

Listen,  
Marxist!

All the old crap of the thirties is coming back again—the shit about the "class line," the "role of the working class," the "trained cadres," the "vanguard party," and the "proletarian dictatorship." It's all back again, and in a more vulgarized form than ever. The Progressive Labor Party is not the only example, it is merely the worst. One smells the same shit in various offshoots of SDS, and in the Marxist and Socialist clubs on campuses, not to speak of the Trotskyist groups, the International Socialist Clubs, and Youth Against War and Fascism.

In the thirties, at least it was understandable. The United States was paralyzed by a chronic economic crisis, the deepest and longest in its history. The only living forces that seemed to be battering at the walls of capitalism were the great organizing drives of the CIO, with their dramatic sitdown strikes, their radical militancy, and their bloody clashes with the police. The political atmosphere throughout the entire world was charged by the electricity of the Spanish Civil War, the last of the classical workers' revolutions, when every radical sect in the American left could identify with its own militia columns in Madrid and Barcelona. That was thirty years ago. It was a time when anyone who cried out "Make love, not war" would have been regarded as a freak; the cry then was "Make jobs, not war"—the cry of an age burdened by scarcity, when the achievement of socialism entailed "sacrifices" and a "transition period" to an economy of material abundance. To an eighteen-year-old kid in 1937 the very concept of cybernation would have seemed like the wildest science fiction, a fantasy comparable to visions of space travel.

That eighteen-year-old kid has now reached fifty years of age, and his roots are planted in an era so remote as to differ *qualitatively* from the realities of the present period in the United States. Capitalism itself has changed since then, taking on increasingly stratified forms that could be anticipated only dimly thirty years ago. And now we are being asked to go back to the "class line," the "strategies," the "cadres" and the organizational forms of that distant period in almost blatant disregard of the new issues and possibilities that have emerged.

When the hell are we finally going to create a movement that looks to the future instead of to the past? When will we begin to learn from what is being born instead of what is dying? Marx, to his lasting credit, tried to do that in his own day; he tried to evoke a futuristic spirit in the revolutionary movement of the 1840s and 1850s. "The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living," he wrote in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*. "And just when they seem to be engaged in revolutionizing themselves and things, in creating something entirely new, precisely in such epochs of revolutionary crisis they anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past to their service and borrow from them names, battle slogans and costumes in order to present the new scene of world history in this time-honored disguise and borrowed language. Thus Luther donned the mask of the Apostle Paul, the revolution of 1789 to 1814 draped itself alternately as the Roman Republic and the Roman Empire, and the revolution of 1848 knew nothing better than to parody, in turn, 1789 and the tradition of 1793 to 1795. . . . The social revolution of the nineteenth century cannot draw its poetry from the past, but only from the future. It cannot begin with itself before it has stripped off all superstition in regard to the past. . . . In order to arrive at its content, the revolution of the nineteenth century must let the dead bury their dead. There the phrase went

beyond the content; here the content goes beyond the phrase."<sup>28</sup>

Is the problem any different today, as we approach the twenty-first century? Once again the dead are walking in our midst—ironically, draped in the name of Marx, the man who tried to bury the dead of the nineteenth century. So the revolution of our own day can do nothing better than parody, in turn, the October Revolution of 1917 and the civil war of 1918-1920, with its "class line," its Bolshevik Party, its "proletarian dictatorship," its puritanical morality, and even its slogan, "soviet power." The complete, all-sided revolution of our own day that can finally resolve the historic "social question," born of scarcity, domination and hierarchy, follows the tradition of the partial, the incomplete, the one-sided revolutions of the past, which merely changed the form of the "social question," replacing one system of domination and hierarchy by another. At a time when bourgeois society itself is in the process of disintegrating all the social classes that once gave it stability, we hear the hollow demands for a "class line." At a time when all the political institutions of hierarchical society are entering a period of profound decay, we hear the hollow demands for a "political party" and a "workers' state." At a time when hierarchy as such is being brought into question, we hear the hollow demands for "cadres," "vanguards" and "leaders." At a time when centralization and the state have been brought to the most explosive point of historical negativity, we hear the hollow demands for a "centralized movement" and a "proletarian dictatorship."

This pursuit of security in the past, this attempt to find a haven in a fixed dogma and an organizational hierarchy as substitutes for creative thought and praxis is bitter evidence of how little many revolutionaries are capable of "revolutionizing themselves and things," much less of revolutionizing society as a whole. The deep-rooted

conservatism of the PLP\* "revolutionaries" is almost painfully evident; the authoritarian leader and hierarchy replace the patriarch and the school bureaucracy; the discipline of the Movement replaces the discipline of bourgeois society; the authoritarian code of political obedience replaces the state; the credo of "proletarian morality" replaces the mores of puritanism and the work ethic. The old substance of exploitative society reappears in new forms, draped in a red flag, decorated by portraits of Mao (or Castro or Che) and adorned with the little "Red Book" and other sacred litanies.

The majority of the people who remain in the PLP today deserve it. If they can live with a movement that cynically dubs its own slogans into photographs of DRUM pickets; if they can read a magazine that asks whether Marcuse is a "copout or cop"; if they can accept a "discipline" that reduces them to poker-faced, programmed automata; if they can use the most disgusting techniques (techniques borrowed from the cesspool of bourgeois business operations and parliamentarianism) to manipulate other organizations; if they can parasitize virtually every action and situation merely to promote the growth of their party—even if this means defeat for the action itself—then they are beneath contempt. For these people to call themselves reds and describe attacks upon them as redbaiting is a form of McCarthyism in reverse. To rephrase Trotsky's juicy description of Stalinism, they are the syphilis of the

\* These lines were written when the Progressive Labor Party (PLP) exercised a great deal of influence in SDS. Although the PLP has now lost most of its influence in the student movement, the organization still provides a good example of the mentality and values prevalent in the Old Left. The above characterization is equally valid for most Marxist-Leninist groups, hence this passage and other references to the PLP have not been substantially altered.

t The Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement, part of the Detroit-based League of Revolutionary Black Workers.

radical youth movement today. And for syphilis there is only one treatment—an antibiotic, not an argument.

Our concern here is with those honest revolutionaries who have turned to Marxism, Leninism or Trotskyism because they earnestly seek a coherent social outlook and an effective strategy of revolution. We are also concerned with those who are awed by the theoretical repertory of Marxist ideology and are disposed to flirt with it in the absence of more systematic alternatives. To these people we address ourselves as brothers and sisters and ask for a serious discussion and a comprehensive re-evaluation. We believe that Marxism has ceased to be applicable to our time not because it is too visionary or revolutionary, but because it is not visionary or revolutionary enough. We believe it was born of an era of scarcity and presented a brilliant critique of that era, specifically of industrial capitalism, and that a new era is in birth which Marxism does not adequately encompass and whose outlines it only partially and onesidedly anticipated. We argue that the problem is not to "abandon" Marxism or to "annul" it, but to transcend it dialectically, just as Marx transcended Hegelian philosophy, Ricardian economics, and Blanquist tactics and modes of organization. We shall argue that in a more advanced stage of capitalism than Marx dealt with a century ago, and in a more advanced stage of technological development than Marx could have clearly anticipated, a new critique is necessary, which in turn yields new modes of struggle, of organization, of propaganda and of lifestyle. Call these new modes whatever you will, even "Marxism" if you wish. We have chosen to call this new approach post-scarcity anarchism, for a number of compelling reasons which will become evident in the pages that follow.

#### *THE HISTORICAL LIMITS OF MARXISM*

The idea that a man whose greatest theoretical contributions were made between 1840 and 1880 could "foresee"

the entire dialectic of capitalism is, on the face of it, utterly preposterous. If we can still learn much from Marx's insights, we can learn even more from the unavoidable errors of a man who was limited by an era of material scarcity and a technology that barely involved the use of electric power. We can learn how different our own era is from that of *all* past history, how qualitatively new are the potentialities that confront us, how unique are the issues, analyses and praxis that stand before us if we are to make a revolution and not another historical abortion.

The problem is not that Marxism is a "method" which must be reapplied to "new situations" or that "neo-Marxism" has to be developed to overcome the limitations of "classical Marxism." The attempt to rescue the Marxian pedigree by emphasizing the method over the system or by adding "neo" to a sacred word is sheer mystification if all the *practical* conclusions of the system flatly contradict these efforts.\* Yet this is precisely the state of affairs in Marxian exegesis today. Marxists lean on the fact that the system provides a brilliant interpretation of the past while willfully ignoring its utterly misleading features in dealing with the present and future. They cite the coherence that historical materialism and the class analysis give to the interpretation of history, the economic insights of *Capital* provides into the development of industrial capitalism, and

\* Marxism is above all a theory of praxis, or to place this relationship in its correct perspective, a praxis of theory. This is the very meaning of Marx's transformation of dialectics, which took it from the subjective dimension (to which the Young Hegelians still tried to confine Hegel's outlook) into the objective, from philosophical critique into social action. If theory and praxis become divorced, Marxism is not killed, it commits suicide. This is its most admirable and noble feature. The attempts of the cretins who follow in Marx's wake to keep the system alive with a patchwork of emendations, exegesis, and half-assed "scholarship" a la Maurice Dobb and George Novack are degrading insults to Marx's name and a disgusting pollution of everything he stood for.

the brilliance of Marx's analysis of earlier revolutions and the tactical conclusions he established, without once recognizing that qualitatively new problems have arisen which never existed in his day. Is it conceivable that historical problems and methods of class analysis based entirely on unavoidable scarcity can be transplanted into a new era of potential abundance? Is it conceivable that an economic analysis focused primarily on a "freely competitive" system of industrial capitalism can be transferred to a managed system of capitalism, where state and monopolies combine to manipulate economic life? Is it conceivable that a strategic and tactical repertory formulated in a period when coal and steel constituted the basis of industrial technology can be transferred to an age based on radically new sources of energy, on electronics, on cybernation?

As a result of this transfer, a theoretical corpus which was liberating a century ago is turned into a straitjacket today. We are asked to focus on the working class as the "agent" of revolutionary change at a time when capitalism visibly antagonizes and produces revolutionaries among virtually all strata of society, particularly the young. We are asked to guide our tactical methods by the vision of a "chronic economic crisis" despite the fact that no such crisis has been in the offing for thirty years.\* We are asked to accept a "proletarian dictatorship"—a long "transitional period" whose function is not merely the suppression of counterrevolutionaries but above all the development of a technology of abundance—at a time when a technology of abundance is at hand. We are asked to orient our "strategies" and "tactics" around poverty and material immiseration at a time when revolutionary sentiment is being generated by the banality of life under conditions of material abundance. We are asked to establish political parties,

\* In fact Marxists do very little talking about the "chronic [economic] crisis of capitalism" these days—despite the fact that this concept forms the focal point of Marx's economic theories.

centralized organizations, "revolutionary" hierarchies and elites, and a new state at a time when political institutions as such are decaying and when centralization, elitism and the state are being brought into question on a scale that has never occurred before in the history of hierarchical society.

We are asked, in short, to return to the past, to diminish instead of grow, to force the throbbing reality of our times, with its hopes and promises, into the deadening preconceptions of an outlived age. We are asked to operate with principles that have been transcended not only theoretically but by the very development of society itself. History has not stood still since Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky died, nor has it followed the simplistic direction which was charted out by thinkers—however brilliant—whose minds were still rooted in the nineteenth century or in the opening years of the twentieth. We have seen capitalism itself perform many of the tasks (including the development of a technology of abundance) which were regarded as socialist; we have seen it "nationalize" property, merging the economy with the state wherever necessary. We have seen the working class neutralized as the "agent of revolutionary change," albeit still struggling within a *bourgeois* framework for more wages, shorter hours and "fringe" benefits. The class struggle in the *classical* sense has not disappeared; it has suffered a more deadening fate by being co-opted into capitalism. The revolutionary struggle within the advanced capitalist countries has shifted to a historically new terrain: it has become a struggle between a generation of youth that has known no chronic economic crisis and the culture, values and institutions of an older, conservative generation whose perspective on life has been shaped by scarcity, guilt, renunciation, the work ethic and the pursuit of material security. Our enemies are not only the visibly entrenched bourgeoisie and the state apparatus but also an outlook which finds its support among liberals, social democrats,

the minions of a corrupt mass media, the "revolutionary" parties of the past, and, painful as it may be to the acolytes of Marxism, the worker dominated by the factory hierarchy, by the industrial routine, and by the work ethic. The point is that the divisions now cut across virtually all the traditional class lines and they raise a spectrum of problems that none of the Marxists, leaning on analogies with scarcity societies, could foresee.

### *THE MYTH OF THE PROLETARIA T*

Let us cast aside all the ideological debris of the past and cut to the theoretical roots of the problem. For our age, Marx's greatest contribution to revolutionary thought is his dialectic of social development. Marx laid bare the great movement from primitive communism through private property to communism in its higher form—a communal society resting on a liberatory technology. In this movement, according to Marx, man passes on from the domination of man by nature, to the domination of man by man, and finally to the domination of nature by man\* and from social domination as such. Within this larger dialectic, Marx examines the dialectic of capitalism itself—a social system which constitutes the last historical "stage" in the domination of man by man. Here, Marx makes not only profound contributions to contemporary revolutionary thought (particularly in his brilliant analysis of the commodity relationship) but also exhibits those limitations of time and place that play so confining a role in our own time.

