply connected” but *identical*. Our “economic program,” for example, boils down in fact to an organizational form: workers’ management. We have no need for a specific program against the bureaucracy, for our whole program is but that.

What is paradoxical in this affair is that the objective result of certain conceptions, formed under the pretext of seeking illusory guarantees against bureaucratization, is to put a brake on the sole struggle against the latter, which is the maximum, the most systematized, and the most coordinated effort to spread our conceptions within the class, to educate working-class militants, and to achieve a merger of manual people and intellectuals within a revolutionary party.

21. The definition we provide of our group as the core of the revolutionary organization rests on the assessment we are making of our ideological platform. We think that this platform:

- a) represents the synthesis of what the workers’ movement has produced until now that is worthwhile;
- b) is the *sole* basis on which the synthesis and integration of what proletarian experience or the experience of other political groups will produce can occur in an adequate way;
- c) has to, as a consequence, become the preponderant ideology within the proletariat, if the revolution is to win out;
- d) will attain this preponderance not miraculously, nor by the mere act of the “spontaneity of the masses,” but through a long and twofold process: on the one hand, the elevation of the class, under the pressure of objective conditions, to the essential features of this ideology; on the other hand, our own ongoing labor of spreading within the class and of demonstrating this platform and of providing the proletarian elite with a revolutionary education.

From this characterization of our platform, what flows immediately, as our central task, is the task of building the revolutionary party.

Proletarian Leadership*

See: http://libcom.org/files/cc_psw_v1.pdf

BETA

*1974 note: Originally published as “La direction prolétarienne,” [*S. ou B.*, 10 \(July 1952\)](#): 10-18. Reprinted in *EMO1*, 145-61, and *EPI*, 395-405. Translated in [*PSW1*](#), 198-205.

Postface to “The Revolutionary Party” and “Proletarian Leadership”^{*}

Discussion of the organizational question went on, in more or less pointed fashion, during the entire history of the S. ou B. group. But the meaning of the two preceding texts [“The Revolutionary Party” and “[Proletarian Leadership](#)”] would remain obscure were they not placed in the context of the discussions going on at the time they were written. In order to shed some light on them, it seemed to me useful to reprint here the accompanying notes published in *S. ou B.*, 2 (May 1949) and 10 (July 1952).

Here first is the note that preceded “The Revolutionary Party” in [issue 2](#):

The Life of Our Group

1. For a year, the group has been gathering twice per month in plenary session. These meetings are essentially devoted to the discussion of general as well as current political problems. Reports have thus been drawn up, which have served as the basis for the discussion of such problems as present-day trade unionism, the imperialism of bureaucratic Russia, the miners’ strike, the current evolution of the economic and political situation, and so on. On the other hand, an educational group has been operating that also meets twice a month; two series of presentations have been given there about the formation and the general aspects of Marxism and about the capitalist economy.

2. On Sunday, April 10 [1949], the group devoted the full plenary session, morning and afternoon, to a discussion of the question of the revolutionary party and of the orientation of its labor toward the construction of the party. After a report from comrade Chaulieu [Castoriadis], whose main content is reproduced in the resolution on the

^{*}Originally published as “Postface au ‘Parti révolutionnaire’ et à ‘La direction prolétarienne,’” *EMOI*, 163-78. Reprinted in [EPI](#), 407-17. Partially translated as “Postface,” [PSWI](#), 205-206. It appears here finally in a full English-language translation.

revolutionary party we publish below [T/E: See “The Revolutionary Party,” above], most of the comrades took the floor to speak at some length and everyone expressed their views on the question under debate.

Three comrades opposed the basic orientation of the report, from markedly different positions. The main part of the discussion turned around the points raised by them; nevertheless, several problems also were broached that, while not directly tied to the central problem, were not devoid of interest and will be the theme of subsequent discussions (in particular, the problem of the socialist organization of the economy and of the abolition of directors-executants relations at that stage).

3. Comrade Carrier¹ is opposed to the idea of considering the group right now as being bound by a collective discipline and the construction of the revolutionary party as being absolutely necessary. While, he says in substance, one must grant a differentiation within the proletariat, this is not the differentiation between the party and the class. Still less than the party, the group at the present stage is not justified as an organized body [*corps organisé*]. The sole distinction to be made is the one between the organization of laboring people and the organization of revolutionaries. An organization of revolutionaries is necessary, but it can be constructed only on the basis of workplaces [*milieux de travail*], not starting from an ideological encounter among individuals. In any case, such an organization of revolutionaries has to be completely subordinated to the organization of laboring people and be tied by no discipline that would involve a solidarity of its members in action. Revolutionaries meet and discuss in common the problems of the revolution; they then separate in order for each to act as they see fit within the organization of laboring people, the class's sole representative. Carrier sees in the Struggle Committees that formed in 1947, and in the similar groupings that may occur, examples of organization

¹T/E: See Alex Carrier, author of “Le cartel d'unité d'action Syndicale” [S. ou B., 1 \(March 1949\): 62-77.](#)

among laboring people. In such committees, the comrades from the group behave like the other elements and are careful not to seek to impose the group's ideas. Finally, if one imagines the group as a whole joining an organization of laboring people, it would immediately have to disappear *qua* group. Carrier therefore characterizes the organization of revolutionaries essentially as a short-lived group whose tendency is to wither away. He concludes by saying that the organization of revolutionaries has to, at any rate, disappear the very day the Soviets seize power.

4. Comrade Denise opposes this assessment of the organization of revolutionaries and of its relations with the organization of laboring people by bringing out that the organization of revolutionaries is indispensable, in an ongoing [*permanent*] way, in order to prepare the revolution and that it has to continue to distinguish itself from all other forms of organization of the class until the revolution, whatever the objective conditions might be. Yet she raises two problems: (1) What is the revolutionary organization's relationship to the class to be? (2) What is the structure of this organization to be? To the first problem, she responds by affirming that the organization of revolutionaries cannot propose, as its goal, to direct [*diriger*] the class. For a militant from the group, it is not a matter, for example, of seeking to direct a Struggle Committee; furthermore, such a militant is not to take the lead [*prendre la direction*] in it but only to manifest his ideas. As concerns the structure of the revolutionary organization, one must not posit that the struggle against bureaucratization pertains only to the program and not to the organizational structure. The principle of democratic centralism is to be studied in the light of past experience and called into question; democratic centralism resting on the executives-directors duality that reigned in the parties of the revolutionary Third International was already, in fact, a bureaucratic centralism.

5. Comrade Ségur, like comrade Denise, states that a political organization is an ongoing necessity, which he does not refuse to call a *party*. Yet he deems that the conception of the party given in the Report, which is a classical conception and is, at bottom, quite close to the Leninist conception from

What is to Be Done?, completely misses the genuine problem, which is that of preventing the party's bureaucratic degeneration. Now, such degeneration is inevitable if the party sees itself being assigned the tasks of political leadership [*direction politique*] of the class. The problem is to restrict its activity to the ideological domain and to prohibit it from intervening on the practical level. The party is to be the class's ideological leadership and not its practical leadership. If it sets for itself practical tasks, the party is substituting itself for the class; it becomes a bureaucratic leadership, which, in acting in the name of the class's interests, acts in fact in the class's stead. In this sense, Comrade Ségur is saying that one must study very closely the period of immediate preparation for the revolution. The moment of insurrection is the moment when the party—if it does not limit itself to its ideological role—itself prepares the seizure of power and when it sets up—outside the class's autonomous organs—the framework of power. The logic of the party is then to act more and more in the place of the Soviets and to transform itself into a bureaucracy.

6. Other comrades rose up against these positions: we offer a condensed version of their speeches in order to bring out more clearly the ideas that were put forward:

a) What emerges from the speeches of the comrades opposed to the Report is that these comrades acknowledge to varying degrees the necessity of an organization of revolutionaries. To deny such an organization would be for us to deny ourselves *qua* group existing on the basis of a common political platform. Yet if one starts from this fact, one must draw all the conclusions therefrom or else one is not fully thinking through the idea of an organization of revolutionaries. Let us suppose, even, that there would be no group that has formed around a political program but only class organs such as Struggle Committees or trade unions called *autonomous*; within such groups, one cannot prevent a certain number of members from happening to agree among themselves and trying to work out together a political program that raises problems not on the scale of the local and the corporative but on a national and international scale and in a universal manner. One cannot prevent these members

who share these political ideas from gathering together separately in order to discuss among themselves some problems that follow from their shared conceptions; either those members are not at all serious or else their will is to bring victory to their ideas, which they believe are just; one therefore cannot prevent them, if they decide to act together in one and the same workplace, or each in his own workplace, in an identical sense, from deciding, in their public activity, to emphasize their agreement and to subordinate thereto their disagreements. The logic of their situation thus leads them necessarily to constitute themselves in a group, an organization, or a party (depending on whether or not their program is sufficiently worked out).

To say that one member of this constituted group has to refrain, for example, from playing a preponderant role in a class body under the pretext that it then alters the spontaneity and autonomy of the organ is in fact to prevent him from expressing his ideas and trying to convince others. For, is it not necessary, if he convinces them, that he be put in charge of tasks involving responsibility and that he acquire a preponderant position within this organ?

b) Animated by the desire to seek guarantees against the bureaucracy, the comrades do not see that, instead of giving an answer to the problem they pose, they are simply suppressing it. For, in order to avoid the danger of bureaucracy, they reject all organized and concerted action. These are not just the exigencies proper to revolutionary struggle, the need to work out a complete political and economic program—that is to say, a historical one—and the need to think and to act on a national and international plane, but the imperatives of all collective action informed by a shared need, which require organization in labor and command in action.

c) The solution cannot consist in limiting the activity of the party to a sphere of theoretical elaboration or to a role of political orientation. All the group's analyses are grounded precisely on the idea that the theoretical, political, and practical tasks not only are closely linked, as Marxists have shown in the past, but have become, properly speaking, identical, that is to say, the different forms of one and the

same reality. To take a position politically on such and such a problem that is of interest to the working class is at the same time to indicate a practical attitude to adopt in such and such a situation. Just as one cannot limit oneself to practical problems and just as the tasks of the revolution involve the overcoming of the practical problem and a solution to the most theoretical problems there might be, so are political positions thoroughly worked out practical positions. To perform an artificial division between the two domains is a step backward. In our era, when political and practical tasks are becoming identical, it is essential to pose the problem of antibureaucratic struggle—not to deny the character of this era. The identity of the practical, the political, and the ideological is in a sense eminently progressive and signifies a ripening of the proletariat's consciousness.

d) The party's connection with the autonomous organs of the class that may be born between now and the revolution—like Struggle Committees—or with Soviets has to be understood correctly. Our group thinks that the constitution of the revolutionary party is the necessary but not at all sufficient condition for the revolution; it has affirmed, since its inception, that the meaning of our era was the tendency of the workers' movement toward autonomy. It has seen in the Struggle Committees that were formed in 1947, particularly the one in the [Unic Factory](#), a major manifestation of the tendency of the vanguard to gather together before the revolution on the factory level in organs where practical problems are raised as a matter of fact in connection with the key political problem of the struggle against the bureaucracy. We think that even if such committees cannot stay alive in an ongoing way until the revolution, the exigencies of the antibureaucratic struggle in our era lay down in a *permanent* way the conditions for their formation. We think, too, that the awakening of antibureaucratic consciousness manifested by such committees is the very condition for the revolution, in other words, that the revolution could not take place if the tendency to struggle did not manifest itself within the proletariat in a palpable and objective manner, not against the Stalinists *qua* "artisans of a bad policy" but against the bureaucracy as such, beneath all its forms.

While, during an entire phase of its history, the party/trade union duality was determinant of the workers' movement, it is toward a party/struggle committee type of duality that this movement is heading. And this evolution of the situation implies a ripening of the proletariat, an increased politicization in all domains of struggle and organization, a much closer connection between the party and the class's organizations. And furthermore, such an evolution implies that the formation of Soviets could be situated only at a higher level than in 1917-1923, the autonomous workers' bodies prefiguring the Soviets and posing problems of workers' power in an embryonic manner within bourgeois society itself. One therefore cannot posit the role of the revolutionary party without juxtaposing the class's autonomous organs. Yet one cannot do the opposite and eliminate the party or limit it in its tasks. On the one hand, as has already been said, the party has a permanent character, whereas these organs may be born and may die; on the other hand, such organs, by themselves, do not have a complete political program and a historical conception of the problems. They express in an extremely profound manner the proletariat's tendency toward autonomy, but it cannot be said that they have already won a genuine autonomy insofar as they do not possess the program of the revolution, insofar, on the contrary, as they remain the terrain of struggle for ideologies hostile to the proletariat. It is in the way in which the party treats the class's autonomous organs that its true nature and its capacity to resolve the problem of bureaucracy will be revealed. Insofar as the autonomous organs are part of its outlook [*perspective*], it is clear that the party cannot be opposed to them and try to reduce them to its advantage while repudiating itself. The party is seeking to give rise to such organs; it sees in them embryos of Soviets. Its goal is to do everything for them to expand, to become aware of their role, and to transform themselves into factory committees. Therefore, there is no sense in it wanting to annex them artificially or to incorporate them.

For the party, defending its program in such committees and getting them to develop their autonomy is one and the same thing and not two movements that contradict

each other. With this example is revealed the fact that the antibureaucratic struggle is essentially programmatic. It is in giving concrete form to the program in all forms of action that one can struggle against the bureaucracy, not by seeking some miraculous by-laws that will yield a guarantee against degeneration.

It is certain that one does not struggle against the bureaucracy as one struggles against the bourgeoisie, under the pretext that these two social forms have an objective existence made real in the economy. The bureaucracy is, to a certain extent, the force involved in the supervision [*d'encadrement*] of labor. It is much more connected to the proletariat; it has detached itself therefrom during the very course of its evolution—that is to say, the struggle against it implies, for the proletariat, a deepening of its program and progress in its forms of organization and struggle. Yet it is from the program that valuable consequences follow as concerns struggle and organization. Solutions built into the by-laws, such as the rejection of democratic centralism, are not what can offer a solution to the problem.

Following the discussion, the comrades as a whole accepted the resolution for orienting the group around the problem of the Party that had been proposed to them—with the exception of three comrades who had defended the opposite point of view. We publish below this resolution in the definitive form given to it by the group's responsible committee. We also publish the resolution on the by-laws that was later adopted.

Various comrades have indeed underscored the importance of the discussion that had taken place and of the adoption of the new orientation, remarking that no systematic work could be accomplished so long as the group had not clearly taken a position on the necessity of preparing for the construction of a revolutionary party, and that it was a matter now of expressing this position concretely in the group's activity.

Here follows the *Résolution statutaire* to which the preceding note referred.

Resolution on the By-Laws

1. Eligible for membership in the group are those comrades who:

a) accept the programmatic positions formulated in the text [“Socialism or Barbarism”](#);

b) pay their dues regularly;

c) work politically under the control and collective discipline of the group, devoting to this work their best effort and orienting their life in terms of this political activity.

2. A comrade is granted membership in the group through cooptation and after having followed the group’s educational courses. This last condition may admit of some exceptions in specific cases, following a decision by the group.

3. The group’s comrades determine in plenary session, through discussion and vote, the political and practical orientation of its activity.

4. The group’s members are bound to execute the tasks the group entrusts to them. The group entrusts tasks to its members only when the material conditions for the achievement of such tasks are present. Failure on the part of a member to execute tasks and obligations makes the member liable to sanctions going from a warning to exclusion. An unwarranted two-month delay in paying dues, or the unwarranted absence from two consecutive meetings or three meetings in three months raises, in principle, the question of whether the absent comrade is to be excluded.

5. The group’s labor on all levels is coordinated and directed by the Responsible Committee elected by the group, which settles all questions that present themselves between two plenary sessions. All the group’s comrades have the right to participate in the meetings of the RC and to express themselves there, but the members of the RC alone vote there. Each comrade from the group is bound to attend, once every two months, a meeting of the RC.

6. The plenary sessions of the group determine the general orientation of each issue of the Review, but the RC has the political responsibility for the editing. If divergencies appear on the topic of the content of the Review's articles, the RC decides by majority vote. Nonetheless, if two members of the RC ask for it, the decision can be turned over to the plenary session of the group. It is understood in the latter case that all measures are to be taken so that publication of the Review may be assured within the normal time limits.

7. Comrades having divergent opinions can express them as such through the Review, except if the RC in its entirety is opposed thereto. Such opposition cannot invoke political motives but only reasons relating to the standards and quality [*la tenue*] of the Review. These comrades can express their opinions in their propaganda activity, on the condition that the main place in such activities be accorded to the exposition of the group's programmatic positions and that their particular positions be shown to be subordinate to their agreement with the group's shared positions. The group can grant comrades outside the group the possibility of expressing themselves within the Review.

8. In all domains of practical activity, the principle of discipline in action is applied by all comrades in relation to the decisions of the plenary sessions or those of the RC that replace those meetings or give them concrete form. Temporarily, nevertheless, until the group's program of action is defined and its consolidation on the organizational level is brought forward, the group does not, on problems regarding outside activity addressed to fractions of the class, impose discipline on comrades who persist in maintaining divergent practical positions, if such positions are based on an experience of concrete conditions those comrades alone possess.

9. This resolution is temporary in character. It will remain in effect until a joint meeting of the comrades from Paris and from the provinces votes for a more detailed resolution on the group's operation.

The preceding discussion (itself the apparent culmination of discussions that in fact had begun before the group left the PCI) took place in April 1949. Shortly thereafter, however, the discussion was taken up again stronger than ever, reaching a climax in the spring of 1951 and concluding at least temporarily with the first scission with Claude Lefort and other comrades who shared his positions (a scission that was, in fact, of short duration). The texts that entered into the discussion were “[Proletarian Leadership](#),” which is reprinted here, and “Le Prolétariat et le problème de la direction révolutionnaire,” by Claude Lefort, which also was published in [issue 10 of S. ou B.](#) (and now reprinted in Claude Lefort, [Éléments d’une critique de la bureaucratie \[Geneva-Paris: Droz, 1971\]](#), pp. 30-38, under the title, “Le Prolétariat et sa direction.”) [T/E: Lefort’s article, also found on pp. 59-70 in the second, revised edition of this book published in 1979 by Gallimard, has been partially translated as “The Proletariat and the Problem of Revolutionary Leadership” in [SouBA](#), 300-308.]

These two texts were preceded by the following note:

The readers of the Review know that the problem of the revolutionary party has preoccupied the group since it was set up, and that a first organized discussion of this problem took place in 1949, an account of which is to be found in [issue 2 of S. ou B.](#) (95-99). At the end of this discussion, a resolution on the party question had been voted for by the large majority of the group ([ibid.](#): 99-107).

The conceptions contained in this resolution were called back into question last year by a portion of the group’s comrades and in particular by comrade Montal [Claude Lefort]. A discussion was then organized again, the texts of comrade Chaulieu [Cornelius Castoriadis] and Montal, which we publish below, served as preparation for this discussion.

The group’s meetings in June of last year [1951], during which these texts were discussed, not only have not occasioned an agreement but have revealed major and multiple divergencies within the group on this question. The divergencies between Chaulieu’s position and that of Montal are evident in reading the texts. Yet these positions have not been the sole ones expressed and are far from having divided the group into two exclusive tendencies. Thus, on the one hand, it is apparent that comrade [Véga \[Alberto Masó\]](#)—who violently criticized Montal’s position—grants to the revolutionary party during the period of the dictatorship of the proletariat a greater role than Chaulieu attributes to it. [Bourt](#)

[\[Raymond Hirz\] AKA Gaspard](#) seems to be still closer to the classical conception when he deems that the task of the group would be to tackle immediately the construction of an organization that would direct workers' struggles. On the other hand, [\[Henry\] Chazé \[Gaston Davoust\]](#), while being in agreement with Montal on the programmatic questions that relate to the party, parts with him as to the conclusions concerning the group, its immediate tasks, and its character.

At the end of the discussion, Montal and the comrades who were in agreement with him declared that they no longer considered themselves members of the group, but that they were ready to continue to collaborate with the group and with the Review, a proposal that was accepted by the other comrades.

I have briefly indicated in the *Introduction générale* (22-23 and 38-39² [General Introduction, [PSW1](#), 10-11 and 21-22]) how the two texts reprinted above—the first especially, but this is also true, to a certain extent, of the “Response to Comrade Pannekoek,” which can be read below [now *above* in the present volume]—remained prisoners of traditional conceptions on some nonnegligible points. The decisive turn was brought about for me during the drafting of *CS I* [“On the Content of Socialism, I,” translated in [PSW1](#)] during the winter of 1954-55; it is clearly indicated in “Workers Confront the Bureaucracy” [translated in [PSW2](#)], in “Results, Prospects, Tasks” [see above], and in “Results” [translated below] and *PO I* [“Proletariat and Organization, I,” translated in [PSW2](#) and excerpted in [SouBA](#)] and *PO II* [“Proletariat and Organization, II,” translated below] (see also *CS II*, [July 1957](#) [“On the Content of Socialism, II,” in [PSW2](#)] and *MTR/MRT III* and *IV*, [October 1964](#) and [March 1965](#)) [“Marxism and Revolutionary Theory,” now included in [IIS](#)]. I also hope that the [General Introduction](#) will help the reader to situate the question on its proper terrain.

It would be rather pointless to summarize here in a detailed fashion the criticism of old texts, which already has been done, either implicitly or explicitly, in subsequent writings. I will add some additional considerations in a new text on the organizational question, which will be published later.³

²FRENCH EDITORS: The [Introduction générale to the Éditions 10/18 reprint](#) will be reprinted in the *What Democracy?* volume of our edition.

³FRENCH EDITORS: The text was never completed. We will publish some fragments of it in *What Democracy?*

**MORE POLITICAL
AND SOCIAL WRITINGS
1945-1997
BOOK 2**

**THE QUESTION OF THE
WORKERS' MOVEMENT
VOLUME 2**

BETA

**PART ONE:
THE CONTENT OF SOCIALISM**

BETA

FRENCH EDITORS: In this first Part of Book 2 of *The Question of the Workers' Movement*, one will find pages 47-260 of *CS* (in which three texts published between 1952 and 1957 in *S. ou B.* and another published in 1961 in the English review *International Socialism* were reprinted). Its "Introduction" [translated as "Socialism and Autonomous Society" in *PSW3*] as well as pp. 261-411 are published in the *What Democracy?* volume of our edition. The final text, "Social Transformation and Cultural Creation" [translated in *PSW3*], has already been published by us in a new collection specially devoted to cultural problems, *FC* [T/E: English-language edition: *WoC*; see: 3-25.]

Although Castoriadis gave the same title to several texts from 1955 to 1958, it must not be thought that we are dealing with successive parts of one and the same set: "On the Content of Socialism, I" [translated in *PSW1*] is in some ways a first version of themes entirely reworked later on, just as "On the Content of Socialism, III" [translated in *PSW3*] is not a mere sequel to "On the Content of Socialism, II" [in *PSW2*]. Moreover, Castoriadis preferred, in his Éditions 10/18 reprint, to integrate this last text in *EMO2* (9-88), since it basically concerns the relations between the contradictions in the organization of the capitalist business enterprise and working-class forms of organization, consciousness, and struggle. The text we have placed in the Appendix to this Part (but which is, chronologically speaking, the first), "The Socialist Program," was published in *S. ou B.*, 10 (July 1952): 1-9. The hold of traditional Marxist conceptions is obvious: it is said there, in particular, that it is "more than ever necessary to reaffirm the idea of the dictatorship of the proletariat," "the unlimited dictatorship the proletariat exercises against the classes that are hostile to it." Clearly stated there, on the other hand, are the critique of the monopolization of leadership functions [*fonctions de direction*] by the "revolutionary party," the need for "total exercise of political and economic power" by soviet bodies, the need for management of the economy by the producers, the need, too, for the appropriation of culture by the proletariat, and especially for the creation of new cultural features: "Past cultural creation will be able to be used by the proletariat in its struggle for the construction of a new form of society only upon the condition that this culture at the same time be transformed and integrated into a new whole." The author insists on the need to "formulate in a much more precise and detailed manner than in the past" the socialist program, and this because the two key features of the traditional program—nationalization and planning, on the one hand, dictatorship of the Party as expression of the dictatorship of the proletariat, on the other—have become "the programmatic bases of bureaucratic capitalism." Whence the need to define socialism in a positive and concrete fashion (as workers' management) and not in a negative and abstract fashion (as abolition of private property and planning in general).

As for the second text devoted to this program (the first one in this Part)—"On the Content of Socialism, I" [translated in *PSW1*]¹—while it is, in a sense, as the author indicated in 1957, a first version of "On the

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Content of Socialism, II" [in [PSW2](#)], it is undoubtedly more than that. He first summarizes in an excellent way the group's analysis of the Eastern countries' bureaucracies and then presents an initial formulation of some of the ideas on workers' management developed in the 1957 text that are not all taken up again as such later on (which does not mean that the author had necessarily renounced them), insisting in particular on the "huge wastefulness" brought about both by the producers' opposition to the system and by the "the lost opportunities that result from neutralizing the inventiveness and creativity of millions of individuals." Also said there is something that was certainly not common within certain milieus in the mid-1950s, viz., that alienation in capitalist society concerns not only the economic domain but "all spheres of social activity": such alienation "not only manifests itself in connection with material life. It also affects in a fundamental way both man's sexual and his cultural functions."

Of all the texts published in the review, "The Content of Socialism, II" [in [PSW2](#)] was probably the one most widely distributed in other countries even before it was reprinted in a volume by Castoriadis. An English-language version was provided in 1972 by the group Solidarity of London under the title [Workers' Councils and the Economics of a Self-Managed Society](#), in a translation by "Maurice Brinton" (Christopher Pallis). This version served as the basis for translations published in Germany in 1974 ([Arbeiterräte und Selbstverwaltete Gesellschaft \[Frankfurt: Neue Kritik\]](#)) and in Spain in 1976 (under the name "Paul Cardan": [Los Consejos obreros y la economía en una sociedad autogestionaria \[Bilbao: Editorial Zero\]](#)). The text was undoubtedly read very attentively in Italy by some of the actors of what would become *operaiismo* (see, for example, [Raniero Panzieri's "Sull'uso capitalistico delle macchine nel neocapitalismo," Quaderni Rossi, 1 \[1961\]: 53-72](#)). Some of its ideas (the critique of capitalist technology, the idea of a possible "automatization" of certain managerial functions of the economy) have also had, directly or indirectly, a posterity we cannot retrace here. There is one—certainly important—point on which Castoriadis modified his position, and this as early as 1963, in "Recommencing the Revolution" [in [PSW3](#)]: "On the Content of Socialism, II" [in [PSW2](#)] presents as a self-evident fact that there is a historical privilege to the industrial proletariat. Upon several occasions in our edition's *What Democracy?* volume, Castoriadis reconsiders the problems the numerical decline of the working class as well as the fact that the business enterprise is no longer the privileged site for socialization in contemporary society raise for the idea of a council democracy—without, however, giving up on this idea. The principal change in the 10/18 edition in relation to the texts published in the review concerns a certain number of sometimes long notes, which Castoriadis rightly thought touched on problems of substance and were better placed in the body of the text (generally, they have been included in parentheses). "The Meaning of Socialism," which *Solidarity* also published as a brochure and which also was widely circulated, summarizes and reformulates, for British readers, what had been said in previous texts while rendering explicit and developing certain points.

On the Content of Socialism, I*

See: http://libcom.org/files/cc_psw_v1.pdf

BETA

*1979 Note: Originally published as “Sur le contenu du socialisme,” [*S. ou B.*, 17 \(July 1955\)](#): 1-26. Reprinted in *CS*, 67-102, and *EP2*, 19-47. Preceding the article was the following note: “This article opens up a discussion on programmatic problems, which will be continued in forthcoming issues of *Socialisme ou Barbarie*.” Translated in [*PSW1*](#), 290-309, and then excerpted in [*CR*](#), 40-49.

On the Content of Socialism, II*

See: http://libcom.org/files/cc_psw_v2.pdf, <http://becomingpoor.files.wordpress.com/2016/02/the-castoriadis-reader.pdf> (excerpted *Castoriadis Reader* version) and [SouBA.pdf](#) (excerpted *Socialisme ou Barbarie Anthology* version).

BETA

*1979 note: Originally published as “Sur le contenu de socialisme,” *S. ou B.*, 22 (July 1957): 1-74, reprinted in *CS*, 103-221, and *EP2*, 49-141 [T/E: and excerpted in *SouBA*, 157-95 (French edition)]. The text was preceded by the following note:

The first part of this text was published in *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, 17: 1-22. The following pages represent a new draft of the entire text and a reading of the previously published part is not presupposed. This text opens a discussion on programmatic questions. The positions expressed here do not necessarily express the point of view of the entire *Socialisme ou Barbarie* group.

[T/E: This text was originally translated by Maurice Brinton under the title *Workers' Councils and the Economics of a Self-Managed Society* (London: Solidarity, 1972), with “Our Preface.” It was reprinted by Philadelphia Solidarity in 1974 (with forewords by Philadelphia Solidarity and the League for Economic Democracy) and in 1984 as a Wooden Shoe Pamphlet (with a statement about the group, Philadelphia Solidarity, titled “About Ourselves,” and a new introduction by Peter Dorman, “Workers Councils...25 Years Later”). An adaptation of Brinton’s translation later appeared in *PSW2*, 90-154, and then was excerpted both in *CR*, 49-105, and in *SouBA*, 249-97.]

The Meaning of Socialism*

*1979 note: Originally published [T/E: as “Socialism and Capitalism” by “Paul Cardan”] in [International Socialism \(London\), 4 \(Spring 1961\), 20-27](#). Reprinted [with a few modifications] as a [brochure by Solidarity \(London\) in September 1961](#). [T/E: Actually, the group, still known as Socialism Reaffirmed at the time, stated in its [1961 Introduction](#) that the text was appearing “in a somewhat different form.”] This version was reprinted on several occasions [T/E: as Solidarity Pamphlet 6. A new [Introduction](#) appeared in the [November 1965 reprint](#). The fifth reprint, dated December 1969, includes another [Introduction](#). An additional [Introduction](#) is dated July 1972. Philadelphia Solidarity’s reprint appeared in 1994]. This text has also been translated and distributed in [Japanese](#), Polish, [Swedish](#), and [Norwegian](#). Retranslated from the English by me. [This first publication of Castoriadis’s French retranslation appeared in CS, 223-60; reprinted in EP2, 143-72. T/E: Libcom.org’s [Transcriber’s Introduction](#) for the online *Solidarity* version asserts, without evidence:

In one important sense this is unlike the other texts by Castoriadis published by *Solidarity*. Where they were translated from French this one was “translated” from English. Castoriadis spoke fluent English and had written the original article in that language.

However, Castoriadis just reported that this text was “retranslated” by him from the English *back* to French in 1979. Libcom.org’s [Transcriber’s Introduction](#) also notes:

In bibliographies of Castoriadis’ writings the “Socialism Reaffirmed” version is described as having been “slightly altered.” In fact it is significantly rewritten, presumably by Maurice Brinton. Brinton took an “activist” approach to translation. His main concern was to get “concepts over to as wide (and unspecialized) an audience as possible.” To that end his translations involved extensive sub-editing of Castoriadis’ texts. Sentences were reworked and sometimes shortened, occasionally lengthened, to make them clearer and more direct. Inessential matter was cut. Having both versions of this text makes it possible to see what this entailed and how far it went.

The present reprint, which Americanizes British spelling and punctuation, starts from the Solidarity Pamphlet version but contains slight alterations to reflect Castoriadis’s 1979 French retranslation, which, *pace* Libcom, follows in fact rather closely the Socialism Reaffirmed/Solidarity version, in both its title and its contents (either because the initial *International Socialism* English-language version was no longer available to Castoriadis or because he preferred the Solidarity Pamphlet version). Therefore, this is a third English-language version, after the *International Socialism* version (a slightly stilted translation—by Castoriadis himself or another—of a now-lost original French version?) and the version prepared (somehow or other) by Socialism Reaffirmed a year after Bob Pennington (?), and not Brinton, translated the original [“Socialisme ou Barbarie” editorial](#) as [Socialism Reaffirmed. An Analysis of the Crisis of Contemporary Society and An Outline of the Road to Working Class Power.](#)]

THE NEED FOR A SOCIALIST PROGRAM

It is amazing how little discussion there is about Socialism among the socialists of today. It is even more surprising to hear self-styled revolutionaries claim that we ought to concern ourselves exclusively with the “practical, day-to-day issues” of the class struggle and let the future take care of itself. These views remind one of Bernstein’s famous saying: “The goal is nothing, the movement everything.”¹ In fact there is no movement except towards a goal, although the objective may have to be redefined constantly, as the movement develops.²

Carefully selected quotations from Marx, directed at the utopian socialists, are frequently resorted to in order to avoid fundamental discussions about Socialism. Now, a quotation is not, of course, a proof. It is, in fact, the exact opposite: a proof that real proof is lacking. We quote no authority to prove that water, left long enough on the fire, will boil. But what of the substance of the matter? Marx rightly argued against those who wanted to substitute *minute* and *unfounded* descriptions of the future society for the actual struggle taking place under their very noses. He did not, however, refrain from stating his own view about the program of a proletarian revolution. He, in fact, appended the elements of such a program to the [*Communist Manifesto*](#). He missed no opportunity offered him, through the growth of historical experience or by the needs of the movement, to develop, elaborate, or even modify his own previous programmatic conceptions. Examples of this are his generalization of the experience of the Paris Commune into the formula of “the dictatorship of the proletariat” and his [*Critique of the Gotha Program*](#).

¹T/E: See n. 3 of “Phenomenology of Proletarian Consciousness,” above in Book 1, about Bernstein’s dictum.

²T/E: The *International Socialism* version is slightly different and more expansive: “In fact, there is no movement except towards a goal, even if the goal has constantly to be re-defined as the movement develops; even if, for the working class movement, the goal is not something as strictly defined as the bridge an engineer is planning to build.”

To propound, in 1961,³ that we cannot and should not go any further than Marx is tantamount to saying that nothing of importance has happened in the last eighty years. This is what some people—including many self-styled “Marxists”—really seem to think. They admit, of course, that many events have taken place, duly to be chronicled, but they reject the idea that this requires any basic change in their programmatic conceptions. Their theoretical and political stagnation goes hand in hand with their organizational disintegration.

We feel that what has happened during the period we are discussing, and particularly since 1917, is more important, for socialists, than anything that has happened before in human history. The proletariat took power in an immense country. It victoriously withstood the attempts at a bourgeois counterrevolution. Then it gradually disappeared from the historical scene and a new social stratum, the bureaucracy, established its domination over Russian society and set out to build “socialism” through the most ruthless methods of terror and exploitation. Contrary to all prognoses, including Trotsky’s, the Russian bureaucracy victoriously withstood the test of the biggest war in history. Today, it disputes industrial and military supremacy with the USA.

On the eve of the war, Trotsky was daily predicting that the bureaucracy would not survive this supreme test, because of “contradictions between the socialist foundations of the regime and the parasitic and reactionary character of the bureaucracy.”⁴ Today, the Trotskyists say that the increasing military power of Russia is the product of these “socialist foundations.” If you are unable to follow this kind of logic, apply the rule: When a sputnik is successfully put into orbit, it must have been launched from the depths of the socialist

³T/E: The “Spring 1961” *International Socialism* version said: “1960.” This gives us a hint of the date of drafting/translation of the original text.

⁴T/E: This may be a paraphrase rather than an actual quotation.

foundations. Explosions in midair are due to the parasitic nature of the bureaucracy.⁵

After the war, the same bureaucratic regime established itself [*s'est instauré*] in countries as diverse as East Germany and Czechoslovakia on the one hand, and China, North Korea, and North Vietnam on the other, *without a proletarian revolution*. If nationalization of the means of production and planning are the “foundations” of Socialism, then obviously there need be no link between Socialism and working-class action. All the workers need do is sweat to build “socialist” factories and keep them running. Any local bureaucracy, granted favorable circumstances and some help from the Kremlin, could do the trick.

But then something happened. In 1956 the Hungarian workers undertook an armed revolution against the bureaucracy. They formed Workers' Councils and demanded *workers' management of production*. Whether Socialism was simply “nationalization plus planning” or whether it was “workers' councils plus workers' management of production” was shown to be no academic question. Five years ago, history posed it at the point of a gun.