The most serious of these limitations emerges from Marx's attempt to explain the transition from capitalism to socialism, from a class society to a classless society. It is vitally important to emphasize that this explanation was reasoned out almost entirely by analogy with the transi-

\* For ecological reasons, we do not accept the notion of the "domination of nature by man" in the simplistic sense that was passed on by Marx a century ago. For a discussion of this problem, see "Ecology and Revolutionary Thought."

tion of feudalism to capitalism—that is, *from one class society to another class society*, from one system of property to another. Accordingly, Marx points out that just as the bourgeoisie developed within feudalism as a result of the split between town and country (more precisely, between crafts and agriculture), so the modern proletariat developed within capitalism as a result of the advance of industrial technology. Both classes, we are told, develop social interests of their own—indeed, revolutionary social interests that throw them against the old society in which they were spawned. If the bourgeoisie gained control over economic life long before it overthrew feudal society, the proletariat, in turn, gains its own revolutionary power by the fact that it is "disciplined, united, organized" by the factory system.\* In both cases, the development of the productive forces becomes incompatible with the traditional system of social relations. "The integument is burst asunder." The old society is replaced by the new.

The critical question we face is this: can we explain the transition from a class society to a classless society by

\* It is ironic that Marxists who talk about the "economic power" of the proletariat are actually echoing the position of the anarcho-syndicalists, a position that Marx bitterly opposed. Marx was not concerned with the "economic power" of the proletariat but with its *political* power; notably the fact that it would become the majority of the population. He was convinced that the *industrial* workers would be driven to revolution primarily by material destitution which would follow from the tendency of capitalist accumulation; that, *organized* by the factory system and *disciplined* by industrial routine, they would be able to constitute trade unions and, above all, political parties, which in some countries would be obliged to use insurrectionary methods and in others (England, the United States, and in later years Engels added France) might well come to power in elections and legislate socialism into existence. Characteristically, many Marxists have been as dishonest with their Marx and Engels as the Progressive Labor Party has been with the readers of *Challenge*, leaving important observations untranslated or grossly distorting Marx's meaning.

means of the same dialectic that accounts for the transition of one class society to another? This is not a textbook problem that involves the juggling of logical abstractions but a very real and concrete issue for our time. There are profound differences between the development of the bourgeoisie under feudalism and the development of the proletariat under capitalism which Marx either failed to anticipate or never faced clearly. The bourgeoisie controlled economic life long before it took state power; it had become the dominant class materially, culturally and ideologically before it asserted its dominance politically. The proletariat does not control economic life. Despite its indispensable role in the industrial process, the industrial working class is not even a majority of the population, and its strategic economic position is being eroded by cybernation and other technological advances.\* Hence it requires an act of high consciousness for the proletariat to use its power to achieve a social revolution. Until now, the achievement of this consciousness has been blocked by the fact that the factory milieu is one of the most well-entrenched arenas of the work ethic, of hierarchical systems of management, of obedience to leaders, and in recent times of production committed to superfluous commodities and armaments. The factory serves not only to "discipline," "unite," and "organize" the workers, but also to do so in a thoroughly bourgeois fashion. In the factory,

\* This is as good a place as any to dispose of the notion that anyone is a "proletarian" who has nothing to sell but his labor power. It is true that Marx defined the proletariat in these terms, but he also worked out a historical dialectic in the development of the proletariat. The proletariat developed out of a propertyless exploited class, reaching its most advanced form in the *industrial* proletariat, which corresponded to the most advanced form of capital. In the later years of his life, Marx came to despise the Parisian workers, who were engaged preponderantly in the production of luxury goods, citing "our German workers"—the most robot-like in Europe—as the "model" proletariat of the world.

capitalistic production not only renews the social relations of capitalism with each working day, as Marx observed, it also renews the psyche, values and ideology of capitalism.

Marx sensed this fact sufficiently to look for reasons more compelling than the mere fact of exploitation or conflicts over wages and hours to propel the proletariat into revolutionary action. In his general theory of capitalist accumulation he tried to delineate the harsh, objective laws that force the proletariat to assume a revolutionary role. Accordingly he developed his famous theory of immiseration: competition between capitalists compels them to undercut each others' prices, which in turn leads to a continual reduction of wages and the absolute impoverishment of the workers. The proletariat is compelled to revolt because with the process of competition and the centralization of capital there "grows the mass of misery, oppression, slavery, degradation."<sup>\*</sup>

But capitalism has not stood still since Marx's day. Writing in the middle years of the nineteenth century, Marx could not be expected to grasp the full consequences of his insights into the centralization of capital and the development of technology. He could not be expected to foresee

<sup>\*</sup> The attempt to describe Marx's immiseration theory in international terms instead of national (as Marx did) is sheer subterfuge. In the first place, this theoretical legerdemain simply tries to sidestep the question of why immiseration has not occurred within the industrial strongholds of capitalism, the *only areas which form a technologically adequate point of departure for a classless society*. If we are to pin our hopes on the colonial world as "the proletariat," this position conceals a very real danger: genocide. America and her recent ally Russia have all the technical means to bomb the underdeveloped world into submission. A threat lurks on the historical horizon—the development of the United States into a truly fascist imperium of the nazi type. It is sheer rubbish to say that this country is a "paper tiger." It is a thermonuclear tiger and the American ruling class, lacking any cultural restraints, is capable of being even more vicious than the German.

that capitalism would develop not only from mercantilism into the dominant industrial form of his day—from state-aided trading monopolies into highly competitive industrial units—but further, that with the centralization of capital, capitalism returns to its mercantilist origins on a higher level of development and reassumes the state-aided monopolistic form. The economy tends to merge with the state and capitalism begins to "plan" its development instead of leaving it exclusively to the interplay of competition and market forces. To be sure, the system does not abolish the traditional class struggle, but manages to contain it, using its immense technological resources to assimilate the most strategic sections of the working class.

Thus the full thrust of the immiseration theory is blunted and in the United States the traditional class struggle fails to develop into the class war. It remains entirely within bourgeois dimensions. Marxism, in fact, becomes ideology. It is assimilated by the most advanced forms of the state capitalist movement—notably Russia. By an incredible irony of history, Marxian "socialism" turns out to be in large part the very state capitalism that Marx failed to anticipate in the dialectic of capitalism.\* The proletariat, instead of developing into a revolutionary class within the womb of capitalism, turns out to be an organ within the body of bourgeois society.

The question we must ask at this late date in history is whether a social revolution that seeks to achieve a classless society can emerge from a conflict between traditional classes in a class society, or whether such a social revolution can only emerge from the decomposition of the traditional classes, indeed from the emergence of an entirely new "class" *whose very essence is that it is a non-class*, a

<sup>\*</sup> Lenin sensed this and described "socialism" as "nothing but state capitalist monopoly *made to benefit the whole people*."<sup>29</sup> This is an extraordinary statement if one thinks out its implications, and a mouthful of contradictions.



growing stratum of revolutionaries. In trying to answer this question, we can learn more by returning to the broader dialectic which Marx developed for human society as a whole than from the model he borrowed from the passage of feudal into capitalist society. Just as primitive kinship clans began to differentiate into classes, so in our own day there is a tendency for classes to decompose into entirely new subcultures which bear a resemblance to non-capitalist forms of relationships. These are not strictly economic groups any more; in fact, they reflect the tendency of the social development to transcend the economic categories of scarcity society. They constitute, in effect, a crude, ambiguous *cultural* preformation of the movement of scarcity into post-scarcity society.

The process of class decomposition must be understood in all its dimensions. The word "process" must be emphasized here: the traditional classes do not disappear, nor for that matter does the class struggle. Only a social revolution could remove the prevailing class structure and the conflicts it engenders. The point is the traditional class struggle ceases to have revolutionary implications; it reveals itself as the physiology of the prevailing society, not as the labor pains of birth. In fact the traditional class struggle stabilizes capitalist society by "correcting" its abuses (in wages, hours, inflation, employment, etc.). The unions in capitalist society constitute themselves into a counter-"monopoly" to the industrial monopolies and are incorporated into the neomercantile stratified economy as an estate. Within this estate there are lesser or greater conflicts, but taken as a whole the unions strengthen the system and serve to perpetuate it.

To reinforce this class structure by babbling about the "role of the working class," to reinforce the traditional class struggle by imputing a "revolutionary" content to it, to infect the new revolutionary movement of our time with "workeritis" is *reactionary to the core*. How often do the Marxian doctrinaires have to be reminded that the his-

tory of the class struggle is the history of a disease, of the wounds opened by the famous "social question," of man's one-sided development in trying to gain control over nature by dominating his fellow man? If the byproduct of this disease has been technological advance, the main products have been repression, a horrible shedding of human blood, and a terrifying distortion of the human psyche.

As the disease approaches its end, as the wounds begin to heal in their deepest recesses, the process now unfolds toward wholeness; the *revolutionary* implications of the traditional class struggle lose their meaning as theoretical constructs and as social reality. The process of decomposition embraces not only the traditional class structure but also the patriarchal family, authoritarian modes of upbringing, the influence of religion, the institutions of the state, and the mores built around toil, renunciation, guilt and repressed sexuality. *The process of disintegration, in short, now becomes generalized and cuts across virtually all the traditional classes, values and institutions. It creates entirely new issues, modes of struggle and forms of organization and calls for an entirely new approach to theory and praxis.*

What does this mean concretely? Let us contrast two approaches, the Marxian and the revolutionary. The Marxian doctrinaire would have us approach the worker—or better, "enter" the factory—and proselytize him in "preference" to anyone else. The purpose?—to make the worker "class conscious." To cite the most neanderthal examples from the old left, one cuts one's hair, grooms oneself in conventional sports clothing, abandons pot for cigarettes and beer, dances conventionally, affects "rough" mannerisms, and develops a humorless, deadpan and pompous mien.

\* On this score, the Old Left projects its own neanderthal image on the American worker. Actually this image more closely approximates the character of the union bureaucrat or the Stalinist commissar.

One becomes, in short, what the worker is at his most caricaturized worst: not a "petty bourgeois degenerate," to be sure, but a *bourgeois* degenerate. One becomes an imitation of the worker insofar as the worker is an imitation of his masters. Beneath this metamorphosis of the student into the "worker" lies a vicious cynicism. One tries to use the discipline inculcated by the factory milieu to discipline the worker to the party milieu. One tries to use the worker's respect for the industrial hierarchy to wed the worker to the party hierarchy. This disgusting process, which if successful could lead only to the substitution of one hierarchy for another, is achieved by pretending to be concerned with the worker's economic day-to-day demands. Even Marxian theory is degraded to accord with this debased image of the worker. (See almost any copy of *Challenge—the National Enquirer* of the left. Nothing bores the worker more than this kind of literature.) In the end, the worker is shrewd enough to know that he will get better results in the day-to-day class struggle through his union bureaucracy than through a Marxian party bureaucracy. The forties revealed this so dramatically that within a year or two, with hardly any protest from the rank-and-file, unions succeeded in kicking out by the thousands "Marxians" who had done spade-work in the labor movement for more than a decade, even rising to the top leadership of the old CIO internationals.

The worker becomes a *revolutionary* not by becoming more of a worker but by undoing his "workerness." And in this he is not alone; the same applies to the farmer, the student, the clerk, the soldier, the bureaucrat, the professional—and the Marxist. The worker is no less a "bourgeois" than the farmer, student, clerk, soldier, bureaucrat, professional—and Marxist. His "workerness" is the *disease* he is suffering from, the social affliction telescoped to individual dimensions. Lenin understood this in *What Is to Be Done?* but he smuggled in the old hierarchy under a red

flag and some revolutionary verbiage. The worker begins to become a revolutionary when he undoes his "workerness," when he comes to detest his class status here and now, when he begins to shed exactly those features which the Marxists most prize in him—his work ethic, his character-structure derived from industrial discipline, his respect for hierarchy, his obedience to leaders, his consumerism, his vestiges of puritanism. In this sense, the worker becomes a revolutionary to the degree that he sheds his class status and achieves an *un*-class consciousness. He degenerates—and he degenerates magnificently. What he is shedding are precisely those *class* shackles that bind him to *all* systems of domination. He abandons those *class* interests that enslave him to consumerism, suburbia, and a bookkeeping conception of life.\*

The most promising development in the factories today is the emergence of young workers who smoke pot, fuck off on their jobs, drift into and out of factories, grow long or longish hair, demand more leisure time rather than more pay, steal, harass all authority figures, go on wildcats, and

The worker, in this sense, begins to approximate the socially transitional human types who have provided history with its most revolutionary elements. Generally, the "proletariat" has been most revolutionary in transitional periods, when it **was** least "proletarianized" psychically by the industrial system. The great focuses **of** the classical workers' revolutions were Petrograd and Barcelona, where the workers had been directly uprooted from **a** peasant background, and Paris, where they were still anchored in crafts or came directly from **a** craft background. These workers had the greatest difficulty in acclimating themselves to industrial domination and became **a** continual source **of** social and revolutionary unrest. By contrast, the stable hereditary working class tended to be surprisingly non-revolutionary. Even in the case **of** the German workers who were cited by Marx and Engels **as** models for the European proletariat, the majority did not support the Spartacists in **1919**. They returned large majorities **of** official Social Democrats to the Congress **of** Workers' Councils, and to the Reichstag in later years, and rallied consistently behind the Social Democratic Party right up to 1933.

turn on their fellow workers. Even more promising is the emergence of this human type in trade schools and high schools, the reservoir of the industrial working class to come. To the degree that workers, vocational students and high school students link their lifestyles to various aspects of the anarchic youth culture, to that degree will the proletariat be transformed from a force for the conservation of the established order into a force for revolution.

A qualitatively new situation emerges when man is faced with a transformation from a repressive class society, based on material scarcity, into a liberatory classless society, based on material abundance. From the decomposing traditional class structure a new human type is created in ever-increasing numbers: the *revolutionary*. This revolutionary begins to challenge not only the economic and political premises of hierarchical society, but hierarchy as such. He not only raises the need for social revolution but also tries to *live* in a revolutionary manner to the degree that this is possible in the existing society.\* He not only

\* This revolutionary lifestyle may develop in the factories as well as on the streets, in schools as well as in crashpads, in the suburbs as well as on the Bay Area-East Side axis. Its essence is defiance, and a personal "propaganda of the deed" that erodes all the mores, institutions and shibboleths of domination. As society begins to approach the threshold of the revolutionary period, the factories, schools and neighborhoods become the actual arena of revolutionary "play"—a "play" that has a very serious core. Strikes become a chronic condition and are called for their own sake to break the veneer of routine, to defy the society on an almost hourly basis, to shatter the mood of bourgeois normality. This new mood of the workers, students and neighborhood people is a vital precursor to the actual moment of revolutionary transformation. Its most conscious expression is the demand for "self-management"; the worker refuses to be a "managed" being, a class being. This process was most evident in Spain, on the eve of the 1936 revolution, when workers in almost every city and town called strikes "for the hell of it"—to express their independence, their sense of awakening, their break with the social order and with bourgeois conditions of life. It was also an essential feature of the 1968 general strike in France.

attacks the forms created by the legacy of domination, but also improvises new forms of liberation which take their poetry from the future.

This preparation for the future, this experimentation with liberatory post-scarcity forms of social relations, may be illusory if the future involves a substitution of one class society by another; it is indispensable, however, if the future involves a classless society built on the *ruins* of a class society. What, then, will be the "agent" of revolutionary change? It will be literally the great majority of society, drawn from all the different traditional classes and fused into a common revolutionary force by the decomposition of the institutions, social forms, values and lifestyles of the prevailing class structure. Typically, its most advanced elements are the youth—a generation that has known no chronic economic crisis and that is becoming less and less oriented toward the myth of material security so widespread among the generation of the thirties.

If it is true that a social revolution cannot be achieved without the active or passive support of the workers, it is no less true that it cannot be achieved without the active or passive support of the farmers, technicians and professionals. Above all, a social revolution cannot be achieved without the support of the youth, from which the ruling class recruits its armed forces. If the ruling class retains its armed might, the revolution is lost *no matter how many workers rally to its support*. This has been vividly demonstrated not only by Spain in the thirties but by Hungary in the fifties and Czechoslovakia in the sixties. The revolution of today—by its very nature, indeed, by its *pursuit of wholeness—wins* not only the soldier and the worker, *but the very generation from which soldiers, workers, technicians, farmers, scientists, professionals and even bureaucrats have been recruited*. Discarding the tactical handbooks of the past, the revolution of the future follows the path of least resistance, eating its way into the most susceptible areas of the population irrespective of their "class

position." It is nourished by *all* the contradictions in bourgeois society, not simply by the contradictions of the 1860s and 1917. Hence it attracts all those who feel the burdens of exploitation, poverty, racism, imperialism and, yes, those whose lives are frustrated by consumerism, suburbia, the mass media, the family, school, the supermarket and the prevailing system of repressed sexuality. Here the form of the revolution becomes as total as its content—classless, propertyless, hierarchyless, and *wholly* liberating.

To barge into this revolutionary development with the worn recipes of Marxism, to babble about a "class line" and the "role of the working class," amounts to a subversion of the present and the future by the past. To elaborate this deadening ideology by babbling about "cadres," a "vanguard party," "democratic centralism" and the "proletarian dictatorship" is sheer counterrevolution. It is to this matter of the "organizational question"—this vital contribution of Leninism to Marxism—that we must now direct some attention.

### *THE MYTH OF THE PARTY*

Social revolutions are not made by parties, groups or cadres, they occur as a result of deep-seated historic forces and contradictions that activate large sections of the population. They occur not merely because the "masses" find the existing society intolerable (as Trotsky argued) but also because of the tension between the actual and the possible, between what-is and what-could-be. Abject misery alone does not produce revolutions; more often than not, it produces an aimless demoralization, or worse, a private, personalized struggle to survive.

The Russian Revolution of **1917** weighs on the brain of the living like a nightmare because it was largely the product of "intolerable conditions," of a devastating imperialistic war. Whatever dreams it had were virtually destroyed by an even bloodier civil war, by famine, and by treachery.

What emerged from the revolution were the ruins not of an old society but of whatever hopes existed to achieve a new one. The Russian Revolution failed miserably; it replaced czarism by state capitalism.\* The Bolsheviks were the tragic victims of their own ideology and paid with their lives in great numbers during the purges of the thirties. To attempt to acquire any unique wisdom from this scarcity revolution is ridiculous. What we can learn from the revolutions of the past is what all revolutions have in common and their profound limitations compared with the enormous possibilities that are now open to us.

The most striking feature of the past revolutions is that

\* **A** fact which Trotsky never understood. He never followed through the consequences **of** his own concept **of** "combined development" to its logical conclusions. He **saw** (quite correctly) that czarist **Russia**, the latecomer **in** the European bourgeois development, necessarily acquired the most advanced industrial and class **forms** instead **of** recapitulating the entire bourgeois development from its beginnings. He neglected to consider that Russia, torn by tremendous internal upheaval, might even run ahead **of** the capitalist development elsewhere in Europe. Hypnotized by the formula "nationalized property equals socialism," he failed to recognize that monopoly capitalism itself tends to amalgamate with the state by its own inner dialectic. The Bolsheviks, having cleared away the traditional forms **of** bourgeois social organization (which still act **as a** rein on the state capitalist development in Europe and America), inadvertently prepared the ground for **a** "pure" state capitalist development in which the state finally becomes the ruling class. Lacking support from **a** technologically advanced Europe, the Russian Revolution became an internal counterrevolution; Soviet Russia became **a** form **of** state capitalism that does not "benefit the whole people." Lenin's analogy between "socialism" and state capitalism became **a** terrifying reality under Stalin. Despite its humanistic core, Marxism failed to comprehend how much its concept **of** "socialism" approximates **a** later stage **of** capitalism itself—the return to mercantile forms on **a** higher industrial level. The failure to understand this development led to devastating theoretical confusion in the contemporary revolutionary movement, **as** witness the splits among the Trotskyists over this question.

they began spontaneously. Whether one chooses to examine the opening phases of the French Revolution of **1789**, the revolutions of 1848, the Paris Commune, the **1905** revolution in Russia, the overthrow of the czar in 1917, the Hungarian revolution of 1956, or the French general strike of 1968, the opening stages are generally the same: a period of ferment explodes spontaneously into a mass upsurge. Whether the upsurge is successful or not depends on its resoluteness and on whether the troops go over to the people.

The "glorious party," when there is one, almost invariably lags behind the events. In February 1917 the Petrograd organization of the Bolsheviks opposed the calling of strikes precisely on the eve of the revolution which was destined to overthrow the czar. Fortunately, the workers ignored the Bolshevik "directives" and went on strike anyway. In the events which followed, no one was more surprised by the revolution than the "revolutionary" parties, including the Bolsheviks. As the Bolshevik leader Kayurov recalled: "Absolutely no guiding initiatives from the party were felt. . .the Petrograd committee had been arrested and the representative from the Central Committee, Comrade Shliapnikov, was unable to give any directives for the coming day."<sup>30</sup> Perhaps this was fortunate. Before the Petrograd committee was arrested, its evaluation of the situation and its own role had been so dismal that, had the workers followed its guidance, it is doubtful that the revolution would have occurred when it did.

The same kind of story could be told of the upsurges which preceded **1917** and those which followed—to cite only ~~the~~ most recent, the student uprising and general strike in France during May-June 1968. There is a convenient tendency to forget that close to a dozen "tightly centralized" Bolshevik-type organizations existed in Paris at this time. It is rarely mentioned that virtually every one of these "vanguard" groups disdained the student uprising

up to May 7, when the street fighting broke out in earnest. The Trotskyist Jeunesse Communiste Revolutionnaire was a notable exception—and it merely coasted along, essentially following the initiatives of the March 22nd Movement.\* Up to May **7** all the Maoist groups criticized the student uprising as peripheral and unimportant; the Trotskyist Federation des Etudiants Revolutionnaires regarded it as "adventuristic" and tried to get the students to leave the barricades on May **10**; the Communist Party, of course, played a completely treacherous role. Far from leading the popular movement, the Maoists and Trotskyists were its captives throughout. Ironically, most of these Bolshevik groups used manipulative techniques shamelessly in the Sorbonne student assembly in an effort to "control" it, introducing a disruptive atmosphere that demoralized the entire body. Finally, to complete the irony, all of these Bolshevik groups were to babble about the need for "centralized leadership" when the popular movement collapsed—a movement that occurred despite their "directives" and often in opposition to them.

Revolutions and uprisings worthy of any note not only have an initial phase that is magnificently anarchic *but also tend spontaneously to create their own forms of revolutionary self-management*. The Parisian sections of 1793-94 were the most remarkable forms of self-management to be created by any of the social revolutions in history. <sup>t</sup> More familiar in form were the councils or "soviets" which the

\* The March 22nd Movement functioned as a catalytic agent in the events, not **as a** leadership. It did not command; it instigated, leaving **a free** play to the events. This free play, which allowed the students to push ahead on their own momentum, **was** indispensable to the dialectic **of** the uprising, for without it there would have been **no** barricades on May **10**, which in turn triggered **off** the general strike **of** the workers.

**t See** "The Forms **of** Freedom."

Petrograd workers established in **1905**. Although less democratic than the sections, the councils were to reappear in a number of later revolutions. Still another form of revolutionary self-management were the factory committees which the anarchists established in the Spanish Revolution of **1936**. Finally, the sections reappeared as student assemblies and action committees in the May-June uprising and general strike in Paris in 1968.\*

At this point we must ask what role the "revolutionary" party plays in all these developments. In the beginning, as we have seen, it tends to have an inhibitory function, not a "vanguard" role. Where it exercises influence, it tends to slow down the flow of events, not "coordinate" the revolutionary forces. This is not accidental. The party is structured along hierarchical lines *that reflect the very society it professes to oppose*. Despite its theoretical pretensions, it is a bourgeois organism, a miniature state, with an apparatus and a cadre whose function it is to *seize* power, not *dissolve* power. Rooted in the prerevolutionary period, it assimilates all the forms, techniques and mentality of bureaucracy. Its membership is schooled in obedience and in the preconceptions of a rigid dogma and is taught to revere the leadership. The party's leadership, in turn, is schooled in habits born of command, authority, manipulation and egomania. This situation is worsened

\* With a sublime arrogance that is attributable partly to ignorance, a number of Marxist groups were to dub virtually **all** of the above forms of self-management as "Soviets." The attempt to bring **all** of these different forms under a single rubric is not only misleading but willfully obscurantist. The actual Soviets were the least democratic of the revolutionary forms and the Bolsheviks shrewdly used them to transfer the power to their own party. The Soviets were not based on face-to-face democracy, like the Parisian sections or the student assemblies of 1968. **Nor** were they based on economic self-management, like the Spanish anarchist factory committees. **The** Soviets actually formed a workers' parliament, hierarchically organized, which drew its representation from factories and later from military units and peasant villages.

when the party participates in parliamentary elections. **In** election campaigns, the vanguard party models itself completely on existing bourgeois forms and even acquires the paraphernalia of the electoral party. The situation assumes truly critical proportions when the party acquires large presses, costly headquarters and a large inventory of centrally controlled periodicals, and develops a paid "apparatus"—in short, a bureaucracy with vested material interests.