Traditional ideas about Socialism have in many ways been tested by events. We cannot run away from the answers. If socialism equals nationalized property plus planning plus Party dictatorship, then Socialism equals Khrushchev, his sputniks, and his “butter in 1964.” If such are one's conceptions, then the best one can do is to be an opponent within the regime, a critic within the ranks of the Communist Party, trying to “democratize” and “humanize” the system. And why even that? Industrialization can take place without democracy. As Trotsky put it, a revolution has its overhead costs. That these costs need be reckoned in terms of heads is only to be expected.

These considerations are not only relevant to any discussion about socialism; they are also fundamental to our understanding of contemporary capitalism. In various

⁵T/E: In both earlier English-language versions, this paragraph and a number of other series of lines appeared as notes. Castoriadis's French “retranslation” placed them instead in the body of the text, as is done here.

capitalist countries, basic sectors of production have been nationalized and important degrees of State control and economic planning have been established. Capitalism itself—“orthodox,” Western-type capitalism—has undergone tremendous changes. Reality has rudely shattered most traditionally-held ideas—for instance, that capitalism can no longer develop production (this is stated quite explicitly in Trotsky’s *Transitional Program*: “Mankind’s productive forces stagnate. New inventions and improvements fail to raise the level of material wealth”);⁶ that there is an inevitable perspective of booms and ever deeper slumps; that the material standards of living of the working class cannot rise substantially and durably under capitalism; that a growing industrial reserve army is an unavoidable product of the system. “Orthodox” Marxists are forced to indulge in all sorts of verbal gymnastics in order to defend these views. They daydream about the next big slump—which, for twenty years now, has been “just around the corner.”⁷

These problems, presented by the evolution of capitalism, are intimately related to the programmatic conceptions of the socialist movement.⁸ As usual, the so-called “realists” (who are reluctant to discuss Socialism as it is obviously “a matter of the distant future”) are the ones who are blind to reality. Reality demands that we reexamine here and now the fundamental problems of the movement. At the end of this article, we show why it is impossible, without such a discussion, to take a correct stand on the most trivial day-to-day and down-to-earth practical problems. At this

⁶T/E: In the May-June 1938 edition of the *Bulletin of the Opposition*, the [English translation of this Trotsky passage](#) reads, almost identically, as: “Mankind’s productive forces stagnate. Already new inventions and improvements fail to raise the level of material wealth.” See also below, n. 10, in “Proletariat and Organization, II.”

⁷T/E: Here, the *International Socialism* version continued: “—and which they feel will restore to them their mental comfort.”

⁸T/E: Here, the *International Socialism* version continued: “The present ideological agony of the Labour Party (both ‘right’ and ‘left’) bears testimony to this fact. All this shows quite clearly that,” before: “as usual.”

stage, however, it should be obvious that no *conscious* movement can exist that evades answering the basic question: "What is Socialism?" This question is but the converse of two others: "What is capitalism?" And: "What are the real roots of the crisis of contemporary society?"

THE CONTRADICTION IN PRODUCTION

Traditional Marxism sees the crisis of capitalist society as brought about by the private ownership of the means of production and by "the anarchy of the market." A new stage of development of human society will start, it is claimed, with the abolition of private property. We can now see that this has proved to be wrong. In the countries of Eastern Europe, there is no private property. There are no slumps. There is no unemployment. Yet the social struggle is fought out no less fiercely than in the West. Need we recall Eastern Germany, 1953; Poland and Hungary, 1956; China, 1957—and the echoes of daily struggles in Russian factories that find their way into the official Soviet press, including Khrushchev's *published* report to the XXth Congress of the CPSU?

Traditional thought held that economic anarchy, mass unemployment, stagnation, and miserable wages were both deep-rooted expressions of the contradictions of capitalism *and* the mainsprings of the class struggle. We see today that, despite full employment and rising wages, the capitalists have constant problems in running their own system and that the class struggle has in no way diminished. The *forms* of the class struggle have altered, for certain deep-going reasons, which are intimately linked up with the problems we discuss in this text. But the *intensity* of the struggle has not lessened. The interest of workers in traditional "politics," "left" or otherwise, has declined. But "unofficial" strikes in Britain and "wildcats" in the USA are increasingly frequent. People who, when confronted with this situation, continue to quote old texts, can make no real contribution to the essential reconstruction of the socialist movement, which is necessary.

Traditional Marxism saw the contradictions and irrationality of capitalism at the level of the economy as a

whole, not at the level of production. (“Marxism” here and later in the text is taken in its effective, historical sense. By *Marxism* we mean the ideas most prevalent in the Marxist movement, barring philological subtleties and minute interpretations of this or other particular quote. The ideas discussed in this text are rigorously those Marx propounded in *Capital*.) The defect, in its eyes, lay in “the market” and in the “system of appropriation,” not in the individual enterprise or in the system of production, taken in its most concrete, material sense. Now, the capitalist factory is of course affected by its relation to the market: it would be absurd for it to produce unsaleable products.⁹ Traditional Marxism acknowledges, of course, that the modern factory is permeated with the spirit of capitalism: methods and rhythms of work are more oppressive than they need be, capitalism cares little about the life or physical health of the workers, and so on. But *in itself*, the factory as it now stands, is seen as nothing but efficiency and rationality. It is Reason in person, from the technical as well as from the organizational point of view. Capitalist technology is *the* technology—absolutely imposed upon humanity by the present stage of historical development, and relentlessly promoted and applied to production by those blind instruments of Historical Reason: the capitalists themselves. The capitalist organization of production (division of labor and of tasks, minute control of the work by the supervisors and finally by the machines themselves) is *the* organization of production *par excellence*, since in its drive for profits it constantly adapts itself to the most modern technology and makes for maximum efficiency of production. Capitalism creates, so to speak, the correct means, the only means, but it uses them for the wrong ends. The overthrow of capitalism, the traditional Marxists tell us, will gear this tremendously efficient productive apparatus toward the correct ends. It will use them for the “satisfaction of the needs of the masses” instead of for “the maximum profit of the capitalist.” It will incidentally eliminate the

⁹T/E: Castoriadis’s 1979 retranslation omits the end of this sentence found in both previously published English-language versions: “or armaments.”

inhuman excesses inherent in the capitalist methods of organization of work. But it will not—it could not, according to this “traditional” view—change anything, except perhaps in a very distant future, in the organization of work and in productive activity itself, whose characteristics flow inevitably from the “present stage of development of the productive forces.”

Marx saw, of course, that the capitalist rationalization of production contained a contradiction. It took place through the ever-increasing enslavement of living labor (the worker) to dead labor (the machine). Man was alienated, insofar as his own products and creations—the machines—dominated him. He was reduced to a “mere fragment of a man”¹⁰ through the ever increasing division of labor. But this was, in Marx’s mind, an abstract, “philosophical” contradiction. It related to the fate of man in production, not to production itself. Production increased, *pari passu*, with the transformation of the worker into a “mere cog” of the machine, and *because* of this transformation the objective logic of production has to roll over the subjective needs, desires, and tendencies of men. It has to “discipline” them. Nothing can be done about it: the situation flows inexorably from the present stage of technological development. More generally it flows from the very nature of the economy, which is still in “the realm of necessity.”¹¹ This situation extended as far into the future as Marx cared to see. Even in the society of the “freely associated producers” Marx claimed “man will not be free within production” (vol. III, *Capital*). The “realm of freedom” would be established outside work, through the “reduction in the working day.”¹² Freedom is leisure, or so it would seem.

¹⁰T/E: In Chapter 15 of Marx’s *Capital*.

¹¹T/E: In Chapter 48 of [vol. 3 of Marx’s Capital](#).

¹²T/E: In *ibid.*, Marx states:

Freedom in this field can only consist in socialized man, the associated producers, rationally regulating their interchange with Nature, bringing it under their common control, instead of being

It is our contention that what Marx saw merely as a “philosophical” contradiction is in fact the most real, the most profound, the most concrete, and the most basic contradiction of capitalism.¹³ It is the source of the constant crisis of present society, both in the West and in the East. The “rationality” of capitalist organization is only very superficial. All means are utilized to a single end: the increase of production for production’s sake. This end in itself is absolutely irrational.

Production is a means to human ends, not Man a means to the ends of production. Capitalist irrationality has an immediate, concrete expression: by treating men in production simply as means, it transforms them into objects, into things. But even on the assembly line, production is based upon man as an active, conscious being. The transformation of the worker into a mere cog—which capitalism constantly attempts but never succeeds in achieving—comes into direct conflict with the development of production. If capitalism ever succeeded in fulfilling this objective, it would mean the immediate breakdown of the productive process itself. From the capitalist point of view, this contradiction expresses itself as the simultaneous attempt, on the one hand, to reduce work into the mere execution of strictly defined tasks (or, rather, *gestures*), and on the other hand, constantly to appeal to and rely upon the conscious and willing *participation* of the worker, on his capacity to understand and do much more than he is supposed to.

This situation is thrust upon the worker eight hours or more each day. As one of our comrades in the Renault factory

ruled by it as by the blind forces of Nature; and achieving this with the least expenditure of energy and under conditions most favorable to, and worthy of, their human nature. But it nonetheless still remains a realm of necessity. Beyond it begins that development of human energy which is an end in itself, the true realm of freedom, which, however, can blossom forth only with this realm of necessity as its basis. The shortening of the working-day is its basic prerequisite.

¹³T/E: Castoriadis’s 1979 retranslation does not reproduce the all-caps rendering of this sentence from the London Solidarity version.

put it,¹⁴ the worker is asked to behave simultaneously “as automaton and as superman.” This is a source of unending conflict and struggle in every factory, mine, building site, or workshop in the modern world. It is not affected by “nationalization” or by “planning,” by boom or by slump, by high wages or by low.

This is the fundamental criticism socialists should today be leveling against the way society is organized. In fighting on this front, they would be giving explicit formulation to what every worker in every factory or office feels every moment of every day, and constantly seeks to express through individual or collective action.

CAPITALIST PRODUCTION

In our society, men spend most of their life at work. Work for them is both agony and nonsense. It is agony because the worker is constantly subordinated to an alien and hostile power, to a power which has two faces: that of the machine and that of management. It is nonsense because the worker is confronted by his masters with two contradictory tasks: to do as he is told...and to achieve a positive result.

Management organizes production with a view to achieving “maximum efficiency.” But the first result of this sort of organization is to stir up the workers’ revolt against production itself. The production losses brought about in this way exceed by far those resulting from the profoundest slumps. They are probably of the same order of magnitude as total current production itself (see J.A.C. Brown, *The Social Psychology of Industry* [Penguin]).¹⁵

To combat the resistance of the workers, the management institutes an ever more minute division of labor and tasks. It rigidly regulates procedures and methods of

¹⁴T/E: Castoriadis’s French version adds here, in brackets: “[D. Mothé]” to refer to S. ou B. member and Renault autoworker Daniel Mothé (Jacques Gautrat).

¹⁵T/E: Castoriadis also cited Brown’s 1954 book in “On the Content of Socialism, II,” now in [PSW2](#), 152, n. 10.

work. It imposes controls of the quantity and quality of goods produced. It institutes payment by results.¹⁶ It also proceeds by giving an increasingly pronounced class twist to technological development. Machines are invented, or selected, according to one fundamental criterion: Do they assist in the struggle of management against workers, do they reduce yet further the worker's margin of autonomy, do they assist in eventually replacing him altogether? In this sense, the organization of production today, whether in Britain or in France, in the USA or in the USSR, is *class organization*. Technology is predominantly *class technology*. No British capitalist, no Russian factory manager would ever introduce into his plant a machine that would increase the freedom of a particular worker or of a group of workers to run the job themselves, even if such a machine increased production.

The workers are by no means helpless in this struggle. They constantly invent methods of self-defense. They break the rules, while "officially" keeping them. They organize informally, maintain a collective solidarity and discipline. They create a new ethic of work. They reject the psychology of the carrot and the stick. Both rate-busters and slackers are forced out of the shops.

With its methods of organizing production, management gets involved in an endless tangle of contradictions and conflicts. These go well beyond those caused directly by the resistance of the workers. The strict definition of tasks management aims at is nearly always arbitrary and often quite irrational. Standards of work are impossible to define "rationally" when the workers are in constant and active opposition. To treat workers as separate cogs contradicts the profoundly collective character of modern production. The result is that there is both a formal, official and an informal, real organization of the plant, of the flow of work, and of communications.¹⁷ These two

¹⁶T/E: Castoriadis's French version is a bit more detailed, yielding: "piece-rate wages or payment by results."

¹⁷T/E: Castoriadis's 1979 retranslation adds "official" and "real" as second, contrasting adjectives in his "formal"/"informal" opposition.

organizations are then permanently at variance with one another.

Management of work is more and more separated from its execution. In order to overcome this separation, in order to administer—*from the outside*—the immense complexity of modern production, management is compelled to reconstruct and mirror, within its own ranks, and again in a completely arbitrary manner, the whole process of production. This is not simply, strictly speaking, impossible; it also leads to the establishment of an enormous bureaucratic apparatus. A further division of labor occurs within this apparatus and the whole set of previous contradictions is reproduced. Management divorced from execution cannot plan rationally. It cannot correct in time the inevitable errors. It cannot compensate the unforeseeable; it cannot accept that the workers should do these things in its place...and it cannot accept that they shouldn't. It is never properly informed. The principal source of information—the workers at shop-floor level—organize a permanent “conspiracy of silence” against it. Management finally cannot really understand production because it cannot understand its principal spring: the worker.

This situation, this set of relations, is the prototype of all the conflicts in today's society. With appropriate variations the above description of the chaos in a capitalist factory applies to the British Government, to the European Common Market, to the Russian Communist Party,¹⁸ to the French National Coal Board, to the United Nations, to the American Army, and to the Polish Planning Commission.

The behavior of management in the course of production is not accidental. Actions are imposed on management by the fact that the organization of production is today synonymous with the organization of exploitation. But the converse is also true: private capitalist and state bureaucrat are today able to exploit precisely because they manage production. The class division in modern society is increasingly stripped of all its legal and formal trappings.

¹⁸T/E: Since Castoriadis eschewed referring to the “Soviet Union” when speaking of Russia, his French modifies the English-language version to eliminate this phrase, replacing it by the one he usually used: “Russian.”

What is revealed is the kernel of fundamental social relationships in *all* class societies: the division of labor between a stratum *directing* both work and social life, and a majority who merely *execute*. Management of production is not just a means for the exploiters to increase exploitation. It is the basis and essence of exploitation itself. As soon as a specific stratum takes over management, the rest of society is automatically reduced to the status of mere objects of this stratum. As soon as a ruling stratum has achieved a dominating position, this position is used to confer privileges upon itself (a polite name for the appropriation of surplus value). These privileges have then to be defended. Domination has to become more complete. This self-expanding spiral leads rapidly to the formation of a new class society. *This* (rather than backwardness and international isolation) is the relevant lesson for us, when we study the degeneration of the October revolution.

SOCIALISM MEANS WORKERS' MANAGEMENT

By *Socialism* we mean the historical period that starts with the proletarian revolution and ends with communism. In thus defining it, we adhere very strictly to Marx. This is the *only* “transitional period” between class society and communism. There is no other. This transitional society is not communism, inasmuch as some sort of “State” and political coercion are maintained (the “dictatorship of the proletariat”). There is also economic coercion (“he who does not work, neither shall he eat”).¹⁹ But neither is it class society, inasmuch as not only the ruling class is eliminated, but also *any sort* of dominating social stratum. Exploitation itself is abolished. The confusion introduced by Trotsky and the

¹⁹T/E: This phrase from Paul (2 Thessalonians 3:10), quoted favorably by John Smith of the Jamestown Colony (Virginia) in 1609, was taken up by Vladimir Ilyich Lenin in his 1917 work *State and Revolution*; see: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/He_who_does_not_work,_neither_shall_he_eat.

Trotskyists in this field, through the insertion of ever more “transitional” societies between capitalism and socialism (workers’ States, degenerated workers’ States, very degenerated workers’ States, etc.) must be exposed. The ultimate result of this confusion is to provide justification for the bureaucracy and to mystify the workers, by persuading them that they can be at one and the same time the “ruling class”...and yet ruthlessly exploited and oppressed. A society in which workers are not the dominant social force in the proper and literal sense is not, and never can be, “transitional” to socialism or to communism (except, of course, in the sense in which capitalism itself is “transitional” to socialism).

It follows that if the socialist revolution is to do away with exploitation and is to abolish the crisis of present society, it must eliminate all distinct strata of specialized or permanent managers from the domination of various spheres of social life. It must do so first and foremost in production itself. In other words, the revolution cannot confine itself to the expropriation of the capitalists; it must also “expropriate” the managerial bureaucracy from its present privileged positions.

Socialism will not be able to establish itself unless it introduces from its very first day workers’ management of production. We arrived at this idea in 1948 as a result of an analysis of the degeneration of the Russian revolution [see now the texts reprinted in [the first volume of *La Société bureaucratique*](#) and the first volume of *Capitalisme moderne et révolution*; T/E: many of these texts now appear in translation in [PSW1](#) and [PSW2](#)]. The Hungarian workers drew exactly the same conclusion in 1956 from their own experience of the bureaucracy. Workers’ management of production was one of the central demands of the Hungarian Workers’ Councils.

For some strange reason, Marxists have always seen the achievement of working class power solely in terms of the conquest of political power. Real power, namely power over production in day-to-day life, was always ignored. Left opponents of Bolshevism correctly criticized the fact that the dictatorship of the party was replacing the dictatorship of the proletarian masses. But this is only part of the problem, and

a secondary aspect at that. We do not intend to discuss here the developments in Russia after 1917, nor whether Lenin or the Bolsheviks “could have done otherwise.” This is a perfectly void and sterile discussion. The important point to stress is the link between what *was* done...and the final results. By 1919 the management of production and of the economy was already in the hands of “specialists”; management of political life was in the hands of the “specialists in revolutionary politics,” i.e., of the Party. No power on earth could under these circumstances have stopped the bureaucratic degeneration. Lenin’s “programmatically conception”—as opposed to his practice—was that political power should rest with the Soviets, the most democratic of all institutions. But he was also relentlessly repeating, from 1917 until his death, that production should be organized from above, along “state-capitalist” lines. This was the most fantastic idealism. The proletariat cannot be a slave in production during six days of the week and then enjoy Sundays of political sovereignty! If the proletariat does not manage production, then, of necessity, somebody else does. And as production, in modern society, is the real locus of power, the “political power” of the proletariat will rapidly be reduced, under these conditions, to mere window-dressing. “Workers’ control” of production does not offer any real answer to this problem. Either workers’ control will rapidly develop into workers’ management, or it will become a farce. Neither in production nor in politics can long periods of dual power be tolerated.

Some of Lenin’s writings on this matter should be better known than they are to revolutionary socialists. The following passages from Lenin’s article [“The Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government”](#) (*Selected Works*, Vol. VII, pp. 332, 342, 345) show very clearly what Bolshevik thinking was on the question of the organization of labor.

The more class-conscious vanguard of the Russian proletariat has already set itself the task of raising labor discipline. ... This work must be supported and pushed forward with all speed. We must raise the question of piecework and apply and test it in

practice; we must raise the question of applying much of what is scientific and progressive in the Taylor system. ...The Taylor system...is a combination of the subtle brutality of bourgeois exploitation and a number of its greatest scientific achievements in the field of analyzing mechanical motions during work, the elimination of superfluous and awkward motions, the elaboration of correct methods of work, ..., etc.

...The revolution...demands, ...in the interests of socialism, that the masses *unquestioningly obey the single will* of the leaders of labor.

...We must learn to combine the "public meeting" democracy of the working people...with *iron discipline* while at work, with *unquestioning obedience* to the will of a single person, the Soviet leader, while at work.

We have not yet learned to do this.

We shall learn it.

We believe that these conceptions, this *subjective* factor, played an enormous role in the degeneration of the Russian Revolution, a role that has never yet been fully assessed. It is obviously not a question of denigrating Lenin. But we can see today the relationship between the views he held and the later reality of Stalinism. We are not better revolutionaries than Lenin. We are only forty years older!

History has shown that the problem of what happens after the revolution is of fundamental importance to socialist thinking. Almost everything depends upon the level of conscious activity and participation of the masses. A genuine revolution does not take place unless this activity has reached extraordinary proportions both in relation to the number of people involved and to the depth of their involvement. A revolution is a period of *intense* and *conscious* activity of the masses, trying to take over *themselves* the management of all the common affairs of society. A bureaucratic degeneration

only becomes possible when there is a reflux of this activity. But what causes this reflux? Here many honest revolutionaries lift their arms to heaven, saying they only wished they knew.

One can offer no guarantees that a revolution will not degenerate. There are no recipes for maintaining a high level of activity among the masses. But history has shown that certain factors do lead, and in fact lead very quickly, to a retreat of the masses from political activity. These factors are the emergence and consolidation, at different points of social life, of individuals or groups who “take charge” of society’s common affairs. (All these remarks are of direct relevance to the problem of the revolutionary organization itself, and of *its* possible degeneration. One need only substitute in the text the word “members” for the word “masses.”) For mass activity to be maintained at a high level it is necessary that the masses see—not in speeches, but in the facts of their everyday life—that power really belongs to them, that they can change the practical conditions of their own existence. And the first and most important field where this can be tested is at work. Workers’ management of production gives to the workers something that can be grasped immediately. It gives real meaning to all other issues, to all political developments. Without it, even revolutionary politics will rapidly become what all politics are today: mere rhetoric and mystification.

WHAT IS WORKERS’ MANAGEMENT?

Workers’ management does not mean that individuals of working-class origin are appointed to replace the present-day managers. It means that industry, at its various levels, is managed by the collectivity of the workers, employees, and technicians. Affairs affecting the shop or the department are decided by the assemblies of workers of the particular shop or department concerned. Routine or emergency problems are handled by stewards, elected and subject to instant recall. Coordination between two or more shops or departments is ensured by meetings of the respective stewards or by common assemblies. Coordination for the whole factory and relations with the rest of the economy are the task of the Workers’

Councils, composed of elected delegates from the various departments. Fundamental issues are decided in general assemblies, comprising all the workers in a given factory.

Under workers' management, it will be possible at once to start eliminating the fundamental contradictions of capitalist production. Workers' management will mark the end of labor's domination over man, and the beginning of man's domination over his labor. Each enterprise will be autonomous to the greatest possible degree, itself deciding all those aspects of production and work that do not affect the rest of the economy, and itself participating in those decisions that concern the overall organization of production and of social life. The general objectives of production will be decided by the whole working population.

We cannot here outline all the technical problems involved in truly democratic planning. These have been fully discussed in [Issue No. 22 \(July 1957\) of *Socialisme ou Barbarie*](#) [T/E: see "On the Content of Socialism, II," in *PSW2*]. The essence of the matter is that the general objectives of the plan should be collectively determined, and as widely accepted as possible. Given certain fundamental data, electronic computers could produce a number of plans and could work out in some detail the technical implications of each, in relation to the various sectors of the economy. The Workers' Councils would then discuss the merits of these various plans, in full knowledge of all that they imply in terms of human labor.

Decisions, for instance, as to whether an increase in productivity of 10 percent should find expression in higher wages—or in a reduced working week or in further investment are decisions in which *all* should participate. They affect everyone. These are not decisions to be left in the hands of bureaucrats "acting in the interests" of the masses. Should such fundamental decisions be left in the hands of "professional experts" they will very soon start deciding things in their own interests. Their dominant position in production will immediately ensure them a dominant role in the distribution of the social product. The basis of new class relationships will have been well and truly laid.

The chosen plan will ascribe to each enterprise the tasks to be accomplished in a given period, and the means will be supplied to them for this end. But within this general framework, workers of each enterprise will have to organize their own work. Anyone familiar with the roots of the crisis in contemporary industrial relations, and anyone who has studied the demands of workers and what their informal struggles are all about, will readily understand along what lines the reorganization of production by the workers themselves will develop. Externally imposed standards of work will certainly be abolished. (This was an explicit demand of the Hungarian Workers' Councils. It is the subject of constant struggle in every factory throughout the world.) Coordination of work will take place through direct contacts and cooperation. The rigid division of labor will start being eliminated through rotation of people between departments and between jobs.

There will be direct and permanent contact and cooperation between machine- and tool-using departments and machine- or tool-making departments and factories. This will result in a change in the workers' relation to the instruments of production. The main objective of today's equipment is, as we have already said, to raise production through the increased subordination of man to the machine. When the workers themselves manage production, they will start adapting equipment not only to the needs of the work to be done, but also and predominantly to their own needs, as human beings.

The conscious transformation of technology will be one of the crucial tasks confronting socialist society. For the first time in history, human beings will become masters of their productive activity.²⁰ Work will cease to be "the realm of necessity." It will become a field where humans exert their

²⁰T/E: Both original versions in English used "man." Castoriadis's 1979 retranslation modifies this to nongendered plural forms, *les êtres humains* and *les humains* (human beings). He reverts to *les hommes* (men) below before returning to *l'être humain* and *les humains*. In the previous paragraph, the *International Socialism* version's "man" already became "human beings" in *Socialism Reaffirmed/Solidarity* versions.

creative power. Contemporary science and technique offer immense possibilities in this direction. Of course, such a transformation will not take place overnight; but neither must it be seen as lying in a hazy, very distant, and unpredictable communist future. These matters should not be left to take care of themselves. They will have to be systematically fought for as soon as working-class power is established. Their fulfilment will require a whole transitional period. This period is in fact socialist society itself (as distinct from communism).

SOCIALIST VALUES

What will be the essential values of a socialist society? What will be its basic orientation? Here again, we are not speaking about a misty future, but about the tasks a proletarian revolution will have to set itself immediately. We are not sucking a new ethic or new metaphysics out of our thumbs. We are simply endeavoring to formulate conclusions that to us seem to flow inevitably from the crisis of the values of present society, and from the real attitudes of workers today, both in the factory and outside.

Workers' management of production, the conscious transformation of technology, the government of society by Workers' Councils, and democratic planning will undoubtedly develop productivity and increase the rate of growth of the economy to a tremendous degree. They will make possible a rapid increase in consumption. Many basic social needs will be satisfied. The working day will be reduced. But this is not, in our view, the substance of the matter. All these are but byproducts, although extremely important byproducts, of the socialist transformation.

Socialism is not a doctrine about how to increase production *as such*. This is a fundamentally capitalist way of looking at things. The main preoccupation of the human race throughout its history has never been to increase production at all costs. Nor is Socialism about "better organization" *as such*, whether it be better organization of production, of the economy, or of society. Organization for organization's sake is the constant obsession of capitalism, both private and bureaucratic (capitalism constantly meets with failure in this

field, but this is irrelevant). The relevant questions, as far as Socialism is concerned are: more production, better organization—at *what* cost, at *whose* cost, and to *what* end?

The usual replies we get today, whether they come from Mr. Kennedy,²¹ from Mr. Khrushchev, from [\[British Labour Party Leader\] Mr. \[Hugh\] Gaitskell](#), from [\[CPGB General Secretary\] Mr. \[John\] Gollan](#), or from [\[Socialist Labour League leader\] Mr. \[Gerry\] Healy](#)²² are more production and better organization in order to increase both consumption and leisure. But let us look at the world around us. Men are subject to ever-increasing pressures by those who organize production. They work like mad in factory or office, during the major part of their nonsleeping lives in order to get a 3 percent annual rise or an extra day's holiday each year. In the end—and this is less and less of an anticipation—human happiness would be represented by a monstrous traffic jam, each family watching TV in its own saloon car²³ while sucking the ice cream provided by the car's refrigerator!

Consumption as such has no meaning for man. *Leisure as such* is empty. Few are more miserable in today's society than unoccupied old people, even when they have no material problems. Workers all over the world wait longingly for Sunday to come. They feel the overwhelming need to escape from the physical and mental slavery of the working week. They look forward to being masters of their own time. Yet they find that capitalist society, even then, imposes its

²¹T/E: *International Socialism*'s Spring 1961 version refers to "Mr. Nixon" (the Socialism Reaffirmed/Solidarity version changes this to "Mr. Kennedy"), suggesting the initial final draft probably was composed even before the November 1960 US Presidential election.

²²T/E: In his 1979 retranslation, Castoriadis added here in brackets: "the latter two were, respectively, leaders of the English Stalinist party and Trotskyist party."

²³T/E: Castoriadis's 1979 retranslation does not retain the following outdated (and futurist?) footnote: "With current rates of increase in car sales, current degrees of immobilization in traffic jams, and current production of TV sets, it will certainly become an economic proposition for car manufacturers to install TV sets in cars, probably by 1970."

dictates upon them. They are as alienated in their leisure as they are at work. Objectively, Sundays reflect all the misery of the working week that has just finished and all the emptiness of the week that is about to start.²⁴

Consumption today reflects all the contradictions of a disintegrating culture. "Rising standards of living" are meaningless, for this rise has no end. (It is exactly what Hegel used to call "bad infinity" [*schlechte Unendlichkeit*].) Society is organized to create more wants than people will ever be able to satisfy. "Higher standards of living" are the electric hare used by capitalist and bureaucrat alike to keep people on the run. No other value, no other motives are left to man in this inhuman, alienated society. But this process is itself contradictory. It will sooner or later cease to function. This decade's standards of living make the previous one's look ridiculous.²⁵ Each income bracket is looked down upon by the one immediately above it.

The *content* of present consumption is itself contradictory. Consumption remains anarchic (and no bureaucratic planning can take care of that) because the goods consumed are not good-in-themselves, are not absolutes, but

²⁴T/E: Castoriadis 1979 retranslation omits a partially outdated footnote: "See 'Correspondence' pamphlet 'The American Worker' by Paul Romano and Ria Stone. Copies from 'Correspondence,' 7737 Mack Avenue, Detroit 14, Mich., USA. Also, D[aniel] Mothe, 'Les Ouvriers et la Culture,' *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, No. 30." *The American Worker* (1947; reprinted, Detroit: Bewick Editions, 1972) was translated for the first eight issues of *S. ou B.* Romano's contribution was partially reprinted in *SouBA*.

²⁵T/E: In point j from the second installment of "Modern Capitalism and Revolution" (now in *PSW2*, 280)—first published in *S. ou B.*, 32 (April 1961) but perhaps composed much earlier, since opposition within the group initially held up publication of this text first drafted in 1959-1960—Castoriadis states in similar fashion this critique of what he called, in the third installment, the "rat race": "The only remaining motivation is the race after the carrot of an 'ever-higher standard of living' (not to be confused with real living, which does not go by standards). This 'rising standard of living,' which bears within itself its own negation (since there is always another, even higher standard to be attained), works like a treadmill."

embody the values of *this* culture. People work themselves to a standstill to buy goods they are unable to enjoy, or even to use. Workers fall asleep in front of TV sets bought with overtime pay. Wants are less and less real wants. Human wants have always been basically *social* ones. (We are not speaking now about biological needs). Today's wants are increasingly manufactured and manipulated by the ruling class. The serfdom of man has become manifest in consumption itself. Socialism, we claim, is not primarily concerned about more production and more consumption *of the present type*. This would lead, through innumerable links and causal connections, to simply more capitalism.

Socialism is about freedom. We do not mean freedom in a merely juridical sense. Nor do we mean moral or metaphysical freedom. We mean freedom in the most real down-to-earth sense: freedom of people in their everyday lives and activities; freedom to decide *collectively* how much to produce, how much to consume, how much to work, how much to rest. Freedom to decide, *collectively and individually*, *what* to consume, *how* to produce, and *how* to work. (A genuine market for consumer goods, with "consumers' sovereignty," will certainly be maintained or rather established for the first time in socialist society.) Freedom to participate in determining the orientation of society.²⁶ And freedom to direct one's own life within this social framework.

Freedom in this sense will *not* arise automatically out of the development of production. It should not be confused with leisure. Freedom for man is not idleness, but free activity. The precise content men give to their "leisure time" is largely conditioned by what happens in the fundamental sphere of social life, namely in production. In an alienated society, leisure, both in its form and in its content, is but one of the expressions of alienation.

Nor will the "increased opportunities of education for all" automatically produce freedom. Education in itself does not solve anything. In itself, it simply results in the mass

²⁶T/E: This sentence was left out of Castoriadis's 1979 retranslation—probably inadvertently, given the presence of the phrase "this social framework" in the next sentence, which refers back to this absent one.

production of individuals who are going to reproduce the same society, of individuals who will be made to embody in their personalities the existing social structure and all its contradictions. Education today, in Britain or in Russia, by the school or by the family, aims at producing people adapted to the present type of society. It corrupts the human sense of integration into society, which it transforms into a habit of subservience to authority. It corrupts the human sense of taking reality into account into a habit of worshipping the *status quo*. It imposes a meaningless pattern of work, which separates, dislocates, and distorts physical and mental potentialities. The more education of the present type is supplied, the more of the present breed of man will be produced, with slavery built into him.

The development of production and the "material plenty" it would induce would not of themselves bring about a change in social attitudes. They would not abolish the "struggle of everybody against everybody." Generally speaking, this struggle is much more harsh and ruthless today in the USA than it is in an African village. The reasons are obvious: in contemporary society alienation penetrates and destroys the meaning of everything. It not only destroys the meaning of work, but the meaning of all aspects of social and individual life. The only remaining values and motivations for men are higher and higher (not just high) "standards" of material consumption. To compensate people for the increasing frustration they experience at work—as in all other social activities—society presents them with a new aim: the acquisition of ever more "goods." The *distance* between what is effectively available to the worker and what society sets as a "decent" standard of consumption has been *increasing* with the rise in production and in actual living standards. This process and the corresponding "struggle of everybody against everybody" will not stop until the present culture, its worship of consumption and its acquisitive philosophy are destroyed at their very roots. These capitalist attitudes have in fact completely penetrated, dominated, and deformed what passes for "Marxism" today.

Private capitalism and bureaucratic capitalism use a common method of maintaining people tied to their work and

in antagonism to one another. This is a systematic policy of wage differentials. On the one hand, a monstrous income differentiation prevails as one moves up the bureaucratic pyramid, be it in the factory or in the State. On the other hand, artificial pay differentials are systematically introduced in order to destroy class solidarity. They are applied to people performing work very similar in regard to skill and effort required. When the class structure of society is destroyed, there will not be the slightest justification, economic or other, for retaining such differentials. It is impossible to discuss here the incredible sophistry with which so-called “Marxists” have tried to justify income inequality, whether in Russia or under “socialism.” In this respect we would stress two points:

a) The strict implementation of the “pay-according-to-value-of-work-done” principle, advocated by Marx in the [*Critique of the Gotha Program*](#), would lead at most to a pay differential of the order of 1 (unskilled manual work) to 1.25 or 1.5 (nuclear physicist). By “value of the work done” we mean value in the Marxist sense, as defined by the labor theory of value.

b) Inequality of incomes under socialism is usually justified on the grounds that society has to pay back to the skilled worker his training costs (including training years). The wage differentials in capitalist society pay this back many times over. The “principle” would be utter nonsense in a socialist society, because training costs would then not fall on the individual [they do not in fact do so, moreover, even today] but would be paid by society itself.²⁷

No collective, democratic management of factory, economy or society can function among economically unequal people. The maintenance of income differentiation will immediately tend to recreate the present nonsense. *Equal*

²⁷T/E: Thrice, Castoriadis’s 1979 retranslation renders here the future tense of the English versions’ “will be” in the conditional, as *serait* (would be). It also added the observation appearing in brackets here.

pay for all who work must be one of the fundamental rules the socialist revolution will have to apply.

THE SOCIALIST ORGANIZATION

When, as revolutionary socialists, we try to define our conception of socialism, what are we really doing? We are, surely, defining the movement itself. Who are we? What do we stand for? On what program do we wish to be judged by the working class?

It is a matter of elementary political honesty that we should state openly and without ambiguity or doubletalk the goals we think the workers should fight for. But this is also a matter of great practical importance. It is in fact a matter of life and death for the construction of a revolutionary organization and for its development. Why is this so?

Let us look first of all at the relationship between the revolutionary organization and the working class. What is this relationship to be? If the sole and main object of the socialist revolution is to eliminate private property and the market in order to accelerate, through nationalization and planning, the development of production, then the proletariat has no *autonomous* and *conscious* role to play in this transformation. All steps that convert the proletariat into an obedient and disciplined infantry—at the disposal of “revolutionary” headquarters—are good and proper ones. It is enough that the working class be prepared—or induced—to fight capitalism to the death. It is irrelevant that it should know how, why, what for. The “leadership” knows. The relation between Party and Class then parallels the division in capitalist or bureaucratic society between those who direct and those who merely execute. After the revolution, management and power rest with the Party, which “manages” society “in the interests of the workers.” This is a conception shared by Stalinists and Trotskyists alike. The emergence of a bureaucratic, class society becomes absolutely inevitable.