As the party expands, the distance between the leadership and the ranks invariably increases. Its leaders not only become "personages," they lose contact with the living situation below. The local groups, which know their own immediate situation better than any remote leader, are obliged to subordinate their insights to directives from above. The leadership, lacking any direct knowledge of local problems, responds sluggishly and prudently. Although it stakes out a claim to the "larger view," to greater "theoretical competence," the competence of the leadership tends to diminish as one ascends the hierarchy of command. The more one approaches the level where the real decisions are made, the more conservative is the nature of the decision-making process, the more bureaucratic and extraneous are the factors which come into play, the more considerations of prestige and retrenchment supplant creativity, imagination, and a disinterested dedication to revolutionary goals.

The party becomes less efficient from a revolutionary point of view the more it seeks efficiency by means of hierarchy, cadres and centralization. Although everyone marches in step, the orders are usually wrong, especially when events begin to move rapidly and take unexpected turns—as they do in all revolutions. The party is efficient in only one respect—in molding society in its own hierarchical image if the revolution is successful. It recreates bureaucracy, centralization and the state. It fosters the

bureaucracy, centralization and the state. It fosters the very social conditions which justify this kind of society. Hence, instead of "withering away," the state controlled by the "glorious party" preserves the very conditions which "necessitate" the existence of a state—and a party to "guard" it.

On the other hand, this kind of party is extremely vulnerable in periods of repression. The bourgeoisie has only to grab its leadership to destroy virtually the entire movement. With its leaders in prison or in hiding, the party becomes paralyzed; the obedient membership has no one to obey and tends to flounder. Demoralization sets in rapidly. The party decomposes not only because of the repressive atmosphere but also because of its poverty of inner resources.

The foregoing account is not a series of hypothetical inferences, it is a composite sketch of all the mass Marxian parties of the past century—the Social Democrats, the Communists, and the Trotskyist party of Ceylon (the only mass party of its kind). To claim that these parties failed to take their Marxian principles seriously merely conceals another question: why did this failure happen in the first place? The fact is, these parties were co-opted into bourgeois society because they were structured along bourgeois lines. The germ of treachery existed in them from birth.

The Bolshevik Party was spared this fate between 1904 and 1917 for only one reason: it was an illegal organization during most of the years leading up to the revolution. The party was continually being shattered and reconstituted, with the result that until it took power it never really hardened into a fully centralized, bureaucratic, hierarchical machine. Moreover, it was riddled by factions; the intensely factional atmosphere persisted throughout 1917 into the civil war. Nevertheless, the Bolshevik leadership was ordinarily extremely conservative, a trait that Lenin had to fight throughout 1917—first in his efforts to re-

orient the Central Committee against the provisional government (the famous conflict over the "April Theses"), later in driving the Central Committee toward insurrection in October. In both cases he threatened to resign from the Central Committee and bring his views to "the lower ranks of the party."

In 1918, factional disputes over the issue of the Brest-Litovsk treaty became so serious that the Bolsheviks nearly split into two warring communist parties. Oppositional Bolshevik groups like the Democratic Centralists and the Workers' Opposition waged bitter struggles within the party throughout 1919 and 1920, not to speak of oppositional movements that developed within the Red Army over Trotsky's propensity for centralization. The complete centralization of the Bolshevik Party—the achievement of "Leninist unity," as it was to be called later—did not occur until 1921, when Lenin succeeded in persuading the Tenth Party Congress to ban factions. By this time, most of the White Guards had been crushed and the foreign interventionists had withdrawn their troops from Russia.

It cannot be stressed too strongly that the Bolsheviks tended to centralize their party to the degree that they became isolated from the working class. This relationship has rarely been investigated in latter-day Leninist circles, although Lenin was honest enough to admit it. The story of the Russian Revolution is not merely the story of the Bolshevik Party and its supporters. Beneath the veneer of official events described by Soviet historians there was another, more basic, development—the spontaneous movement of the workers and revolutionary peasants, which later clashed sharply with the bureaucratic policies of the Bolsheviks. With the overthrow of the czar in February 1917, workers in virtually all the factories of Russia spontaneously established factory committees, staking out an increasing claim on industrial operations. In June 1917 an all-Russian conference of factory committees was held in

Petrograd which called for the "organization of thorough control by labor over production and distribution." The demands of this conference are rarely mentioned in Leninist accounts of the Russian Revolution, despite the fact that the conference aligned itself with the Bolsheviks. Trotsky, who describes the factory committees as "the most direct and indubitable representation of the proletariat in the whole country," deals with them peripherally in his massive three-volume history of the revolution. Yet so important were these spontaneous organisms of self-management that Lenin, despairing of winning the Soviets in the summer of 1917, was prepared to jettison the slogan "All Power to the Soviets" for "All Power to the Factory Committees." This demand would have catapulted the Bolsheviks into a completely anarcho-syndicalist position, although it is doubtful that they would have remained there very long.

With the October Revolution, all the factory committees seized control of the plants, ousting the bourgeoisie and completely taking control of industry. In accepting the concept of workers' control, Lenin's famous decree of November 14, 1917, merely acknowledged an accomplished fact; the Bolsheviks dared not oppose the workers at this early date. But they began to whittle down the power of the factory committees. In January 1918, a scant two months after "decreeing" workers' control, Lenin began to advocate that the administration of the factories be placed under trade union control. The story that the Bolsheviks "patiently" experimented with workers' control, only to find it "inefficient" and "chaotic," is a myth. Their "patience" did not last more than a few weeks. Not only did Lenin oppose direct workers' control within a matter of weeks after the decree of November 14, even union control came to an end shortly after it had been established. By the summer of 1918, almost all of Russian industry had been placed under bourgeois forms of

management. As Lenin put it, the "revolution demands ... precisely in the interests of socialism that the masses *unquestionably obey the single will* of the leaders of the labor process."\* Thereafter, workers' control was denounced not only as "inefficient," "chaotic" and "impractical," but also as "petty bourgeois"!

The Left Communist Osinsky bitterly attacked all of these spurious claims and warned the party: "Socialism and socialist organization must be set up by the proletariat itself, or they will not be set up at all; something else will be set up—state capitalism."<sup>31</sup> In the "interests of socialism" the Bolshevik party elbowed the proletariat out of every domain it had conquered by its own efforts and initiative. The party did not coordinate the revolution or even lead it; it dominated it. First workers' control and later union control were replaced by an elaborate hierarchy as monstrous as any structure that existed in pre-revolutionary times. As later years were to demonstrate, Osinsky's prophecy became reality.

The problem of "who is to prevail"—the Bolsheviks or the Russian "masses"—was by no means limited to the fac-

\* V. I. Lenin, "The Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government," in *Selected Works*, vol. 7 (International Publishers; New York, 1943), p. 342. In this harsh article, published in April 1918, Lenin completely abandoned the liberatarian perspective he had advanced the year before in *State and Revolution*. The main themes of the article are the needs for "discipline," for authoritarian control over the factories, and for the institution of the Taylor system (a system Lenin had denounced before the revolution as enslaving men to the machine). The article was written during a comparatively peaceful period of Bolshevik rule some two months after the signing of the Brest-Litovsk Treaty and a month before the revolt of the Czech Legion in the Urals—the revolt that started the civil war on a wide scale and opened the period of direct Allied intervention in Russia. Finally, the article was written nearly a year before the defeat of the German revolution. It would be difficult to account for the "Immediate Tasks" merely in terms of the Russian civil war and the failure of the European revolution.



tories. The issue reappeared in the countryside as well as the cities. A sweeping peasant war had buoyed up the movement of the workers. Contrary to official Leninist accounts, the agrarian upsurge was by no means limited to a redistribution of the land into private plots. In the Ukraine, peasants influenced by the anarchist militias of Nestor Makhno and guided by the communist maxim "From each according to his ability; to each according to his needs," established a multitude of rural communes. Elsewhere, in the north and in Soviet Asia, several thousand of these organisms were established, partly on the initiative of the Left Social Revolutionaries and in large measure as a result of traditional collectivist impulses which stemmed from the Russian village, the *mir*. It matters little whether these communes were numerous or embraced large numbers of peasants; the point is that they were authentic popular organisms, the nuclei of a moral and social spirit that ranged far above the dehumanizing values of bourgeois society.

The Bolsheviks frowned upon these organisms from the very beginning and eventually condemned them. To Lenin, the preferred, the more "socialist," form of agricultural enterprise was represented by the state farm—an agricultural factory in which the state owned the land and farming equipment, appointing managers who hired peasants on a wage basis. One sees in these *attitudes* toward workers' control and agricultural communes the essentially bourgeois spirit and mentality that permeated the Bolshevik Party—a spirit and mentality that emanated not only from its theories, but also from its corporate mode of organization. In December 1918 Lenin launched an attack against the communes on the pretext that peasants were being "forced" to enter them. Actually, little if any coercion was used to organize these communistic forms of self-management. As Robert G. Wesson, who studied the Soviet communes in detail, concludes: "Those who went into corn-

munes must have done so largely of their own volition."<sup>32</sup> The communes were not suppressed but their growth was discouraged until Stalin merged the entire development into the forced collectivization drives of the late twenties and early thirties.

By 1920 the Bolsheviks had isolated themselves from the Russian working class and peasantry. Taken together, the elimination of workers' control, the suppression of the Makhnovtsy, the restrictive political atmosphere in the country, the inflated bureaucracy and the crushing material poverty inherited from the civil war years generated a deep hostility toward Bolshevik rule. With the end of hostilities, a movement surged up from the depths of Russian society for a "third revolution"—not to restore the past, as the Bolsheviks claimed, but to realize the very goals of freedom, economic as well as political, that had rallied the masses around the Bolshevik program of 1917. The new movement found its most conscious form in the Petrograd proletariat and among the Kronstadt sailors. It also found expression in the party: the growth of anticentralist and anarcho-syndicalist tendencies among the Bolsheviks reached a point where a bloc of oppositional groups, oriented toward these issues, gained 124 seats at a Moscow provincial conference as against 154 for supporters of the Central Committee.

On March 2, 1921, the "red sailors" of Kronstadt rose in open rebellion, raising the banner of a "Third Revolution of the Toilers." The Kronstadt program centered around demands for free elections to the Soviets, freedom of speech and press for the anarchists and the left socialist parties, free trade unions, and the liberation of all prisoners who belonged to socialist parties. The most shameless stories were fabricated by the Bolsheviks to account for this uprising, acknowledged in later years as brazen lies. The revolt was characterized as a "White Guard plot" despite the fact that the great majority of Communist Party

members in Kronstadt joined the sailors—*precisely as Communists*—in denouncing the party leaders as betrayers of the October Revolution. As Robert Vincent Daniels observes in his study of Bolshevik oppositional movements: "Ordinary Communists were indeed so unreliable. . . that the government did not depend upon them either in the assault on Kronstadt itself or in keeping order in Petrograd, where Kronstadt's hopes for support chiefly rested. The main body of troops employed were Chekists and officer cadets from Red Army training schools. The final assault on Kronstadt was led by the top officialdom of the Communist Party—a large group of delegates to the Tenth Party Congress was rushed from Mosow for this purpose."<sup>33</sup> So weak was the regime internally that the elite had to do its own dirty work.

Even more significant than the Kronstadt revolt was the strike movement that developed among the Petrograd workers, a movement that sparked the uprising of the sailors. Leninist histories do not recount this critically important development. The first strikes broke out in the Troubotchny factory on February 23, 1921. Within a matter of days the movement swept one factory after another, until by February 28 the famous Putilov works—the "crucible of the Revolution"—went on strike. Not only were economic demands raised, the workers raised distinctly political ones, anticipating all the demands that were to be raised by the Kronstadt sailors a few days later. On February 24, the Bolsheviks declared a "state of siege" in Petrograd and arrested the strike leaders, suppressing the workers' demonstrations with officer cadets. The fact is, the Bolsheviks did not merely suppress a "sailors' mutiny"; they crushed the working class itself. It was at this point that Lenin demanded the banning of factions in the Russian Communist Party. Centralization of the party was now complete—and the way was paved for Stalin.

We have discussed these events in detail because they

lead to a conclusion that the latest crop of Marxist-Leninists tend to avoid: the Bolshevik Party reached its maximum degree of centralization in Lenin's day *not to achieve a revolution or suppress a White Guard counterrevolution, but to effect a counterrevolution of its own against the very social forces it professed to represent*. Factions were prohibited and a monolithic party created not to prevent a "capitalist restoration" but to contain a mass movement of workers for soviet democracy and social freedom. The Lenin of 1921 stood opposed to the Lenin of 1917.