(This conception, scarcely camouflaged, can be found in the [October-November 1960 issue of *Labour Review*](#) [“theoretical” organ of the English Trotskyists]. An [article by Cliff Slaughter titled “What is Revolutionary Leadership”](#)

contains, *inter alia*, an attack on the ideas of *Socialisme ou Barbarie*. The article contains nothing beyond the standard collection of platitudes on the “necessity of iron-trained leadership,”²⁸ of the kind found in any Trotskyist article on the subject written in the course of the last twenty years. The author, moreover, follows the genuine tradition of Trotsky’s epigones in carefully avoiding any attempt at understanding the ideas he criticizes. His theoretical level is amply illustrated by the fact that, for him, the whole history of humanity in the last forty years can only be explained by the “crisis of revolutionary leadership.”²⁹ For not a single moment does our author ask himself: What are the causes of this crisis? If the party is the solution to this crisis and “has to be built by those who grasp the historical process theoretically,”³⁰ why is it that the grasping Trotskyists have for thirty years now been unable to build it? Why have Trotskyist organizations disintegrated even in countries where they once had some forces? Slaughter’s “refutation” of antibureaucratic conceptions is based on the argument that consciousness is necessary for the overthrow of capitalism. Consciousness is then, quite naively, identified with the consciousness of the leaders of the Party. The author finally betrays his basically bourgeois mentality by depicting the centralization of bourgeois power, its organization, its weapons, etc., and by demanding, in order to combat this, a “heightening of discipline and centralized authority to an unprecedented degree.”³¹ He does not suspect for a single

²⁸T/E: The most similar phrase that appears in [Slaughter’s article](#) (on p. 106) is: “What is needed *above all* is a strongly disciplined leadership.” Three pages later appears this: “Lenin, convinced that without a proletarian party of iron discipline there could be no revolution, was prepared to subordinate everything to insistence on this task.”

²⁹T/E: Slaughter’s phrase “crisis of leadership” appears twice on p. 106.

³⁰T/E: This phrase by Slaughter appears on p. 106 in italics.

³¹T/E: Slaughter argues on p. 111 that what is needed is “not an abandonment of discipline and centralized authority, but its heightening to an unprecedented degree.”

moment that *proletarian* centralization and discipline—as exemplified by a workers' council or strike committee—represents a completely different thing from *capitalist* centralization and discipline, of which he is constantly asking for more.)

If, on the other hand, the object of the socialist revolution is to institute workers' management of production, economy, and social life, through the power of the Workers' Councils, then the active and conscious subject of this revolution and of the whole subsequent social transformation can be none other than the proletariat itself. The socialist revolution can take place only through the autonomous action of the proletariat. Only if the proletariat finds *in itself* the will and consciousness necessary to bring about this immense transformation of society will the transformation take place. Socialism realized “on behalf of the proletariat,” even by the most revolutionary party, is a completely nonsensical conception. The revolutionary organization is not and cannot therefore be “the leadership” of the class. It can only be an instrument in the class struggle. Its main task is, through word and deed, to assist the working class to grasp its historical role of managing society.

How is the revolutionary organization to function internally? According to traditional conceptions, the Party is organized and functions according to certain well-proven principles of efficiency that are allegedly based on “common sense,” namely a division of labor between “leaders” and “rank and file,” control of the former by the latter at infrequent intervals and usually after the event (so that control, in fact, becomes ratification), specialization of work, a rigid division of tasks, etc. This may be bourgeois common sense, but it is sheer nonsense from a revolutionary point of view. This type of organization is efficient only in the sense of efficiently reproducing a bourgeois state of affairs, both inside and outside the party. In its best and most “democratic” form, it is nothing but a parody of bourgeois parliamentarism.

The revolutionary organization should apply to itself the principles evolved by the proletariat in the course of its own historic struggles: the Commune, the Soviets, and the Workers' Councils. There should be autonomy of the local

organs to the greatest degree compatible with the unity of the organization; direct democracy wherever it can be materially applied; eligibility and instant revocability of all delegates to central bodies having power of decision.

WHAT ARE SOCIALIST DEMANDS?

What should be the attitude of the organization regarding the day-to-day class struggle? What should be its demands, both “immediate” and “transitional”?

For the traditional organizations, whether reformist or “Marxist,” the struggle is viewed essentially as a means of bringing the class under the control and leadership of the party. For Trotskyists, for instance, what matters during a strike is to have the strike committee applying “the line” decided by the party faction. Strikes have often been doomed because the whole upbringing and mentality of party members make them, quite unintentionally, see as their first objective *their own control* of the movement, not its intrinsic development. Such organizations see the struggle within the unions as essentially a struggle for the control of the union machine.

The demands advocated are themselves reflective of the reactionary ideology and attitude of these organizations. They do so in two ways. First, by talking *exclusively* about wage increases, about the fight against slump and unemployment, or about nationalizations, they focus the attention of workers on reforms that are not only perfectly possible under capitalism but are, in fact, increasingly applied by capitalism itself. These reforms are, in fact, the very expression of the bureaucratic transformation taking place in contemporary society. Taken as such, these demands tend merely to rationalize today’s social structure. They coincide perfectly well with the program of the “left” or “progressive” wing of the ruling classes.

Secondly, by producing “transitional” demands—sliding scales of wages and hours, workers’ “control,” workers’ militias, etc.—which are *deemed* to be incompatible with capitalism, but are not presented as such to the working

class, these organizations mystify and manipulate³² the working class. (In fact, some of them are not incompatible with capitalism: the sliding scale of wages is today applied in many industries and in various countries. But this manifestation of the Trotskyists' ability to live in an imaginary world is irrelevant to our main argument.) The Party, for instance, "knows" (or believes that it knows) that the sliding scale of wages will never be accepted by capitalism. It believes that this demand, if really fought for by the workers, will lead to a revolutionary situation and eventually to the revolution itself. But it does not say so publicly. If it did, it would "scare the workers off," who are not "yet" ready to fight for socialism as such. So the apparently innocent demand for a sliding scale of wages is put forward as *feasible*...while "known" to be unfeasible. This is the bait, which will make the workers swallow the hook and then the revolutionary line. The Party, firmly holding the rod, will drag the class along into the "socialist" frying pan. All this would be a monstrous conception, were it not so utterly ridiculous.

For the revolutionary organization, there is but one simple criterion in determining its attitude to the day-to-day struggles of the workers. Does this particular form of struggle, this particular form of organization *increase* or *decrease* the participation of workers, their consciousness, their ability to manage their own affairs, their confidence in their own capacities (all of which, by the way, are the *only* guarantees that a struggle will be vigorous and efficient even from the most immediate and limited point of view)?

We therefore stand unconditionally for direct decisions by assemblies of strikers on all the important issues; for strike committees elected and subject to instant recall (this might seem commonplace for Britain; it is certainly not on the Continent); against the management of strikes by the union bureaucrats; for rank-and-file organization; for the

³²T/E: Castoriadis's 1979 retranslation omits the French equivalent of "tend to" before "mystify and manipulate."

unconditional support of shop stewards,³³ and against all illusions about “reforming,” “improving,” or “capturing” the bureaucratic apparatus of the trade unions.

Demands must be decided by the workers themselves and not imposed on them by unions or parties. This of course does not mean that the revolutionary organization has no point of view of its own on these questions or that it should refrain from defending this point of view when workers do not accept it. It certainly does imply, however, that the organization refrains from manipulating or forcing workers into particular positions.

The attitude of the organization to particular demands is directly linked to its whole conception of socialism. Take two examples:

a) The source of oppression of the working class is to be found in production itself. Socialism is about the transformation of these relations of production. Therefore, immediate demands related to *conditions of work*, and, more generally, to life in the factory, must take a central place, a place at least as important and perhaps even more important than wage demands. (It is of course no accident that unions and traditional political organizations remain silent on this problem, nor that an increasing proportion of “unofficial” struggles takes place in Britain and the USA around precisely these demands.) In taking this stand, we not only express the deepest preoccupations of the workers today; we also establish a direct link with the central problem of the revolution. In taking this stand, we also expose the deeply conservative nature of all existing unions and parties.

b) Exploitation increasingly expresses itself in the hierarchical structure of jobs and incomes, and in the atomization introduced into the proletariat through wage differentials. We must relentlessly denounce

³³T/E: Castoriadis’s 1979 French retranslation includes, in brackets, an explanation that such “delegates from shops in Great Britain” are “elected directly by the workers and revocable at every moment by them.”

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hierarchical conceptions of work and of social organization; we must support such wage demands as tend to abolish or reduce wage differentials (for example, equal increases for all or *regressive* percentage increases, which give more to the man at the bottom, and less to the man at the top). In so doing, we increase, in the long run, the sense of solidarity within the working class, we expose the bureaucracy, we directly attack the whole capitalist philosophy and all its values, and we establish a bridge toward fundamentally socialist conceptions.

These are the true “transitional demands.” Transitional demands, in the sense given to the expression by Trotskyist mythology, have never existed in history. Transitional demands have existed and can exist only in two sets of circumstances. Either that, in a given situation, demands that are otherwise “feasible” within capitalism become explosive and revolutionary (“bread and peace” in 1917, for instance); or that immediate demands, if supported by a vigorously waged class struggle, undermine by their content the deepest foundations of capitalist society. The examples given above belong to this class.

APPENDIX

BETA

On the Socialist Program*

Why a Restatement Is Necessary

Both for the constitution of the revolutionary vanguard and for the renewal of the workers' movement as a whole, it is indispensable that the socialist program be formulated anew and that it be so in a much more precise and detailed manner than in the past. By *socialist program*, we mean the societally transformative measures the victorious proletariat will have to undertake in order to reach its communist goal. The problems concerning working-class struggle within the framework of an exploitative society are not considered here.

We are saying: *formulate anew* the program for the power of the proletariat and *formulate in a much more precise and detailed manner than in the past*. *Formulate anew*, for its traditional formulation has in great part been surpassed by the evolution of history; in particular, this traditional formulation is today indistinguishable from the Stalinist deformation thereof. *Formulate with much greater precision*, for Stalinist mystifications have as a matter of fact utilized the general and abstract character of the programmatic ideas of traditional Marxism in order to camouflage bureaucratic exploitation under a "socialist" mask.

*Originally published as "Sur le programme socialiste" in [S. ou B., 10 \(July 1952\)](#): 1-9. Reprinted in *CS*, 47-65, and *EP2*, 173-87. [T/E: We have on occasion consulted the loosely adapted translation (by Bob Pennington?), *The Socialist Programme*—a 12-page brochure, published as [Socialism Reaffirmed, 2 \(\[September?\] 1960\)](#), with no author attribution and with Socialism Reaffirmed's unsigned introduction "What is Socialism?" appearing on the inside cover. Retained, in brackets, are the first section-heading title as well as three lettered subsection titles supplied by Socialism Reaffirmed (the predecessor to London Solidarity). The final section, "Culture in Transitional Society," was *not* translated at all in Socialism Reaffirmed's published version.]

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We have shown on several occasions in this review how the Stalinist counterrevolution was able to make use of the traditional program as a platform. The two cornerstones thereof—nationalization and planning of the economy, on the one hand, and the dictatorship of the party as concrete expression of the dictatorship of the proletariat, on the other—have proved themselves to be, under the given conditions of historical development, the programmatic bases of bureaucratic capitalism. Barring a rejection of this empirical observation or a denial of the proletariat's need for a socialist program, it is impossible to stick to the traditional programmatic positions. Without working out a new program, the vanguard will never be capable of demarcating its boundary line in relation to Stalinism on the truest and deepest terrain; the lamentable experience of Trotskyism has abundantly proved that.

Yet it is also obvious that, far from signifying that the Stalinist realization of Marxism has revealed itself to be its genuine essence, as others have said in order to grieve or rejoice about it, such a utilization of the traditional programmatic ideas of Marxism by Stalinism has simply expressed the fact that these abstract forms—nationalization, dictatorship—have taken a concrete form that is different from the potential content they originally had. For Marx, nationalization signified the abolition of bourgeois exploitation. Moreover, it has not lost this signification in the hands of the Stalinists, but it has, in addition, acquired another one—the instauration of bureaucratic exploitation. Is this to say that the reason for the success of Stalinism was the imprecise or abstract character of the traditional program? It would be shallow to envisage the question so. This abstract and imprecise character itself expressed merely the lack of maturity of the workers' movement, even among its most conscious representatives, and it is from this lack of maturity, in the largest sense, that the bureaucracy proceeds. On the other hand, the bureaucratic experience, the "realization" by the bureaucracy of the traditional ideas will allow the

workers' movement to attain this maturity and to give concrete form to its programmatic goals in a new way.

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Formulating the socialist program with greater precision than has been done until now within the framework of Marxism in no way signifies a return toward utopian socialism. Marxism's struggle against utopian socialism stemmed from two factors. On the one hand, the essential characteristic of "utopianism" was not the description of future society but the attempt to found that society, in its minutest details, in accordance with a logical model, without examining the concrete social forces that are tending toward a superior organization of society. That was effectively impossible before the analysis of modern society commenced by Marx. The conclusions of this analysis allowed Marx to lay down the bases for the socialist program; the continuation of this analysis today, with the infinitely richer material a century of historical development has accumulated, allows one to advance much further in the programmatic domain.

On the other hand, utopian socialism was preoccupied solely with ideal plans for the reorganization of society in an age when such plans, good or bad, had in any case very little importance for the real development of the concrete workers' movement and totally lost interest in that movement. Against this attitude and its relics, Marx was right to declare that one practical step was worth more than one hundred programs.¹ Yet today, for the most part the concrete revolutionary struggle is in fact the struggle against Stalinist or reformist mystifications that present more or less new variants of exploitation as "socialism." This struggle is possible only at the cost of working out anew the program.

The voluntary limits Marxism had imposed upon itself in the elaboration of the socialist program also held to the idea, then implicitly in effect, that the revolutionary

¹[Karl Marx, London, 5 May 1875, in a letter to W. Bracke in Brunswick:](#)
"Every step of real movement is more important than a dozen programs."

destruction of the capitalist class and of its State would give free rein to the construction of socialism. Together, theoretical analysis and the experience of history go to prove that this was, to say the least, an ambiguous idea. While it is true, as Trotsky said, that “socialism, as opposed to capitalism, consciously builds itself up,”² therefore that the conscious activity of the masses is the essential condition for socialist development,³ one must draw out all the conclusions from this idea, and above all this one: that this conscious building up presupposes a precise programmatic orientation.

Moreover, the spirit impregnating Marx’s relative “empiricism” in this domain remains forever valid, in the sense that it constitutes a severe warning both against all dogmatic dryness that would tend to subordinate the living analysis of the historical process to *a priori* schemata and against every attempt to substitute the elaboration of a sect for the creative action of the masses themselves. No programmatic elaboration is worthwhile that fails to take into account real development and especially the development of the proletariat’s consciousness. The program of the revolution formulated by the vanguard’s organization is but an anticipated expression of the tasks flowing from the objective situation and from the class’s consciousness during the revolutionary period and, in return, the publication and propagation of this program are a condition for the future development of such class consciousness.

²T/E: The same (unsourced) quotation of Trotsky appears in “On the Content of Socialism, I” (in *PSWI*, 298). Trotsky does declare, in “Revolutionary and Socialist Art,” the [eighth and last chapter](#) of *Literature and Revolution* (1923): “Communist life will not be formed blindly, like coral islands, but will be built consciously, will be tested by thought, will be directed and corrected.”

³T/E: In the [seventh chapter](#) of *Results and Prospects* (1906), Trotsky, commenting on what is translated as Marx’s phrase “essential prerequisites for socialism” in the *Communist Manifesto*, states that “the concentration of production, the development of technique[,] and the growth of consciousness among the masses are essential pre-requisites for socialism.”

Communism and Transitional Society

We call the program of the revolution *socialist program* solely to indicate that it concerns not communist society itself but the phase of historical transition that leads toward this society. In other words, there exists no “socialist society” as a definite and stable societal type, and the confusion that has reigned around this notion for fifty years is to be combated vigorously.

Marx established a single distinction between two phases of postrevolutionary society, which he called the *lower* and the *higher* phase of communism. This distinction has an indisputable economic and sociological basis: the “lower phase of communism” (the one we call *transitional society*) still corresponds to an economy of scarcity, during which society still has not achieved material abundance and full development of human capacities; this at once economic and human limitation of transitional society is expressed on the political plane by the maintenance—with a content and a form that are entirely new in relation to preceding history—of “state” power, that is to say, by the dictatorship of the proletariat. While, in these two respects the transitional society “is still stamped with the birthmarks of the old society from whose womb it emerges,”⁴ on the other hand it radically distinguishes itself from them by this, that it immediately abolishes exploitation. Trotsky’s sophisms around the question of “socialism” and of the “workers’ State” have made one forget the following essential fact: while economic scarcity justifies coercion, distribution according to labor and not according to needs, on the other hand, in no way justifies the persistence of exploitation. In other words, the passage from capitalist society to communist society would forever be impossible. The construction of communism will always start from a situation of scarcity: if such scarcity rendered necessary, and justified, exploitation, it would be a new class regime that would result therefrom and not at all communism.

⁴T/E: Karl Marx, [*Critique of the Gotha Program*](#) (1875).

Communist society (“the higher phase of communism”) is defined by economic abundance (“to each according to his needs”),⁵ the complete disappearance of the State (“the government of persons is replaced by the administration of things”),⁶ and the full flourishing of human capacities (“human man, total man”).⁷ Transitional society, by contrast, is a passing historical form defined by its goal, which is the construction of communism. As scarcity declines and human capacities develop, the necessity for organized coercion (the State) and the domination of the economic over the human wither away. If, to borrow Marx’s expression, communist society (the genuine human society) is the realm of freedom, this realm of freedom does not signify the abolition of the realm of necessity that is the economy but its gradual reduction and its total subordination to the needs of human development, the essential conditions for which are the abundance of goods and the reduction of the working day.

The orientation of transitional society is determined by its goal—the construction of communism—and by the conditions under which it is to be achieved [*doit se réaliser*]⁸—the present-day situation of world society.

The construction of communism presupposes the abolition of exploitation, the rapid development of the forces of production, in the last analysis the development of the total

⁵T/E: *Ibid.*

⁶T/E: Friedrich Engels, *Anti-Dühring* (1878).

⁷T/E: Castoriadis’s specific French (para)phrase we translate here as “full flourishing...” is: *le plein épanouissement des capacités de l’homme*. The phrase “all-round development of the individual” appears in the *Critique of the Gotha Program*’s English translation; see “Value, Equality, Justice, Politics: From Marx to Aristotle and from Aristotle to Us” (*CLI*, 414) for Castoriadis’s use of its French equivalent, *épanouissement universel* (using the Pléiade edition’s *Critique du programme de Gotha*). The phrase “total man” is found in the “[Private Property and Communism](#)” section of the *Economic & Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*’s [Third Manuscript](#).

aptitudes of man. This development of man is at once the most general expression of the goal of this society and the basic means for the achievement of this goal. It expresses itself under its most concrete form through the liberation of the conscious activity of the proletariat. This activity determines the abolition of exploitation (“The emancipation of the working classes must be conquered by the working classes themselves”)⁸ as well as the development of the forces of production (“Of all the instruments of production, the greatest productive power is the revolutionary class itself”)⁹ and the radically new character of the dictatorship of the proletariat *qua* state power (“the power of the armed masses”).

The deep-seated tendency of world capitalism leads it, through the total concentration of the forces of production, to abolish private property *qua* economic function essential to exploitation and to make the management of production the function that separates the members of society into exploiters and exploited. Through the effect of this same development, the economy's managerial apparatus, the state bureaucracy, and the intelligentsia organically tend to merge, exploitation becoming impossible without a direct connection with physical coercion and ideological mystification.

Consequently, the abolition of exploitation can be achieved only if—and solely if—the abolition of the exploiting class is accompanied by the abolition of the modern conditions for the existence of such a class; those conditions are less and less “private property,” the “market,” and so on (abolished by the evolution of capitalism itself) and more and more the monopolization of the management of the economy and of social life, a kind of management that remains an independent function, opposed to production properly speaking. The real base for modern exploitation can be abolished only insofar as the producers themselves

⁸T/E: International Workingmen's Association, [Rules and Administrative Regulations of the International Workingmen's Association](#) (1867).

⁹Karl Marx, [The Poverty of Philosophy: Answer to the Philosophy of Poverty by M. Proudhon](#) (1847), [ch. 2](#).

organize the management of production. And economic management having become inseparable from political power, workers' management concretely signifies the dictatorship of mass proletarian bodies [*organismes*] and the appropriation of culture by the proletariat.

The abolition of the opposition between directors and executants in the economy and its maintenance in politics (through the dictatorship of the party) is a reactionary mystification that would rapidly culminate in a new conflict between the producers and political bureaucrats. Symmetrically, the management of the economy by the producers is presently the necessary and sufficient condition for the rapid realization of communist society.

It is only in this complete meaning of the term that *dictatorship of the proletariat* effectively expresses the essence of the transitional society.

The Transitional-Period Economy

The problem of the transitional-period economy has two main aspects: abolition of exploitation, on the one hand; rapid development of the forces of production, on the other.

[*A. The Abolition of Exploitation*]

Exploitation appears first and foremost as exploitation in production itself, as alienation of the producer in the production process. This is the transformation of man into a mere nut bolted to the machinery, into an impersonal fragment of the production apparatus, the reduction of the producer into an executant of an activity whose signification and integration into the economic process as a whole he can no longer grasp. Abolishing this root of exploitation, its deepest and most important one, signifies raising the producers to the management of production, entrusting them totally with the determination of the pace and duration of work, of their relations with the machines and with the other workers, of the objectives of production, and of the means of achieving those objectives. It is obvious that such management will pose extremely complex problems of

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coordination of the various sectors of production and of business enterprises, but there is nothing insoluble about those problems.

Exploitation also expresses itself, in a derivative way, in the distribution of the social product, that is to say, in the inequality of the connections between income and the labor furnished. It is not inequality in general that will be abolished in the transitional society; such inequality will be able to be abolished only in communist society, and this not in the form of an arithmetically equal income for everyone, but in that of the complete satisfaction of the needs of each. Yet the transitional society will abolish the appropriation of incomes without productive labor or not corresponding to the quantity and quality of productive labor effectively furnished to society; it will therefore abolish the unequal ratios between the income of labor and the quantity of labor.

Without wanting to give a "solution" or even an analysis of the problem of the remuneration of productive labor in the transitional economy, we can nevertheless note that this society will strive, from the outset, toward as great an equalization as possible. For, whereas the drawbacks that result from an inequality in rates of remuneration of labor are major and clear cut (distortion of social demand, satisfaction of secondary needs by some where others still cannot satisfy basic needs, psychological and political effects that result therefrom), the advantages thereof are all contestable and secondary.

Thus, the justification for a higher remuneration for skilled labor by the greater "production costs" (cost of training and nonproductive years) of this labor collapses starting from the moment when it is society itself that bears such costs. At the very most, one can, in this case, agree that the "price" of this labor would be greater (corresponding either to its "value" or to its "production cost") but not that the personal income of this laborer reflects this difference. The idea that a higher remuneration is necessary to attract individuals toward the most skilled jobs is simply ridiculous; the attraction of such activities is to be found in the nature of the activity itself, and the principal problem, once social oppression is abolished, will be rather to fill "inferior"

activities. Two other problems are less simple: in order, during a period of scarcity, to obtain the maximum productive effort on the part of individuals, it would be possible for society to tie the remuneration of labor to the quantity of labor furnished (measured by labor time), and perhaps even to its intensity (measure by the number of objects or acts produced). Yet the importance of the problem diminishes as industrialization and mass production abolish all technical independence of individual labor, by integrating it into the productive activity of a whole that has its own pace, which the individual's pace cannot usefully overcome (assembly-line production, and so on, as opposed to piecework). Within this framework, the key thing is that the concrete set of producers determines its optimum total pace, and not that each increase his productive effort in an incoherent manner. It is therefore on the scale of the group of workers forming a technical-productive unit that the problem can be posed. Another problem consists in this, that it may be essential to procure in the short term geographical or occupational transfers of manpower; if persuasion does not suffice to prompt them, it may become indispensable to operate via differentiations in wage rates. Yet the size of such differentiations will be minimal, as the example of capitalist society abundantly proves.

[*B. The Development of the Productive Forces*]

The problem of the rapid development of social wealth arises on the one hand as a problem of the rational organization of the existing forces of production, on the other hand as the growth of those productive forces. The rational organization of productive forces itself offers an infinite number of aspects, but the most essential one is workers' management. It is because the producers alone, in their organic whole, have a complete view and awareness [*conscience*] of the problem of production—including its most essential aspect, which is the concrete execution of productive acts—that only they can organize the production process in a rational manner. On the contrary, the exploiting classes' management is always intrinsically irrational, for it is

always external to the productive activity itself, it has only an incomplete and fragmentary knowledge of the concrete conditions in which such activity unfolds and of the implications of the objectives chosen.

The problem of the growth of the forces of production has been presented until now especially from the standpoint of the so-called irreducible opposition that is said to exist between accumulation (growth of fixed capital) and the production of the means of consumption, therefore the amelioration of the standard of living. This opposition, upon which the mystifiers in the pay of the bureaucracy insist, is a false opposition that masks the genuine terms of the problem. The opposition between the necessities of accumulation and those of consumption is resolved in the synthesis offered by the notion of the productivity of human labor. The development of the forces of production, more exactly the productive result of such development, is reduced in the final analysis to the development of the productive power of labor, that is to say, to the development of productivity. Such productivity depends in turn on both the development of the objective conditions of production—essentially, development of fixed capital—and the development of the productive capacities of living labor. Such productive capacities are directly linked, on the one hand, to the flourishing of the productive individual within production—therefore to workers' management—and, on the other, to the increase in the laboring people's consumption and in their well-being, the development of their technical and total culture and the reduction of labor time; more generally, this aspect of productivity, which could be called *subjective productivity*, depends on the producers' total and conscious adherence to production. There is, therefore, an objective relation between the accumulation of fixed capital and the extension of consumption (in the broadest sense) that determines an optimum solution to the problem of the choice between these two paths for increasing total productivity. Just as one can increase production while reducing and because one reduces working hours, so an increase in well-being can be more productive—in the most material sense of the term—than an increase in equipment. By its very nature, an exploiting class

or a stratum of managers can see only one of the aspects of the problem—accumulation in fixed capital becomes for it the sole means of increasing production. It is only in placing oneself at the point of view of the producers that one can achieve a synthesis between the two points of view. Still, in the absence of the producers themselves, this synthesis will have but an abstract value, for the conscious adherence of the producers to production is the essential condition for the maximum development of productivity, and such adherence will be achieved only insofar as the producers know that the solution given is their own.

[*C. Prices in the Socialist Economy*]

So long as the scarcity of goods persists, society will be obliged to ration its consumption, and the most rational method of doing so will be to assign each product a price. The consumer will thus be able to decide himself the way in which to spend his income that will procure for him maximum satisfaction. And society will be able, in the short term, to face up to exceptional shortages or to inequalities in the development of production by postponing the satisfaction of less intense needs through the manipulation of the sale prices of the products in question. Once income inequality is removed, the relative intensity of demand for various products and the scope of genuine social need will be able to be measured adequately by the sums consumers are disposed to pay for procuring the good in question, and variations in the stocks of this good will provide directives for the development or the slackening of production within a branch.

The problem of general economic equilibrium in terms of value is simple under these conditions. It is necessary and sufficient that the total of distributed incomes—that is to say, essentially wages—be equal to the sum of the values of available consumer goods. That implies, insofar as there is to be accumulation, that the prices of commodities will be higher than their production cost, though proportionate thereto. They will have to be higher than their production costs since some producers, while earning wages, do not produce consumer goods but the means of production, which

are not put up for sale. Yet it is rational that they be proportional to their respective production costs, for it is only upon this condition that the act of purchasing this commodity rather than another one genuinely expresses the extent of subjective need, that it signifies, in other words, that society is confirming through its consumption its initial decision to devote so many hours to the production of that product.

The Dictatorship of the Proletariat

Faced with a fresh outbreak of petty-bourgeois democratic illusions provoked by the totalitarian degeneration of the Russian Revolution, we find that it is more than ever necessary to reaffirm the idea of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Civil war, and the consolidation of workers' power once it is established, signify the violent crushing of the political tendencies that strive to maintain or to restore exploitation. Proletarian democracy is a democracy for the proletarians; it is, at the same time, the unlimited dictatorship the proletariat exercises against the classes that are hostile to it.

These elementary notions nonetheless have to be given concrete form in light of the analysis of present-day society. So long as the basis for class domination was private ownership of the means of production, one could give a constitutional form to the "legality" of the dictatorship of the proletariat, while depriving of political rights those who lived directly on the labor of others, and outlaw the parties that were striving to restore such ownership. The withering away of private ownership in present-day society and the crystallization of the bureaucracy as exploiting class remove from these formal criteria most of their importance. The reactionary currents against which the dictatorship of the proletariat will have to struggle, at the very least the most dangerous ones among them, will not be the restorationist bourgeois currents but the bureaucratic ones. Those currents will undoubtedly have to be excluded from soviet legality on the basis of an evaluation of their goals and of their social nature which will no longer be able to be based on formal criteria ("ownership," etc.) but on their genuine character *qua*

bureaucratic currents. The revolutionary party will have to consider these basic criteria, proposing and struggling for the exclusion within soviet bodies of all the currents that are opposed, whether overtly or not, to the workers' management of production and to the total exercise of power by the mass bodies. On the contrary, the broadest freedoms will have to be granted to working-class currents that place themselves upon this platform, independently of their divergencies on other points, however important they might be.

Judgment and the definitive decision about this question as on all others will belong to soviet bodies and to the proletariat in arms. The total exercise of political and economic power by these bodies is but one aspect of the abolition of the opposition between directors and executants. This abolition is not fated; it depends on the sharp struggle that will take place between the socialist tendencies and the tendencies of relapse toward an exploitative society. In this sense, not only is the degeneration of soviet bodies not excluded *a priori* but the condition for socialist development is to be found in the content of the constructive activity of the proletariat, whose soviet form is but one of the moments. However, that form offers the optimal condition under which such activity can develop, and in this sense it is inseparable therefrom. The contrary is true for the dictatorship of the "revolutionary party," which rests on the monopolization of the functions of direction by a category or a group and which is, therefore, insofar as it consolidates itself, absolutely inconsistent with the development of the creative activity of the masses and as such is a positive and necessary condition for the degeneration of the revolution.

Culture in Transitional Society

The construction of communism presupposes the proletariat's appropriation of culture. Such appropriation signifies not only the assimilation of bourgeois culture but, especially, the creation of the first elements of communist culture.

The idea that the proletariat can at the very most only assimilate existing bourgeois culture—an idea defended by Trotsky after the Russian Revolution—is in itself false and

politically dangerous. True, the problem that was posed to the Russian proletariat in the aftermath of the Revolution was especially the assimilation of the existing culture—and practically not even bourgeois culture but the most elementary forms of historical culture (struggle against illiteracy, for example), and in this domain there is neither a proletarian grammar nor a proletarian arithmetic. This domain pertains, rather, to the “technical” and formal conditions of culture than to culture itself. As for the latter, there never was and there never will be an assimilation pure and simple of bourgeois culture, for this would signify the enslavement of the proletariat to bourgeois ideology. Past cultural creation will be able to be used by the proletariat in its struggle for the construction of a new form of society only upon the condition that this culture at the same time be transformed and integrated into a new totality. The creation of Marxism itself is a demonstration of this fact; the much-talked-about “component parts” of Marxism¹⁰ were products of bourgeois culture, but Marx’s elaboration of revolutionary theory signified, as a matter of fact, not the assimilation pure and simple of English political economy or of German philosophy but their radical transformation. Such a transformation was possible because Marx placed himself on the terrain of communist revolution; it proves that this embryonic manifestation of the future communist culture of humanity was situated on a level that was new in relation to the historical heritage. Trotsky’s conception—viz., that, so long as the proletariat remains proletariat, it has to assimilate bourgeois culture, and that when a new culture will be able to be created, it will no longer be a proletarian culture since the proletariat will have ceased to exist *qua* class¹¹—is at the very

¹⁰T/E: See V. I. Lenin, [*The Three Sources and Three Component Parts of Marxism*](#) (1913). These three sources/component parts are said to be “German philosophy, English political economy[,] and French socialism.”

¹¹T/E: In, for example, Trotsky’s 1923 text, [“What Is Proletarian Culture, and Is It Possible?”](#), he states: “before the proletariat will have passed out of the stage of cultural apprenticeship, it will have ceased to be a proletariat.”

most a terminological subtlety. Taken seriously, it would signify either that the proletariat can struggle against capitalism only by assimilating bourgeois culture and without itself constituting an ideology that would be the negation thereof or that the revolutionary ideology is solely a destructive arm without positive content and unrelated to the future communist culture. The first idea refutes itself; the second expresses a misappreciation of what can and should be a revolutionary ideology and even an ideology, period. The struggle against reactionary ideologies and the conscious orientation of the class struggle presuppose a positive conception about the basis of the problems humanity is confronting, and this conception is but one of the first expressions of the future communist culture of society.

This position obviously has nothing to do with the absurdities and the reactionary prattling of the Stalinists about “proletarian biology,” “proletarian astronomy,” and the proletarian art of planting cabbage. For the Stalinists, this shameful distortion of the idea of a revolutionary culture is but an additional means of denying reality and mystifying the masses.

If, through the appropriation of the existing culture, the proletariat creates at the same time the bases for a new culture, that implies a new attitude on the part of proletarian society vis-à-vis ideological and cultural currents. A culture is never an ideology or an orientation, but an organic whole, a constellation of ideologies and currents. The plurality of tendencies that constitute a culture implies that freedom of expression is an essential condition for the creative appropriation of culture by the proletariat. The reactionary ideological currents that will not fail to manifest themselves in transitional society will have to be combated, insofar as they express themselves only on the ideological terrain, through ideological arms and not through mechanical means limiting freedom of expression. The boundary [*limite*] between a reactionary ideological current and reactionary political activity is sometimes difficult to find, but the proletarian dictatorship will have to define that boundary each time under penalty of degeneration or overthrow.

**PART TWO:
THE EXPERIENCE OF THE
WORKERS' MOVEMENT, 2**

BETA

FRENCH EDITORS: This second part reprints pp. 9-261 of *EMO2*, as well as pp. 9-46 of *CMR2*. Pages 264-444 of *EMO2* are published in our edition's *What Democracy?* volume. The other *CMR2* texts will be found below in the third part [now in [PSW2](#), 226-343]. A presentation of the main texts was already provided in our French Editors' Introduction: "Castoriadis, Political Writer (I)," in the first volume of *The Question of the Workers' Movement*.

On the Content of Socialism, III:
The Workers' Struggle
Against the Organization of the
Capitalist Enterprise*

See: http://libcom.org/files/cc_psw_v2.pdf

BETA

*Originally published as “Sur le contenu du socialisme, III: La Lutte des ouvriers contre l’organisation de l’entreprise capitaliste,” [S. ou B., 23 \(January 1958\)](#): 81-125. Reprinted in *EMO2*, 9-88, and *EP2*, 193-247. Translated in [PSW2](#), 155-92.

Results*

On [September 28 \[1958\]](#), five out of six French voters went to the polls. Four voters out of five approved the [new Constitution](#) and granted the government full powers for four months. Two weeks later, de Gaulle ordered the Army to leave the Committees of Public Safety and thereby separated it from the ultrarightists [*ultras*]. He thus took the first step since his accession to power, since followed by several others, toward the restoration of the authority of the French bourgeoisie over Algiers. What we considered four months ago to be by far the most improbable eventuality, the cool transition toward a new regime, is in the process of coming about.

What does this regime represent? The power—more direct and naked than before—of the most concentrated and most modern strata of finance and industry; the governance of the country by the most qualified representatives of big capital, liberated in the main from parliamentary control. What is its orientation? Setting back into order, from the viewpoint and interests of the big employers, the operation of French capitalism. No longer being able to make its political machine work through fragmented, discredited, and broken-down parties, French capitalism is disconnecting them, rendering the government in fact independent from the Parliament. Faced with the impossibility of maintaining through force, in a quasi-colonial status, an awakening Black Africa, it is dumping ballast, making of necessity a virtue, and striving to maintain African populations within its domain of exploitation by joining together the Black bourgeoisie and a nascent bureaucracy to which it is opening up prospects for advancement in the new “Community.”¹ Understanding that

*Originally published as “Bilan” in [S. ou B., 26 \(November 1958\)](#): 1-19. Reprinted in *EMO2*, 89-116, and *EP2*, 249-67.