Thereafter, Lenin simply floundered. This man who above all sought to anchor the problems of his party in social contradictions found himself literally playing an organizational "numbers game" in a last-ditch attempt to arrest the very bureaucratization he had himself created. There is nothing more pathetic and tragic than Lenin's last years. Paralyzed by a simplistic body of Marxist formulas, he can think of no better countermeasures than organizational ones. He proposes the formation of the Workers' and Peasants' Inspection to correct bureaucratic deformations in the party and state—and this body falls under Stalin's control and becomes highly bureaucratic in its own right. Lenin then suggests that the size of the Workers' and Peasants' Inspection be reduced and that it be merged with the Control Commission. He advocates enlarging the Central Committee. Thus it rolls along: this body to be enlarged, that one to be merged with another, still a third to be modified or abolished. The strange ballet of organizational forms continues up to his very death, as though the problem could be resolved by organizational means. As Mosche Lewin, an obvious admirer of Lenin, admits, the Bolshevik leader "approached the problems of government more like a chief executive of a strictly 'elitist' turn of mind. He did not apply methods of social analysis to the government and was content to consider it purely in terms of organizational methods."<sup>34</sup>

If it is true that in the bourgeois revolutions the "phrase went beyond the content," in the Bolshevik revolution the forms replaced the content. The Soviets replaced the workers and their factory committees, the party replaced the Soviets, the Central Committee replaced the Party, and the Political Bureau replaced the Central Committee. In short, means replaced ends. This incredible substitution of form for content is one of the most characteristic traits of Marxism-Leninism. In France during the May-June events, all the Bolshevik organizations were prepared to destroy the Sorbonne student assembly in order to increase their influence and membership. Their principal concern was not the revolution or the authentic social forms created by the students, but the growth of their own parties.

Only one force could have arrested the growth of bureaucracy in Russia: a social force. Had the Russian proletariat and peasantry succeeded in increasing the domain of self-management through the development of viable factory committees, rural communes and free Soviets, the history of the country might have taken a dramatically different turn. There can be no question that the failure of socialist revolutions in Europe after the First World War led to the isolation of the revolution in Russia. The material poverty of Russia, coupled with the pressure of the surrounding capitalist world, clearly militated against the development of a socialist or a consistently libertarian society. But by no means was it ordained that Russia had to develop along state capitalist lines; contrary to Lenin's and Trotsky's initial expectations, the revolution was defeated by internal forces, not by invasion of armies from abroad. Had the movement from below restored the initial achievements of the revolution in 1917, a multifaceted social structure might have developed, based on workers' control of industry, on a freely developing peasant economy in agriculture, and on a living interplay of ideas, programs and political movements. At the very

least, Russia would not have been imprisoned in totalitarian chains and Stalinism would not have poisoned the world revolutionary movement, paving the way for fascism and the Second World War.

The development of the Bolshevik Party, however, precluded this development—Lenin's or Trotsky's "good intentions" notwithstanding. By destroying the power of the factory committees in industry and by crushing the Makhnovtsy, the Petrograd workers and the Kronstadt sailors, the Bolsheviks virtually guaranteed the triumph of the Russian bureaucracy over Russian society. The centralized party—a completely bourgeois institution—became the refuge of counterrevolution in its most sinister form. This was covert counterrevolution that draped itself in the red flag and the terminology of Marx. Ultimately, what the Bolsheviks suppressed in 1921 was not an "ideology" or a "White Guard conspiracy," but an *elemental struggle of the Russian people* to free themselves of their shackles and take control of their own destiny.\* For Russia, this meant the nightmare of Stalinist dictatorship; for the generation of the thirties it meant the horror of fascism and the

\* **In** interpreting this elemental movement **of** the Russian workers and peasants **as a series of** "White Guard conspiracies," "acts **of** kulak resistance," and "plots **of** international capital," the Bolsheviks reached an incredible theoretical **low** and deceived no one but themselves. **A** spiritual erosion developed within the party that paved the way for the politics **of** the secret police, for character assassination, and finally for the Moscow trials and the annihilation **of** the Old Bolshevik cadre. One sees the return **of** this odious mentality in **PL** articles like "Marcuse: Cop-out or Cop?"—the theme **of** which **is** to establish Marcuse **as an agent of** the CIA. (See *Progressive Labor*, February 1969.) The article has **a** caption under **a** photograph **of** demonstrating Parisians which reads: "Marcuse got to Paris too late to stop the May action." Opponents **of** the **PLP** are invariably described by this rag **as** "redbaiters" and **as** "anti-worker." **If** the American left does not repudiate this police approach and character assassination it will pay bitterly in the years to come.

treachery of the Communist parties in Europe and the United States.

### *THE TWO TRADITIONS*

It would be incredibly naive to suppose that Leninism was the product of a single man. The disease lies much deeper, not only in the limitations of Marxian theory but in the limitations of the social era that produced Marxism. If this is not clearly understood, we will remain as blind to the dialectic of events today as Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky were in their own day. For us this blindness will be all the more reprehensible because behind us lies a wealth of experience that these men lacked in developing their theories.

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels were centralists—not only politically, but socially and economically. They never denied this fact and their writings are studded with glowing encomiums to political, organizational and economic centralization. As early as March 1850, in the famous "Address of the Central Council to the Communist League," they call upon the workers to strive not only for "the single and indivisible German republic, but also strive in it for the most decisive centralization of power in the hands of the state authority." Lest the demand be taken lightly, it is repeated continually in the same paragraph, which concludes: "As in France in 1793, so today in Germany the carrying through of the strictest centralization is the task of the really revolutionary party."

The same theme reappears continually in later years. With the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War, for example, Marx writes to Engels: "The French need a thrashing. If the Prussians win, the centralization of state power will be useful for the centralization of the German working class."<sup>35</sup>

Marx and Engels, however, were not centralists because

they believed in the virtues of centralism per se. Quite the contrary: both Marxism and anarchism have always agreed that a liberated, communist society entails sweeping decentralization, the dissolution of bureaucracy, the abolition of the state, and the breakup of the large cities. "Abolition of the antithesis between town and country is not merely possible," notes Engels in *Anti-Duhring*. "It has become a direct necessity . . . the present poisoning of the air, water and land can be put to an end only by the fusion of town and country. . . ." To Engels this involves a "uniform distribution of the population over the whole country"<sup>36</sup>—in short, the physical decentralization of the cities.

The origins of Marxian centralism are in problems arising from the formation of the national state. Until well into the latter half of the nineteenth century, Germany and Italy were divided into a multitude of independent duchies, principalities and kingdoms. The consolidation of these geographic units into unified nations, Marx and Engels believed, was a *sine qua non* for the development of modern industry and capitalism. Their praise of centralism was engendered not by any centralistic mystique but by the events of the period in which they lived—the development of technology, trade, a unified working class, and the national state. Their concern on this score, in short, is with the emergence of capitalism, with the tasks of the bourgeois revolution in an era of unavoidable material scarcity. Marx's approach to a "proletarian revolution," on the other hand, is markedly different. He enthusiastically praises the Paris Commune as a "model to all the industrial centers of France." "This regime," he writes, "once established in Paris and the secondary centers, the old centralized government would in the provinces, too, have to give way to the *self-government of the producers*." (Emphasis added.) The unity of the nation, to be sure, would not

disappear, and a central government would exist during the transition to communism, but its functions would be limited.

Our object is not to bandy about quotations from Marx and Engels but to emphasize how key tenets of Marxism—which are accepted so uncritically today—were in fact the product of an era that has long been transcended by the development of capitalism in the United States and Western Europe. In his day Marx was occupied not only with the problems of the "proletarian revolution" but also with the problems of the bourgeois revolution, particularly in Germany, Spain, Italy and Eastern Europe. He dealt with the problems of transition from capitalism to socialism in capitalist countries which had not advanced much beyond the coal-steel technology of the Industrial Revolution, and with the problems of transition from feudalism to capitalism in countries which had scarcely advanced much beyond handicrafts and the guild system. To state these concerns broadly, Marx was occupied above all with the *preconditions* of freedom (technological development, national unification, material abundance) rather than with the *conditions* of freedom (decentralization, the formation of communities, the human scale, direct democracy). His theories were still anchored in the realm of *survival*, not the realm of *life*.

Once this is grasped it is possible to place Marx's theoretical legacy in meaningful perspective—to separate its rich contributions from its historically limited, indeed paralyzing, shackles on our own time. The Marxian dialectic, the many seminal insights provided by historical materialism, the superb critique of the commodity relationship, many elements of the economic theories, the theory of alienation, and above all the notion that freedom has material preconditions—these are lasting contributions to revolutionary thought.

By the same token, Marx's emphasis on the industrial

proletariat as the "agent" of revolutionary change, his "class analysis" in explaining the transition from a class to a classless society, his concept of the proletarian dictatorship, his emphasis on centralism, his theory of capitalist development (which tends to jumble state capitalism with socialism), his advocacy of political action through electoral parties—these and many related concepts are false in the context of our time and were misleading, as we shall see, even in his own day. They emerge from the limitations of his vision—more properly, from the limitations of his time. They make sense only if one remembers that Marx regarded capitalism as historically progressive, as an indispensable stage to the development of socialism, and they have practical applicability only to a time when Germany in particular was confronted by bourgeois-democratic tasks and national unification. (We are not trying to say that Marx was correct in holding this approach, merely that the approach makes sense when viewed in its time and place.)

Just as the Russian Revolution included a subterranean movement of the "masses" which conflicted with Bolshevism, so there is a subterranean movement in history which conflicts with all systems of authority. This movement has entered into our time under the name of "anarchism," although it has never been encompassed by a single ideology or body of sacred texts. Anarchism is a libidinal movement of humanity against coercion in any form, reaching back in time to the very emergence of propertied society, class rule and the state. From this period onward, the oppressed have resisted all forms that seek to imprison the spontaneous development of social order. Anarchism has surged to the foreground of the social arena in periods of major transition from one historical era to another. The decline of the ancient and feudal world witnessed the upsurge of mass movements, in some cases wildly Dionysian in character, that demanded an end to all systems of authority, privilege and coercion.

The anarchic movements of the past failed largely because material scarcity, a function of the low level of technology, vitiated an organic harmonization of human interests. Any society that could promise little more materially than equality of poverty invariably engendered deep-seated tendencies to restore a new system of privilege. In the absence of a technology that could appreciably reduce the working day, the need to work vitiated social institutions based on self-management. The Girondins of the French Revolution shrewdly recognized that they could use the working day against revolutionary Paris. To exclude radical elements from the sections, they tried to enact legislation which would end all assembly meetings before 10 p.m., the hour when Parisian workers returned from their jobs. Indeed, it was not only the manipulative techniques and the treachery of the "vanguard" organizations that brought the anarchic phases of past revolutions to an end, it was also the material limits of past eras. The "masses" were always compelled to return to a lifetime of toil and rarely were they free to establish organs of self-management that could last beyond the revolution.

Anarchists such as Bakunin and Kropotkin, however, were by no means wrong in criticizing Marx for his emphasis on centralism and his elitist notions of organization. Was centralism absolutely necessary for technological advances in the past? Was the nation-state indispensable to the expansion of commerce? Did the workers' movement benefit by the emergence of highly centralized economic enterprises and the "indivisible" state? We tend to accept these tenets of Marxism too uncritically, largely because capitalism developed within a centralized political arena. The anarchists of the last century warned that Marx's centralistic approach, insofar as it affected the events of the time, would so strengthen the bourgeoisie and the state apparatus that the overthrow of capitalism would be extremely difficult. The revolutionary party, by duplicating

these centralistic, hierarchical features, would reproduce hierarchy and centralism in the postrevolutionary society.

Bakunin, Kropotkin and Malatesta were not so naive as to believe that anarchism could be established overnight. In imputing this notion to Bakunin, Marx and Engels willfully distorted the Russian anarchist's views. Nor did the anarchists of the last century believe that the abolition of the state involved "laying down arms" immediately after the revolution, to use Marx's obscurantist choice of terms, thoughtlessly repeated by Lenin in *State and Revolution*. Indeed, much that passes for "Marxism" in *State and Revolution* is pure anarchism—for example, the substitution of revolutionary militias for professional armed bodies and the substitution of organs of self-management for parliamentary bodies. What is authentically Marxist in Lenin's pamphlet is the demand for "strict centralism," the acceptance of a "new" bureaucracy, and the identification of soviets with a state.

The anarchists of the last century were deeply preoccupied with the question of achieving industrialization without crushing the revolutionary spirit of the "masses" and rearing new obstacles to emancipation. They feared that centralization would reinforce the ability of the bourgeoisie to resist the revolution and instill in the workers a sense of obedience. They tried to rescue all those precapitalist communal forms (such as the Russian *mir* and the Spanish *pueblo*) which might provide a springboard to a free society, not only in a structural sense but also a spiritual one. Hence they emphasized the need for decentralization even under capitalism. In contrast to the Marxian parties, their organizations gave considerable attention to what they called "integral education"—the development of the *whole* man—to counteract the debasing and banalizing influence of bourgeois society. The anarchists tried to live by the values of the future to the extent that this was possible under capitalism. They believed in direct action to

foster the initiative of the "masses," to preserve the spirit of revolt, to encourage spontaneity. They tried to develop organizations based on mutual aid and brotherhood, in which control would be exercised from below upward, not downward from above.

We must pause here to examine the nature of anarchist organizational forms in some detail, if only because the subject has been obscured by an appalling amount of rubbish. Anarchists, or at least anarcho-communists, accept the need for organization.\* It should be as absurd to have to repeat this point as to argue over whether Marx accepted the need for social revolution.