¹T/E: “The French Community (French: *Communauté française*) was an association of former French colonies, mostly from Africa. In 1958 it replaced the French Union, which had itself succeeded the French colonial empire in 1946” ([English Wikipedia, s.v.](#)).

it cannot liquidate the Algerian War by military means alone, it profits from the attrition of the FLN [Front de libération nationale ([Algerian National Liberation Front](#))] in order to allow a glimpse of the possibility of a compromise.

That does not mean that all the problems posed to the French employing class have been resolved, nor that the solutions already given do not harbor new problems. Allowing a glimpse that in Algeria negotiations are not ruled out is different from actually bringing them to a successful conclusion. Beyond the juridical artifices of the "Community," the African masses will really raise one day or another the real problem of their exploitation. The Gaullist Constitution itself is but a rough-and-ready answer, providing an organizational structure, as has been said, for the conflict of powers; it is the least bad solution possible for the bourgeoisie in the present, since it is the sole one that allows for a restoration of governmental authority; it will be able to function only upon the condition that the present-day political apathy persists and that Parliament and voters are resigned to the third-class role to which it assigns them. Finally, on the economic level, everything remains to be done and the elimination of the backward strata of French production will lead to more tears being shed than the reduction of the traditional political personnel has done.

For the time being, however, and no doubt for a long time to come, French capitalism emerges victorious from the deep-seated crisis that has been brewing since the beginning of the Algerian War and that violently exploded [with the [Algiers military coup of May 13 \[1958\]](#)]. For the first time since 1945, it is reestablishing unity and discipline in its camp; it is arriving at the point of giving itself a political leadership group [*une direction politique*]; it is succeeding in getting ahead of events, instead of hopelessly running behind them. It is emerging especially victorious in the sense that it has managed to forge for itself an oligarchical "republic" that allows it to govern with the aid of its right-hand men without having to compromise with any opposition whatsoever.

French capitalism did not obtain this victory through violence. The remote threat of violence sufficed. It did not have to instaurate overtly a dictatorship, because in fact

everyone accepted the dictatorship wearing the mask of legality. It did not have to have recourse to civil war, for it takes two to conduct a civil war and the second character did not show up. The new Constitution has the following dictatorial characteristic: it in reality eliminates politics from the public stage and makes of it the private and secret affair of government. Yet this is but in appearance an arbitrary act; it is the French population, in its great majority, that has withdrawn from politics, tacitly for years, explicitly since May 13, and, finally, noisily on [September 28 \[the 1958 constitutional referendum\]](#). Approval of the Constitution and the granting of all powers to de Gaulle signified precisely this: We no longer want to deal with it; you have carte blanche.

We are not speaking only of the French population in general. We are also speaking about laboring people, who, far from struggling against the instauration of the new regime, have positively approved it. Without the vote their majority gave on September 28, the cool transition to the Fifth Republic would have been much more difficult, if not impossible. How is one to explain this attitude and the confidence granted to a general who, even if he did not appear to be the fascist denounced each day by [\[the French Communist daily\] L'Humanité](#), clearly expresses the interests and the policy of Big Business [*grand capital*]? How could such a phenomenon occur, not in a backward country, not in 1851, but smack in the middle of the twentieth century, in a large industrial country, where the proletariat has behind it a long past of revolutionary struggles?

It is today the first task of working-class and socialist militants to ask themselves as seriously and deeply as possible this question and to try to be clear-sighted about it. The attitude the vote of the majority of laboring people on September 28 expresses, even if this attitude is only passing, even if it reflects profoundly contradictory elements, signifies all in all a major regression. It would be criminal to avert one's eyes therefrom or to glide over it after some hasty and superficial "explanation." The leaders of the French CP and of the UGS [*Union de la gauche socialiste* ([Union of the Socialist Left](#))] who are content therewith and hasten to return to current affairs have excellent reasons to do so, for in any

event and whatever the explanation given, the vote of September 28 constitutes their ultimate condemnation.

The contradictions, the anarchy, and the crisis of modern capitalist societies have reached an exceptional intensity in postwar France. At the same time as it was experiencing a broad economic, technical, and scientific boom, the country had been plunged into interminable and absurd colonial wars, into periodic economic chaos, and into permanent political anarchy. With governments overturned every three months, laws voted and not put into application, almost never interrupted inflation, crushing taxation striking solely the weakest, and the scandalous housing situation a dozen years after the end of the war while trillions of [old] francs were swallowed up in colonial expeditions—all that ended up totally discrediting the institutions of the bourgeois parliamentary republic, the parties that were supposed to make them operate, the ideas that inspired them, and the very notion of politics.

Truly speaking, this republic was already bankrupt before World War II. In 1936, the Socialist and Communist Parties had to pull out all the stops to keep the factory occupation movement within the boundaries of the regime. Again, in 1944-1945, they had to use all their influence to restore this historically condemned regime, altering its forms in a demagogic direction. Laboring people could then be deluded by the few “reforms” achieved, by the idea that there was no going back, and by the hope that the Socialist-Communist majority would give to the parliamentary regime a different meaning through the presence of Communists in the government. As early as 1947-1948, they had wised up. A few years after the regime had been installed in power, the rotten mess it was no longer sparked exasperation or anger but simply sniggering and shrugged shoulders; the life of the French Fourth Republic did not unfold against the will of the population but in the absence of that population, which no longer had for those institutions anything but contempt and disgust.

What was there, opposite these completely worn-out and discredited institutions? The Left, the working-class parties? But this “Left” and those “working-class parties”

were but integral parts of the regime, the flesh of its flesh and the blood of its blood. Not only did they never offer to laboring people, in acts or even in words, a revolutionary perspective, they were up to their necks in the system, whose operation would have been impossible and inconceivable without their active participation. Such participation was active when they were in power as well as when they were in the “opposition.” Even more so, perhaps, in the latter case. For, such opposition not only has always remained on the terrain of the regime and has never tried to upset the established order; it has always formed the indispensable complement to the established power, it has been the system’s safety valve, the means for channeling and rendering inoffensive movements of public opinion, for aborting working-class struggles or making them end up in miserable compromises.

The Socialist Party and the Communist Party have furnished the regime half of the deputies of this Fourth Republic, half of the city councilors and mayors, a president of the Republic, several [presidents of the Council](#), dozens of ministers, masses of senior officials and directors of nationalized companies. They have done so in order to conduct the same policy as the Radicals [the [Radical Party](#)] and Independents [the [National Centre of Independents and Peasants](#)]. There is no point in dwelling upon the case of the SFIO [the Socialist [French Section of the Workers’ International](#)]. After having taken an active part in conducting the Indochina War, been in on all the parliamentary scheming, taken a stand against workers’ demands in order to worry about balancing the budget and “price stability,” the Socialist Party was able to add the most beautiful jewels to its crown by taking over the running [*direction*] of the Algerian War, which the Right dared not take on alone, while favoring the organization of fascism in Algiers and, ultimately, by lending its support to de Gaulle’s operation—without which that operation had barely any chances of success.

Certainly, the CP has not taken as many direct responsibilities in the regime’s policy. Yet the functioning of the Republic would have been equally impossible without it, for it alone was capable, during a twelve-year period, of

keeping the French proletariat sidetracked. Certainly, too, the CP is not a party completely comfortable in the French bourgeois regime, like the SFIO; its outlook is still that of instaurating in France a totalitarian bureaucratic-capitalist regime integrated into the Eastern Bloc. Yet, this objective having no chance of being achieved under current international circumstances, the CP is reduced to trying to influence the policy of the French bourgeoisie to go in a direction favorable to Russian foreign policy; the "Cold War" period (1948-1952) now ended, it does its utmost to furnish the bourgeoisie all possible assurances of its good will. This same party, which in 1952 was trying with blows from a club to get the workers to go out and demonstrate against [\[US General\] Ridgway](#),² was practically always opposed to their struggles as soon as those struggles aimed at defending their interests. In 1953, when four million state employees were on strike, the CP and the CGT [the Communist-allied [General Confederation of Labor](#)] used their influence and their huge material means to prevent the extension of the strike from extending to industry—and they succeeded. In the Summer of 1955, the CP and the CGT again played the same role in relation to the metalworkers' strike of Nantes and Saint-Nazaire. In July 1957, the CGT, in solidarity with the FO [Force Ouvrière ([Workers' Force](#))] and the CFTC [Confédération française des travailleurs chrétiens ([French Confederation of Christian Workers](#))] sabotaged the bank employees' strike. Since early 1956, the CP has abstained from all action that might hamper the work of [\[French Socialist Prime Minister Guy\] Mollet](#) and [\[Governor General Robert\] Lacoste](#) in Algeria; it granted Mollet special powers in March 1956, as it did to [\[French Prime Minister Pierre\] Pflimlin](#) in May 1958. When, in the Spring of 1956 recalled

²T/E: Note 3 of "Sartre, Stalinism, and the Workers" explains ([PSWL](#), 238): "General Matthew Ridgway (b. 1895) was at this time just beginning his tour as the Supreme Commander of Allied forces in Europe. The background of the Ridgway affair and of the subsequent controversy between Sartre and Lefort, along with Castoriadis's contribution, is discussed in Arthur Hirsh's *The French New Left: An Intellectual History from Sartre to Gorz* (Boston: South End Press, 1981), pp. 46-49 and 113."

reservists and workers demonstrated, sometimes with extreme violence, against the Algerian War, it was again the insidious tactics of the CP that curbed their movement.

These are but a few examples of the policy of the traditional organizations, which could easily be multiplied. Yet, still more than on great political occasions, it is in their daily existence and activity that trade unions and “working-class” parties have been able to demonstrate that nothing essential separates them from the regime they claim in their program to oppose. It is in their most ordinary deeds and gestures, in all sorts of commonplace circumstances, that millions of laboring people have learned to see in Socialist or Communist deputies, municipal councilors, and trade-union leaders and delegates representatives—just like the others, with slight variations in vocabulary—of established society, they being especially preoccupied with smoothing things over, avoiding a fuss, keeping people quiet—in short, with maintaining order in their sector.

It is equally in the structure of these organizations, their attitude, and their methods that laboring people have learned to identify them with the other institutions of capitalist society. These “working-class” organizations, these trade unions, these parties “of a new type” have functioned exactly like capitalist organizations, capitalist parties, business enterprises, and the bourgeois Parliament. Here we have irremovable leaders who themselves choose the people who surround them and the ritual consecration of power through fake democracy, in the form of congresses whose results are cooked up in advance; the organization’s base is kept in the role of executants of instructions from the political bureau or the steering committee [*comité directeur*]. The working class is reduced to an object manipulated according to the line of the parties’ leadership [*direction*]; demagogic and blatantly deceitful propaganda; the organization retains for itself the monopoly on information and is constantly trying to impose its point of view on the masses, without ever leaving to the latter the possibility of deciding or even expressing themselves.

All that does not signify that the masses were comparing the attitude of the bureaucratic organizations to the

model of a revolutionary working-class organization and condemning them on the basis of this comparison. The masses have had their experience of the trade unions and "working-class" parties in the sense that they have increasingly identified them with the regime itself and its other institutions in all respects: regarding their objectives, their structure, their attitude, and their methods of action. And it is precisely insofar as, in the absence of a revolutionary organization, no positive comparison could be made, insofar as no other prospect seemed to be opening up, and insofar as all that was being offered on the political market represented only variants on the same basic rottenness that the masses have accepted Gaullism.

Still less does this signify that if, at this or that moment, the Communist Party had had another policy, everything would have been different. First of all, the Communist Party absolutely could not conduct another policy than the one it did: it conducted the policy of a bureaucratic organization tied to Russia, aiming at instaurating in France a totalitarian dictatorship and incapable of succeeding in doing so at the present time, while fearing above all the autonomous mobilization of the masses, yet obliged to fasten itself to these masses without whom it is nothing, and therefore ultimately reduced to dithering on all key questions. The ideas on which it is built, the mentality of its cadres, its structure and its methods of action, and the type of relations it entertains with the workers entirely rules out it ever being able to change that. Yet even if, by a miracle, the Communist Party had changed policy at a given moment, that would not have sufficed to erase the results of all its prior action. That would not have eliminated the deep-seated scission it itself has created within the French proletariat, nor would that have prevented it from continuing to represent for numerous French workers and intellectuals the prospect of the instauration in France of a Russian-type regime they rightly abhor, especially since the Hungarian Revolution. That would not have canceled in a single stroke the products of twenty-five years of chauvinist propaganda, reformist attitudes, and its ongoing effort aimed at destroying in the proletariat any germ of autonomous action, self-organization, initiative, and

critique, at fastening it to “French grandeur,” at making it forget what socialism is, and at persuading it that it can do nothing by itself outside the party. The various features of how French politics evolved since the War, the attitude of the proletariat, that of the “working-class” organizations, and the relationship between the two form an indissociable whole. Having granted its confidence to the Communist Party, having supported it, and having nourished it, the proletariat in turn suffered the outcome of this party’s action, and not just on the surface; up to a certain point, it has itself been deeply permeated thereby. The only outcome, at this stage, could be the wearing down of all ideas and of all wills, the darkening of all prospects for autonomous action, which ultimately ended in the instauration of Gaullism.

For, when May 13 arrived, the laboring population had not only long ago lost every illusion relative to the regime and to the “working-class” organizations; it had also lost, in the main, all faith in its possibilities for organization and action. It did not succeed in envisaging the prospect of a fundamentally different regime, or else it recoiled before the enormity of the problems such a change would have posed. The organizations’ attitude when faced with events, the Socialists’ participation in the de Gaulle operation, the Communists hanging on to [\[former French Prime Minister Pierre\] Pflimlin](#)’s coattails and then leading a lukewarm opposition to de Gaulle without placing in his stead anything other than a barely disguised return to the beauties of the Fourth Republic—all that has certainly accentuated laboring people’s disarray and disgust but has not played a primordial role. The key thing resides elsewhere: in the work of the bureaucratic organizations over decades, which has aimed at ideologically integrating laboring people into capitalist society, succeeding there in part, at the very least to the point of erasing all prospect for autonomous action on the political level.

Certainly, it could be said, in the abstract, that even under these conditions the proletariat could have drawn everything from itself and forged ahead. It did not do so, and there is no point in going on about that, except for those who

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always want to find in the immaturity of conditions a justification for their inaction.

Thus deprived of all prospect for action on their own, what could the majority of laboring people do other than vote "Yes" on September 28? Nothing was being offered to them, outside of Gaullism, other than a return to the Fourth Republic, or else the unknown, chaos, and the threat of a civil war that would as a matter of fact have posed the problems it was unwilling and unable to pose to itself. Compared with that, de Gaulle represented a possibility for change; even more than that: If our affairs are in any case to be managed by other people than us, they might as well be so by someone who is effective and who at least seems to know what he wants.

A stage of the workers' movement in France is thus drawing to a close in a rout, in disgust and apathy on the part of the workers, in the bankruptcy of the bureaucratic organizations. Revolutionaries have to look this situation calmly in the face, but above all they have to turn themselves toward the future and reflect on the conditions for and on the orientation of their action tomorrow.

The current state of apathy on the part of the masses will not last forever. It will not take long for the smoke clouds and dust clouds to settle, the false nightmares and the insane hopes to drift away, so that the new regime might appear in its true perspective, so that laboring people might rediscover, absolutely intact, the hard reality of class society, the hard necessity of struggle. They will then find again, too, the lessons of the period that has just ended.

Indeed, it is not very likely that the bureaucratic organizations will be able to continue to play the same role of putting a brake on struggles that they had played in the past. Their wear and tear, long manifest and at its peak since May 13, can only accelerate still further under the new regime. Truly speaking, these organizations are henceforth entirely meaningless; it is hard to glimpse, in the new period opening up, the *raison d'être* of the Communist Party, the Socialist Party, the UGS, or [\[former French Prime Minister\] Monsieur \[Pierre\] Mendès France](#). De Gaulle is in the process of carrying out the policy of "France's grandeur and renewal,"

along with his policies of a rational adjustment of the relationships with Africa and the colonies and of setting back into order the affairs of established society they demanded. What separates the present opposition from the government? Almost solely the fact that this opposition is demanding the government to go faster in Algeria and that it is impugning the government's motives. On the terrain it has long placed itself, the terrain of ameliorating capitalism, this opposition genuinely is and will remain His Majesty's opposition. Will it, under such conditions, be able to persuade the country that its fate will depend on the election of 50 and not 40 Communist deputies in a rump Parliament—a few months after 150 Communist deputies in a “sovereign” Parliament had dazzlingly proved their total uselessness?

This situation will set the relations between the workers and the bureaucratic organizations onto a new terrain. Already in 1953, in 1955, and in 1957, the tension between laboring people and the trade-union and political bureaucracy was near the breaking point. No one can say whether that rupture will burst forth in the coming period, but one thing is certain: it is only upon this condition that some working-class action will become possible. Were the bureaucratic organizations still capable of maintaining their grip over laboring people, it would have to be concluded that one would not see major struggles, whatever the objective conditions. In the Fall of 1957, the working class, despite a considerable deterioration of its living conditions, was unable to break the roadblock of trade-union organizations or to surmount the difficulties it felt when faced with the idea of a generalized struggle that would risk going beyond wage demands, and agitation within the factories led nowhere. In the present period, the grip of the bureaucratic organizations and the difficulty workers feel in glimpsing a prospect of their own making do not act as an obstacle that their action would encounter at a stage in its development and that would prevent it from going further; these organizations act at the outset and they quite simply prevent any struggles from being triggered. It is only if laboring people succeed in acting in an autonomous fashion that they will be able to struggle, to struggle effectively, for the defense of their condition. Otherwise, one

will at the very most witness some sporadic, abortive, haggard attempts that will culminate only in discouragement and in the consolidation of the absolute power of the employers.

Yet the development of laboring people's capacity to act in an autonomous fashion and the creation of possibilities for the extension and deepening of their struggles urgently require the rapid construction of a revolutionary working-class party. This is the crucial lesson that is to be drawn from fourteen years in postwar France. Attempts at autonomous action on the part of laboring people have taken place on several occasions, at various moments, and in different places. With immense difficulties, the working class, even during the period that has just elapsed, has succeeded in drawing from itself the first elements of a revolutionary response to the situation on all sorts of problems. It has triggered struggles against the organizations, as in 1953; it has given back to strikes their genuinely combative character, as in 1955 in Nantes; it has lined itself up against the Algerian War, with the demonstrations of Spring 1956. These attempts have never gone beyond their first steps or have been nipped in the bud. Why? Because, instead of encountering a revolutionary organization that would have taken up the content of such attempts, would have made them known to the working class of the country as a whole, and would have provided them with the necessary means of expression, the indispensable connections with other localities and other occupations, they have found, opposite them, the trade-union and political bureaucracy that has been hellbent on aborting these attempts, on preventing them from spreading, and on keeping them hidden from the rest of laboring people.

The events in France have demonstrated in overwhelming fashion the necessity of a revolutionary organization, not in order to "direct" the workers or to substitute itself for them, but in order to spread, amplify, and develop the methods and forms of actions, the objectives of struggle, and the class consciousness workers themselves are constantly creating. The events of the last fourteen years have proved that the already enormous difficulties the proletariat feels under capitalism for achieving a clear consciousness of its class objectives and of its own means for realizing them

are multiplied to infinity by the action of the bureaucratic organizations. They have also proved that such action does not remain external to the working class but tends to penetrate deeply within, to subject it to reformist and chauvinistic illusions, and, most importantly, to demolish constantly in it the idea that it is capable of resolving its problems through its own action. And that unfolds at all levels. The “working-class” bureaucracy has systematically striven to make French workers forget that a struggle has to be conducted by an elected strike committee that can be recalled and is responsible before the strikers—and it has succeeded in doing so. It has also striven to make them forget what a revolutionary transformation of society is, what socialism signifies, and to persuade them that they are incapable of themselves managing their own affairs and society—and here, too, it has succeeded in doing so.

This last point, which may seem remote and abstract, is in reality the most concrete and most important of all. As soon as the crisis of the capitalist regime attains a certain degree of intensity, the workers can no longer defend their condition without posing the total problem of society. This was clearly seen in the Fall of 1957; it was clearly seen again in May 1958. In the former case, the workers really felt that restoring their wage levels depended on France’s overall economic situation, which in turn was determined by the Algerian War. A struggle for wages that would take on a certain breadth would inevitably pose both the problem of control of prices, without which wage increases would remain illusory, and that of Algerian policy—would lead therefore to a struggle for power. But what kind of power? The question was posed still more sharply on May 13. Struggle against a kind of fascism or an authoritarian State? Yes. In order to maintain the Fourth Republic? Certainly not. But then, what for?

Beyond the elementary level of the business enterprise, there can be no class action without a revolutionary outlook [*perspective*]. Now, the daily operation of the capitalist regime and the daily work of the “working-class” bureaucracy tend both objectively and intentionally to obscure, to blur, to erase this perspective within the

consciousness of laboring people. It is in this regard that the role of a revolutionary organization is absolutely decisive, inasmuch as it traces out a socialist prospect [*perspective*], inasmuch as it shows in concrete terms that a working-class solution to the crisis of society exists, and inasmuch as the proletariat is capable of achieving it. One has to have a revolutionary organization that proclaims constantly and openly the necessity of a socialist transformation of society, it has to point out the content of such a transformation on the basis of the experience of the proletariat's revolutionary struggles and of its actual needs, and it has to show the problems this transformation will encounter and the solutions that can be given to those problems. This outlook is the catalyzing element allowing for the crystallization of the ideas and of the wills of laboring people, who, without that, would risk never achieving the clarity necessary for decisive action. In keeping the socialist objective constantly present before laboring people, the organization does not substitute itself for them, it only reminds them what their own action was at its highest moments. For, socialism is not an invention of ideologues and theorists but the working class's own creation, this working class that has produced [*réalisé*] the Commune, the Soviets, the Workers' Councils, that has demanded the management of production, the abolition of the wages system, and the equalization of pay, and that has proclaimed that it is not awaiting its salvation from God, from Caesar, or from tribunes, but from itself.

Therefore, the first task today is to undertake the construction of a revolutionary working-class organization, on ideological bases that rule out all compromise, all confusion, all imprecision. This organization will have to draw the lessons from the experience of the French and international workers' movement. It will have to renew its ties with the content of the great struggles of the past, but it will also have to respond to the present-day needs of laboring people and to the problems posed by the way modern societies have evolved. It will proclaim openly and daily that the proletariat's objective cannot be to limit or to adjust capitalist exploitation but to abolish it. It will show that all the attempts at "reforming" or "ameliorating" capitalism have in no way

attenuated the crisis of contemporary society; that through the “market” or through the “plan,” with “private property” or “nationalized property,” the capitalist and bureaucratic exploiters are only pursuing their own interests and that both are radically incapable of ensuring the rational and harmonious development of society; that, with expansion or recession, high wages or low, the life of the laborer is always the same, that of an executant riveted to an eternally repeated task, enslaved to the orders of the directors, that of a consumer who never succeeds in making ends meet and is chasing after the ever-higher needs modern society creates.

It will show that the sole outcome of the crisis of society is socialism, understood as the power of Councils of laboring people and workers’ management of production, of the economy, of society. It will denounce the mystification of “nationalization” and “planning” by making one see that they are but the form of the power of the political and economic bureaucracy and that they abolish neither exploitation nor the deep-seated anarchy of capitalism. It will show that production will be able to be oriented in the interests of society only if laboring people themselves are the ones managing it; that there can be socialist planning only if the organized masses decide on its objectives and its means; that in a socialist society there can be no other “State” and no other power than that of laboring people organized in their Councils. It will recall that it is the instauration of such a power that has always been the objective of the working class in its great revolutionary struggles; it will analyze the difficulties these struggles have encountered, the obstacles they will have to overcome in the future, in order to aid the proletariat in raising itself to the height of its historical task, the achievement of a society that will be, for the first time, human.

The revolutionary organization will not just speak of socialism on Sundays and holidays. It will talk about it constantly, but also and above all it will be inspired by the principles of socialism in its everyday and current action. It will be unconditionally at the sides of laboring people in the defense of their condition to which the regime of exploitation obligatorily binds them each day. Yet its attitude will always

be set on this principle, that it is up to the workers themselves to direct their struggles, to define their demands, and to choose their means of action. It will place at their disposal its means of expression, information, and liaison. It will endeavor to spread to the whole of the working class the example and experience of partial struggles. Its action will have as its goal and as its principal means the development of the consciousness of laboring people and of their confidence in their own capacity to resolve their problems.

The structure of the organization itself will have to be an example of collective and democratic functioning in the eyes of the working class. That is, moreover, the necessary condition for the organization to be effective. The organization's orientation will be defined by the base; the bodies and persons charged with the indispensable tasks of centralization will be under the permanent control of the militants as a whole. It is not a matter here, however, of some simple rules of formal democracy: it is only in this way that the organization as a whole can genuinely be associated with its effort, that individuals can mobilize themselves for objectives whose importance they know since they have themselves defined them, and that they can deploy and develop their capacities. An organization that reduces its members to the role of executants is not simply antidemocratic; it is also and especially ineffective, for it can implement only a minuscule part of the human potential its members represent.

This organization will inevitably be constructed in the coming period. The ideas on which it is to be founded exist and become each day more obvious for a growing number of individuals. Working-class struggles demonstrate the vital need for them. The young generations are there, and neither the official institutions nor the old organizations have any hold over them, and they feel and suffer [*épreuvent*] in their person the crisis of society. Yet the pace of its construction can be influenced in a decisive way through the attitude that will be adopted, in the coming months, by the major fraction of militants from the traditional organizations that is reflecting today on events and is trying to draw lessons therefrom.

Indeed, the evolution of postwar France has been analyzed above by describing the relations between the proletariat and the “working-class” bureaucracy. Yet this analysis would remain incomplete were it to keep silent about the capital role of this indispensable connecting element between laboring people and bureaucratic leadership groups: militants. Without the daily participation of tens and hundreds of thousands of militants, neither the trade unions nor the “working-class” parties would have been able to act or simply to exist. In their great majority, these militants, whatever might have been their faults or their quirks [*leurs défauts ou leurs déformations*], cannot be confused with the Stalinist or reformist bureaucracy. They have sincerely struggled for what they believed was the defense of the interests of laboring people or a policy leading to socialism. Today, they are very well obliged to take note: What have they all ended in, all these years of relentless effort, these evenings spent in meetings and these nights spent putting up posters, this money, these newspapers sold, these brawls, these insults, this perpetual tension? They have all ended in this: the working class is turning away from them and from the ideas they are supposed to embody; and de Gaulle is settling into power.

Faced with this reality, numerous militants are succeeding today in seeing that the policy of the bureaucratic organizations forms a whole, that there were no “errors,” that their activity for the past fourteen years was necessarily readying today’s outcome which in turn sheds definitive light on its meaning. They thus arrive at a radical critique of the management [*direction*] of the organizations in question and of these organizations as such, which undoubtedly is at present the prime necessity. Yet such a critique does not suffice. Militants are enlightened about the role of their leadership groups. They currently can do nothing about the masses, except to say to themselves: The masses have not been able to do *everything* by themselves, and our organizations have done *everything* for them to do nothing. Yet it is also indispensable for them to ask themselves: What have *we* done?

Without their action, those organizations could not have played the role they played. Militants therefore have to understand their own responsibilities, not to grieve about it or

to beat their breasts, but in order to move forward. And to do that, they have to try to see clearly the motivations of this behavior that led them for years to support a policy diametrically opposed to the ends they believed that they as militants were pursuing.

Two closely connected postulates are to be found at the base of this behavior. In the first place, the idea that what really matters above all is to militate and to act “effectively,” efficacy being measured by the capacity to influence in the immediate and in a noticeable way the life of society, *therefore* the life of the capitalist regime, to exert pressure over the government’s action, to obtain, to this end, the greatest number of votes in elections, and so on. As only a large organization can act “effectively” in this direction, the outcome is that the existence, the unity, and the prestige of such an organization become ends in themselves to defend at any price, and, ultimately, whatever the policy of the organization. All the more so—and here is the second postulate—as militants, once they have joined the organization, do not have to worry about the soundness of this or that action it undertakes, and still less its overall policy, as they have only to apply that policy and defend it before the public, as they have to reflect only in order to execute it better, and as, for all else, the Politburo thinks for them.

It is hardly necessary to recall to what extent these postulates are collapsing today beneath the weight of their own consequences. For years, militants have acted to be effective—and what was the outcome? They could just as well have spent their years copying *Capital* on the back of a postage stamp or building a miniature Kremlin with matches, and their objectives would have benefitted therefrom just as much. Doctrinaire sectarians did not understand how important it was for the CP to have 150 deputies, it had them. What have they done, and where are they now at? The problems had been resolved by Stalin and [\[French CP leader Maurice\] Thorez](#); the Politburo reflected for them, it was in possession of the scientific knowledge and the information mere militants could not possess. It therefore was always right, it could not be mistaken [*se tromper*]. But who was mistaken then, or are we living in a mirage and is de Gaulle

a phantom? The problems that were simmering within these militants for many long years, the question marks that were accumulating—Tito, their organizations' attitude toward the workers' struggles, East Berlin, the Twentieth Congress, Algeria, Poland, Hungary, Suez, to mention only the most burning ones—they masked these problems from themselves at the cost of making an ever greater effort while desperately clinging to this sole tangible "reality": the organization, the party, its strength, its efficacy, which were above all not to be jeopardized by doubts and criticisms. The organization, which at the outset was but a means to achieve certain political ends, was thus becoming the absolute end, and its policy but a means.

This "absolute end" is today a grotesque gaping void, this "reality" a perfect illusion: these parties are corpses, in no way have they changed anything, and still less are they capable of changing themselves. Reality henceforth forbids one from postponing any further the problems that have been dodged for years, if one wants to remain consistent: If what really matters above all is effective action, how does one not see not only that the action of the parties has been totally ineffective but that henceforth all effectiveness is absolutely denied them?

It is only upon the condition that one rid oneself of these illusions (and not repeat them under slightly altered forms) that militants will be able to overcome their current crisis and play a positive role in the development of a new revolutionary organization.

Political action has no meaning, indeed, if it is not effective. But effective in relation to what? That is the whole question. A revolutionary policy is effective insofar as it raises the consciousness and combativeness of laboring people, helps them to rid themselves of the mystifications of established society and of its bureaucratic instruments, removes obstacles from their path, and increases their capacity to resolve their problems. It is effective in helping ten workers to see clearly present-day problems; it is absolutely not so in getting ten additional Communist Party deputies elected.

Political action has no meaning outside of an organization. But what kind of organization, and in order to do what? The organization is nothing if its everyday operation, activity, and policy are not the visible incarnation, inspectable and verifiable [*contrôlable*] by all, of the ends this organization proclaims. That is infinitely more important than the size of the organization as such, which, properly speaking, has no signification outside of the content of the organization: a bureaucratic organization that is three times larger is simply three times more harmful, period.

Militants who draw lessons from the bankruptcy of the traditional organizations and who want to go forward have to understand that, if they do not want to go through the same ordeal with the same gaping void at the end, they must start at the beginning. They have to give up the idea that they can do without a radical revision of the ideas upon which they have been getting by for years. They have to rid themselves of the illusion—which curiously is today gripping the “Communist opposition” and showing how deep-seated the survivals of Stalinism can be—that it suffices to criticize the French CP about problems that are ultimately conjunctural, like its attitude about Algeria or May 13, and that one must above all avoid posing the big “abstract” questions: were they to go down this path, they would be readying themselves for the same political fate as befell the CP itself, when the Algerian question will no longer be there and May 13 will be forgotten. They above all have to understand that the beginnings of a new revolutionary organization will inevitably be modest, that one neither has to grieve nor rejoice about that but simply recognize that this is the sole path open today, and that everything else is political charlatanism. Those who want something “big” can stay in the CP; those who content themselves with less can go to the UGS. But those who want to inhabit something solid will have to construct it themselves. Almost all the materials are there, but the land has been razed level.

For a third of a century, the workers' movement has been dominated almost entirely by the bureaucracy, whether Stalinist or reformist. For a few years, demonstrations of the most diverse kind, though ones that all ultimately express the

same evolution, are announcing that this period is coming to an end. In the East, the proletariat of Berlin, Poznan, and Budapest has struggled head on against the power of the bureaucracy, and even in Russia the Kremlin can no longer govern as it did in the past. In the Western countries, the bureaucratic organizations' grip over laboring people is deeply worn out. In France, this wearing out is being expressed for the time being in negative fashion, through the disgust and withdrawal of the workers. Yet one must look further. A resumption of workers' struggles is inevitable, and those struggles will have a hard time going along the traditional paths. To the new period of the workers' movement will necessarily correspond a new organization, one that draws lessons from the phase of bureaucratization as regards the socialist program, its own structure, and its relations with laboring people. This organization will be able to be constructed only on clear ideological bases, pitilessly eliminating the neo-reformisms, the neo-Stalinisms, and the neo-Trotskyisms that abound in today's confusion and that are of interest only for political archeology.

It is for the construction of this organization that *Socialisme ou Barbarie* is calling upon all those who want to work for the proletariat and for socialism.

Note on Lukács and Rosa Luxemburg*

The book by [Georg Lukács](#), *History and Class Consciousness*, was published in 1923; the texts that make it up were written between 1919 and 1922, in the midst of the revolutionary period. The subsequent evolution of the author, who, to stay within the [Communist International](#), disowned his book and forbade its republication, cannot erase the fact that this is a theoretical work of capital significance, one that, on the philosophical plane, remains nearly the sole major contribution to Marxism since Marx himself.

The “Critical Observations” about [Rosa Luxemburg](#)’s [The Russian Revolution](#) pose, through the defense of Bolshevik policy [*politique bolchevique*] undertaken by Lukács, the essential aspects of the problems of a revolutionary politics [*politique révolutionnaire*] in a period when the regime of exploitation is being overthrown. It goes without saying that we are publishing this text as a contribution to the discussion of these problems, without for all that necessarily sharing the author’s views. Here is not the place to undertake a systematic discussion of those views; the readers of *Socialisme ou Barbarie* can, if they desire to know our point of view, refer themselves to the numerous texts already published by the review on these questions. On one point, nevertheless, Lukács’s text calls for a commentary that must be done right here.

*1974 note: Originally published as “Note sur Lukács et R. Luxembourg,” [S. ou B.](#), 26 (November 1958): 20-22 [reprinted in *EMO2*, 117-21, and *EP2*, 269-71]. This note introduced Lukács’s text, “Remarques critiques sur la critique de la révolution russe de Rosa Luxembourg,” Kostas Axelos and Jacqueline Bois’s translation of which was published in the review [[S. ou B.](#), 26 (November 1958): 22-45] before it appeared in [Histoire et conscience de classe](#) (Paris: Minuit, 1960), pp. 309-32. [T/E: See, in English: “Critical Observations on Rosa Luxemburg’s ‘Critique of the Russian Revolution,’” in Georg Lukács, [History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics](#), trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1971), pp. 272-94.] In this text, Lukács criticized Rosa Luxemburg’s [The Russian Revolution](#), which was posthumously published in German for the first time in 1922.

Lukács rightly criticizes Rosa for her “organic” conception of the revolution, her forgetting to draw out all the implications that flow from the idea of violent revolution. He recalls that, as opposed to the bourgeois revolution, which has only to eliminate the obstacles preventing the full flourishing of already developed capitalist production, the proletarian revolution has to undertake the conscious transformation of the relations of production, a transformation for which capitalism creates only the “objective” (that is to say, material) presuppositions, on the one hand, the proletariat as revolutionary class, on the other. He nevertheless in turn leaves completely in the shadows the question of what such a transformation might consist in. When he says for example that, however advanced the concentration of capital might be, a qualitative leap always remains to be performed in order to pass over to socialism, the content of this qualitative leap remains entirely indeterminate: the context, and the fact that all this aims at defending Bolshevik policy, leaves the impression that it would be a matter of pushing such concentration to its limits (through nationalization or statification) and of eliminating the bourgeois as private owners of the means of production. Now, in reality, the qualitative leap in question consists in the transformation of the content of the capitalist relations of production, the abolition of the directors/executants division, in a word: workers’ management of production. The maturation of the proletariat as revolutionary class, as obvious condition for every revolution that is not a mere military putsch, then takes on a new meaning. Undoubtedly, such a maturation still cannot be considered the “spontaneous” and simply “organic” product of the evolution of capitalism, separate from the activity of the proletariat’s most conscious elements and of a revolutionary organization; yet it is a maturation in relation not to mere uprising but to the management of production, of the economy, and of society as a whole, without which speaking of socialist revolution is entirely meaningless. The party’s role, then, absolutely does not consist in being the midwife, through violence, of the new society, but in aiding in this maturation, without which its violence could lead only to results that are opposed to the ends it is pursuing. Now, in

this regard, it must be recalled that the Bolshevik Party not only did not aid in, but most of the time was opposed to, the attempts to seize the management of the factories undertaken by the [Russian Factory Committees](#) in 1917-1918.

Seen from this angle, and also of course in the light of the subsequent evolution of the Russian Revolution, the distinction between the dictatorship of the party and the dictatorship of the class, which Lukács disdainfully dismisses, takes on its full importance. It is not a matter of more or less democracy, it is not even a matter of two different conceptions of socialism; it is a matter of two diametrically opposed social regimes. For, whatever might be the intentions and the will of persons, groups, and organizations, the dictatorship of the party can only lead inevitably to the dictatorship of a new bureaucratic class.

It is within this context that the problem of “freedom [*liberté*]” takes on its true meaning. Only mass bodies of the proletariat can decide whether this or that political current is to be free or not; that they might be mistaken [*se tromper*] is certain, but no one on earth can protect them from such errors. It is too easy to confine oneself to saying that the goal of the reign of the proletariat is not to serve freedom, but that freedom is to serve the reign of the proletariat. The reign of the proletariat can only be freedom for the proletariat itself. The key experience is that in Russia neither freedom nor the reign of the proletariat was saved in this way. To say that they could not have been saved, given the circumstances, is another discussion. Yet one must not erect what the Bolsheviks have—perhaps under duress—done under given circumstances, and what objectively prepared the advent of the opposite of socialism, into the revolution’s general principle; for, then the path is opened to identifying [\[Russian general Lavr Georgiyevich\] Kornilov](#) with [Kronstadt](#)—as was done by Trotsky and picked up again here by Lukács—which soon led to the identification of Kornilov with Trotsky and with Lukács himself, as Stalin and his successors later undertook to do.

Proletariat and Organization, I*

See: http://libcom.org/files/cc_psw_v2.pdf

BETA

*Originally published as “Prolétariat et organisation,” *S. ou B.*, 27 (April 1959): 53-88. Reprinted as “Prolétariat et organisation, I” in *EMO2*, 123-87, and *EP2*, 273-316. [T/E: Excerpted as “Prolétariat et organisation” in *SouBA*, 218-28 (French edition). Translated in *PSW2*, 193-222, and excerpted as “Proletariat and Organization” in *SouBA*, 324-37.]

Proletariat and Organization, II*

Parallel to bureaucratic degeneration, and fed by it, an antiorganizational primitivism is constantly being reborn within the workers' movement. Quite particularly in the present period, there has appeared, symmetrical to the range and depth of the bureaucratization of organizations and of society, a veritable ideological current that draws from the experience of the last forty years conclusions that are directed against any form of organization.

The theoretical premise of these conclusions is to identify bureaucracy with organization. This premise remains most often unconscious, which is normal. Clearly formulated, it would lead one immediately to ask oneself why the organization of society by the proletariat, during and after a revolution, would not be just as fatally doomed to bureaucratization (and, in fact, countless people have, since the Russian Revolution, answered this question in the affirmative and have abandoned the struggle). The crucial error in this reasoning is that it posits organization as something apart, making of it in fact an autonomous factor in historical evolution. In reality, organizations are not the only things to have degenerated, as we have seen; revolutionary ideology has also degenerated, as have the forms of working-class struggle. Nor is organization an autonomous and originary factor in degeneration; organizations would not have been able to degenerate had the proletariat itself not participated in some way in this evolution and had it not continued to support the bureaucratized organizations. Bureaucratization is but the deepest of the forms through which the capitalist society expresses its continual grip upon the proletariat.

It is therefore unsurprising that this antiorganizational tendency would be expressed within *Socialisme ou Barbarie*.

*Originally published as "Prolétariat et organisation (suite et fin)," *S. ou B.*, 28 (July 1959): 41-72. Reprinted as "Prolétariat et organisation, II" in *EMO2*, 189-248, and *EP2*, 317-57. [T/E: At times, a copy of Pierre Lanneret, Daryl Van Fleet, and Sandie Van Fleet's unpublished draft translation of this second part has been consulted.]

It was Claude Lefort who, following the lead of other comrades,¹ became its spokesman. In 1951, he formulated this conception in a way that would carry it to its logical conclusion.² The tendency to get organized politically, he was in substance saying, belongs only to one phase of the workers' movement; Bolshevism and anti-Bolshevism (Lenin and Rosa Luxemburg), despite their deep-seated opposition, come together to affirm the need for a vanguard organization and both are expressive of a henceforth outdated historical period: "It is therefore not only erroneous but *impossible* in the present period to set up *any* organization" (*SouBA*, 312 emphases added). There could be, at most, only a spontaneous regrouping of the vanguard during a revolutionary period, "as a purely present and provisional [*conjoncture*] detachment from the proletariat" (*ibid.*, 311). One should therefore in no way "set as one's task to contribute to the vanguard a program of action to follow, still less an organization to join" (*ibid.*, 313).

Though coherent up to this point, this conception ceased to be so when it wanted to broach the problem of the tasks of revolutionaries. In fact, it is irreconcilable with any revolutionary activity whatsoever—even when purely theoretical. Lefort proposed that we carry on with *Socialisme ou Barbarie* as a theoretical review, "a site of discussion and elaboration,"³ but did not go to the trouble of explaining how

¹See "The Revolutionary Party," *S. ou B.*, 2 (May 1949): 99-107, reprinted in *EMOI*, 121-43, and "Postface to 'The Revolutionary Party' and 'Proletarian Leadership,'" *EMOI*, 163-75 [both now translated in full in the present edition]. At the time, Lefort had voted in favor of the resolution.

²See "The Proletariat and the Problem of Revolutionary Leadership" [which originally appeared in French in *S. ou B.*, 10 (July 1952): 18-27, and is now partially translated in *SouBA*, 307-15]; it is from this text that the four following quotations are drawn.

³*S. ou B.*, 10 (July 1952): 27. [FRENCH EDITORS: Castoriadis cites the review here because Lefort did not include the last twelve lines of his text when he reprinted it in *Éléments d'une critique de la bureaucratie* (Geneva-Paris: Droz, 1971). T/E: Actually, *fourteen* lines are missing in

the proletariat had need of theoretical reviews in general and *Socialisme ou Barbarie* in particular. If the revolutionary process is this spontaneous maturation of the proletariat and of its vanguard, a ripening process [*maturation*] in which the political activity of organized elements appears at best only as a disruptive factor, the inevitable conclusion is that theoretical labor is at the very most a private pastime for intellectuals at history's margins. And the intellectuals confined to this labor cannot but remain radically separated from the workers. For, in this form, theory holds no interest for workers, nor, especially, does it offer them any possibility of participation. That the theory elaborated by intellectuals under such conditions would be revolutionary in name only is obvious, too: specialists separated from the proletariat who discuss a theory having no connection with social practice are indulging in a bourgeois type of activity; and their potential intention to see things "through the eyes of the workers" does not suffice to alter their retina. External to the proletariat and to its action, they could generate nothing but speculations that would be alien to the proletariat and that would ultimately reproduce bourgeois ideas.

This position was in fact untenable for anyone who wanted to maintain any degree of political activity. And Lefort, who had left *Socialisme ou Barbarie* in 1951, returned some time later. As he says today, "revolutionary activity, being collective and seeking ever more to be so, necessarily implies a certain amount of organization." That seems so obvious to him that he immediately adds: "No one has ever denied or is denying this,"⁴ forgetting that he had violently denied it in the past.

this reprint. But Castoriadis cites Lefort's *S. ou B.*'s version because his present text is from 1959, well before Lefort began reprinting anything.]

⁴Claude Lefort, "Organization and Party" [T/E: which first appeared in French in *S. ou B.*, 26 (November-December 1958): 120-34, was partially translated in *SouBA*, 316-23. The quotations in the following part of the present text are drawn from this article, the numbers in parentheses indicating the page. The present in-text quotation appears in translation in *SouBA*, 316].

The facts, however, brought proof that a vague agreement on the need for “a certain amount of organization” was an absolutely insufficient basis for collective activity. In coming back to *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, Lefort was trying to reconcile his participation with his old postulate that identified organization with bureaucracy by adopting attitudes that boiled down in fact to this: the organization is to be the least organization possible, the action is to be the least action possible, even the ideology is to be the least ideology possible. The history of the perpetually renewed frictions and conflicts that resulted therefrom cannot be retraced here. Suffice it to say that, in the view of the comrades who did not share these positions, the attitude of Lefort, [Roger] Berthier [i.e., Henri Simon], and a few others appeared more and more as an attempt to neuter as much as possible the activity of *Socialisme ou Barbarie* for purposes of antibureaucratic prevention.

The events of [May 13 \[1958, with the Algiers military coup\]](#) have posed the problems in such a way that it was becoming impossible to dodge them any longer. Faced with the prospect of a social crisis, many readers and sympathizers were coming to *Socialisme ou Barbarie* in order to work with us. How could we all work together? How could we organize ourselves? Two conceptions clashed immediately.

For the majority of *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, there could be no organization without the adoption of some principles. We had to know who was considered a member of the organization. If the number of participants required a division into groups, it was necessary to maintain overall cohesion on the one hand through frequently held and sovereign general assembly meetings and, on the other, in between meetings, through a responsible organ composed of elected delegates from the grassroots groups who were subject to recall. Finally, possible divergencies should be settled through voting and decisions implemented by all, the minority remaining free to express its disagreements publicly.

For Lefort, Berthier, and a few other comrades, the boundaries of an organization ought to be “deliberately imprecise.” Each of the groups that make up the organization would act as it saw fit. The decisions made in common—

more exactly, the votes—would not be binding on the minority, which could act in accordance with its own ideas. The problem of the unity of the organization and of the coordination of its activity was not even raised, the sole “central” tasks envisaged being considered and presented as technical ones. As for the rest, an appeal was made to the “spontaneous cooperation” of the comrades.

It then became clear that no halfway solution was possible. Lefort and those who think like him have left *Socialisme ou Barbarie*. This is the sole reasonable solution with which everyone, on their side and ours, should be pleased. Each side can henceforth implement its principles without restrictions and assess their value through practice. As for us, we claim that, with Lefort's principles and methods, no kind of organization can be constructed or can exist—neither a “flexible” one, as he says, nor a rigid one, neither crystalline nor gaseous. All that can exist is a discussion group that can live—that is to say, discuss—so long as it remains reduced in size. If, however, this group wanted to go on to engage in some genuine activity, or even if it merely were to expand, it would be impossible for it not to explode, those who take its principles seriously opposing those who take seriously the idea of engaging in some sort of activity, the latter being incompatible with the former.

It is indeed impossible for an organization, “flexible” or not, to expand if it does not develop any real activity. People, and in particular workers, do not participate regularly in an organization if it is simply a matter of discussing and mutually “informing” one another. They do so only if it is a matter of *doing* something that seems to them important enough to sacrifice thereto a portion of the meager leisure time capitalist exploitation leaves them. And it is impossible for real and effective, that is to say, coherent activity to develop without a minimum of ideological homogeneity and collective discipline. That involves a clear definition of ideas, goals, and means—that is to say, a program—and a way of resolving in practice the divergencies that may arise in the course of an action—that is to say, the acceptance of the majority principle. These two points entail the need to define who participates in the organization. Finally, it is impossible

for an organization to develop without encountering and without being obliged to resolve in practice the problem of centralization.

It is on these points that our divergencies with Lefort bear—and not on whether the revolutionary organization is to be a “leadership [*direction*]” for the proletariat. And it is characteristic that Lefort chose to discuss this last point in the text published in the [last issue of the Review](#), and not the real divergencies. Perhaps this was not done to create a diversion; but in any case it is because Lefort and his comrades decided that those problems do not exist—and because they have simply chosen not to envisage them. It is useless to expatiate on this attitude, which to us seems purely negative and sterile. What really matters, on the other hand, is to discuss the theoretical positions they are led to take, and which really do lead far beyond divergencies over the problem of organization.

The Trotskyist Experience

To introduce his positions, Lefort calls upon an analysis of the Trotskyist experience. However, this analysis is both incomplete and ambiguous. Incomplete, for the phenomena of bureaucratization that exist on the scale of the small Trotskyist organization—and that the Socialisme ou Barbarie group denounced when it broke with Trotskyism⁵—do not derive simply from the fact that the PCI [Parti Communiste Internationaliste ([Internationalist Communist Party, or French Section of the Fourth International](#))] had decided to be “the party of the proletariat, its irreplaceable *leadership*.” More accurately, this idea itself expresses only one of the aspects of the social and historical reality of Trotskyism. Ambiguous, for, in the manner in which it is conducted by Lefort, the analysis seems to lead to the conclusion that it is almost impossible to constitute an

⁵See “Lettre ouverte aux militants du PCI et de la ‘IV^e Internationale’” [T/E: [S. ou B., 1 \(mars-avril 1949\)](#): 91-101], reprinted in [SBI](#), especially, 202-204 [FRENCH EDITORS: *SB(n.é.)*, 145-58; the text will be reprinted in the *Bureaucratic Society* volume of our republication project].

organization without that organization becoming bureaucratized.

If one bothers to undertake an analysis of the experience of Trotskyism, it should be done for real and on a twofold—sociological and historical—level. A sociological analysis cannot limit itself to describing the similarities in behavior of Trotskyist militants and deduce such behaviors, as Lefort tries to do, from those militants' desire to set themselves up as the leadership of the proletariat. It is useful to point out here, briefly, the other aspects such an analysis ought to encompass. For, they are all important for a discussion of the problem of revolutionary organization in the future.

The first aspect is the *type of labor* the militants were expected to perform and did somehow or other perform. They first of all had to be initiated into an abstract theory that was related to their current experience only through its remotest consequences and that had become a dogma in the strongest sense of the term: formulated once and for all by Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Trotsky, the theory had its authentic interpreters in the person of the leaders of the party and of the Fourth International. Secondly, the militants had to understand that this "theory" necessarily culminated in slogans, types of actions, and forms of struggle that were codified once and for all (in [*The Transitional Program*](#)) and were valid for the entire coming historical period. The sole question to be raised in this regard was whether the "objective situation" was of type A, calling for slogans a, b, and c, or of type B, entailing the use of slogans x, y, and z. Discussions within the organization were therefore reduced essentially to these "appreciations of the situation," to which militants could contribute only by "taking the temperature of the workers in the factories." And yet, the things they said were used only as tokens for the arguments of the leaders, who, on the basis of their economic and political "knowledge," decided whether or not capitalism was in crisis and whether one was going through a period of "rise" or "retreat." Thirdly, and especially, the labor of the militants consisted in propagating the party's slogans within their respective settings [*milieu*]. They attained their ultimate objective when they

succeeded in getting those slogans adopted, as such or in slightly modified form, by a union local or a strike committee.

By the very nature of his labor, the Trotskyist militant was therefore a *political executant*. He had to absorb and disseminate ideas set in place [*idées fixées*] once and for all by others (no matter whether living or dead). This is where the root of his political alienation was to be found.

Yet this observation would be totally insufficient, were it to leave aside the *content* of these ideas. It is impossible to envisage the problem of Trotskyism seriously while bracketing, as Lefort does, its ideology. What really matters in this regard is not so much the fact that this ideology was “false” but how it was so, its meaning, its social character. It boiled down, in practice, to stating that socialism involves only some objective transformations of social structures (nationalization, planning, etc.). The immense lessons of the degeneration of the Russian Revolution were passed over in silence, this degeneration was but an accident, Bolshevism played no rôle therein. The critique of the bureaucracy remained completely superficial,⁶ the idea of the autonomous action of the working class was absolutely ignored, and the notion of workers’ management was greeted with derisive laughter.⁷

⁶The Trotskyists have even backtracked from Trotsky’s own critique of the bureaucracy. [\[Pierre\] Frank](#) went so far as to write in 1947, in the PCI’s *Bulletin intérieur*, that a certain dose of bureaucracy would be necessary in any case during the initial phase of the existence of a Workers’ State (we are quoting from memory).

⁷Certainly, a contradiction remained within Trotskyism in this regard, a faint echo of the fundamental contradiction of Bolshevism. When it was a matter of polemicizing against the “right wingers,” the “true” Trotskyists gladly unearthed Lenin’s phrase about the masses being one hundred times more to the left than the party (though in their mouths it was no longer but the expression of a permanent agitatory hysteria, no more nor less revolutionary than the organic opportunism of [\[PCI General Secretary Yvan\] Craipeau](#)); in accusing the Stalinists of bureaucratism, they called for Soviet democracy and so on. Yet these aspects remained purely formal, themes for oratorical exercise: that was their Romantic side, their holiday attire. Serious matters of politics, as the Trotskyists understood them, were something else.

Militants were therefore recruited and “educated” on the basis of an ideology that criticized the most outward aspects of the phenomenon of bureaucracy (“betrayal” and “errors” of Stalin, of the CP, and of the SP) only to better preserve the substance thereof. This ideology was deeply related to the *motivations* of the Trotskyist militants, which cannot be understood without considering the origin of Trotskyist recruitment. Typically, the Trotskyist militant came from a traditional organization (most often from the CP) from which he had broken on account of criticism of the most outward aspects of its policy: nationalism of the “Resistance,” Popular Front or tripartite government,⁸ an opportunistic or extremist attitude toward workers’ struggles. Stalinism seemed to him to be a new edition of reformism, itself viewed as a mere “betrayal,” and the problem of bureaucracy remained unknown. Certainly, this criticism of the policy of the traditional organizations *could have and should have* become the starting point for a much more thoroughgoing critique, leading in turn to a new definition of the socialist program. However, in encountering the Trotskyist ideology it found an illusory outlet and aborted. The militant coming to Trotskyism learned that “the proletariat has ceased to develop numerically and culturally” and that “the historical crisis of mankind is reduced to the crisis of the revolutionary leadership.”⁹ Therefore, the revolutionary process was viewed

⁸T/E: [English Wikipedia \(s.v.\)](#) explains: “*Tripartisme* was the mode of government in France from 1944 to 1947, when the country was ruled by a three-party alliance of communists, socialists and Christian democrats, represented by the [French Communist Party \(PCF\)](#), the [French Section of the Workers’ International](#) (SFIO) and the [Christian Democratic] [Popular Republican Movement \(MRP\)](#), respectively.”

⁹T/E: In his footnote, Castoriadis attributes both of these quotations to Trotsky’s 1938 [The Transitional Program](#) (already mentioned above in the present text). While the second quotation is reproduced here according to the <http://www.marxists.org> version, an exact equivalent for the first quotation has not been found; it is simply translated here from Castoriadis’s French. In his 1973 General Introduction ([PSWI](#), 11), Castoriadis, citing this work, paraphrases one of its ideas and then states that Trotsky “also wrote that the productive forces of humanity had ceased to grow and that the proletariat no longer was advancing, either

independently of the continuous development of the proletariat and its consciousness. The only thing missing was a revolutionary leadership; the sole task of the militants was to build it. Humanity would be saved from barbarism only if a leadership capable of taking over from those who had committed “betrayal” were constituted “in time,” and the militant who took upon his shoulders this tremendous task necessarily classed himself apart and became a member of a new elite.

Under these conditions, any organizational “democracy” could not help but be an empty shell. The Trotskyists implemented Leninist “democratic centralism,” which, as we have seen, inevitably created a division between directors and executants. Yet even a Soviet democracy in the PCI, had it been conceivable, would have quickly been transformed into its opposite. For, it is the *nature* and *type of labor* carried out by the organization that reduced the majority of militants to mere executants of decisions made by others who excluded them from all effective participation in directing the organization; it is its *ideology* that provided a solemn justification for this state of affairs and, even more than that, made it appear to be the only conceivable one. The conception of the party as leadership [*direction*] of the working class was, of course, part and parcel of this ideology. Yet it must be added, if one wants to respect the facts, that *in practice* this conception played only a minimal role. The militants’ labor, and their unconsciously bureaucratic ideology, were realities; their aspiration to direct the proletariat never went beyond the stage of desire.

To conclude, the most extensive “sociological” analysis of Trotskyism would remain abstract if it did not insert the phenomenon of Trotskyism into the framework of historical developments. Independent of its ideas, intentions,

numerically or culturally.” All that can be found in [The Transitional Program](#) is the briefer claim that “Mankind’s productive forces stagnate.” However, in [“The USSR in War”](#) (September 1939), which was reprinted in [In Defense of Marxism](#), Trotsky does affirm: “Under conditions of decaying capitalism the proletariat grows neither numerically nor culturally.” See also above, in n. 6 of “The Meaning of Socialism.”

and by-laws, Trotskyism's fate was laid out in advance by the historical context in which it was born and had grown up or, rather, vegetated. As has been said elsewhere, Trotskyism was but a vain attempt to restore the Bolshevism of the heroic period at a moment when it could no longer have any basis in real history. Trotskyism was but a final echo of the great movements of 1905-1923, with all their contradictions and negative aspects and without a single germ of renewal. It did not merely try to be a "party" but a party of a well-defined type—the Leninist type—taking on certain functions and not others, conceiving its labor in a given fashion and not in others, with everything indissolubly tied to a given ideology. The "bureaucratization"¹⁰ of Trotskyism, as well as its failure, can be understood only on the basis of this overall situation, itself a product of a determinant historical phase in which these conceptions and these behaviors had first predominated and then gradually degraded into Stalinism; finally, in reacting against Stalinism but situating itself on the same terrain, a core group that had wished to restore and to maintain the contradictory flame of Bolshevism in its original purity met up with a thin stratum of workers and militants disgusted with the old organizations and vegetating at the margin of historical experience.

The Positive Conclusions of the Critique of the Bureaucracy

It was necessary to dwell on the critique of the experience of Trotskyism, for this real, though limited, example allows us, using a real example, to give concrete form to the analysis of bureaucratization done in the first part of the present text. Yet it also allows us to understand better the positive principles we are drawing from the critique of an entire phase of the workers' movement, principles that should be summarized briefly here.

¹⁰We place the word between quotation marks because neither should one exaggerate things. Incidentally, not everyone who wants to be a bureaucrat is one.

A historical period comes to its end, with an immense proletarian experience about the bureaucracy considered from its deepest standpoint: not as a leadership that may make mistakes or commit betrayal but as an exploiting stratum that may arise from the workers' movement itself. In the coming period, the proletariat will be able to struggle to achieve its objectives only by struggling at the same time against bureaucracy. This struggle will give rise to countless needs, practical and ideological, to which a revolutionary organization alone can respond. This organization will not be able to be constituted except with workers and militants who have been through the experience of bureaucracy, or with young people who reject bureaucracy right away as a form of established society, and it will not be able to recruit except among them. Its function will be to be an instrument of the proletariat in its struggle, not its leadership. This organization will have a conception of revolutionary theory radically opposed not only to that of Trotskyism but also to the one that has predominated for a century. It will categorically reject the idea of a "science of society and of revolution," worked out by specialists, from which would be derived "correct" practical conclusions, a politics that would be but a technics. It will develop revolutionary theory in the first place on the basis of the experience and the action of the proletariat, which will furnish it not observational material or examples for verification but the most profound principles. Consequently, the militants will no longer be executants in relation to an ideology defined outside them, on bases and according to methods that are alien to them. Without the active and dominant participation of the laboring people who join it, the organization will never be able to define an ideology or a program or any revolutionary activity.

The first task of militants therefore will be to give expression to their own experience and to that of their respective settings. The organization's labor will in the first place consist in formulating this experience and disseminating it, sifting out what has a universal value and working out a coherent overall conception. It will consist at the same time in bringing to expression the experience of the greatest possible number of workers, in giving workers a voice, and in

allowing the dissemination and communication of examples of struggle, of opinions, and of ideas within the proletariat. The problem of how individuals relate within the organization will thus be posed in a totally new fashion. There will no longer be a basis, either economic or in "production" (that is to say, in the organization's activity, in the type of labor it performs) for one category of individuals to become a stratum of separate and irremovable leaders. People will come to the organization not because they think that there "have to" be separate leaders but because there is no specific *role* [fonction] for such leaders; and they will come to it in order to do a job that explicitly postulates the equal importance of what everyone has to say. The structure of the organization will organically express its orientation and its conceptions; it will be a structure through which the participation and the predominance of the militants in their entirety not only would be expressed in the "by-laws" but would be rendered possible and facilitated by them; it could therefore only be a soviet-type structure, inspired by the modes of organization created by the proletariat in the course of its history: the broadest possible autonomy of the grassroots bodies in the determination of their own labor; determination of the general orientation of the organization via the methods of direct democracy and, for want of that, by elected delegates subject to recall; free expression of the militants and of tendencies inside and outside the organization.

These conceptions, which have been worked out on the basis of the critique of the history of the workers' movement and of the theories that have dominated it, constitute at once a response to the problem of the tasks of revolutionaries in the present period, of their relation with the proletariat, and of their mode of organization and a radical rejection of the traditional theses (and not just the Leninist ones) about the party. They have been formulated in the review¹¹ and within *Socialisme ou Barbarie* for years. Lefort

¹¹The texts "On the Content of Socialism" (whose first part appeared in [issue 17](#), dated July 1955, and which was continued in issues [22](#) and [23](#) [all three parts now available in [PSW1](#) and [PSW2](#)]), "The Proletarian Revolution against the Bureaucracy" ([issue 20](#) [now in [PSW2](#)]), "Bilan,

chooses to ignore these conceptions, to present a few brief snatches from them as “amendments” and “riders [*correctifs*]” to the Leninist conception, to polemicize against three or four phrases from old texts removed from what preceded, surrounded, and followed them, and to refute... [What is to be Done?](#) We need not characterize this process. Yet it is necessary to unveil its logic, intentional or not; refuting Lenin for the thousandth time, and after so many others, allows him to avoid present-day problems and masks the absence of answers to the true questions today confronting revolutionaries and the proletariat. To be convinced of this, it suffices to consider the “positive” proposals Lefort ends up formulating.

The Tasks of Revolutionaries in the Present Period

The definition of these tasks, according to Lefort, must take as its starting point the distinction between two categories of “active” elements within what is called *the vanguard*: “Among these active elements are those—by far the most numerous—who tend to meet together within workplaces [*enterprises*], without seeking at first to extend their action on a vaster scale. They spontaneously find the form of their labor: they set up a small local newspaper, or a newsletter, militate in an opposition trade union, or make up a small struggle group” ([S. ou B., 26](#): 132-33). Others feel the need for broader action, and among those others are numerous comrades who find themselves outside workplaces; the latter’s action “can have no other objective than to support,

perspectives, tâches” ([issue 21](#), in particular pp. 10-12 [see “Results, Prospects, Tasks,” above, pp. 58-60]), “La voie polonaise de la bureaucratisation” ([issue 21](#)), and “Perspectives de la crise française” ([issue 25](#), in particular pp. 64-65 [see “Prospects for the French Crisis,” above, 163-64]) amply suffice to show that the object of the discussion about the party had for a long time no longer been about “leadership” and that Lefort, for reasons known to him alone, is polemicizing against conceptions their authors had gone beyond. [FRENCH EDITORS: “The Polish Path to Bureaucratization” (“La voie...”) will appear in the *Bureaucratic Society* volume of the present series.]

amplify, and clarify the action conducted by workplace-based groups" (*ibid.*: 133).¹²

One may ask oneself whether those people who meet together within workplaces have to confine themselves therein. Is the positive character of this labor a result of the fact that these militants do not seek "at first to extend their action on a vaster scale"? What does this "at first" mean? Is a prospect of deepening and extension necessary for it—or harmful? Yet the question does not even lie there.

Firstly, it must be stated bluntly that this is a mythological distinction. Except ephemeral ones, "small struggle groups" do not exist and, were they to exist, Lefort no more than we would, by definition, know anything about them. Secondly, the "small local newspaper[s] or...newsletter[s]" that exist in France can be counted on the fingers of one hand. Thirdly, and most importantly, these newspapers and newsletters have always been founded by militant political workers who had belonged and, most of the time, continued to belong to far-left organizations or groups. That these militants wanted to make of those newspapers organs for autonomous expression of laboring people and not instruments of their own organization, and that they often succeeded, is very important, indeed capital, but goes completely against what Lefort wants to demonstrate. For, it proves that this still embryonic movement did not start off "from workplaces" but from some militants among those who "feel the need to enlarge their horizons" and so on¹³—and that that did not prevent them from being transformed into real nuclei *inside* workplaces.

We have long discussed in *Socialisme ou Barbarie* the problem of "Struggle Committees," including under this

¹²T/E: These two quotations are drawn from a part of the "Militant Activity" section of Lefort's article that was not translated for *SouBA*. We include in parentheses their pagination from Lefort's article in *S. ou B.*, 26; see the reprint in his *Éléments d'une critique de la bureaucratie*, p. 119. Here, Castoriadis omits "militants or" before "workplace-based groups" but restores it when he again quotes this sentence below.

¹³T/E: Castoriadis is again quoting from p. 133 of *Lefort's S. ou B. article*.

designation any attempt at autonomous regrouping inside workplaces initiated by minority nuclei that are independent of political organizations. We asked ourselves in particular whether, *outside of a period of open struggle*, such regroupings could maintain ongoing [*permanente*] activity. This is a problem rendered to be of capital importance by the ever-more complete bureaucratization of trade unions in the present period: Can an organization of laboring people united on a class basis, even a minoritarian, embryonic, and almost informal one, permanently exist under the regime of exploitation?

The conclusion of twelve years of experience in France, which began with the Struggle Committee of 1947 at Renault, is clear cut: the embryos of autonomous organization that were able to exist did not keep themselves going beyond periods of struggle—save in the cases where these organizational embryos took on a quasi-“political” character, that is to say, where the participants were led to clarify their ideas about problems that went far beyond those of the “workplace” and where they felt committed as militants to an ongoing task. And in those cases, they have always sought, to the contrary of what Lefort says, to extend their action to a vaster scale.¹⁴

¹⁴It is to this experience that the following sentence from “Proletarian Leadership” [1952], quoted by Lefort, corresponds: “In this sense, the distinction between Party and ‘Committees of Struggle’ (or any other minoritarian organizational form of the vanguard of the working class) is concerned exclusively with the degree of clarification and organization and nothing else” (*PSWI*: 203). As what preceded it shows, this experience signifies, under the regime of exploitation, that such committees (to the extent that they are meant to be permanent) cannot be just semi- or quasi-political bodies and that there no longer can be, as in the past, merely “economic,” “demand-based,” or “trade-union” regroupings situated on a class basis. Already the *critique* of the trade unions itself cannot happen outside of a more general conception of the role of the trade unions in present-day society, therefore also of the bureaucracy—in short, without a major degree of ideological clarification. In order to fight on the terrain of economic demands, it was said, conscious workers are obliged to go beyond the level of economic demands. Lefort understands this argument as “an attempt to subordinate the struggle committees to the Party” [T/E: this last quotation may be Castoriadis’s paraphrase of Lefort’s view].

In the future, will such regroupings be formed “spontaneously,” that is to say, outside the action of militants? No one knows—and the question is of little import. What one does know and what alone is of interest here is this: there will certainly be some if militants with clear ideas try to set them up and make them into instruments of laboring people and not appendages of their organization; and they will keep themselves going [*se maintiendront*] if such militants maintain them, and if they train [*forment*] around them people like them and better than them. For a reason that ought to be obvious, one can safely wager that there will be such regroupings only upon this condition. Who can undertake such an effort and continue to engage in such labor through ups and downs, successes and defeats, against circumstances and a climate that are unfavorable eleven months out of twelve? Only individuals whose ideology, having become the flesh of their flesh, allows them to resist coming events, to interpret them, to put them in perspective, and to know that, even if for the moment they are isolated, they belong to something infinitely vaster and more powerful than themselves. What Lefort does not see is that a militant who carries on action in an ongoing way within a workplace and does not try to universalize that action and to deepen it is a psychological absurdity. This is an inconsistent character with no internal logic, invented by a poor novelist.

The process described by Lefort is therefore purely imaginary and invented for the needs of his theory. There are, in France, no elements, “by far the most numerous,” who strive to meet together within workplaces while distinguishing themselves from others who “enlarge their horizons.” There is a huge *objective* need for the working class to set up autonomous bodies for struggle; and there is the fact that the sole people who would be staunch advocates of such bodies and resolute in their effort to perform the necessary labor to make them a reality are a few political militants with quite clear ideas.

What, then, is the action of the latter according to Lefort? They are to “have no other objective than to support, amplify, and clarify the action conducted by militants or workplace-based groups” (*ibid.*). Let us suppose that the latter

exist. What does it mean to amplify and *clarify* their action? According to Lefort, it is a matter of “bringing the former information they do not have at their disposal, knowledge that can be obtained only through a collective effort conducted outside workplaces” (*ibid.*). What information and which forms of knowledge? On which subject, from which angle, chosen according to what criteria? Short of falling into the trap of “objective” information and educating the people, it is clear that none of all that is possible without a coherent ideology. And here there is but one choice: either one will dissimulate this ideology—which boils down, objectively, to deceiving people about the merchandise one is selling them—or one will formulate it clearly—and what then distinguishes it from the much loathed “program,” which, if you believe Lefort, lies at the origin of political alienation in revolutionary organizations? For, the ideology in question is not some pure theory; it is a social ideology from which some practical consequences necessarily follow. How will that relate to the “militants inside workplaces”?

The question necessarily raised here is that of the organization’s *program*, a topic to which we shall return. For the time being, it suffices to ask oneself why the people who belong to the organization desired by Lefort go there rather than elsewhere or nowhere. Lefort says: “because of a deep ideological agreement” (*SouBA*, 323). Once again, he replaces ideas with adjectives—a deep agreement, modest tasks, a flexible organization—and tries thereby to get rid of a volume of problems by playing with the colors. Upon what does this ideological agreement bear? Probably upon “the idea that laboring people, if they want to defend themselves, will be summoned to take their fate into their hands, to organize themselves on a society-wide scale, and that that is socialism” (*ibid.*). Perfect. This idea, says even Lefort, is something one must endeavor to spread [*propager*]. By the way, such propagation or propaganda, as you wish, is not taken very seriously, for in no way is it given concrete form in the practical tasks proposed later on (certainly, neither disseminating information and knowledge nor conducting investigations about the experience of life and labor in

workplaces is the same thing as propagating the idea of autonomy).

If, however, the idea of autonomy is taken seriously, one will inevitably ask oneself how one goes about that in order to propagate it. Should one repeat it in an abstract form as a regulative idea—or really show in each concrete case what it signifies? Does it not imply, for example, that in a strike over economic demands, laboring people are to act in a certain fashion and not another one—electing a revocable strike committee, holding general assembly meetings, and so on, instead of turning their strike over to the trade-union bureaucracy? Is the organization to say that at every opportunity, or not? Of course, this is not to be done in an artificial fashion, but in fact, to do so in a nonartificial fashion, does it not have to be connected to the working class and to include the greatest possible number of laboring people? Why would these laboring people come to it if they do not see in the organization an essential instrument of their action?

Do not a host of consequences, both direct and indirect, flow from this idea of autonomy? Must they be hidden? And a host of problems, too, that laboring people pose to themselves in very precise fashion? Is one to keep quiet about them? Does it not follow from this, for example, in a certain though indirect fashion, that laboring people have to struggle against hierarchy and consequently put forward demands for uniform wage increases? Is the organization to repeat that tirelessly, or not? And let it not be said that, in doing so, the organization is *merely* taking up demands that arose within the proletariat itself. We have said so at length, but we have never forgotten that the working class has also put forward the opposite demands: strikes by one or another category of workers, for example, have never ceased to exist. The organization, and even an isolated revolutionary, cannot avoid the *choice*, and it is futile to try to flee one's responsibilities by hiding behind the proletariat, transformed thereby into an imaginary entity for the needs of the cause.

Socialism is autonomy, says Lefort. This has been said in this review since its very first page. Yet is one to stop there? It is not only we but the workers who are asking: What does that mean? How can a society managed by laboring

people operate? Apparently, the answer to be given to them is: You'll see when you do it. Yet the issue is that, for a good portion of them, they do not do it because they do not see it. As absurd as it is to think that an organization might be able to have in hand the carefully timed operational plan for the socialist society, it is nonetheless vital to give concrete form to the idea of socialism, to show that a socialist organization of society is possible, and to point out some solutions to the problems such a society will encounter.