The real question at issue here is not organization versus non-organization, but rather what *kind* of organization the anarcho-communists try to establish. What the different kinds of anarcho-communist organizations have in common is organic developments from below, not bodies engineered into existence from above. They are social movements, combining a creative revolutionary lifestyle with a creative revolutionary theory, not political parties whose mode of life is indistinguishable from the surrounding bourgeois environment and whose ideology is reduced to rigid "tried and tested programs." As much as is humanly possible, they try to reflect the liberated society they seek to achieve, not slavishly duplicate the prevailing system of hierarchy, class and authority. They are built around intimate groups of brothers and sisters—affinity groups—whose ability to act in common is based on initiative, on convictions freely arrived at, and on a deep personal

involvement, not around a bureaucratic apparatus fleshed out by a docile membership and manipulated from above by a handful of all-knowing leaders.

The anarcho-communists do not deny the need for coordination between groups, for discipline, for meticulous planning, and for unity in action. But they believe that coordination, discipline, planning, and unity in action must be achieved *voluntarily*, by means of a self-discipline nourished by conviction and understanding, not by coercion and a mindless, unquestioning obedience to orders from above. They seek to achieve the effectiveness imputed to centralism by means of voluntarism and insight, not by establishing a hierarchical, centralized structure. Depending upon needs or circumstances, affinity groups can achieve this effectiveness through assemblies, action committees, and local, regional or national conferences. But they vigorously oppose the establishment of an organizational structure that becomes an end in itself, of committees that linger on after their practical tasks have been completed, of a "leadership" that reduces the "revolutionary" to a mindless robot.

These conclusions are not the result of flighty "individualist" impulses; quite to the contrary, they emerge from an exacting study of past revolutions, of the impact centralized parties have had on the revolutionary process, and of the nature of social change in an era of potential material abundance. Anarcho-communists *seek to preserve and extend the anarchic phase that opens all the great social revolutions*. Even more than Marxists, they recognize that revolutions are produced by deep historical processes. No central committee "makes" a social revolution; at best it can stage a *coup d'état*, replacing one hierarchy by another—or worse, arrest a revolutionary process if it exercises any widespread influence. A central committee is an organ for acquiring power, for *recreating* power, for gathering to itself what the "masses" have achieved by

\* **The** term "anarchist" is a generic word like the term "socialist," and there are probably **as** many different kinds of anarchists **as** there are socialists. **In** both cases, the spectrum ranges from individuals whose views derive from an extension of liberalism (the "individualist anarchists," the social-democrats) to revolutionary communists (the anarcho-communists, the revolutionary Marxists, Leninists and Trotskyists).

their own revolutionary efforts. One must be blind to all that has happened over the past two centuries not to recognize these essential facts.

In the past, Marxists could make an intelligible (although invalid) claim for the need for a centralized party, because the anarchic phase of the revolution was nullified by material scarcity. Economically, the "masses" were always compelled to return to a daily life of toil. The revolution closed at ten o'clock, quite aside from the reactionary intentions of the Girondins of 1793; it was arrested by the low level of technology. Today even this excuse has been removed by the development of a post-scarcity technology, notably in the U.S. and Western Europe. A point has now been reached where the "masses" can begin, almost overnight, to expand drastically the "realm of freedom" in the Marxian sense—to acquire the leisure time needed to achieve the highest degree of self-management.

What the May-June events in France demonstrated was not the need for a Bolshevik-type party but the need for greater consciousness among the "masses." Paris demonstrated that an organization is needed to propagate ideas systematically—and not ideas alone, but *ideas which promote the concept of self-management*. What the French "masses" lacked was not a central committee or a Lenin to "organize" or "command" them, but the conviction that they could have *operated* the factories instead of merely occupying them. It is noteworthy that *not a single Bolshevik-type party in France raised the demand of self-management*. The demand was raised only by the anarchists and the Situationists.

There is a need for a revolutionary organization—but its function must always be kept clearly in mind. Its first task is propaganda, to "patiently explain," as Lenin put it. In a revolutionary situation, the revolutionary organization presents the most advanced demands: it is prepared at every turn of events to formulate—in the most concrete

fashion—the immediate task that should be performed to advance the revolutionary process. It provides the boldest elements in action and in the decision-making organs of the revolution.

In what way, then, do anarcho-communist groups differ from the Bolshevik type of party? Certainly not on such issues as the need for organization, planning, coordination, propaganda in all its forms or the need for a social program. Fundamentally, they differ from the Bolshevik type of party in their belief that genuine revolutionaries must function *within the framework of the forms created by the revolution*, not within the forms created by the party. What this means is that their commitment is to the revolutionary organs of self-management, not to the revolutionary "organization"; to the *social* forms, not the *political* forms. Anarcho-communists seek to persuade the factory committees, assemblies or Soviets to make themselves into *genuine organs of popular self-management*, not to dominate them, manipulate them, or hitch them to an all-knowing political party. Anarcho-communists do not seek to rear a state structure over these popular revolutionary organs but, on the contrary, to dissolve all the organizational forms developed in the prerevolutionary period (including their own) into these genuine revolutionary organs.

These differences are decisive. Despite their rhetoric and slogans, the Russian Bolsheviks never believed in the soviets; they regarded them as instruments of the Bolshevik Party, an attitude which the French Trotskyists faithfully duplicated in their relations with the Sorbonne students' assembly, the French Maoists with the French labor unions, and the Old Left groups with SDS. By 1921, the Soviets were virtually dead, and all decisions were made by the Bolshevik Central Committee and Political Bureau. Not only do anarcho-communists seek to prevent Marxist parties from repeating this; they also wish to prevent their



own organization from playing a similar role. Accordingly, they try to prevent bureaucracy, hierarchy and elites from emerging in their midst. No less important, they attempt to *remake themselves*; to root out from their own personalities those authoritarian traits and elitist propensities that are assimilated in hierarchical society almost from birth. The concern of the anarchist movement with lifestyle is not merely a preoccupation with its own integrity, but with the integrity of the revolution itself.\*

In the midst of all the confusing ideological cross-currents of our time, one question must always remain in the foreground: what the hell are we trying to make a revolution for? Are we trying to make a revolution to recreate hierarchy, dangling a shadowy dream of future freedom before the eyes of humanity? Is it to promote further technological advance, to create an even greater abundance of goods than exists today? It is to "get even" with the bourgeoisie? Is it to bring **PL** to power? Or the Communist Party? Or the Socialist Workers Party? Is it to emancipate abstractions such as "The Proletariat," "The People," "History," "Society"?

Or is it finally to dissolve hierarchy, class rule and coercion—to *make it possible for each individual to gain control of his everyday life*? Is it to make each moment as marvelous as it could be and the life span of each individual an utterly fulfilling experience? If the true purpose of revolution is to bring the neanderthal men of **PL** to power, it is not worth making. We need hardly argue the

\* It is this **goal**, we may add, that motivates anarchist dadaism, the anarchist flipout that produces the creases **of** consternation on the wooden faces **of PLP** types. The anarchist flipout attempts to shatter the internal values inherited from hierarchical society, to explode the rigidities instilled by the bourgeois socialization process. In short, it is an attempt to break down the superego that exercises such a paralyzing effect upon spontaneity, imagination and sensibility and to restore a sense **of** desire, possibility and the marvelous—**of** revolution **as** a liberating, joyous festival.

inane questions of whether individual development can be severed from social and communal development; obviously the two go together. The basis for a whole human being is a rounded society; the basis for a free human being is a free society.

These issues aside, we are still faced with the question that Marx raised in **1850**: when will we begin to take our poetry from the future instead of the past? The dead must be permitted to bury the dead. Marxism is dead because it was rooted in an era of material scarcity, limited in its possibilities by material want. The most important social message of Marxism is that freedom has material preconditions—we must survive in order to live. With the development of a technology that could not have been conceived by the wildest science fiction of Marx's day, the possibility of a post-scarcity society now lies before us. All the institutions of propertied society—class rule, hierarchy, the patriarchal family, bureaucracy, the city, the state—have been exhausted. Today, decentralization is not only desirable as a means of restoring the human scale, it is necessary to recreate a viable ecology, to preserve life on this planet from destructive pollutants and soil erosion, to preserve a breathable atmosphere and the balance of nature. The promotion of spontaneity is necessary if the social revolution is to place each individual in control of his everyday life.

The old forms of struggle do not totally disappear with the decomposition of class society, but they are being transcended by the issues of a classless society. There can be no social revolution without winning the workers, hence they must have our active solidarity in every struggle they wage against exploitation. We fight against social crimes wherever they appear—and industrial exploitation is a profound social crime. But so are racism, the denial of the right to self-determination, imperialism and poverty profound social crimes—and for that matter so are pollu-

tion, rampant urbanization, the malignant socialization of the young, and sexual repression. As for the problem of winning the working class to the revolution, we must bear in mind that a precondition for the existence of the bourgeoisie is the development of the proletariat. Capitalism as a social system presupposes the existence of *both* classes and is perpetuated by the development of both classes. We begin to undermine the premises of class rule to the degree that we foster the declassifying of the non-bourgeois classes, at least institutionally, psychologically and culturally.

For the first time in history, the anarchic phase that opened all the great revolutions of the past can be preserved as a permanent condition by the advanced technology of our time. The anarchic institutions of that phase—the assemblies, the factory committees, the action committees—can be stabilized as the elements of a liberated society, as the elements of a new system of self-management. Will we build a movement that can defend them? Can we create an organization of affinity groups that is capable of dissolving into these revolutionary institutions? Or will we build a hierarchical, centralized, bureaucratic party that will try to dominate them, supplant them, and finally destroy them?

Listen, Marxist: The organization we try to build is the kind of society our revolution will create. Either we will shed the past—in ourselves as well as in our groups—or there will simply be no future to win.

New York  
May 1969

## A Note on Affinity Groups

The term "affinity group" is the English translation of the Spanish *grupo de afinidad*, which was the name of an organizational form devised in pre-Franco days as the basis of the redoubtable Federation Anarquista Iberica, the Iberian Anarchist Federation. (The FAI consisted of the most idealistic militants in the CNT, the immense anarcho-syndicalist labor union.) A slavish imitation of the FAI's forms of organization and methods would be neither possible nor desirable. The Spanish anarchists of the thirties were faced with entirely different social problems from those which confront American anarchists today. The affinity group form, however, has features that apply to any social situation, and these have often been intuitively adopted by American radicals, who call the resulting organizations "collectives," "communes" or "families."

The affinity group could easily be regarded as a new type of extended family, in which kinship ties are replaced by deeply empathetic human relationships—relationships nourished by common revolutionary ideas and practice. Long before the word "tribe" gained popularity in the American counterculture, the Spanish anarchists called their congresses *asambleas de las tribus*—assemblies of the tribes. Each affinity group is deliberately kept small to allow for the greatest degree of intimacy between those who compose it. Autonomous, communal and directly democratic, the group combines revolutionary theory with revolutionary lifestyle in its everyday behavior. It creates a free space in which revolutionaries can remake themselves individually, and also as social beings.

Affinity groups are intended to function as catalysts within the popular movement, not as "vanguards"; they provide initiative and consciousness, not a "general staff"

and a source of "command." The groups proliferate on a molecular level and they have their own "Brownian movement." Whether they link together or separate is determined by living situations, not by bureaucratic fiat from a distant center. Under conditions of political repression, affinity groups are highly resistant to police infiltration. Owing to the intimacy of the relationships between the participants, the groups are often difficult to penetrate and, even if penetration occurs, there is no centralized apparatus to provide the infiltrator with an overview of the movement as a whole. Even under such demanding conditions, affinity groups can still retain contact with each other through their periodicals and literature.

During periods of heightened activity, on the other hand, nothing prevents affinity groups from working together closely on any scale required by a living situation. They can easily federate by means of local, regional or national assemblies to formulate common policies and they can create temporary action committees (like those of the French students and workers in 1968) to coordinate specific tasks. Affinity groups, however, are always rooted in the popular movement. Their loyalties belong to the social forms created by the revolutionary people, not to an impersonal bureaucracy. As a result of their autonomy and localism, the groups can retain a sensitive appreciation of new possibilities. Intensely experimental and variegated in lifestyles, they act as a stimulus on each other as well as on the popular movement. Each group tries to acquire the resources needed to function largely on its own. Each group seeks a rounded body of knowledge and experience in order to overcome the social and psychological limitations imposed by bourgeois society on individual development. Each group, as a nucleus of consciousness and experience, tries to advance the spontaneous revolutionary movement of the people to a point where the group can finally disappear into the organic social forms created by the revolution.

A Discussion on  
"Listen,  
Marxist!"

D

*Robert B. Carson, in an article published in the April 1970 issue of Monthly Review, writes that the "major thrust" of 'Listen, Marxist!' is to "destroy a class-based analysis of society and revolutionary activity." This criticism has been made by many Marxists who read the article. \**

Carson's accusation is quite absurd. I seriously doubt if he did more than skim the article. Carson goes on to say that my approach is "ahistorical" and that I try to promote a "crude kind of individualistic anarchism"—this despite the fact that a large portion of the article attempts to draw important historical lessons from earlier revolutions and despite the fact that the article is unequivocally committed to anarcho-communism.