And yet, for the organization it is not just a question of propagating the *idea* of autonomy. It is a question of helping laboring people to *realize* some autonomous actions. The organization can do so only if it is itself an action-oriented organization. Lefort leaves this problem entirely aside. One can be convinced of this by considering the "tasks" he assigns to the organization. It is not that such tasks are said to be "modest": even if they were inflated to infinity, they would have nothing to do with action. Only indirectly does he discuss an organization's action-oriented tasks while leaving the impression that they would consist in ensuring "strict coordination of struggles and centralized decision-making" (*ibid.*, 322) and that there lies utopia.

Lefort writes: "*The function of coordination and centralization...falls to minoritarian groups of workers or employees who, while multiplying contacts among themselves, do not stop being a part of the production settings in which they act*" (*ibid.* [T/E: emphasis in original restored]). Here again, the problem is posed in a mythological manner. Where has anyone seen, except in a period of *revolution*, minoritarian groups of workers or employees multiplying contacts among themselves in order to ensure coordination and centralization? These groups spring forth fully armed—and disarming—from Lefort's head. When the workers and employees themselves begin to ensure coordination and centralization, one is in a revolutionary period or at the very least in a period of vast and deep struggles, and one is not dealing with "minoritarian" groups but with delegates from strike committees, councils, and so on. Outside of such a period, the problem, to tell the truth, is not even posed; in any case, it is not posed as a problem of "centralization of

decisions.” What is posed, as a task, is an effort oriented toward the dissemination of examples of partial struggles, and possibly toward their extension, and it is absurd to claim that a revolutionary organization has nothing to do in this domain.

What is being asked, therefore, is not that the organization “coordinate and centralize” but effectively *help* workers’ struggles. The means for doing so depend upon circumstances and also upon the organization’s own strength, but they are innumerable. One skirts the issue when one says: “Workers’ struggles as they have occurred over the past twelve years...have not suffered from the absence of a party-type organ that would have succeeded in coordinating the strikes” or “from a lack of politicization.... They have been dominated by the problem of the autonomous organization of the struggle,” a problem “[n]o party can make the proletariat resolve” (*ibid.*). The solution to the problem of the autonomous organization of struggles, which did indeed dominate the French proletariat’s situation for twelve years, does not depend upon one wagering on the proletariat attaining a state of grace, a state for which revolutionaries would have only to wait while peering into the heavens. Laboring people’s tendency to organize themselves autonomously in order to engage in struggles, a result of having experienced the bureaucratization of organizations, is constantly hampered, combated, annihilated by their situation within capitalist society and in particular by the action of the bureaucratic organizations, by the lack of material means, by ignorance of what is happening elsewhere, by doubts about the possibility of organizing themselves, and so on. In relation to all these points, a revolutionary organization has an enormous amount of labor to accomplish, rather than waiting until the free will of the proletariat allows it to draw everything from itself. What Lefort forgets to see or to say is that, for those twelve years, the French proletariat has on several occasions tried to start down the path of autonomous action. These attempts aborted. Why? It can always be answered: “Because the situation wasn’t ripe.” Yet this response does not advance us one bit. The task of a revolutionary is neither to speculate on the ripeness of conditions nor to lament the absence thereof; it is to labor for

such maturation to come about. The lack of a maturation of conditions in 1955, for example, was expressed through a very specific fact: the workers of Nantes and Saint-Nazaire remained isolated in their struggle. And that was not because France lacked telephones, roads, and railways—but because the bureaucratic organizations and the bourgeoisie did everything to keep them isolated. At that time, would a revolutionary organization have waited for the metalworkers of Paris to come “freely” to the decision to support the Nantes struggle? (Be it noted that “freely” here signifies: bound hand and foot by the bourgeoisie, the CGT [Communist-allied Confédération Générale du Travail (General Confederation of Labor)], the CFTC [Confédération française des travailleurs chrétiens (French Confederation of Christian Workers)], FO [Force Ouvrière (Workers’ Force)], the French CP, the SFIO [the Socialists of the French Section of the Workers’ International], and so on.) No, an organization worthy of that name would have, to start with, undertaken an informational campaign about what was happening in Nantes, the methods the workers employed in their struggle, their demands, and so on. It would have shown the exemplary character of this struggle, explaining that it had to be supported by all the laboring people of France. It would have put five trucks at the disposal of the people of Nantes, telling them: If you want to send a massive delegation to Renault, here are the means to do so. It is only when one would have done all that, and a thousand other things of that kind, and not only as relates to Nantes and for one day, but everywhere and for years on end, that one would have been able to judge whether the situation was “ripe” and up to what point the French proletariat was in a position to resolve the problem of organizing autonomously.

If one does not accept such activity directed toward the autonomy of the proletariat, this is because one gives to autonomy an absolute, metaphysical meaning: The workers must, *without any outside influence*, reach certain conclusions. In this case, one must condemn not only all action but any effort to propagate ideas—including the idea of autonomy itself. Wanting to persuade people that they are to be free is still infringing upon [*violating*] people. And what if it pleases them not to be so?

It hardly needs to be said that here we have a desperately absurd position, nor need one be reminded that no one achieves anything without some outside influence. Still, one must not dodge the conclusions of this self-evident fact. Autonomy, or freedom, is not a metaphysical state; it is a social and historical process. Autonomy is won through a series of contradictory influences; freedom arises in the course of struggles with others and against them. Respecting someone's freedom is not leaving them untouched; it is to treat him as an adult, telling him what one thinks. Respecting his freedom, not as a moralist but as a revolutionary, is to help him to do what can give it to him—not in a hypothetical future but here and now; not instaurating socialism on his behalf but helping him to carry out socialist acts this very day. The politics of freedom is not the politics of nonintervention but that of intervention in a positive direction; it knows no other limits than deceit, manipulation, and violence.

The Significance of Delegates¹⁵

Against the capitalist modes of organization that, in their form as much as in their deep spirit, are put into practice by the traditional parties and trade unions, we have put forward the modes of organization created by the proletariat. These may be defined in three points:

1. The broadest possible autonomy of the grassroots organizations, within the limits set by the unity and coherence of action of the organization as a whole.
2. Direct democracy, wherever it is materially feasible.
3. Election, subject to recall, of all organs entrusted with tasks involving centralization.

¹⁵T/E: The London Solidarity draft translation provides a perhaps more helpful section title—"Centralisation, Democracy, and Program"—than Castoriadis's "La Signification des délégués."

Lefort makes of all that a “rider” to the Leninist theory of the party (those who know it will appreciate) and reduces it to a negative recipe: revocability of delegates. It is obvious that, thus separated from the rest of these organizational principles and especially from an overall conception of the labor of a revolutionary organization, the ability to recall delegates is but of a quite limited significance. Also, we do not want to discuss Lefort’s critique thereof, which sidesteps our conception; we will dwell simply on a few arguments he puts forward that seem to us revelatory of the ideology that underlies his positions though he does not formulate it in his text.

Lefort contrasts revocability in class-based bodies—where “the notion of revocability can have a positive content through the fact that there exists a real work setting” and through the fact that what men decide “concerns their life”—to revocability within the party, which is “an artificial, heterogeneous setting” whose unity “exists only because of the centralization imposed on the organization...itself grounded on the cohesiveness of the program.”

Let us say first that it is untrue that a Works Council formed by revocable delegates derives its value simply from the fact that men have an immediate experience “that allows them to settle with clarity the problems they encounter.”¹⁶ This is not even true at the scale of a single factory, which as a totality goes beyond the immediate experience of every particular worker. One just has to reflect on what a Workers’ Council would mean at Renault, or even in a factory of a few thousand laboring people, to see that, directly or through their delegates, the workers would be called upon to decide problems concerning the factory’s operation, problems of which they have no immediate experience or whose effects on “their life” may be indirect or remote. This is also the case with general problems as well as with those that concern aspects of the activity of this or that part of the factory that have effects on the whole, about which consequently one part

¹⁶T/E: The quotations in this and the previous paragraph appeared on p. 128 of Lefort’s original text in [S. ou B., 26](#) but were not translated for the [SouBA](#) excerpt.

of the laboring people has some direct experience but which this whole necessarily has to settle.

However, the important thing lies elsewhere. The implication of Lefort's argument is quite simply that socialism is impossible—at the very least *qua* power of the Workers' Councils and workers' management. For, in a workers' regime, the laboring people and their Councils would not simply have to settle questions that concern their work setting. They would have to decide about *everything*—or else, they would have to decide about *nothing*, for what happens in the workplace is determined by what happens in society at large. They would have to decide on a production plan, on political problems, and on the orientation of a host of social activities of general importance. They would have to decide, for example, about the most general questions concerning education—or is it believed that, in a socialist society, it would be up to teachers to say, sovereignly and all by themselves, what kind of education and how much education is needed in society?

Now, if it is said that the value of the Councils—and of the rule of revocability—comes from the fact that the problems they have to resolve are those the men encounter in their production setting, it strictly follows that the Councils are worthless for everything else—that is to say, for directing society in general. Who, then, will take charge of all that? There remains but one answer: a special and separate leadership body [*organisme de direction*] whose particular function is to solve universal problems. We know the name of this functionary of the universal: it is the bureaucracy.

This absurd, but inescapable, conclusion results from the radical split Lefort establishes between the setting of the workplace and the general social setting, the immediate experience of one's production setting and the political and social experience of individuals. We shall return to this point.

Equally absurd conclusions result from the second part of Lefort's argument. Revocability within the party, he says, has no validity, for the party is an artificial and heterogeneous setting. That immediately signifies that the party members cannot validly discuss the problems posed to them, for they do not participate in the same experience of productive labor.

Indeed, the argument does not concern only the delegates: it holds—if it holds—for every decision-making process within an organization.

Just as with Lefort's preceding argument, this one tends to destroy any rational basis for democracy within a society—save, perhaps, within a collectivity that would be constituted strictly on the basis of an immediate work setting. Yet it equally leads to the denial of the possibility of all organization, including the one Lefort claims to advocate. If it is a matter of “constituting little by little a genuine vanguard network” (Lefort, *S. ou B.*, 26: 133), or even of simply forming an organization, however modest and “flexible” one wishes, would not this organization be called upon to make some decisions concerning its activity and to resolve some problems? How could its members justifiably do so, since they constitute an artificial and heterogeneous setting? For, it obviously is not enough to deny the label *party* to a regrouping for it to lose its character as an “artificial, heterogeneous setting”; such a character results from the fact that the organization brings together people belonging to different production settings. At issue here is not even the problem of discipline or of the relations between majority and minority. The logic of Lefort's positions necessarily leads to a rejection of any basis for collective activity outside the workplace (and why not the department or the shop?). For, when it comes to problems of which some have direct experience, this experience alone is valid. It is not that the opinions of others is not to be imposed upon them mechanically; it is that those opinions have by definition no value. And when it comes to problems of which no one has any direct experience, no one can have a valid opinion. It then may be asked why these people meet together, what they can do, and even what they can say in common. Such an “organization” is but a roundtable of singularities indulging in monologues whose contents can never overlap.¹⁷

¹⁷Lefort does not glimpse how far his critique of organization leads him. He goes so far as to write:

Democracy is not perverted by the existence of bad organizational rules. It is so on account of the very existence of the party.

Even if the organization is only a setting where people come to discuss, it must necessarily be assumed that the experiences of those who participate in it are not unrelated to one another and that, on the contrary, they tend to converge objectively, while retaining their essential and irreducible specificities. If this were not so, not only would all action but also all discussion would be impossible. It is tiresome to have to discuss this, but it is impossible not to underscore the total untruth of what Lefort is affirming; for, according to him, “the unity of this setting [of the party] exists only because of the centralization imposed on the organization, and this centralization is itself grounded on the cohesiveness of the program” (*ibid.*: 128) Whether or not the organization is centralized, why do people come to it? Centralization can be imposed on the organization only if the organization exists, and why the devil does it exist? What drives people who “differ” so much from one another to enter into the organization? Reading Lefort, one might believe that Lenin, endowed with magic powers, attracted some totally heterogeneous people and that, once those people were well packed in his pouch, he imposed on them a unity through centralization—itsself based on the cohesiveness of his personal program!

And who will tell us whence come these mysterious programs? What is this new philosophy of the immediate, which contrasts the direct experience of the production setting—the sole fecund milieu, and which itself is to be glorified—with a universal expression of social experience, itself tainted with artifice and therefore liable to be condemned. Since when can humanity progress without giving to its experience

Democracy cannot be achieved within it because it is not itself a democratic body—that is, a body *representative* of the social classes on whose behalf it claims to be acting (*SouBA*, 320).

One wonders then: Why will the organization that Lefort himself wants set up be democratic? Of what social class will it be “representative”? Here again, one falls back on the following absolute dualism: the proletariat’s sole institution is “revolution itself” (*ibid.*, 323). Everything that is not revolution is tainted with both unreality and corruption. In what way can one speak then of collective revolutionary activity before the revolution, on what can it be grounded, how can it be organized?

some expressions that are meant to be universal and that certainly are valid only for a time but without which there would be no time?

The truth, it turns out, is the opposite of what Lefort is claiming. A party or an organization can exist only because there is a deep virtual unity of experience of broad categories of people, going beyond the framework of the workplace, and because this experience leads them to come together to act with a view toward objectives they were already setting for themselves or in which, once formulated, they at the very least recognize in part their aspirations. The program is nothing other than the set of these objectives. Here again, the error consists in erecting into an absolute criterion what is but a relative term. The party is a heterogeneous setting in some respects, and homogeneous in some other ones. It is heterogeneous with respect to the production setting to which its members belong or to their culture—though it is not so with respect to their overall experience of society and with respect to their objectives. Do we have here an artificial cohesiveness? With some of the Hungarian revolutionaries who emigrated to Paris after 1956, we have noted an infinitely greater homogeneity than among people who have been working alongside us for years in the same workplace.

Yet that is not the sole thing that really matters. The organization—that is to say, the people who make it up—is engaged in a certain kind of labor. This labor, in turn, creates a new shared experience and gives these people the possibility of “verifying what they decide on the basis of their lives.” Yet Lefort seems to be denying that a shared and coherent experience on the part of militants might be formed within a revolutionary organization. “Under such conditions [the conditions of the party],” he says, “the decisions to be made at the level of cells have always had a dual motivation: one whose origin is drawn from an action to be conducted in an outside social setting and another whose origin is drawn from implementing the program or obeying the central authority” (*ibid.*). Let us pass over this “obedience to the central authority,” which clearly is there only to fog the issue, insinuating into the reader’s mind that, within the organization, the cells cannot help but obey a central

authority. The phrase one has just read, and those that follow it, boil down to the affirmation that (1) there necessarily is conflict—or a lack of connection—between the necessities of the action to be conducted in an outside social setting and the organization's "program"; (2) it will inevitably be resolved in favor of the program and to the detriment of the necessities of action within one's setting.

Here again we have an example of the transformation into absolute and absolutely separated opposites two terms that have meaning only through their innermost union. Far from creating insurmountable conflicts and leading inevitably to "bureaucratization," this dual motivation is the element without which there can be no revolutionary action. Could such action find its motivation solely in the "action to be conducted in an outside social setting"? But what is this action? Is it a matter of propagating the theory of relativity, of turning people into vegetarians, of getting them to buy [Knorr soups](#)? The action to be conducted is necessarily defined, inspired, and guided at every moment by ideas, principles, and prospects; all of that is nothing other than *the program*, that is to say, the definition of the goals and means of action. Conversely, activity cannot be motivated solely on the basis of the program; it is just as much so by the setting in which it unfolds. That far from signifies simply that the program is to be implemented each time while taking "concrete conditions" into account. The program itself is in fact nothing other than the condensed expression of laboring people's experience of the social situation. And the organization's activity is to lead it to deepen, alter, and, if need be, upend its program in a continuous and ongoing fashion.

Will it be said that here we have, all the same, a "contradiction" and that it results from this, that the problem would be ill posed at the outset and that the organization's cells would be conducting action in "an outside social setting," that such action is to be condemned, and that the sole possible action is the one "the active elements" in workplaces conduct? But then this discussion would be meaningless: may each person return to his workplace and may he stay there; above all, may he not bring anything into it that he might have found "outside." However, this is not what Lefort does or

says: he writes in *Socialisme ou Barbarie* and he wants to outline prospects for action even for elements “who do not belong to a production setting” (*ibid.*: 133). As ridiculously insignificant as they may be, the tasks he assigns them are already impossible to carry out without what he calls “our theses,” “our ideas,” or “our principles”—and what we call a *program*.

A New Philosophy of History

There are always two terms in each of the problems posed to revolutionary thought, as well as in the effectively actual process of class struggle and revolution.

There is the business enterprise, a concrete collectivity of laboring people united by a direct experience of the workplace and by a “spontaneous,” informal organization—and there is the class, the unity of laboring people beyond the bounds of the workplace, of the trade, of the locality, and even of the nation, a unity mediated by their convergent experience of exploitation and alienation.

There is an immediate experience of society as labor, and an immediate experience of society as society. There is an immediate experience, and there is also an experience already elaborated and systematized.

There is the proletariat’s own development toward socialism, and there has been, for a century, the permanent political activity of revolutionary militants in all countries.

There is an ongoing informal struggle on the part of laboring people against exploitation, and there is also an explicit political struggle against the present organization of society, which the proletariat has almost always conducted.

And so on and so forth.

The separation of these two terms is not only logical. It is real. But also, the task of revolutionaries is not only to unify them in thought, in a correct theory. It is to act in such a way as to go beyond [*dépasser*] this separation in reality, knowing that the revolution alone will be able to overcome [*dépasser*] this separation definitively.

At bottom, Lefort’s methodology consists in performing the most radical separation between the terms of

each of these pairs, which revolutionary thought encounters at each step, and in maintaining them in an absolute opposition. The “transcendence [*dépassement*]” of this opposition is then effectuated through what is in fact a step backward: one of the terms is enhanced in value, the other is condemned or sees its reality reduced.

Thus, the setting and experience of the workplace alone are considered important; the general social setting, the experience of society as such and in its multiple aspects—political society, cultural society, etc.—are not even mentioned. Militants’ action “inside workplaces” seem to be the sole kind that truly counts; all other action is reduced to communicating “information and knowledge”; ongoing labor aimed at formulating in a universal way the *meaning* of laboring people’s experience of society, immediate as well as mediated, is ignored. To the extent that it is recognized that there is something like a revolutionary theory, this theory appears as some sort of individual preoccupation on the part of certain militants (*ibid.*: 130-31). The proletariat’s advance toward socialism thus takes on the look of an organic ripening, and the primordial role properly political organizations and struggles have played and continue to play in its evolution is conjured away.

Thus, for example, the concept of the concrete relations of production and of the workplace, which very early on *Socialisme ou Barbarie* placed at the center of its analyses, tends to become in Lefort’s hands a mythical concept, one that, pushed to absurd lengths, succeeds eventually in splitting the world in two. The life of laboring people in the workplace becomes the sole reality—and everything that is not “in” or “of” the workplace is at once unreal and wicked.

We are saying, on the contrary, that from this shared self-evident fact, that the workplace does not exist outside of and separate from the economy, from the State, and so on—in a word, from society overall (and vice versa)—one has to draw out all the conclusions. Likewise, one must draw out all the conclusions from these other self-evident, and no less shared, facts: (a) that laboring people also take a passionate interest in what happens *outside* the workplace and that, were this not so, all discussion about socialism would merely be

idle talk; (b) that it is precisely on this terrain that it is most difficult for laboring people to form their experience, that the formation of this experience encounters the most obstacles, and that it runs up not only against the absence of information, as systematically organized by capitalism and the working-class bureaucracy, but also and especially against the complexity of the thing itself and against the difficulty of working out an overall schema of understanding, without which all information that might be available in other respects serves no purpose.

And it is on this terrain that the revolutionary organization has one of the foremost tasks to fulfill—where it betrays its role, if it refuses to help the proletariat *against* capitalism by bringing it the elements necessary for the formation of this overall experience.

These elements are not and cannot be simply “information and knowledge.” The whole problem of program, ideology, and theory is posed in this regard. We have spoken about this already—and we shall speak about it again. Let us note, for the time being, that, inasmuch as Lefort grants that the organization, as he conceives it, possesses an ideology and does devote itself to theoretical labor, one ends up with the separate existence of two worlds while refusing to establish any communication between them. In one of these worlds, there are ideas in general, a socialist perspective, the contradictions of the capitalist economy and of the capitalist society at the global level, “anti-structures,” and the “party and its double.”¹⁸ In the other world, the world “of the workplace,” there are the representation and the experience of the wage earners shut up in its present state—and it would be to harm the autonomy of the proletariat to want to introduce therein the former elements, the “ideological,” “theoretical,” and “programmatic” ones.

¹⁸T/E: In his major *S. ou B.* article from [issue 19](#), “Totalitarianism Without Stalin,” Lefort does explain: “Reduced to commenting on men’s effectively actual conduct, the Party thus reintroduces a radical split within social life. Each has his ideological *double*” (*SouBA*, 213). The specific provenance, in Lefort’s work or elsewhere, of Castoriadis’s allusion here to “anti-structures” remains unclear.

Thus, universal elements of knowledge concerning the general problems of society become the private affair of a special, though ill-defined, category of individuals: militants, intellectuals, and so forth. This is their precious and shameful thing; they speak about it among themselves, endlessly cultivating it within the confidential gardens of limited-run reviews. Above all, however, one should not speak of it to the workers. That would disturb and adulterate the marvelous autonomous process of maturation of the class, which will one day overthrow the world but which in the meantime remains fragiler than a Sully Prudhomme vase.¹⁹

The sole junction this conception is capable of effecting between the world “of the workplace” and the world of “ideology” is the abandonment of any *precise* content for the socialist program and the idea of revolution, which become mere words—words that, moreover, one has less and less the right to utter in public. There is a maturation of the class that bears a future within itself—but what that future might be, we neither know nor can know nor we to try to know: only the class.... For, it becomes clearly apparent, upon reading Lefort’s text, that an organization has absolutely no right to have a program, to propose a concrete conception of socialism (which is the fruit, of course, of the historical experience of proletarian revolutions): were it to do so, that would be an attempt to substitute itself for the class.

What this conception expresses, first of all, is a total distortion of historical reality. Secondly, it wholly misjudges a fundamental presupposition for the socialist revolution. Finally, it ends up depriving the proletariat, *qua* revolutionary class and even *qua* any sort of class at all (which does not exist, even in present-day society, only in workplaces, each one apart from the other ones), of elements, both human and ideological, that are indispensable for its revolutionary struggle and for any sort of struggle at all on its part.

The historical reality is that the proletariat is not just maturation toward socialism, or rather that such maturation is

¹⁹T/E: The most famous poem by [the 1901 Nobel Prize in Literature laureate René François Armand \(Sully\) Prudhomme](#) was “[The Broken Vase](#),” which contains the line: “Was cracked by a lady’s fan’s soft blow.”

nothing other than a permanent struggle within the proletariat: between the creative elements of a new social reality and alienation in all its forms. This struggle manifests itself no less, though only in a different form, on the level of the workplace. There is no maturation process for us to “disturb”: *there is* a maturation process *only* insofar as it is constantly “disturbed,” in relation to what would be the intrinsic experience of the workplace, by elements that do not belong to it, economic, political, and ideological ones (and, among those, reactionary, reformist, Stalinist, and revolutionary ones). We can do nothing about that: it does not depend on us whether or not Stalinists distribute leaflets or that laboring people do not leave in the cloakroom what the bourgeoisie teaches them in the schoolroom or in newspapers, what they have seen at the movies or remember about their brother’s or son’s draft papers. All that depends on us is that, in this permanent battle, revolutionary ideas not be absent because we would refuse to represent them or would do so only in the most neutered way possible. (Indeed, ultimately even this does not depend on us; were we to refuse to represent our ideas in the working class, others would sooner or later rise up to do so, should those ideas have any value at all.)

Not only can we not stop this permanent battle, but it would be absurd to wish for it not to take place. For, it is only in terms of this battle that the proletariat can form an experience concerning society overall—an experience without which it is futile to speak of a socialist perspective.

In the second place, such a conception entirely misjudges a fundamental presupposition of the socialist revolution. Socialism is possible only as conscious action for the transformation of society. Yet such a conscious transformation is possible only if the essential elements of its content and its form are explicitly formulated in advance. That does not signify that the bourgeois revolution improvises and the proletarian revolution acts according to a preestablished plan—but simply that the improvisation of the socialist revolution contains (and has to, under penalty of failure, contain) infinitely more conscious elements than any previous revolution. There can be no socialism without a socialist project—and the socialist program of the

organization is one of the poles of this project. The explicit formulation of this project is a condition for the transformation of objective historical possibilities in the direction of revolution.

It is to be noted here that Lefort's positions ultimately rest on the same erroneous postulates as the positions he believes he is violently combating, namely, the postulates of *What is to be Done?* Lefort's positions are based on the idea that there is but a single possible type of theory of society, of program, and of activity for the elaboration and dissemination of ideas—the Leninist type, which, without fail, degenerates into the Stalinist or Trotskyist type. As this type—with elaboration separated from workers' experience, falsely scientific abstract content, and dissemination that becomes indoctrination—is to be condemned, one cannot help but condemn the very activities in question here—or perhaps tolerate them among the “intellectuals” for whom they constitute an incurable vice never to be laid out in the open. Lefort postulates in fact, as does Lenin of *What is to be Done?*: (1) that the proletariat, due to its intrinsic experience, is interested only in what is immediate—the sole difference being that this immediate realm is no longer defined as “economic interests” but as “the workplace”; (2) that there is but a single type of theory, the one that can be exemplified in the writings of Marx, Lenin, Trotsky, and their rehashed popularizations (in the best of cases, an abstract theory removed from workers' experience, unfathomable by the proletariat; in the worst of cases, a caricature of theory, a mystifying popularization, and an instrument for manipulation). Lenin found the first point bad and the second good; for Lefort, it is the opposite, but the analysis remains the same. His positions are only the positions of *What is to be Done?* with the plus and minus signs reversed.

In fact, the fundamental problem of our age is: How, along another path than that of [Nikolai Bukharin and Yevgeni Preobrazhensky's] *The ABC of Communism*, is the indispensable fusion of workers' experience with theoretical, ideological, and other elements to be achieved—and only a crank or a charlatan could claim that, without this fusion, there could ever be a socialist transformation of society.

As for us, we are saying not only that such a path exists but much more: If it had been demonstrated that such a path could not exist, it would be necessary to abandon straight away any idea and discussion of socialism. If it could be demonstrated that the proletariat is by its nature incompatible with [*hétérogène à*] the most universal and total conception of the problems of modern society and of that society's transformation—still less, if it could be demonstrated that there objectively exists no basis for an organic link [*liaison organique*] between the proletariat's own experience and such a conception—any proletarian revolution would be impossible, and there could be, at the very most, only some workers' revolts doomed to defeat. For, already victory over exploitative society, but even more the building of a new society, implies that the proletariat might find in its own experience the seeds [*germes*] for such a universal conception and the criteria that would allow it to resolve problems that go infinitely beyond the framework of the workplace.

We are saying that, while the proletariat's experience does not carry it automatically, immediately, directly, and always toward universal problems, there is indisputably an organic link between the proletariat's experience in the workplace and in its daily life and the problems that concern society overall [*globale*]. We are saying that, starting from this everyday experience, it is possible to assist in the formation of an experience on the part of the proletariat as relates to the whole of society. We are saying that setting before its eyes, in a new way and in a new language, and to best of our abilities, the most encompassing [*globale*] experience of society, the most radical project for its transformation, not only does not infringe upon the proletariat but, on the contrary, contributes to the development of the virtual possibilities being organically constituted within it. This obviously presupposes an equally radical transformation of revolutionary theory itself, of the way it is elaborated and expounded, and of the conception of what politics is and what a militant is. This transformation is (much more than any change in the content of our ideas, however important such a change might be) the truly original task contemporary society sets for us as revolutionaries. It is this task that Lefort is

incapable even of envisaging. This is because, ultimately, he cannot conceive theory other than in accordance with a bourgeois model (which, as must be recognized, is, furthermore, the one Marxism has in its essence remained), that is to say, as the elaboration, by separate specialists, of abstract truths (and the deduction, therefrom, of equally abstract political directives that remain unverifiable for those not in possession of the premises). He ends up wanting to forbid communication between such theoretical activity and the proletariat.

Certainly, this radical transformation of the very conception of what a theory is remains almost entirely to be carried out. Yet we do not have here a reason to avert our eyes before an inescapable task. This transformation is an enormous collective work involving the coordinated labor of a great number of individuals (a labor that will be exactly the opposite of a purely bookish kind of labor) and thereby one of the capital tasks of a revolutionary organization achieving the fusion of workers and intellectuals.

This organic link between the proletariat's immediate experience and the fullest [*la plus totale*] experience of society flows from factors that express the most deep-seated characteristics of modern society. First, the very content of the proletariat's immediate experience forces the proletariat to go beyond the frames of this experience. Almost at every moment, what happens within the workplace brings the worker back to what happens outside the workplace. Secondly, this immediate experience itself is far from confined to the life of the workplace: whether one likes it or not, the worker is at the same time a consumer, voter, renter, potential draftee, parent of schoolchildren, newspaper reader, moviegoer, and so on. Thirdly, while being different from the worker's immediate experience, the overall experience of society is not radically other, for in the end it expresses the same models of social relations and conflicts. For example, the contradictions in the workplace and those in the economy are of the same ultimate nature, and this identification becomes almost an immediate identity in the case of full-blown [*intégral*] bureaucratic capitalism. This is because the type of alienation modern exploitative society tends to bring about is in the end the same

in all domains. Here we have the objective foundation for the unity of the experience of society, whether it is lived by the miners of Northern France, Parisian metalworkers, bank employees, teachers, or even social-science researchers [*chercheurs du CNRS*].²⁰ Certainly, such unity is not directly and immediately given, and the ultimate subject for its realization can be only the organized totality of laboring people. Yet, in this domain, too, the organization is the provisional instance that allows its incomplete achievement and that is therefore, here again, a “prefiguration” of socialist society and of the revolution. And it is above all this passage to an adequate conception of the problems of society as a whole and particularly of the State that is the most difficult thing for the proletariat to achieve. The role of a revolutionary, however, is not to speculate on the greater or lesser ease of this passage but, once the objective possibility of its realization is demonstrated, to work to make it happen.

Finally, the crucial question Lefort refuses to answer is the following: What is the relation between the proletariat and socialism? Sometimes, he seems to want to say: As nobody knows what socialism is (or will be), one must above all not speak of it, and all we can do in our public activity (it is another thing what we think *in petto*) is to stick to the way the workers here and now see the problems. This position is obviously untenable in practice and is one that, in any event, removes all justification not only for the existence of an organization but for all militant activity whatsoever.

As for us, we are saying: The proletariat’s struggle against exploitation leads it to pose the problem of transforming social relations. Even the act of posing this problem, and still more of responding to it, is the stake involved in an age-old struggle. This struggle does not unfold only inside the workplace—it begins there and there it always returns, but it soon encompasses the entire society in all its

²⁰T/E: As of 1952, thanks to [Raymond Aron](#), Lefort was assigned to the Sociology section of the Centre national de la recherche scientifique ([French National Center for Scientific Research](#)). (On this point, the [English Wikipedia entry for Claude Lefort](#) has been mistranslated to say the opposite of what the [French Wikipedia entry](#) accurately states.)

aspects. In this struggle, the proletariat has need of the totality of experience of social experience. Far from being immediately given by the “natural” conditions of capitalist society, this totality is at once virtually created and constantly destroyed by the operation of capitalism, which fragments this experience, partitions it, obscures it, hides it, and mystifies it. In the course of this struggle for the conquest of the totality, individuals, groups, currents, and organizations have always emerged within the proletariat and within society that have tried to help it along. And there was a whole period during which those groups, organizations, and so on have tried to take everything upon themselves, when they identified themselves with this experience of the totality. This period is no doubt historically over. Yet, however that might be, just as men will never stop breathing, for fear of swallowing some microbes, or thinking, for fear of being mistaken, so will they never cease to act, for fear of being transformed into bureaucrats. And from the moment the problem of socialism is posed historically, we can neither deny that it has been nor cover our faces; we can only participate in this struggle and try to facilitate the proletariat’s conquest of the experience of the totality, letting ourselves be guided by the most deep-seated content of already acquired experience—namely, that the problem of socialism is the organized masses of laboring people’s conquest of their autonomy and their domination over all aspects of social activity. It is obvious that we cannot work out that experience within ourselves and for ourselves but for the proletariat and with it.

The Structure of the Organization

Whatever definition one gives of the role and tasks of the organization, it is a truism to note that this organization must possess a determinate *structure*. In particular, unless one is talking about a regrouping whose “activity” is reduced to discussions or to the publication of an open platform [*tribune libre*], as soon as it is a matter of *doing* something decisions have to be made in one way or another; if divergent opinions arise, a rule will be required to allow a settlement of the matter. More generally speaking, as soon as a regrouping

exceeds a tiny size—fifteen or twenty individuals—it cannot exist without making some operating rules for itself that allow its segments to communicate among themselves, that allow each militant to know what the other ones are doing and to make an assessment, and that allow the whole group to define common positions and translate them into shared activities.

How does Lefort address these problems? With an adjective and a negative: “the organization that is suitable for revolutionary militants is necessarily *flexible*” (*ibid.*: 134). It rests, first and foremost, “on the rejection of centralization.” But what else? Nothing.

It would be sterile to try to imagine, in Lefort’s stead, the positive solutions this “rejection of centralization” might harbor. He says nothing about it undoubtedly because he knows nothing about such solutions and we know even less. Yet it can already be seen right now that the “rejection of centralization” immediately signifies the rejection of the *unity* of the organization and ultimately, in practice, the rejection of organization, period, insofar as it would be a question of an action-oriented organization.

Centralization does not signify *Central Committee*. Centralization signifies that the whole organization operates while implementing, in matters of general interest, general decisions. It signifies that each militant or each cell does not define its policy independently from A to Z but that the key points of this policy are decided upon by the organization as a whole. That, of course, still says nothing about the way in which these decisions are made. In a political or trade-union bureaucratic organization, as in a capitalist workplace, they are made at the top by irremovable leaders [*dirigeants inamovibles*]. In a revolutionary organization, as in a Soviet or in a Works Council, they have to be made by all the participants (direct democracy) and, when that is physically impossible, by their elected delegates who are subject to recall. But a General Assembly that votes, a Works Council—that’s centralization; it decides for all and its decisions are obligatory for the minority.

The pure and simple “rejection of centralization” therefore includes the rejection of direct democracy as well as of soviet democracy. It equally includes rejection of the

majority principle. And in fact, a refusal to accept majority decisions was one of the principal reasons for the departure of Lefort and that of his comrades from *Socialisme ou Barbarie*. They championed the right not to explain publicly their disagreements with duly-made decisions—with which nobody has ever taken issue—but to not implement them.

Now, if in a regrouping each acts as he sees fit, whatever might be the decisions of the majority, it is absolutely futile and sterile to call this regrouping *an organization*. Like a man, an organization is defined through its acts; if these acts are not homogeneous, there are as many organizations as there are tendencies or opinions that may present themselves on each question debated—which is as good as saying that there is no organization at all. Indeed, if militants group together, it is not to exchange arguments; such an exchange of arguments is worthwhile for them because it allows them to reach better grounded decisions. The militants regroup in order to act together, because they recognize that collective action alone is effective and also because they recognize a practical value in the opinions of the others. To deny the majority principle is not only to demolish the efficacy of collective action; it is to evince an individualism that spurns the judgment of those whose fundamental views it otherwise claims to share; it is to create an insurmountable contradiction between what one says of the revolutionary organization and what one says of a proletarian society.

Such a regrouping could certainly have, for lack of anything else, some usefulness as a “setting” within which opinions are exchanged. It would be futile, however, to expect it to carry out the essential tasks of a revolutionary organization.

Take, for example, an organization with one thousand members spread out among various workplaces and localities in France—and let it decide to publish a paper of some sort. How and by whom will decisions be made about the problems that will constantly arise in the course of such activity—topics to be dealt with, orientation to be traced out, events to be interpreted, articles to be chosen, what place they are to be granted, and so on? To present such decisions as “technical” ones and to feign to be entrusting them to some technical

secretariat would be to mask the most serious problems; one would thus just be dissimulating from the organization's view the instance of authority that would in fact be directing things, and under the pretext of eliminating any center, one would be creating one that is occult, uncontrolled, and irresponsible. On the other hand, it is impossible to conceive of the publication of a paper as a fully decentralized sort of activity. Certainly, such activity could not take place without the broadest possible collaboration on the part of the organization as a whole. It would be possible to envisage a partial decentralization of its editorial staff (columns entrusted to local or workplace groups)—but a paper is not a mere addition of columns working at cross purposes. Even in this elementary case, some centralization would therefore be absolutely necessary, and it would be impossible to ensure it other than through a committee of elected delegates subject to recall from the groups making up the organization.

Problems of this kind are already posed with a group of thirty individuals. One encounters them at each step when the group has one hundred members. Beyond that number, solving them becomes a matter of life and death for an organization. Not to formulate them clearly, not to try to give them an answer that is at once real and in conformity with the principles to which one claims to adhere signifies simply that one is not posing seriously the problem of organization. And as there is in fact no break in the logical structure of these problems, whether they are being posed in a revolutionary organization or will be posed in a socialist society, the sterility of such an attitude is revealed on the most decisive issue of all.

For, to affirm that “the workers’ movement...is to seek its forms of action in the multiple nuclei of militants that organize freely their activity and ensure through their contacts, their information, and their liaisons²¹ not only the

²¹T/E: When Lefort, Henri Simon, and others left S. ou B. at the time of this 1958 split, they formed Informations et liaisons ouvrières (Workers’ information and liaison), which became [Informations et correspondances ouvrières](#) (Workers’ information and correspondence) after Lefort’s departure.

confrontations but also the unity of workers' experiences" (*ibid.*: 134) says nothing at all. No one has ever proposed that the nuclei organize their activity "unfreely." One wants only to know what a free organization of multiple nuclei *concretely* signifies. One want to know *how* these nuclei will ensure the *unity* of workers' experiences, what such unity signifies, and whether it can be advanced without one attempting to formulate it.

The sole known response of Lefort and his comrades to these problems is to be found in a text submitted for discussion, where they asked that we be inspired, in matters of organization, by the critique of bureaucracy "conducted in particular by [S. ou B. member Daniel] Mothé who...has contrasted the spontaneous organization of workers with the formalism of rules and the futility of leadership apparatuses." Let us leave aside Mothé, who thus found himself being unwillingly called upon to defend positions radically opposed to his own. Let us note merely that the situation of the revolutionary movement would be desperate indeed, were it reduced to a choice between spontaneous cooperation and leadership apparatuses. That would signify in fact that bureaucracy is inevitable in all domains where spontaneous cooperation is physically impossible on account of the size or the articulation, across space or time, of the kind of activities at issue here. Is Lefort in a position to specify the meaning of the phrase "spontaneous cooperation" as applied to the 45,000 workers at the Renault factory? Or of the spontaneous cooperation that might eventually be established between the miners of Pas-de-Calais [near the Strait of Dover] and the farm workers of the Midi *départements* [in Southern France]? Or between a cell of an organization in Toulouse and another in Metz? Would the problems of the organization of the socialist society and those of an organization grouping together just a few hundred militants throughout France be identical to those of the relations among a dozen comrades meeting once a week in Paris to exchange information and ideas?

In reality, the fundamental problem of a socialist type of organization, whether it be the organization of society or of a minority of revolutionary militants under an exploitative

regime, is to make the transition from cooperation on a shop floor or within a cell to coordination of the activities of vaster units that inevitably go beyond an immediate setting and “elementary” cooperation. The problem is not simply to contrast the “spontaneous cooperation” of the workers with the “formalism of rules and the futility of leadership apparatuses.” That, as has amply been shown in this review, is already being lavishly done by bourgeois industrial sociology. *The task of the proletariat is to organize society in socialist fashion at the very places where, by definition, “spontaneous cooperation” cannot exist.* Here is the terrain upon which the socialist revolution will triumph or fail. Our task as revolutionaries is to show that a socialist organization not only of the shift or the shop but of the economy, of the “State,” and of society as a whole is possible. It is also to show it in practice *by resolving* the problem of an organization that goes beyond the framework of the “elementary” group rather than by *denying* it, as Lefort does.

When one leaves the impression, as in the above-mentioned text, that outside of “spontaneous cooperation” there is but “the formalism of rules and the futility of leadership apparatuses,” one may believe oneself to be at the summit of revolutionary vision, but that is precisely where one is in fact espousing the most profoundly bourgeois conception. For, as nobody could think for a second that the coordination of the entirety of social activities could be carried out through the spontaneous cooperation of 40 million individuals, the sole outcome is precisely...the constitution of a bureaucratic leadership apparatus. One will be able to criticize its futility and deplore its existence; those are but laments devoid of any objective content. For, the unavoidableness of a bureaucratic leadership apparatus follows from the very way in which the problem is posed—unless it is a question of returning to the “state of nature” and of decreeing that modern societies should be broken up into tribes within which spontaneous cooperation would suffice to resolve the problems at hand.

The socialist conception is precisely the opposite: it deems that laboring people can, going beyond their spontaneous elementary organization while relying thereupon,

create a structure that covers the whole of society and is capable of managing it—precisely, a structure that would not be a separate leadership apparatus. Were that not so, any criticism of bureaucracy would be moralizing chatter. It is distressing to have to remind sociologists that every discussion about society presupposes that society exists other than as juxtaposition of elementary groups and miraculous coincidence of instances of spontaneous cooperation. It is distressing to have to remind Marxists that the socialist conception consists precisely in refusing the *typically bourgeois* dilemma between spontaneous cooperation and leadership apparatuses.

Being socialist signifies, perhaps more than anything else, rejecting the idea that there is an evil spell cast over society and over organization as such,²² refusing the false alternative between depersonalized, bureaucratic Molochs and true human relations reduced to a dozen persons, and believing that it is within men's grasp to create, on the scale of society and on that of a political organization, institutions they understand and they dominate.

²²T/E: Castoriadis is paraphrasing here the Author's Preface to [*Humanism and Terror*](#) (1947; trans. John O'Neill [Boston: Beacon Press, 1969], p. xxxviii), where Merleau-Ponty asks: "Is there not a sort of evil in collective life? [*N'y a-t-il pas comme un maléfice de la vie à plusieurs?*]." Castoriadis also took exception to this Merleau-Pontean idea of an "evil spell [*maléfice*]" inherent to life lived with others in "Curtain on the Metaphysics of the Trials" (1956) as well as in the first part of the present text, "Proletariat and Organization" (1959); see: [*PSW2*](#), 50 and 207.

What Really Matters*

See: http://libcom.org/files/cc_psw_v2.pdf

BETA

*Originally published as “Ce qui est important,” *Pouvoir Ouvrier*, 5 (March 1959), the monthly supplement to *S. ou B.* Reprinted in *EMO2*, 249-53, and *EP2*, 359-62. [T/E: Translated in *PSW2*, 222-25. *Pouvoir Ouvrier* means “Workers’ power.” We have consulted Tom McLaughlin’s translation of this article, which appeared in *Catalyst*, 13 (Spring 1979): 91-94, as “What Is Important.” McLaughlin’s translation also was published in *The Red Menace*, 3 (Winter 1979). Our change in title is at Castoriadis’s suggestion; he had originally sought a French equivalent of this English-language phrase.]

Social Classes and Monsieur Touraine*

Stalinism's domination of the international workers' movement for thirty years has allowed "left-wing" intellectuals in France to get by on a dual identification. Marxism or revolutionary ideology, that's [\[French CP Senator and author Roger\] Garaudy](#), [\[French CP leader Maurice\] Thorez](#), and Stalin. The proletariat, that's Stalin, Thorez, and Garaudy. Attracted to or repelled by the CP, they have never called this identity into question—so much so that, when the Stalinist bureaucracy cracked, in their view it was already the proletariat itself that was disbanding. When the workers stopped following the CP's slogans, they solemnly posed the following question: Does the working class exist? When, with difficulty, they succeeded in discovering that Garaudy & Co. are but parrots incapable even of changing lies, they see therein a sign of the need to abandon or transcend [*dépasser*] revolutionary ideology.

What are they doing then? The pattern [*schéma*] has been repeated a dozen times. They "go beyond [*dépassent*]" an imaginary Marxism, without having even a hint of what is to be overcome [*à dépasser*] in genuine Marxism. They "refute" it by contrasting it with facts long known that required complete blinders to ignore, and while remaining ever blind to what is truly new in our age. They cook up a horrible mixture, the denial of the false ideas they had accepted for years leading them just to take the opposite, equally false view. They ultimately remain prisoners of the same methodology, the same postulates, the same deep-seated mystifications as before. They continue to get by on the same unconscious Stalinist "philosophy," except that they are claiming to be altering the empirical material to which that "philosophy" is to be applied.

The latest batch of intellectuals to have looked into Marxism and the proletariat, the most representative of which

*Originally published as Jean Delvaux, "Les Classes sociales et M. Touraine," [S. ou B.](#), 27 (April-May 1959): 33-52. Reprinted in *CMR2*, 11-39, and *EP2*, 363-86.

is Alain Touraine,¹ has not escaped this pattern. There is a *Stalinist* ideology that consists in saying: Capitalism and exploitation are to be defined essentially by private property, by “money,” bosses, and trusts. Laboring people’s exploitation is pauperization; it is their misery *qua* consumers. Such exploitation grounds their class consciousness and has to lead them to support the CP’s action, which is aimed at overthrowing capitalism and establishing socialism, defined as nationalization of the means of production, and so on. It matters little that this last conclusion would be advanced less and less by the Stalinists; it remains the principal element of the CP’s force of attraction.

It is by means of these ideas that the Stalinists try to evade the *basis* [fond] of the social problem: that socialism is not a mere change of the regime of property ownership but a radical upheaval of all social organization, and in the first place the abolition of the domination exerted over laboring people by a particular stratum that directs production, the instauration of workers’ management; that one’s standard of living is ultimately a secondary aspect of the laborer’s situation, for, as Marx said, “whether wages be high or low, life in the factory is a perpetual agony for the worker.”²

Now, these Stalinist ideas, which provide the justification for every ruling [*dirigeante*] bureaucracy, are fully shared by Touraine. He polemicizes against what he calls “the sociological model that still dominates left-wing thought,” but in reading him one cannot miss that what he is reproaching this “left-wing thought” for are incorrect material premises, absolutely not its philosophy. For him, too,

¹See [issue 12-13 of *Arguments*](#) and the articles by Touraine, [Serge] Mallet, [Michel] Collinet, and [Michel] Crozier. In the same *Arguments* issue, one can read Daniel Mothé’s response to the sociologists; he shows in striking fashion that those sociologists remain incapable of seeing where the social problem is situated for a worker. The quotations from Touraine given below relate to this same *Arguments* issue.

²T/E: We have translated from Castoriadis’s French this unreferenced quotation or, perhaps, paraphrase of Marx.

pauperization is a key problem, and he reproaches the Stalinists for not seeing that it is in the process of being resolved. For him, too, the proletariat's class consciousness is a consciousness of "non-ownership"—and he deduces therefrom that it is tending to disappear at the same time as property. For him, too, socialism would basically be nationalization and so on—which leads him to think that it would not settle the "other problems." It is therefore not surprising that, applying the same philosophy to different "facts," Touraine arrives in conclusion only at another variant of bureaucratic policy, as old as the "new facts" supposedly grounding it: a sort of reformism, whose content remains, moreover, utterly undefined. As for the true problem, the laborer's situation in his work, Touraine, whose professional field of specialization is the sociology of work, does not succeed even in posing it in correct terms.

Without being able to broach here the totality of the problems Touraine skims over and "resolves" in eight pages, we will try to show, using a few major examples, in what his method, his postulates, and his conclusions consist.

Given the way modern industry has evolved, labor organization and mass production have, says Touraine, brought about the disappearance of the "occupational [*professionnelle*] autonomy" the skilled workers of earlier times possessed. This disappearance has a positive character; "the appearance of large mechanized organizations in industry has therefore created an indispensable condition for the appearance of a genuine class consciousness, for the constitution of a positively revolutionary workers' movement" (p. 9). Touraine contrasts this observation with the "sociological model" that "still dominates left-wing political thought" (p. 8).

What Left is he talking about? For Marxism, in any case, it has always been the *loss* of occupational autonomy and of trade skills that has been considered the condition for the development of a revolutionary consciousness in the

proletariat.³ A century later, Touraine merely “discovers” one of Marx’s fundamental ideas while making it look like he has gone beyond him. Is he then unaware that the analysis of the proletariat’s situation, in the first volume of *Capital*, is not concerned at all with the worker’s skills and his “occupational autonomy,” except to show that they are inevitably destroyed by capitalism, and that this analysis is on the contrary centered around the *compartmentalized* [parcellaire] worker?

This cavalier attitude toward the history of ideas is accompanied by a just as cavalier attitude regarding real history. In the past, Touraine says, as a function of occupational autonomy “working-class thought and action were more inclined to defend one class against another than to take on the problems of society” (p. 9). Transformations in industry are said to make “the workers’ movement henceforth rest no longer on the defense of one part of society against another but on the will to control the whole of social organization” (*ibid.*).

Such a separation is a total lie. There were, there are, and there will be, so long as capitalism exists, actions by workers aimed simply at defending the interests of laboring people or even some such particular category thereof; ultimately, when a category defends “its” interests by opposing them to those of others, such actions coincide with the retrograde sides of the workers’ movement. Yet the workers’ movement became revolutionary as soon as it manifested the will to take on the interests of the entire society—that is to say, for a long time now. For, this will has nothing to do with “the appearance of large mechanized organizations”; it is clearly expressed in the proletariat’s first major actions, whether one is talking about the Commune or about 1848, or about the constitution of political parties and even the trade unions of

³⁴“Thus there is found with medieval craftsmen an interest in their special work and in proficiency in it, which was capable of rising to a narrow artistic sense. For this very reason, however, every medieval craftsman was completely absorbed in his work, to which he had a contented, slavish relationship, and to which he was subjected to a far greater extent than the modern worker, whose work is a matter of indifference to him.” (Karl Marx, *The German Ideology*).

the nineteenth century. Does the objective, loudly proclaimed by the first working-class trade unions, of the "abolition of the wages system"⁴ aim at the "defense of one part of society against another" or, rather, the abolition of all the parts and the radical reorganization of society? Whether the business enterprises might be primitive, mechanized, or automated, laboring people glimpse sooner or later that they cannot change their condition by acting solely to defend themselves, or solely within the framework of the business enterprise, but by tackling the total organization of society. The modern technical and organizational transformations of industry are of enormous importance from numerous standpoints, but those are not the ones that have conditioned the appearance of a revolutionary consciousness in the proletariat.

These two examples do not allow us just to see where Touraine's rigorous scientific standards are situated. They are characteristic of the irresponsible attitude of the French left-wing intellectual when faced with questions of vital importance for the workers' movement. When Touraine presents his dissertation at the Sorbonne, nothing is in his view sufficiently rigorous; he offers quotation after quotation, contorts himself to espouse the thought of the author he wants to refute, the better to understand it, refrains from generalizing or extrapolating, or allows himself to do so only at the price of endless precautionary remarks and circumlocutions. His connection with a scientific approach is often reduced just to these external paraphernalia. Yet he rid himself entirely of these well-mannered ways of the Spirit when, beyond the University, he deals with problems of interest to the workers' movement; among poor relations, anything goes for the Smart Set of science [*tout est permis au*

⁴T/E: At the end of his June 1865 speech to the First International Working Men's Association, "[Value, Price and Profit](#)," Marx stated that the working class "ought to understand that, with all the miseries it imposes upon them, the present system simultaneously engenders the material conditions and the social forms necessary for an economical reconstruction of society. Instead of the conservative motto: 'A fair day's wage for a fair day's work!' they ought to inscribe on their banner the revolutionary watchword: 'Abolition of the wages system!'"

Tout-Paris de la science]. You can talk any sort of nonsense, extrapolate and generalize worry free, discover ideas that have long been commonplace, refute other ones you have invented yourself while attributing them to imaginary adversaries—in short, piss out copy left and right. This will always be good enough for the workers. [This issue of *Arguments*](#) is teeming with examples of such behavior.

But let us come to the present. Touraine says that, at the same time as it creates the conditions for the appearance of class consciousness, this transformation of work “threatens this class consciousness,” and this for two reasons. On the one hand, given the will “to participate in all material and nonmaterial aspects of culture,” “class consciousness becomes reformist if the level of the workers’ participation in social values and social goods is high. High wages are a particularly important form of this strong participation.” On the other hand, there is the “bureaucratization of labor” and all that this entails.

If capitalist society succeeds in creating strong participation in values and goods, “the working class becomes integrated into society as a whole and revolutionary consciousness weakens to an extent that was previously inconceivable.” If wages go up, if the workers attend soccer matches, if they read [\[the high-circulation evening newspaper\] *France-Soir*](#), if they dress like everyone else—in short, if they “are no longer encamped in the nation,” their consciousness is altered. What, then, are they demanding? Apparently, still higher wages, in order to attend more soccer matches, to read twice the number of *France-Soir* newspapers, to dress even more like everyone else.

Differences in the mode and degree of participation and nonparticipation on the proletariat’s part in social values and social goods incontestably exist when compared to the nineteenth century. Yet this superficial observation in no way grounds the conclusion Touraine draws therefrom. It is entirely false to contrast, as he does, a nineteenth-century proletariat that allegedly did not participate at all in the society of its era and a twentieth-century proletariat that is said to be participating more and more therein. In each era and necessarily, the proletariat at once participates in the

established society and remains outside it. The mythic opposition drawn up by Touraine, a genuinely idealized, cartoonish image [*image d'Épinal*], offers a semblance of reality only insofar as one concerns oneself with the most superficial traits, the most external traits, of working-class existence: clothing, types of leisure, places of habitation, "linguistic behaviors," and so on. Concerning oneself especially or even just a lot with that is to engage in the sort of descriptive entomology that in the University passes for a sociology of the working class; it is to participate in the alienation typical of the bourgeois "sociologist" who transposes to society the most rudimentary methods of the natural sciences, ones from which Touraine does not escape. It is at once absurd to make of the *type* of consumption the criteria for a class existence and absurd not to glimpse that this type always remains essentially different when one considers the upper-middle-class person [*le grand bourgeois*] or bureaucrat and the worker or low-wage earner. One can only regret for the sociologists that this difference is no longer symbolized by velvet clothes, which in their myopia they would have less difficulty in distinguishing from other kinds.⁵

Such increased participation is said, by Touraine, to be expressed in particular by high wages. We shall not insist upon this question, which is dealt with elsewhere in the present issue.⁶ Let us note simply that, while in the past the boundary between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie separated "poverty from wealth" (p. 8), that boundary remains *fully intact* today. It is one thing to say that there is no pauperization, that the quantity of workers' consumption, measured in terms of objects, has increased. It is another thing to say or to leave the impression that, even for the categories that have most benefitted from this change, the problem of consumption has been resolved, that it is henceforth posed in the same terms as for the bourgeoisie, with slight differences.

⁵In the correspondence received at *S. ou B.*, one can say just by looking at the envelope whether or not a letter comes from a worker.

⁶See the article by P. Canjuers [Daniel Blanchard], "Sociology-fiction pour gauche-fiction" [*S. ou B.*, 27 (April 1959): 13-31].

One must be blind not to see that within contemporary society there exists a definite boundary as relates to the problem of consumption,⁷ that the great majority of individuals—even more than four-fifths of wage earners, both workers and others—are perpetually *in financial straits*, that they struggle constantly “to make ends meet,” that they know perfectly well that there is a minority for whom this problem *does not exist*. In this regard, it does not matter whether these financial straits include a motor scooter or a car. The rise in purchasing power has followed only at a distance the rise in needs created by modern society (from the sociological standpoint, the distinction between “real” needs and “imaginary” ones is entirely meaningless: in a given type of culture, the frustration of the individual who does not own a car can be felt more heavily than bad food in another one, and in this regard, too, Touraine remains, as a matter of fact, a prisoner of the simplistic and Stalinist caricature of the Marxism he is claiming to go beyond), and neither from the economic standpoint nor from the ideological one can this society hold, except by perpetually creating among its members more needs than they can satisfy; for, the rise in the standard of living, conceived as growth in quantities of butter consumed, is the sole life goal Khrushchev is able to propose to the Russians, just as American capitalism is threatened with collapse if it does not succeed in imbuing among its citizens the elevated moral ideal of “two cars per family.” Far from being resolved, the contradiction of capitalist consumption is pushed to the

⁷That it might be difficult to establish with exactitude at what income level this boundary is set in no way affects this observation. Are 650 [old] francs per month in France in 1959 a “high” wage or a “low” one? It is in any case clearly above what the majority of wage earners earn in France. Let Touraine read, in the January 8, 1959 edition of [[the French weekly news magazine](#)] [L'Express](#) how one lives with a “high” salary of 650 francs per month. American economists and sociologists are in agreement, noting that within the whole range of salaries going from \$2,000 to \$20,000 per year, consumers are seriously worried about balancing their budgets. In 1948, 45.6% and in 1949 47.5% of families in the United States had zero or negative savings—that is to say, had increased their debt in the course of the year. See [Statistical Abstract of the US, 1951](#), pp. 265 and 268.

point of paroxysm by contemporary society, and the tension on this level is showing no tendency to diminish, as are proved by the demands of wage earners in all advanced countries, which become fiercer and fiercer as the standard of living rises.

The proletariat, Touraine says again, “participates in values.” But what values are at issue here? What are the values today’s society is proposing to individuals? Quite simply, there are none. We are not criticizing them; we are not saying that they are false. We have no need to do so. It suffices for us to observe that this commodity is no longer on the market. What are the values of the French bourgeoisie today? It does not know that itself, it does not believe in them, it believes in nothing, it proposes nothing, it says nothing. Who speaks for it? No one. Where are the ideologues of the bourgeoisie? No one knows. Is there a milieu, bourgeois, working-class, or other, in which someone would dare to stand up and say that present-day society is and has to be based on labor, honesty, love of country, respect for God, family-mindedness, without rousing a big round of laughter? Would this value be culture? Yet, increasingly separated from society and people’s lives, this culture—these painters who paint for painters; these novelists who write for novelists novels about the impossibility of writing a novel—is no longer, in what it had that was original, but a perpetual self-denunciation, a denunciation of society and rage against the culture itself. Beyond that, there are [\[French Catholic writer and historian Henri\] Daniel-Rops](#) and [\[socialist realist novelist\] André Stil](#), or [\[1952 Nobel Prize in Literature winner and Catholic Gaullist writer\] François Mauriac](#) and [\[Surrealist poet and Communist Party intellectual Louis\] Aragon](#), but already they are from time to time wracked with doubt. It would be surprising if the proletariat were participating in these values when the bourgeoisie itself has for a long time ceased to participate in them; it would be surprising if it would find in the bourgeois lifestyle a reason to live, when the very children of the dominant classes do not find one, when the privileged youth, from New York to Stockholm and from Paris to Moscow, are wracked by a destructive rage against this society and this culture.

In more general fashion, let it be said: The question is not whether the proletariat is “participating” or “not participating” in society. The proletariat *at once* participates and does not participate, more exactly its participation in society is *contradictory*. This is because its situation is contradictory and the society in question is itself contradictory (we have here but two aspects of the same phenomenon). It proposes to people, as end, an elevated standard of living and constantly postpones the desirable standard of living; it claims to see in culture the most elevated value and makes of this culture an activity completely apart from life; it claims to be based on the sovereignty of citizens and is constantly excluding citizens from public affairs, and so on and so forth.⁸

Yet all those aspects ultimately become organized around and take on their meaning starting from a central phenomenon: production. The proletarian is not to be defined by his place in consumption or by the greater or lesser degree of his participation in society, but by his situation in the production process. And the question that is posed is: Are the changes that have taken place in the social relations of production tending to disband the proletariat, to “erase its class consciousness,” as Touraine says, and to orient it toward reformism—or the opposite?

⁸The contradiction contained in the “rise of the standard of living” put into practice by modern capitalism is beginning to be perceived by the bourgeois ideologues themselves; see, for example, the latest book by the American economist John Kenneth Galbraith, *The Affluent Society*, 1958. This is obviously the moment French left-wing intellectuals, always on the cutting edge, have chosen to discover the merits of participation in society by means of the rise of the standard of living. It is probably their lag behind bourgeois thought that entitles them to give the proletariat lessons. On the destruction of all popular participation in the politics of capitalist democracy and on the collapse of the values of this society, see the excellent chapters “The Mass Society” and “The Higher Immorality” of *The Power Elite* by C. Wright Mills, a sociologist without quotation marks.

The Proletariat and Bureaucratization

Touraine agrees with the view that the key thing is the place the proletariat occupies in the social process of production. Unfortunately, he does not understand the signification of this expression: on the one hand, he confuses the relations of production with the forms of property; on the other hand, he is incapable of seeing that the bureaucratic organization of labor in the business enterprises of modern capitalism leaves intact, at its basic level, the laborer's situation and the conflict that sets him against the social system.

Noting that the dominant tendency of modern capitalism is the tendency to bureaucratization, Touraine seems to be saying that this wholly alters the situation of the proletariat in production and in society: "it is the very principle of the working-class condition that is overturned and the problem of ownership can no longer occupy the central role that until then it had: class consciousness is fading away" (p. 11). The experiences of the proletariat, "even in working life, are not to be reduced to those of ownership and lack of ownership." Other problems are posed, "which are not automatically or directly resolved by the passage to socialism."

That the problem of ownership, in the formal-juridical sense, might not occupy the central place in the present-day workers' movement is what has been repeated in this review for ten years. Yet that does not signify that "class consciousness is fading away"; such a conclusion would be justified only if classes were defined on the basis of their relationship to formal-juridical ownership, and not, as a matter of fact, on the basis of their place in the "social process of production." Juridical property relations are completely different in France, where traditional private ownership of the means of production is the dominant form, and in Russia, where these means are "nationalized"; that in no way prevents the situation of the worker in the social process of production from being essentially the same in the two countries. The proletariat is not to be defined by the fact that it has opposite it some private property owners. It defines itself as exploited and alienated class in its labor, as class of wage earners

harnessed to a labor of execution opposite a dominant class that *has at its disposal* the means of production, the labor of wage earners, and its products; that it might have these at its disposal in the juridical form of private property or “nationalized” property is important in other respects but is absolutely a matter of indifference as regards this question. What counts is that effectively actual power over the means of production, over people’s labor and its products, belongs to a particular category in society.

The secondary character of the juridical aspect of ownership does not signify, either, that the real appropriation of the means of production would not be a central problem. Touraine leaves that entirely aside. The “passage to socialism” of which he speaks clearly concerns only the abolition of private property, and it leaves out the crucial question: *Who in effective actuality disposes of the “nationalized” means of production?* Now, socialism cannot but signify the instauration of the total power of the organized collectivity of laboring people over the means of production and over the organization of their own labor. Here we have workers’ management, which Touraine disdainfully dismisses in two words: “plain utopianism,” he says.

Touraine’s positions would be meaningful if he could show that what he calls, incorrectly, the “bureaucratization of labor,” that is to say, the bureaucratization of the capitalist business enterprise, effectively results in an alteration of the basic situation of the wage-earning laborer, if such bureaucratization led to the disappearance of what has been considered to be, since Marx, its principal determination, that is to say, alienation in the production process, in labor itself, if, finally, it led to the disappearance—or tended to lead to the disappearance—of the conflict between the laborer and the productive and social system.

Now, it is on this question that Touraine remains the haziest and the most contradictory. On the one hand, he says that “the organization of labor poses a growing number of problems that are only very indirectly related to the conflict between the capitalist and the proletarian.” Rid of the negative fetishism of private property that characterizes Touraine’s work, that clearly means: Far from resolving or

attenuating the conflicts between laboring people and the system of production, the bureaucratized organization of the factory merely multiplies such conflicts. On the other hand, the "injustices in pay and command" can be connected to the capitalist system only by a "superficial argument" and, furthermore, "they are corrected," at the very least, some of them, thanks "to the pressure exerted... by the unions" (p. 10). And finally, more than the rise in income, it is "from a modification of working-class labor, from a transformation of tasks of execution, of manufacture, into tasks of communication" that "a disappearance of working-class consciousness" risks coming about (p. 11).

The Proletarianization of Employees

Touraine lends support to these considerations through a comparison between industrial workers and low-paid employees or civil servants. The worker, he says, "retains a stronger class consciousness" because industry is not yet completely bureaucratized; insofar as it will increasingly tend to be so, the class consciousness of the workers will disappear. The proof? Where bureaucratization is complete, among low-paid employees and subaltern civil servants, such consciousness no longer exists.

This comparison completely reverses the direction of historical development, it literally stands it on its head. What one observes in reality is that, far from representing a model of absence of class consciousness the workers increasingly would be approaching, low-paid employees and subaltern civil servants are constantly coming closer to the type of consciousness and behavior that characterizes the industrial proletariat. This is shown by the fact that these strata more and more frequently enter into struggle and by their combativeness.⁹ The reasons why things have evolved like

⁹It is hardly necessary to note the superficial and casual way in which Touraine passes over this universally known phenomenon, viz., that the numerically largest categories of "low-paid employees and subaltern civil servants," postal workers and railroad men, are in no way distinguishable from industrial workers as regards their combativeness. On the evolution

this are multiple. The proliferation of these strata could not help but go hand in hand with the rapid erosion of their relative economic position; their wages or pay [*traitements*] are henceforth comparable to those of industrial workers, and their degree of exploitation is just as great. This same proliferation, the “massification” of these categories, on the other hand, each day destroys further the illusion that they might formerly have had a privileged and superior social status at the same time as it has already and definitively destroyed what could form its objective basis: a statistically nonnegligible “chance” of a substantial promotion. The low-paid employee now irrefutably knows that he will die a low-paid employee, exactly like the worker. Yet the most important thing is, as a matter of fact, the transformation of the labor process in offices. On the first day of his arrival in Paris, a primitive might remain in marvel before the six-story houses and not note the existence of planes. Touraine likewise goes into raptures at some novelties that really are not so, but he is incapable of discerning the most revolutionary phenomena of his age. He speaks of the bureaucratization of industry and does not glimpse the *industrialization of offices*, which is but the other side of the same process. He forgets that the methods of industrial organization are applied to offices as soon as those offices reach a certain size; he forgets,

of other categories of employees—in insurance companies and banks—see the articles by R. Berthier [Henri Simon] in issues [20](#) and [23](#) of *S. ou B.* The struggles of office workers over the last ten to a dozen years are innumerable. “New York City, 30 March 1948. At 8:55 this morning violence broke out in Wall Street. Massed pickets from local 205 of the United Financial Employees union, supported by members of an AFL seamen’s union, knocked over four policemen at the entrance to the stock exchange and lay down on the sidewalk in front of the doors. One hundred police officers swarmed up and in several knots of furious club-swinging, 12 people were hurt, 45 seized and arrested. The outbreak was over in 30 minutes, but most of the day, 1200 massed pickets surrounded the stock exchange building and shouted epithets at those who entered the building” ([C. Wright Mills, *White Collar*](#), p. 301). “About 250 clerks at the [Rootes Group’s Ryton-on-Dunsmore factory](#), near Coventry, began a sit-down strike yesterday over a bonus pay claim made on the grounds that office staff are just as important as production workers” ([“Labour News,”] *Financial Times*, February 17, 1959: 9).

especially, the huge technological transformation that is in the process of coming about in this domain and that leaves far behind it the most grandiose upheavals ever achieved by material manufacturing industries. From the Pharaohs to World War II, the labor of bookkeeping remained virtually unchanged; the upheaval it has undergone on account of electric and electronic machines in the last ten years is as great as the upheaval undergone by the transformation of metals over ten millennia. Subject to an ever-greater division of labor, obliged to perform repetitive, monitored [*contrôlées*], and standardized tasks, dragged into mechanization, office workers are henceforth but compartmentalized, exploited, and alienated wage-earning executants; they are proletarians and behave more and more as such.

Yet Touraine supports his “observations” with “arguments.” Bureaucratization (or technical progress? it matters little which) transforms the tasks of execution and manufacture into “tasks of communication and responsibility.” Bureaucratization eliminates (or hides) the boss and leaves the wage earner face to face with an organization “that is but a system of transmission and execution” (and not of decision).

Mixing up the concepts of execution and (material) manufacture offers another lovely example of Touraine’s rigorousness. A mailman from the PTT [Postes, Télégraphes et Téléphones ([French Postal, Telegraph, and Telephone service](#))] manufactures nothing; that does not keep him from being an executant, pure and simple. Manufacturing tasks have not disappeared and will not disappear anytime soon—certainly not before capitalism itself disappears. Yet where those tasks have disappeared, low-level wage earners have not been transformed into bureaucrats; they have remained exploited and alienated executants. Only an advocate of capitalism could present the mindnumbing and dehumanizing tasks performed by a semiskilled worker [OS] on transfer machines at the Renault factory, for example, as tasks of “communication and responsibility.” These workers felt no change in their situation (except for the worse) and will feel no further change under the pretext that the

sociologists have labeled their monotonous and overwhelming task of mere monitoring [*surveillance*] a “task of communication and responsibility.”¹⁰ And it is literally incredible for one to insinuate that “low-paid employees or subaltern civil servants” find themselves in a situation different from that of workers because they would possess a “delegation of authority”; what a lovely delegation of authority a saleslady in a department store or a post office worker at a window possesses! Their tasks, just like those of a worker in manufacturing or a worker monitoring an automated assembly, are strictly circumscribed and defined by the bureaucratic regulation of labor. All of them are mere executants—and all possess a margin of autonomy, for such regulation, which likes to think of itself as absolute, fails miserably when it tries to be so.¹¹

The Bureaucracy as Apparatus and as Class

Does the (real or apparent) elimination or remoteness of the boss have the results Touraine attributes to him? Touraine wants to present the bureaucracy solely as “a system of transmission and execution.” “The basic decisions are not made within the bureaucratic organization.” And what

¹⁰Speaking of automation at Renault, Serge Colomb, a factory technician, declared at an international conference organized by the European Productivity Agency:

Hours worked are not reduced and although somewhat better paid, the workers in sections which have turned over to automation have not received the advantages announced by the automation prophets. The workers’ isolation in the midst of complicated machinery may have very serious repercussions and accentuate the dehumanization of the work felt all the more in the absence of hard physical labor (*Manchester Guardian*, May 18, 1956).

[T/E: A longer excerpt from Colomb’s presentation, again including this passage, appears in Castoriadis’s article, “Les Grèves de l’automation en Angleterre,” originally published in *S. ou B.*, 19 (July 1956): 101-15; see: 113; translated as “Automation Strikes in England,” in *SouBA*; see: 164.]

¹¹See, in this regard, in [issue 23 of *S. ou B.*](#), “On the Content of Socialism,” 84-124 [T/E: in translation, “On the Content of Socialism, III,” in [PSW2](#)].

difference can that make? Is it that this signifies that wage earners no longer know against whom to turn, or that they do not hold their immediate or remote superiors responsible for their fate? The fact that the one ultimately responsible for decisions may not be the bureaucratic body under consideration itself, but a more remote instance of authority, be it the "State," has never prevented post office workers or railroad men from going on strike and from being as combative as industrial workers, if not more so. For, quite evidently they know that there *exists* in the final analysis an instance of authority that is to make a decision, and they do not care whether this is a private boss, a "nationalized" business enterprise (like Renault or the French Coal Board), or the State. Nor do they perceive the bureaucratic body immediately facing them, embodied in subaltern and upper staff for example, as a mere "body of transmission and execution" that would be neutral; they identify these staff with exploitation, because these staff have begun by identifying themselves with exploitation and because their concrete behavior, at the everyday point of production, does not differ from that of foremen, department heads, and so on, within a factory.