The most interesting thing about Carson's criticism is what it reveals about the theoretical level of many Marxists. Apparently Carson regards a *futuristic* approach as "ahistorical." He also seems to regard my belief that freedom exists only when each individual controls his daily life as "a crude kind of individualistic anarchism." Here we get to the nub of the problem. Futurism and individual freedom are indeed the "main thrust" of the pamphlet. Carson's reply confirms *precisely* what the pamphlet set out to prove about Marxism today, namely that Marxism (I do not speak of Marx here) is *not* futuristic and that its perspectives are oriented not toward concrete, existential

\* This is an edited summary of several discussions on "Listen, Marxist!," most of which occurred at my anarcho-communism class at Alternate U, New York's liberation school. I have selected the most representative and recurrent questions raised by readers of the pamphlet.

freedom, but toward an abstract freedom—freedom for "Society," for the "Proletariat," for *categories* rather than for people. Carson's first charge, I might emphasize, should be leveled not only at me but at Marx—at his futurism in the *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon*.

As to the charge that I am opposed to a "class-based analysis of society and revolutionary activity," need I say that a "class analysis" permeates the pamphlet? Is it conceivable that I could have terms like "capitalist" and "bourgeois" without working with a "class-based analysis"? Originally I thought there could have been no doubt about the matter. I have since changed the expression "class analysis" in the text to "class line," and perhaps I had better explain the difference this change is meant to convey.

What Carson is *really* saying is that I do not have a *Marxist* "class analysis"—a "class analysis" in which the industrial proletariat is driven to revolution by destitution and immiseration. Carson apparently assumes that Marx's traditional "class *line*" exhausts all there is to say about the class struggle. And in this respect, he assumes far too much. One need only turn to Bakunin, for example, to find a class analysis that was quite different from Marx's—and more relevant today. Bakunin believed that the industrial proletariat by no means constitutes the most revolutionary class in society. He never received the credit due him for predicting the *embourgeoisement* of the industrial working class with the development of capitalist industry. In Bakunin's view, the most revolutionary class was not the industrial proletariat—"a class always increasing in numbers, and disciplined, united, organized by the very mechanisms of capitalist production itself" (Marx)—but the uprooted peasantry and urban *declasses*; the rural and urban lumpen elements Marx so heartily despised. We need go no further than the urban centers of America—not to

speak of the rice paddies of Asia—to find how accurate Bakunin was by comparison with Marx.

As it turned out, the development of capitalist industry not only "disciplined," "united" and "organized" the working class but, *by these very measures*, denatured the proletariat for generations. By contrast, the transitional and lumpenized classes of society today (such as blacks, drop-out youth, people like students, intellectuals and artists who are not rooted in the factory system, and young workers whose allegiance to the work ethic has been shaken by cultural factors) are the most radical elements in the world today.

A "class analysis" does not necessarily begin and end with Marx's nineteenth-century version, a version I regard as grossly inaccurate. The class struggle, moreover, does not begin and end at the point of production. It may emerge from the poverty of the unemployed and unemployables, many of whom have never done a day's work in industry; it may emerge from a new sense of possibility that slowly pervades society—the tension between "what is" and "what could be"—which percolates through virtually all traditional classes; it may emerge from the cultural and physical decomposition of the traditional class structure on which the social stability of capitalism was based. Finally, every class struggle is not necessarily revolutionary. The class struggle between the original Roman *proletarius* and *patricius* was decidedly reactionary and eventually ended, as Marx observed in the opening lines of the *Communist Manifesto*, "in the common ruin of the contending classes."<sup>37</sup>

Today, not only poverty but also a relative degree of affluence is causing revolutionary unrest—a factor Marx never anticipated. Capitalism, having started out by proletarianizing the urban *declasses*, is now ending its life-cycle by creating new urban *declasses*, including "shiftless"

young industrial workers who no longer take the jobs, the factory discipline or the work ethic seriously. This stratum of *declasses* rests on a new economic base—a post-scarcity technology, automation, a relative degree of material abundance—and it prefigures culturally the classless society the Marxists so devoutly envision as humanity's future. One would have thought that this remarkable dialectic, this "negation of the negation," would have stirred a flicker of understanding in the heavy thinkers of the Marxist movement.

*It would be difficult to conceive of a revolution in any industrially advanced capitalist country without the support of the industrial proletariat.*

Of course. And "Listen, Marxist!" makes no claim that a social revolution is possible without the participation of the industrial proletariat. The article, in fact, tries to show how the proletariat can be won to the revolutionary movement by stressing issues that concern the quality of life and work. I agree, of course, with the libertarian Marxists and anarcho-syndicalists, who raise the slogan "workers' management of production." I wonder, however, if this slogan goes far enough now. My suspicion is that the workers, when they get into revolutionary motion, will demand even more than control of the factories. I think they will demand the elimination of toil, or, what amounts to the same thing, freedom from work. Certainly a drop-out outlook is growing among kids from working-class families—high school kids who are being influenced by the youth culture.

Although many other factors may contribute to the situation, it remains true that the workers will develop revolutionary views to the degree that they shed their traditional working-class traits. Young workers, I think, will increasingly demand leisure and the abolition of alienated

labor. The young Marx, I might add, was not indifferent to the development of unconventional values in the proletariat. In *The Holy Family*, he cites with obvious favor a Parisian working-class girl in Eugene Sue's *The Wandering Jew* who gives of her love and loyalty spontaneously, disdain marriage and bourgeois conventions. He notes, "she constitutes a really human contrast to the hypocritical, narrow-hearted, self-seeking wife of the bourgeois, to the whole circle of the bourgeoisie, that is, to the official circle."<sup>38</sup> The working class, in the young Marx's view, is the negation of capitalism not only in that it suffers total alienation, abasement and dehumanization, but also in that it affirms life forces and human values. Unfortunately, observations of this kind tend to fade away as Marx's socialism becomes increasingly "objectivist" and "scientific" (the admirers of Marx's famous—but untranslated and little-read—*Grundrisse* notwithstanding). The later Marx begins to prize the bourgeois traits of the worker—the worker's "discipline," "practicality," and "realism"—as the characteristics necessary for a revolutionary class.

The approach which Marx followed in *The Holy Family* was, I think, the correct one. Trapped by the notion that the working class, *qua* class, implied the liquidation of class society, Marx failed to see that this class was the alter ego of the bourgeoisie. Only a new cultural movement could rework the outlook of the proletariat—and deproletarianize it. Ironically, the Parisian working-class girls of Marx's youth were not industrial workers, but rather people of transitional classes who straddled small- and large-scale production. They were largely lumpenized elements, like the *sans-culottes* of the French Revolution.

*If the analysis in "Listen, Marxist!" is "class-based," what is the nature of the class struggle?*

The class struggle does not center around material ex-

ploitation alone but also around spiritual exploitation. In addition, entirely new issues emerge: coercive attitudes, the quality of work, ecology (or, stated in more general terms, psychological and environmental oppression). Moreover, the alienated and oppressed sectors of society are now the *majority* of the people, not a single class defined by its relationship to the means of production; the more radical as well as more liberatory sensibilities appear in the younger, not in the more "mature," age groups. Terms like "classes" and "class struggle," conceived of almost entirely as economic categories and relations, are too one-sided to express the *universalization* of the struggle. Use these limited expressions if you like (the target is still a ruling class and a class society), but this terminology, with its traditional connotations, does not reflect the sweep and the multi-dimensional nature of the struggle. Words like "class struggle" fail to encompass the cultural and spiritual revolt that is taking place along with the economic struggle.

*"Listen, Marxist!" speaks a great deal about the potentialities of a post-scarcity society, but what of the actualities? There is still a great deal of poverty and hunger in the U.S. Inflation is a growing problem, not to speak of unemployment, bad housing, racial discrimination, work speed-ups, trade union bureaucracy, and the danger of fascism, imperialism and war.*

"Listen, Marxist!" was written to deal with the simplifications of social problems (the economic and Third World-oriented "either/or" notions) that were developing in the "New Left." The post-scarcity viewpoint advanced in the pamphlet was not designed to replace one simplification (class struggle) by another (utopia). Yes, these economic, racial and bureaucratic actualities exist for millions of people in the U.S. and abroad. Any revolutionary move-

ment that fails to deal energetically and militantly with them will be as distorted as a movement that deals with them, singly or severally, to the exclusion of all others. My writings on post-scarcity possibilities, ecology, utopia, the youth culture and alienation are intended to help fill a major gap in radical theory and praxis, not to create another gap.

The really important problem we face is how the actualities of the present scarcity society are related to—and conditioned by—the potentialities for a future post-scarcity society. So far as this really dialectical problem is concerned, the heavy thinkers of the "left" show themselves to be incredibly light-minded and narrowly empirical. In the industrialized Western world, scarcity has to be enforced, so great is the productive potential of technology. Today economic planning has one basic purpose: to confine a highly advanced technology within a commodity framework. Many of the social problems which were endured almost passively a generation ago are now regarded as intolerable because the tension between "what is" and "what could be" has reached a point where "what is" seems utterly irrational. This tension adds an explosive character to many actualities that evoked only a flicker of protest a quarter of a century ago. Moreover, the tension between "what is" and "what could be" conditions all the traditional economic and social issues that have occupied radical movements for generations. We can no longer deal with these issues adequately unless we view them in the light of the economic, social and cultural possibilities of post-scarcity.

Let me present a concrete example. Assume there is a struggle by welfare mothers to increase their allotments. In the past, the mothers were organized by liberal groups or Stalinists; petitions were drawn up, demonstrations were organized, and *perhaps* a welfare center or two was occupied. Almost invariably, one of the groups or parties

trotted out a "reform candidate" who promised that, if elected, he would fight "unflinchingly" for higher welfare expenditures. The entire struggle was contained within the organizational forms and institutions of the system: formal meetings of the mothers (with the patronizing "organizers" pulling the strings), formal modes of actions (petitions, demonstrations, elections for public office), and maybe a modest amount of direct action. The issue pretty much came to an end with a compromise on allotment increases and perhaps a lingering formal organization to oversee (and later sell out) future struggles around welfare issues.

Here actuality triumphed completely over potentiality. At best, a few mothers might be "radicalized," which meant that they joined (or were shamelessly used by) organizations such as the Communist Party to promote their political influence. For the rest, most of the welfare mothers returned to the shabbiness of their daily lives and to varying degrees of passivity as human beings. Nothing was really changed for those who did not ego trip as "leaders," "politicals" and "organizers."

To revolutionaries with a "post-scarcity consciousness" (to use Todd Gitlin's phrase), this kind of situation would be intolerable. Without losing sight of the concrete issues that initially motivated the struggle, revolutionaries would try to catalyze an order of relationships between the mothers entirely different from relationships the usual organizational format imposes. They would try to foster a deep sense of community, a rounded human relationship that would transform the very subjectivity of the people involved. Groups would be small, in order to achieve the full participation of everyone involved. Personal relationships would be intimate, not merely issue-oriented. People would get to *know* each other, to *confront* each other; they would *explore* each other with a view toward achieving the most complete, unalienated relationships. Women would discuss sexism as well as their welfare allotments,

child-rearing as well as harassment by landlords, their dreams and hopes as human beings as well as the cost of living.

From this intimacy there would grow, hopefully, a supportive system of kinship, mutual aid, sympathy and solidarity in daily life. The women might collaborate to establish a rotating system of baby sitters and child-care attendants, the cooperative buying of good food at greatly reduced prices, the common cooking and partaking of meals, the mutual learning of survival skills and new social ideas, the fostering of creative talents, and many other shared experiences. Every aspect of life that could be explored and changed would be one part of the new kinds of relationships. This "extended family"—based on explored affinities and collective activities—would replace relationships mediated by "organizers," "chairmen," an "executive committee," *Robert's Rules of Order*; elites, and political manipulators.

The struggle for increased allotments would expand beyond the welfare system to the schools, the hospitals, the police, the physical, cultural, aesthetic and recreational resources of the neighborhood, the stores, the houses, the doctors and lawyers in the area, and so on—into the very ecology of the district.

What I have said on this issue could be applied to every issue—unemployment, bad housing, racism, work conditions—in which an insidious assimilation of bourgeois modes of functioning is masked as "realism" and "actuality." The new order of relationships that could be developed from a welfare struggle is Utopian only in the sense that actuality is informed and conditioned by post-scarcity consciousness. The future penetrates the present; it recasts the way people "organize" and the goals for which they strive.

*Perhaps a post-scarcity perspective is possible in the U.S. and Europe, but it is hard to see how a post-scarcity*



*approach has any relevance for the Third World, where technological development is grossly inadequate to meet the most elementary needs of the people. It would seem that the libertarian revolution and the non-coercive, unmediated social forms that are possible for the U.S. and Europe would have to be supplanted by the rigorous planning of highly centralized, coercive institutions in Asia, Africa and Latin America. Carl Oglesby has even argued that to help these continents catch up with the U.S., it will be necessary for Americans to work ten or twelve hours daily to produce the goods needed.*

I think we must dispel the confusion that exists about the Third World. This confusion, due partly to the superficiality of knowledge about the Third World, has done enormous harm to radical movements in the First World. "Third World" ideology in the U.S., by promoting a mindless imitation of movements in Asia and Latin America, leads to a bypassing of the social tasks in the First World. The result is that American radicals have often eased the tasks of American imperialism by creating an alien movement that does not speak to issues at home. The "Movement" (whatever *that* is) is isolated and the American people are fair game for every tendency, reactionary as well as liberal, that speaks to their problems.