These things should not have to be discussed, and it is characteristic of the decrepitude of the French "Left" that such absurdities would be celebrated as a contribution to the ideology of the worker's movement. Yet it is useful to add a word about the origin of Touraine's ideas about the bureaucracy. The source for the "definition" of the bureaucracy given by Touraine is the German sociologist Max Weber,¹² and it is from Weber's work that Touraine also takes the idea that the bureaucracy is but a system of transmission. Yet in Weber's work this idea is part of a formal ("ideal typical") description of the bureaucracy, which aims at grasping the essence of the bureaucratic apparatus as it has existed indiscriminately since the Pharaohs or in Prussia, in

¹²"I call *bureaucracy*..." says Touraine. "I" is to be taken here in the broad sense: we are dealing here with Max Weber, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, p. 128 of the 1956 reprint edition, whose definition is, moreover, much richer.

the Catholic Church or in the modern-capitalist business enterprise, in the Army or in hospitals. Never would Max Weber have imagined that one could draw from a *definition* some conclusions about men's *real* relations in history. Where he did, on the basis of a study of the reality of those relations, draw such conclusions, they are diametrically opposed to Touraine's: "The ways of life of the salaried employees and the workers in the state-owned Prussian mines and railroads are absolutely not and to any perceptible degree different from those in big private capitalist business enterprises" (*Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, p. 843).¹³ To that is added the fact that Weber considers the "system of transmission" aspect solely when he speaks of the bureaucratic *apparatus* as such. There, he says, "Always the question is posed: *Who dominates* the existing bureaucratic apparatus?" (*ibid.*, p. 128).¹⁴ In this passage, he does not envisage the following problem: What happens when the bureaucracy spreads out and comes to cover the entire terrain of social domination? He envisaged this problem elsewhere¹⁵

¹³T/E: This is a literal translation of Castoriadis's translation from the German original. In [*Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, ed. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich \(Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1978\)](#), this sentence appears instead as a question: "Are the daily working conditions of the salaried employees and the workers in the state-owned Prussian mines and railroads really perceptibly different from those in big business enterprises?" Weber immediately answers his own rhetorical question: "It is true that there is even less freedom, since every power struggle with a state bureaucracy is hopeless and since there is no appeal to an agency which as a matter of principle would be interested in limiting the employer's power, such as there is in the case of a private enterprise. That would be the whole difference."

¹⁴T/E: Again, this translates into English Castoriadis's translation from the German to the French. *Economy and Society*, p. 224 reads: "The question is always who controls the existing bureaucratic machinery?"

¹⁵In "Parlament als Regierung," *Politische Schriften*, pp. 148-54 (passage reproduced in the 1956 reprint of *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* as section 4 of chapter IX of volume 2, pp. 841-45). [T/E: Max Weber, "Parliament and Government in Germany under a New Political Order," in [*Political Writings*](#), ed. Peter Lassman and Ronald Spears (Cambridge, UK and New

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and he responded to it as follows: "The future belongs to bureaucratization." "If private capitalism were eliminated, state bureaucracy would rule *alone*." And he added, "What would it mean in practice? Would it perhaps mean that the steel housing (*Gehäuse*) of modern industrial work would break open? No!"¹⁶

Yet in any case, it is certain that one cannot today present the bureaucracy as a mere "system of execution and transmission," when on almost half of the Earth the bureaucracy is the sole source of power and domination. If he wanted to follow his "definitions," the sociologist Touraine would find himself faced with the following insoluble paradox: How does Russian society, for example, function if the bureaucracy is a mere body of transmission and execution? Transmission and execution of what? Where and

York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 154-59 ("based on five articles first published in the *Frankfurter Zeitung* between April and June 1917"). The full, correct German title and reference are: *Parlament und Regierung im neugeordneten Deutschland. Zur politischen Kritik des Beamtentums und Parteiwesens* (Munich and Leipzig: Dunder & Humblot, 1918).]

¹⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 842-84 [T/E: [Political Writings](#), pp. 156-57]. These sentences date from 1917, that is to say, exactly the same year Lenin noted, for his part, that "monopoly has evolved into state monopoly" (*Coll. Works*, vol. XX-1, p. 282) [T/E: Castoriadis did not provide the date of this edition of Lenin's *Collected Works* when he offered this French translation (now translated above into English), but the phrase "monopoly capitalism is developing into state monopoly capitalism" appears in "[22: Resolution on the Current Situation](#)," from "[The Seventh \(April\) All-Russia Conference of the R.S.D.L.P.\(B.\)](#)," [April 24-29, 1917](#)]: "monopoly capitalism is in the process of transforming itself into state monopoly capitalism" (*ibid.*, p. 317). [T/E: The phrase "the process of transformation of monopoly capitalism into state-monopoly capitalism" appears in the August 1917 [Author's Preface](#) to [The State and Revolution](#).] Forty years later, those other leading lights of the French Left, [[Union of the Socialist Left \(UGS\)](#) cofounder [Gilles\] Martinet](#) and [[UGS supporter Pierre\] Naville](#), continue to state that the sole persons ever to have spoken of bureaucratization and statification are [Bruno R\[izzi\]](#) and [James\] Burnham](#). See, just recently, a letter by Naville in the January 1959 issue of *Le Contrat Social*, pp. 60-61. [T/E: Naville's letter, "Un revenant: Bruno. R.," was published in issue 3:1, in response to Georges Henein's article "Bruno R. et la 'nouvelle classe,'" *Le Contrat Social*, 2:6 (January 1958): 365-68.] That obviously makes easier the imaginary elimination of the problem of the bureaucracy.

by whom are decisions made? What, in his formalism (for, the truncated definition of bureaucracy he gives is not a sociological definition: it is the definition a professor of administrative law would give), Touraine is incapable of seeing is that the bureaucracy is not only an apparatus charged with transmitting and executing; it is also the set of people who populate this apparatus, who have common interests and perform a common function. When this function is reduced to border control, to the collection of customs duties, and so on, it forms just one social category among others. Yet, let this function become that of managing production, the economy, and social life as a whole and in its details and let the bureaucracy have at its disposal the apparatus of coercion, the material means of production, people's labor, and education, then it is a *class* and the dominant class, and the decisions are made within it and cannot be made anywhere else (or else does Touraine believe that they are made by the Russian people during the election of the Supreme Soviet?). The real social process during which those decisions are formed (which in no way coincides, of course, with the juridical process that clothes it), the way in which the interests and the position of the various layers or groups of bureaucrats are reflected therein—this is a problem that cannot be broached here. Let us note simply that the process is essentially “irrational” and that here we have one of the fundamental contradictions of bureaucratic capitalism.

The Class Struggle Under Bureaucratic Domination

Such is the meaning of the objective evolution of modern capitalism. And this evolution does not eliminate, but only deepens, the struggle of wage-earning executives against the system. For, it does not eliminate, but maintains and aggravates, their exploitation and their alienation.

This fundamental reality—that the wage-earning executive laborer is *exploited*—disappears entirely from Touraine's “analysis.” For, to observe that wages have increased is not to eliminate the problem of exploitation. The proletariat is exploited if it receives wages of 50 on a product

of 100; it is just as much so if it receives wages of 500 on a product of 1,000. And it is always in relation to the total product, to society's wealth, to the correlatively increased needs, to the use to which the product of his labor is put by the exploiting strata that the worker judges exploitation. Nothing is changed therein, either objectively or in the perception of the workers, if the incomes of the exploiters take the form of "salaries" instead of that of dividends. Touraine says: "The worker...no longer is faced with an entrepreneur but a salaried director." The workers of General Motors, in other words, would no longer feel—or else, no longer *would be*? Touraine's trick here consists in constantly leaving up in the air [*dans le vague*] these types of questions—exploited, since the CEO is only a salaried person like they are, and since the difference separating them is but a difference of degree: he earns \$400,000 per year, while they get \$4,000—but there remains for them "the struggle for advancement".... It is impossible to discuss Touraine's implausible statements about wages, which can flow only from a total ignorance of the most elementary notions of political economy: take, for example, the idea that surplus value is the difference between the sale price of the commodity and the price at which the capitalist buys labor (p. 11). Let us note simply that Touraine's idea that the worker henceforth connects the idea "of the fair wage no longer to his effort or to the price of the product of his labor but to the cost of living" (*ibid.*) represents but an absurd extrapolation of what happens in the course of a period of inflation (when wage earners try to defend their purchasing power against price hikes) to all periods. The workers do not cease making demands when inflation ceases any more than it is "inflation that convinces the worker that society is operating against him" (p. 12). The annual "rounds" of demands by wage earners in the United States and England, with or without inflation, could have prevented Touraine from writing absurdities if only he remembered, when he does higher theory, what he reads in his daily newspaper.

This other, still more fundamental reality—the alienation of the laborer—we have seen, remains vague [*dans le flou*]. What Touraine says about it boils down to a repeated

oscillation between the idea that the problem no longer exists—or will no longer exist—on account of the “disappearance of tasks of execution,” the idea that it is minor and can be “corrected,” the idea, almost, that it is not a matter of a social problem but a technical or purely organizational one, and the idea, finally, that in the aspirations and demands of workers they no longer encounter this problem.

We do not need to discuss this question “in general.”¹⁷ It suffices to say a few words about the “radical transformation of working-class consciousness” discovered by Touraine, about this effacing of class consciousness, and about these new objectives the proletariat, it seems, is setting for itself—or will be setting for itself? or has to set to for itself?—henceforth: “the struggle for advancement, for employment security, for higher stipends [*traitements*], for the reform of command.”

One cannot help but admire this horrible mixture. Touraine stuffs in here at random some demands that have existed from time immemorial (wage raises, dubbed “stipends” since the workers are henceforth bureaucrats), purely imaginary demands (the *reform* of command!), and attitudes, like “the struggle for advancement,” that are at once individual (advancement of everyone in a hierarchical structure makes no sense) and clearly reactionary (this “struggle” cannot but set wage earners in *opposition* to one another and is effectively used by the managerial bureaucracy in order to divide them).

Nor can one help but admire the “scientific” method used on this score by Touraine. For, ultimately it is frankly ridiculous to try to deduce from *a priori* considerations the upheavals in the working-class condition and working-class

¹⁷See Mothé’s response to Touraine in the [same issue of *Arguments*](#). See also the texts by [Paul] Romano [Phil Singer], [G.] Vivier, [Daniel] Mothé [Jacques Gautrat], and [Roger] Berthier [Henri Simon] published by *S. ou B.* [T/E: Mothé’s *Arguments* text is “L’ouvrier et l’exploitation.” See [SouBA](#) for some texts by Romano and Mothé in English translation; see the *S. ou B.* [Table of Contents](#) page on the [Cornelius Castoriadis/Agora International Website](#) to search for the other *S. ou B.* articles by these authors, consulting [soubscan.org](#) for specific texts available online.]

consciousness that will result from a "system of bureaucratic organization," when this system is already a full reality for 900 million individuals from Budapest to Shanghai and when one can observe and note what happens there. What would you think of a naturalist who would say: "According to my calculations and reasoning, crocodiles are birds living in the desert who feed in the main on Quaker Oats and through evolution they will lose their feathers in the near future"? You would ask yourself why the naturalist in question is not going rather to observe and study those crocodiles where they are to be found, instead of constructing them in his mind or at least why he is not reading what travelers report about them. This naturalist bears a strange resemblance to Monsieur Touraine.

For, in the countries of the East, where the bureaucratization of production and of society has been 100 percent accomplished, what one notes is that the struggle between executives and directors, far from abating, is deepening. When they have been able to act in broad daylight, the laboring people of those countries (workers as well as low-paid employees and subaltern civil servants) have acted not in a reformist direction but a revolutionary one. We are indeed saying *revolutionary*, and not simply *insurrectional*; it is not only that the workers of East Berlin, Poznan, and Budapest have struggled physically against the bureaucracy, it is that the explicit objective of this struggle was the radical overturning of social relations, at the point of production as well as in the State. They have not demanded their "advancement," they have attacked the very system in which such "advancement" exists, they have stood up against the hierarchical structure itself. They have not demanded "reform" but the *destruction* of bureaucratic command and its replacement by workers' management of production. They have been able to show in concrete fashion what workers' management signifies, by requiring the abolition of labor norms; such abolition in effect attacks the bureaucratic managerial [*de direction*] apparatus at its core and tends to reestablish the management [*gestion*] of his labor by the laborer at the most elementary level. They did not demand to "participate more"

in society but to direct [*diriger*] it: the workers of East Berlin were demanding “a metalworkers’ government.”¹⁸

Here is the prime reality—which Touraine, with his scientific objectivity, stubbornly ignores, by substituting for it his own petty-bourgeois ideal of “advancement” and of the “reform of command”; if one could humanize the adjutants and have the possibility of being promoted adjutant one day oneself, everything would be settled. In this, he is not alone; in nine-tenths of cases, the French “Left” has, in the face of the most profound aspects of the working-class revolts of the East, observed a *surlly silence*. God knows that it has spoken endlessly of what Khrushchev did, of what [[Hungarian Prime Minister Imry](#)] Nagy said, of what [[General Secretary of the Hungarian Socialist Workers’ Party János](#)] Kádár or [[First Secretary of the Polish Workers’ Party Władysław](#)] Gomułka were wrong or right to think. Yet about the activity of the Hungarian workers during the revolution, about the Works Councils: Nothing. That activity, those Councils were calling into question this Left’s role as the people’s representative and savior. The people themselves were suddenly trying to represent themselves and save themselves: What childishness, what plain utopianism!

What the proletariat’s evolution under bureaucratic capitalism shows, therefore, is not that class consciousness is fading away but, on the contrary, that it is reaching its highest level. For, across those struggles, and in particular through the demand for workers’ management, the ultimate objective of the proletariat is being expressed: the abolition not merely of the private-property form but of the real content of capitalist relations as exploitation and alienation, the restoration of men’s domination over their labor, over its means, and over its products. And contrary to what Touraine is saying, this is precisely the form the struggle for the control of the means of production takes under bureaucratic capitalism. Workers’ management is indeed inconceivable without the producers’

¹⁸See the analyses of these struggles in issues [13](#), [20](#), [21](#), [23](#), and [24](#) of *S. ou B.* [T/E: A good summary is found in Castoriadis’s “The Proletarian Revolution against the Bureaucracy,” now in [PSW2](#); see: 77.]

domination over the means of production, over the organization of production, and over the results of production.

A Final Novelty: Reformism

If the sociologist Touraine's sociological analyses are built upon sand, it will be understood that we deem it superfluous to discuss the political superstructure he wants to make them support. One cannot discuss colors with the blind, nor politics with someone who, in speaking of trade unions in France since the War—these trade unions that wallowed in the most total class collaboration—reproaches them for their “revolutionary intransigence,” their “manifestations of ideological rigidity,” their “total ideological and political opposition to present-day society,” their “dream of the dictatorship of the proletariat” (pp. 14 and 15). A dream, indeed—of a fully asleep sociologist who has of “revolutionary intransigence” nearly the same idea as Monsieur Gabriel-Robinet.¹⁹ One cannot discuss the proletariat with someone who is constantly confusing it with the political and trade-union bureaucrats who shackle it to its exploitation. One cannot discuss the objectives of the workers' movement with someone who proposes that it submit itself in fact to [Mendésiste](#) leadership, that is to say, the “liberal” wing of French capitalism.

Let us remark simply, in conclusion, that as a man of science, a politician enamored of “empiricism,” a despiser of myths, and a destroyer of the simplistic utopianism of workers' management, Touraine has missed an excellent occasion to submit his practical conclusions to the test of reality. For, this reformism he is proposing to the French proletariat, these “strong” trade unions, participating in however many “mixed bodies” as you wish, this politically unified “Left” that agrees to “participate in political power”—all that exists, in many countries, and for example

¹⁹FRENCH EDITORS: [Louis Gabriel-Robinet](#) was, from 1948 until the early 1970s, one of the main editorial writers for [[the conservative daily newspaper](#)] [Le Figaro](#).

in England. And to what does that lead? The English workers are increasingly breaking away from the trade-union bureaucracy, are organizing themselves around the shop stewards, triggering each day, apropos of everything and nothing, ten strikes, the majority of which are “unofficial,” that is to say, without or against the advice of the trade union.²⁰ Where is the English Left at? Nowhere. For eight years, the Labour Party has been painfully trying to find a program and does not succeed in doing so. It is the English bourgeoisie that is, more than any other, dismayed by this. Its organs, such as *The Economist* and the *Financial Times*, periodically beg Labour leaders to use their imagination and invent something that might be able to serve as a program for them; without that, they say, the future of English democracy, which would not be able to continue to exist without a second party, is compromised.

The proletariat itself has always been and will always be, so long as capitalism endures, partially “reformist”: that is to say that it always tries by all means to improve its situation. In this sense, it can support for a long time reformist parties or trade unions, which can for all kinds of reasons have greater numerical importance in one country rather than another. Yet the question does not lie here. All this reformist action (begun not with the appearance of “large mechanized business enterprises” but more than one hundred years ago) has resolved none of the problems of contemporary society, nor has it eliminated the conflict between classes. The bureaucratic organizations that have made themselves into the champions of the proletariat today find themselves removed from the proletariat, almost as much so as the other institutions of class society. A socialist politics, on the other

²⁰Let Touraine go to the trouble of following for just one week the *Financial Times*, whose role is not to report on working-class movements. He would see there on average five or six strikes per day affecting all aspects of life and production in the capitalist business enterprise. He would also see there, from time to time, the urgent calls for the English bourgeoisie to address the trade unions so that they might “improve their organization and their contacts with their base”—that is to say, so that they might regain control over the workers.

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hand, is meaningful only if, beyond partial improvements, it tries to aid proletarians in changing radically their situation, in liberating themselves from capitalist and bureaucratic slavery. A socialist politics has meaning only if it is revolutionary.

BETA

The English Elections*

The most apparent trait of the latest English elections is their Americanization. While a difference still remains, it is especially the case that in England the analogy with a “show” has been replaced by the analogy with a “match.” The electoral population has become a public audience [*un publique*]; this public counts the points, relying on such deeply political criteria as the more or less clever use of television, the more or less sympathetic and stirring look of the leaders, and so on. Even the electoral programs are first judged, *qua* genre pieces, on their so-to-speak technical value, like a poster or an infomercial [*publireportage*]. One need only read *The Economist* to be convinced of this.

It is nevertheless obvious that even as such, these elections are challenging the political attitude of English society and that it is in deep political and not accidental terms that one is to account for the problem: Why did Labour fail?

The Conservatives’s strong points offer an initial set of reasons for this failure. These strong points were, as the Conservatives proclaimed, peace and prosperity.

Whereas, after the Suez Crisis, the Tories could easily be presented by their adversaries as warmongers, today, with the aid of fading memories, [[British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan](#)], the “man in the fur cap,”¹ the audacious visitor to Russia in the depths of winter, had a fine time presenting himself as a trailblazer for the summit meeting and as an indispensable partner for the pursuit of “détente.” Under these conditions, to what could the Labourites lay claim? That they might be trusted to speak to the Russians better than Macmillan?

*Originally published as “Les Élections anglaises,” *S. ou B.*, 29 (December 1959): 106-114. Reprinted in *CMR2*, 40-46, and *EP2*, 387-91.

¹T/E: “When Macmillan visited Russia in 1959 he surprised his hosts and the press by stepping off the aeroplane wearing a tall white fur cap of Russian style” (see: <https://issuu.com/lyonandturnbullauctioneers/docs/376> [p. 33, item #290]).

Likewise, six months ago, at the low point in the recession, the Conservatives could be charged with extending unemployment, and so on. Yet today, business has picked up, unemployment is in large part reduced; production of fast-moving consumer goods is flourishing: this is really what, in capitalist language, one calls *prosperity*. What remains for the Labourites is to offer still more prosperity.

In sum, English capitalism finds itself, as much on the foreign as the domestic plane, in a good posture, having surmounted its difficulties without resorting to exceptional measures. For, while it is true that, six months ago, the Labourites would have had greater chances of winning, it is truer still that England has exited from the recession without need of the Labourites. The normal operation of a modern form of capitalism finds within itself the resources that allow it to triumph over its cyclical difficulties.

And, in fact, the structural reforms proposed—or, rather, suggested—by Labour have been proposed with extreme timidity. Numerous Labour candidates have barely dared to speak to their voters of nationalizations and increased state intervention.

On the other hand, they have gone wild over the chapter of electoral promises to the “disadvantaged parts of the population”: a considerable hike in annuities and pensions, rent stabilization, bailout of businesses hurt by the recession, therefore by unemployment, subsidies to state-owned companies—also with a view to full employment—and so on. This accumulation of promises has been especially frightening, for it was hard to see how they would succeed in reconciling them within a budget, and these promises have not cut the mustard in comparison to the real prosperity about which the Conservatives have been able to boast.

In sum, the voters have been unable to see in what way the programs of the two major parties differed, and this is what explains that the elections are said to have taken the form of a match, or of a horse race. This metamorphosis has in no way benefitted the Labourites. To a good number of voters, especially among the young, they look like an apparatus that has lost its *raison d'être* and no longer has a grip on reality. Even if the Conservatives hardly have any

additional attractions, and even a greater chance of being odious, at least their role in society appears more serious. In the present-day situation of English capitalism, the choice between the two major parties is no longer based in reality and no longer corresponds to a real alternative.

However, in order to clarify the situation of Labour in relation to the real life of society, it must be compared to what is undoubtedly the problem of contemporary English capitalism, a problem it is less and less capable of settling, and which is infinitely more profound than all the recessions and cold wars. We are speaking here of the workers' endemic "lack of discipline," which is expressed in "wildcat strikes" that are breaking out just about everywhere, at any moment, and apropos of anything and that unleash chaos within the production process.² An example of this is the strike of oxygen workers, which broke out in the middle of the electoral campaign and paralyzed or threatened with paralysis several key sectors of the English economy, such as the automobile industry, shipbuilding, and the building trade. These wildcat strikes express the fundamental fact that the working class is striving to escape from the employers' control over the production process itself. But also from the control of the "working-class" bureaucracy. And it is on this basis that the trade unions' and Labour's situation in society is to be understood. Labour's failure in the elections expresses—though on the most superficial level—this situation.

In order to make itself acceptable to the bourgeoisie as a worthy interlocutor, the reformist bureaucracy deems it obviously vital to prove that it alone is capable of controlling

²See, in [issue 19 of *S. ou B.*](#), "Automation Strikes in England" [T/E: now in [SouBA](#), 153-68; the issue is incorrectly listed as "26" in the original and in the French Editors' reprint] and the Notes in *S. ou B* issues [22](#) and [24](#). [T/E: See S. Tensor's two articles "Grèves en Grande-Bretagne" (Strikes in Great Britain), [22](#):171-173, and "Notes sur l'Angleterre" (Notes on England), [24](#):112-113. Tensor's article "Les grèves de mai, juin et juillet en Angleterre" (The May, June, and July strikes in England) appeared in [26](#):112-119; this same issue also contained, on pp. 144-47, the unsigned text "En Angleterre, les shop stewards donnent du fil à retordre aux bonzes syndicaux" (In England, the shop stewards make life difficult for the trade-union bigwigs)].

the working class. Wildcat strikes offer a categorical refutation of this claim. Also, the bureaucracy spares itself no effort to struggle against such strikes.

Let us take up again the example of the oxygen workers' strike. It was triggered while negotiations between the union (TGWU [[the Transport and General Workers' Union](#)]) and the employer over the renewal of the collective bargaining agreement had culminated in a relative success for the trade union. Yet the workers were not in agreement with the demand being presented by the union (instead of one week of additional vacation, they preferred a larger wage hike) and also they trusted neither the employer nor the union to apply the agreement—certain clauses of which, moreover, were unknown to them. The strikers had endowed themselves with a very strong organization, with a strike committee and general assemblies of the grassroots members that made the decisions; the call for solidarity from the workers in other sectors furnished them with amply sufficient funds. The topmost trade-union bigwigs went along in order to attempt to get them back to work, but they ran up first against the workers' refusal to let these bigwigs speak for them, and then, despite having passed this hurdle, against a hostile vote from the base. The workers returned to work only when faced with the layoffs of their comrades from other industries that were paralyzed by their strike. And yet, as the *Financial Times* itself admitted, this strike could, thanks to how it was organized, to grassroots [*de la base*] participation, and to its resources, break out again at any moment, even after the resumption of work.

The trouble caused to the trade unions and later to Labour on account of the wildcat strikes manifested itself on a more general level during the Trades Union Congress. Apart from a few efforts to work out a series of demands, which ended in leaving the initiative on this score to the particular trade-union federations, this Congress dealt particularly with the problem of wildcat strikes and the shop stewards. As is known, the stop stewards (who are extremely closely controlled by the base) do indeed often play a determining role in the organization of wildcat strikes. Yet, as they are at the same time the sole living connection through which the

bureaucracy is still in communication with its base, the only conclusion drawn from this debate was, apart from some severe judgments made about the conduct of the shop stewards, a decision to conduct an inquiry into their role...in order to talk about it again next year.

Thus, the trade unions and their political expression, Labour, find themselves largely discredited in the eyes of the employers *qua* instruments capable of keeping workers disciplined within production; it was not for nothing that the *Financial Times* deplored “the serious failure of communication between officials and their base”³ and exhorted the trade unions to find remedies for it. But also, the reformist organizations became even more seriously discredited in the eyes of the most combative and radical fraction of the working class.

True, this fraction has no rigid boundaries. In certain highly industrialized regions—in Scotland, for example—the workers conduct frequent and energetic struggles, often despite and even against their unions, while still remaining to a great extent attached to Labour. They thus extend their action on the level of economic demands by combining it with a traditional type of political action.

Yet it is increasingly obvious that, for a growing number of workers, a deep break is being established between the struggle against capitalism on the level of living conditions and labor conditions and one’s political attitude: they are staging wildcat strikes and voting Conservative. In order to explain this opposition, it must be granted that, in these workers’ view, politics in the traditional sense of the term no longer seems to concern real life, that for which they are ceaselessly struggling. In other terms, the reformist organizations no longer succeed in linking these two levels.

This is, in a sense, positive. This is how the proletariat’s experience of the true nature of the bureaucracy is starting to look in England, and it is the beginning of the affirmation of what politics signifies for the proletariat when

³T/E: The French is translated here, since Castoriadis provides no further information about this statement from the *Financial Times*.

faced with politics as it is practiced by the apparatuses in power. Yet it remains the case that broad strata of English workers voted Conservative. This measures the immensity of the task of revolutionaries who have to work to deepen and to enlarge these objectives and these methods of struggle being put forward in the factories in order to bring them to the level of overall politics, where alone they will be able to find their full signification and provide a solution to the problem of society. Capitalist society in England no longer includes any real reformist alternative but only a revolutionary alternative. One will be able to surpass the present-day "depoliticization" of English workers only if they succeed in acquiring an overall awareness of this alternative and in organizing themselves in order to carry it through to victory.

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The Signification of the Belgian Strikes*

See: http://libcom.org/files/cc_psw_v3.pdf

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*Originally published as “La Signification des grèves belges,” [*S. ou B.*, 32 \(April 1961\)](#): 1-4. Reprinted in *EMO2*, 255-61, and *EP2*, 393-97. [T/E: Translated in [*PSW3*](#), 1-6.]

**PART THREE:
THE REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENT
UNDER MODERN CAPITALISM**

BETA

FRENCH EDITORS: This third part reprints pp. 47-258 of *CMR2* (pp. 11-46 were published in the preceding part; pp. 259-316 will be reprinted in our edition's *What Democracy?* volume). The text published in *S. ou B.* and translated into English by Maurice Brinton was published as early as 1963 by the Solidarity group of London under the title *Modern Capitalism and Revolution* (with new editions in 1965 and 1974), and it has since been circulated, on the basis of the English or the French, in other languages and under various forms. A Spanish version (*Capitalismo moderno y revolución*), which took the English-language edition into account, was published in 1970 in Paris by Ruedo Ibérico in a translation by Enrique Escobar and Daniel de la Iglesia. The major themes of this text (and notably those of "privatization" and of the nature of modern capitalism) were broached anew by the author in quite a number of texts reprinted in our edition's *What Democracy?* volume.

Modern Capitalism and Revolution*

See: http://libcom.org/files/cc_psw_v2.pdf

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*1979 note: Originally published as “Le Mouvement révolutionnaire sous le capitalisme moderne,” “Le Mouvement révolutionnaire sous le capitalisme moderne (suite),” and “Le Mouvement révolutionnaire sous le capitalisme moderne (fin),” *S. ou B.*, 31-33 ([December 1960](#), [April](#) and [December](#) 1961): 51-81, 84-111, and 60-85, respectively. The first version of this text was published in the *Bulletin Intérieur*, no. 12, of the Socialisme ou Barbarie group (October 1959); the second in no. 17 (May 1960). On the controversy it has generated since the outset, the attempts to prevent or delay its publication, and, finally, the 1963 scission, see “Postface à ‘Recommencer la révolution,’” in *EMO2*, 373ff. [T/E: Translated as “Postface to ‘Recommencing the Revolution’” in *PSW3*, 80-88.] The first installment of the text (*S. ou B.*, no. 31) was preceded by the following notice: “The text presented here, whose ideas are not necessarily shared by the entire Socialisme ou Barbarie group, opens up a discussion on the problems of revolutionary politics in the present era which will be continued in the coming issues of this review.” This article was reprinted in *CMR2*, 47-203 [and in *EP2*, 403-528]. [T/E: It was first translated into English by Maurice Brinton as *Modern Capitalism and Revolution* (London: Solidarity, 1963 and 1965; 2nd ed., 1974). Both editions designate the author as “Paul Cardan.” The present translation (*PSW2*, 226-315) has made extensive use of Brinton’s version. Section titles from the English edition are placed in brackets. Following his practice, Castoriadis’s additions to the 1963 and 1965 English editions and the 1979 French edition are placed in brackets, preceded by the corresponding year. These additions, when written by the author in English, are printed verbatim, except for alterations in quotations, the “Americanization” of spellings and phrases, and minor editorial changes and corrections.]

Appendix to the First English Edition*

See: http://libcom.org/files/cc_psw_v2.pdf

BETA

*1979 note: The Appendix was written at the request of the English comrades of Solidarity to accompany the English translation (published in April 1965). I translated the Appendix into French, with a few slight modifications intended to aid in the understanding of the text. Reprinted in *CMR2*, 205-22 and *EP2*, 529-44. [T/E: This Appendix appeared in [PSW2](#), 316-25.]

Author's Introduction to the 1974 English Edition*

See: http://libcom.org/files/cc_psw_v2.pdf

BETA

*1979 note: The “Author’s Introduction to the 1974 English Edition” was written in English for Solidarity’s 1974 reprint edition of *Modern Capitalism and Revolution*; I translated it into French for inclusion in *CMR2*, 223-58, and *EP2*, 545-74. [T/E: The present version ([PSW2](#), 326-43) adopts the slight changes introduced in the 1979 French text, “Americanizes” the English text, and makes a number of minor editorial changes and corrections.]

APPENDIX: POTENTIAL FUTURE TRANSLATION PROJECTS*

BOOK-LENGTH TRANSLATION PROJECTS

FR2002A *Sujet et vérité dans le monde social-historique. Séminaires 1986-1987. La Création humaine, 1.* Texte établi, présenté et annoté par Enrique Escobar et Pascal Vernay. Paris: Éditions du Seuil.

FR2004A *Ce qui fait la Grèce. Tome 1. D'Homère à Héraclite. Séminaires 1982-1983. La Création humaine II.* Texte établi, présenté et annoté par Enrique Escobar, Myrto Gondicas et Pascal Vernay. Paris: Éditions du Seuil.

FR2009A *Histoire et création. Textes philosophiques inédits (1945-1967).* Réunis, présentés et annotés par Nicolas Poirier. Paris: Editions du Seuil.

FR2011A *Ce qui fait la Grèce. Tome 3. Thucydide, la force et le droit. Séminaires 1984-1985. La Création humaine IV.* Texte établi, présenté et annoté par Enrique Escobar, Myrto Gondicas et Pascal Vernay. Paris: Editions du Seuil.

FR2013A *Écrits politiques 1945-1997. Tome 3. Quelle démocratie? Tome 1.* Édition préparée par Enrique Escobar, Myrto Gondicas et Pascal Vernay. Paris: Éditions du Sandre.

FR2013B *Écrits politiques 1945-1997. Tome 4. Quelle démocratie? Tome 2.* Édition préparée par Enrique Escobar, Myrto Gondicas et Pascal Vernay. Paris: Éditions du Sandre.

*All date-letter references mentioned in this Appendix refer to the Bibliographies on the Cornelius Castoriadis/Agora International Website: <http://www.agorainternational.org/fr/bibliographies.html>; # = missing info.

FR2015A *Écrits politiques 1945-1997*. Tome 5. *La Société bureaucratique*. Édition préparée par Enrique Escobar, Myrto Gondicas et Pascal Vernay. Paris: Éditions du Sandre.

FR2016B *Écrits politiques 1945-1997*. Tome 6. *Guerre et théories de la guerre*. Édition préparée par Enrique Escobar, Myrto Gondicas et Pascal Vernay. Paris: Éditions du Sandre.

FR2020A *Écrits politiques 1945-1997*. tome 7. *Écologie et politique, suivi de Correspondances et compléments*. Édition préparée par Enrique Escobar, Myrto Gondicas et Pascal Vernay. Paris: Éditions du Sandre.

FR2020B *Écrits politiques 1945-1997*. Tome 8. *Sur la dynamique du capitalisme et autres textes, suivi de L'Impérialisme et la guerre*. Édition préparée par Enrique Escobar, Myrto Gondicas et Pascal Vernay. Paris: Éditions du Sandre.

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FR1982B “Table ronde. Égalités et inégalités: Héritage ou mythe occidental?” (“Le 29 septembre 1981”). *Ibid.*: 70-98; Castoriadis, *ibid.*: 70-72 et 87-88.

FR1983F Cornelius Castoriadis, René Girard, *et al.* “La contingence dans les affaires humaines. Débat Cornelius Castoriadis-René Girard” (13 juin 1981 au colloque de Cerisy). *L'Auto-organisation. De la physique au politique*. Sous la direction de Paul Dumouchel et Jean-Pierre Dupuy. Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1983: 282-301. Présentation. *Ibid.*: 281.

FR1983I “Je ne suis pas moins esclave de mon maître.” *Information et réflexion libertaire* (Lyon), 51 (été 1983): 33-35.

FR1987A “L'auto-organisation, du physique au politique” (entretien à Radio-France avec Gérard Ponthieu). *Création et*

désordre. Recherches et pensées contemporaines. Paris: L'Orignal/Radio-France, 1987: 39-46.

FR1987C “Imaginaire social et changement scientifique” (conférence-débat organisée par l'Action locale Bellevue le 23 mai 1985). *Sens et place des connaissances dans la société*. Paris: CNRS, 1987: 161-83.

FR1987H “L'histoire du savoir nous a pris par la peau du cou et nous a jetés au milieu de l'océan Pacifique de l'Être en nous disant: ‘Maintenant nagez!’” (“Un entretien [du 18 février 1987] mené par Dominique Bouchet”). *Lettre Science Culture*, 28 (octobre 1987): 1-2.

FR1988C “L'utilité de la connaissance dans les sciences de l'homme et dans les savoirs” (“table ronde présidée par Étienne Barilier”). *Revue européenne des sciences sociales*, 79 (avril 1988): 87-131; Castoriadis, *ibid.*: 91-95, 99-101, 102-03, 106, 107-08, 113-15, 116, 117-18, 122, 128-29, et 130.

FR1990A “Pour soi et subjectivité.” *Colloque de Cerisy. Arguments pour une méthode (Autour d'Edgar Morin)*. Sous la direction de Daniel Bournoux, Jean-Louis Le Moigne et Serge Proulx. Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1990: 118-27.

EN1991C “Cornelius Castoriadis interviewed by Paul Gordon.” *Free Associations*, 24 (1991): 483-506.

FR1991O “Fragments d'un séminaire philosophique.” *Ibid.*: 104-6.

EN1993D “Imagining Society—Cornelius Castoriadis Interview.” *Variant*, 15 (Autumn 1993): 40-43.

EN1994C “Cornelius and Cybèle Castoriadis: Writer Psychoanalyst, Paris, 1991.” *Fathers and Daughters: In Their Own Words*. Introduction by William Styron. Photographs by Mariana Cook. San Francisco: Chronicle Books: 1994: 66-67.

FR1995A “Tract” (texte pour une oeuvre d’art). Costis Triandaphylou. *Espace électrique*. Athens: Artbook, 1995: 41; voir: 26 (31 en grec), 63.

FR1997B “Conseils à un débutant: apprendre à discerner” (entretien par Nicolas Truong), *Le Monde de l’Education, de la culture et de la formation*, 244 (janvier 1997): 48-49.

FR1997C “Les carrefours du labyrinthe V” (conférence du 22 mars 1997). *Parcours. Les Cahiers du GREP Midi-Pyrénées*, 15-16 (septembre 1997): 385-410 (voir FR1998D).

FR1999D “Fragments d’un séminaire sur la vertu et l’autonomie.” *Areté. Revista de filosofia*, 11:1-2 (1999): 293-313.

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