I think we should begin with some essentials. The Third World is *not* engaged in a "socialist revolution." One must be grossly ignorant of Marxism—the favored ideology of the Third World fetishists—in order to overlook the *real* nature of the struggle in Asia, Africa and Latin America. These areas are still taking up the tasks that capitalism resolved for the U.S. and Europe more than a century ago—national unification, national independence and industrial development. The Third World takes up these tasks in an era when state capitalism is becoming predominant in the U.S. and Europe, with the result that its own

social forces have a highly stratified character. Socialism and advanced forms of state capitalism are not easy to distinguish from each other, especially if one's conception of "socialism" is highly schematic. Drape hierarchy with a red flag, submerge the crudest system of primitive accumulation and forced collectivization in rhetoric about the interests of "the People" or "the Proletariat," cover up hierarchy, elitism and a police state with huge portraits of Marx, Engels and Lenin, print little "Red Books" that invite the most authoritarian adulation and preach the most inane banalities in the name of "dialectics" and "socialism"—and any gullible liberal who is becoming disenchanted with his ideology, yet is totally unconscious of the bourgeois conditioning he has acquired from the patriarchal family and authoritarian school, can suddenly become a flaming "revolutionary" socialist.

The whole process is disgusting—all the more so because it stands at odds with every aspect of reality. One is tempted to scream: "Look, motherfucker! Help the Third World by fighting capitalism at home! Don't cop out by hiding under Ho's and Mao's skirts when your real job is to overthrow domestic capitalism by dealing with the real possibilities of an American revolution! Develop a revolutionary project at home because every revolutionary project here is *necessarily* internationalist and anti-imperialist, no matter how much its goals and language are limited to the American condition." Oglesby's hostility to a post-scarcity approach on the grounds that we will have to work ten or twelve hours daily to meet the Third World's needs is simply preposterous. To assume that the working day will be increased by an American revolution is to invite its defeat before the first blow is struck. If, in some miraculous way, Oglesby's "revolution" were to be victorious, surely he doesn't think that the American people would accept an increased working day without a strong, centralized state apparatus cracking its whip over

the entire population. In which case, one wonders what kind of "aid" such a regime would "offer" to the Third World?

Like many of the "Third World" zealots, Oglesby seems to have an incomplete knowledge of America's industrial capacity and the real needs of the Third World. Roughly seventy percent of the American labor force does absolutely no productive work that could be translated into terms of real output or the maintenance of a rational system of distribution. Their work is largely limited to servicing the commodity economy—filing, billing, book-keeping for a profit and loss statement, sales promotion, advertising, retailing, finance, the stock market, government work, military work, police work, etc., *ad nauseam*. Roughly the same percentage of the goods produced is such pure garbage that people would voluntarily stop consuming it in a rational society. Working hours could be reduced enormously after a revolution without losing high productive output, provided that the available labor supply and raw materials were used rationally. The quality of the productive output, moreover, could be so improved that its durability and usefulness would more than cancel out any reduction in productive capacity.

On the other side, let us look more closely at the material needs of the Third World. As Westerners, "we" tend to assume out of hand that "they" want or need the same kind of technologies and commodities that capitalism produced in America and Europe. This crude assumption is bolstered by the fear consciously generated by imperialist ideology, that millions of black, brown, and yellow people are hungrily eyeing "our" vast resources and standard of living. This ideology reminds us how lucky "we" are to be Americans or Europeans, enjoying the blessings of "free enterprise," and how menacing "they" are, festering in poverty, misery and the ills of overpopulation. Ironically, the "Third World" zealots share this ideology in the sense

that they, too, conceive of Asian, African and Latin American needs in Western terms—an approach that might be called the Nkrumah mentality of technological gigantism. Whatever is living and vital in the precapitalist society of the Third World is sacrificed to industrial *machismo*, oozing with the egomaniacal elitism of the newly converted male radical.

Perhaps no area of the world is more suitable for an eco-technology than the Third World.\* Most of Asia, Africa and Latin America lie in the "solar belt," between latitudes 40 degrees north and south, where solar energy can be used with the greatest effectiveness for industrial and domestic purposes. New, small-scale technologies are more easily adapted for use in the underdeveloped areas than elsewhere. The small-scale gardening technologies, in fact, are indispensable for the productive use of the soil types that are prevalent in semi-tropical, tropical, and highland biomes. The peasantry in these areas have a long tradition of technological know-how in terracing and horticulture, for which small machines are already available or easily designable. Great strides have been made in developing an irrigation technology to provide year-round water resources for agriculture and industry. A unique combination could be made of machine and handcrafts, crafts in which these areas still excel. With advances in the standard of living and in education, the population of these areas could be expected to stabilize sufficiently to remove pressure on the land. What the Third World needs above all is a rational, sophisticated communications network to redistribute food and manufactures from areas of plentiful supply to those in need.

A technology of this kind could be developed for the

\* The alternatives to a "Western"-type technology for the Third World and the resolution of the "population problem" in this area will be discussed in some detail in my forthcoming book, *The Ecology of Freedom*, to be published by Alfred A. Knopf and as a Vintage paperback.

Third World fairly rapidly by American and European industry without placing undue strain on the resources of the West. The rational use of such a technology presupposes a sweeping social revolution in the Third World itself—a revolution, I believe, that would almost immediately follow a social revolution in the U.S. With the removal of imperialism's mailed fist, a new perspective could open for the Third World. The village would acquire a new sense of unity with the elimination of the local hierarchies appointed by the central governments which have so heavily parasitized the regions. An exchange economy would continue to exist in the Third World, although its base would probably be collectivist. In any case, the exploitation of labor and the domination of women by men would be eliminated, thus imposing severe restrictions on the use of income differentials for exploitative purposes.\* The resources of the First World could be used to promote the most revolutionary social alternatives—a people's movement as against an authoritarian one, decentralized, immediate relations as against centralized mediated institutions.

It would be difficult to say what kind of institutional structure would emerge from revolutionary changes in the Third World following a complete social revolution in the First World. Until now, the Third World has been obliged to fight imperialism largely on its own. Although there has been a great deal of international solidarity from millions of people in Europe and the U.S. for Third World struggles, there has been no real, disinterested material support

\* More can be learned, I think, from the impact the Spanish anarchist movement had on the village economy than from Mao or Ho and the movements they spoke for. Unfortunately, very little information on this development is available in English. The spontaneous takeover and collectivization of the land by Spanish *pueblos* during the early weeks of Franco's rebellion provides us with one of the most remarkable accounts of how the peasantry can respond to libertarian influence.

from these key industrial areas. One wonders what will happen when a revolutionary United States and Europe begin to aid the Third World fully and disinterestedly, with nothing but the well being of the African, Asian and Latin American peoples at issue. I believe that the social development in the Third World will take a more benign and libertarian form than we suspect; and that surprisingly little coercion will be needed to deal with material scarcity in these areas.

In any case, there is no reason to fear that a quasi-statist development in the Third World would be more than temporary or that it would affect the world development. If the U.S. and Europe took a libertarian direction, their strategic industrial position in the world economy would, I think, favor a libertarian alternative for the world as a whole. Revolution is contagious, even when it occurs in a relatively small and economically insignificant country. I cannot imagine that Eastern Europe could withstand the effects of a libertarian revolution in Western Europe and the U.S. The revolution would almost certainly engulf the Soviet Union, where massive dissatisfaction exists, and finally the entire Asian continent. If one doubts the fulfillment of this possibility, let him consider the impact of the French Revolution on Europe at a time when the world economy was far less interdependent than it is today.

After the revolution the planet would be dealt with as a whole. The relocation of populations in areas of high density, the development of rational, humanistic birth control programs oriented toward improving the quality of life, and the modification of technology along ecological lines—all of these programs would be on the agenda of history. Aside from suggesting some basic guidelines drawn from ecology, I can do no more than speculate about how the resources and land areas of the world could be used to improve life in a postrevolutionary period. These programs

will be solved in practice and by human communities that stand on a far higher level, culturally, psychologically and materially, than any community that exists today.

*"Listen, Marxist!" seems to be quite relevant as a critique of the vulgar Marxists—Progressive Labor, the Trotskyists, and other "Old Left" movements. But what of the more sophisticated Marxists—people such as Marcuse, Gorz and the admirers of Gramsci? Surely "Listen, Marxist!" imputes too much to the "Old Left" in taking it as the point of departure for a critique of Marxism.*

Marcuse is the most original of the thinkers who still call themselves Marxists, and I must confess that even on those points where I may have disagreements with him, I am stimulated by what he has to say.

With this exception, I would differ with the claim that "Listen, Marxist!" is relevant only as a critique of the "Old Left." The article is relevant to all types of Marxist ideology. Two things trouble me about Marx's mature writings: their pseudo-objectivity and the obstacles they raise to Utopian thinking. The Marxian project, as it was formulated by Marx himself, deepened the early socialist tradition but also narrowed it, and in the long run this has produced a net setback rather than a net gain.

By Marx's pseudo-objectivity I mean the astonishing extent to which Marx identified "scientific socialism" with the scientism of the nineteenth century. Although there is a tendency today for the more sophisticated "neo-Marxists" to cast the Marxian project in terms of alienation, the project (as it developed in Marx's hands) was above all an attempt to make socialism "scientific," to provide it with the authority of a scientific critique. This led to an emphasis on "objectivity" that increasingly subverted the humanistic goals of socialism. Freedom and eros (where the latter was taken up at all) were anchored so

completely in the material preconditions for freedom that even the loss of freedom, if it promoted the material development, was viewed as an "advance" of freedom. Marx, for example, welcomed state centralization as a step in the development of the productive forces without once considering how this process enhanced the capacity of the bourgeoisie to resist revolution. He disclaimed any moral evaluation of society and in his later years became increasingly captive to scientism and to mathematical criteria of truth.

The result of this development has been a major loss for the humanistic and imaginative elements of socialism. Marxism has damaged the left enormously by anchoring it in a pseudo-objectivity that is almost indistinguishable from the juridical mentality. Whenever I hear "New Left" Marxists denounce a position as "objectively counter-revolutionary," "objectively racist," or "objectively sexist," my flesh crawls. The charge, flung randomly against all opponents, circumvents the need for an analytic or a dialectical critique. One simply traces "counterrevolution," "racism" or "sexism" to be the preconceived "objective effects." Marx rarely exhibited the crudity of the "Old Left" and "New Left" in his use of this approach, but he used the approach often enough—and often as a substitute for a multi-dimensional analysis of phenomena.

You must see how consequential this is. Freedom is divested of its autonomy, of its sovereignty over the human condition. It is turned into a means instead of an end. Whether freedom is desirable or not depends upon whether it furthers the "objective" development. Accordingly, any authoritarian organization, any system of repression, any manipulatory tactic can become acceptable, indeed admirable, if it favors the "building of socialism" or "resistance to imperialism"—as though "socialism" or "anti-imperialism" is meaningful when it is poisoned by manipulation, repression, and authoritarian forms of organization.

Categories replace realities; abstract goals replace real goals; "History" replaces everyday life. The universal, which requires a complex, many-sided analysis to be grasped, is replaced by the particular; the total, by the one-sided.

No less serious is the rejection of Utopian thought—the imaginative forays of Charles Fourier and William Morris. What Martin Buber called the "utopian element in socialism" is rejected for a "hardheaded" and "objective" treatment of "reality." But, in fact, this approach shrivels reality by limiting one's purview of social experience and data. The hidden potential of a given reality is either subverted by an emphasis on the "objective" actualities or, at least, diminished by a one-sided treatment. The revolutionary becomes a captive to experience not as it exists dialectically, in *all* its actualities and potentialities, but as it is defined in advance by "scientific socialism." Not surprisingly, the New Left, like the Old Left, has never grasped the revolutionary potential of the ecology issue, nor has it used ecology as a basis for understanding the problems of communist reconstruction and Utopia. At best the issue is given lip service, with some drivel about how "pollution is profitable"; at worst it is denounced as spurious, diversionary and "objectively counterrevolutionary." Most of the sophisticated Marxists are as captive to these limiting features of Marxism as their New Left brethren. The difference is that they are simply more sophisticated.

*In contrast to most radical works, "Listen, Marxist!" continually speaks of "hierarchical society" instead of "class society," of "domination" instead of "exploitation." What significance do these differences in language have?*

A difference is definitely intended. Pre-Marxian socialism was, in many ways, much broader than the Marxian variety. Not only was it more utopian, it was also occupied

more with the general than the particular. Varlet, the last of the great *enrages*, who survived the death of his comrade Jacques Roux and Robespierre's purge of the left, concluded that government and revolution are utterly "incompatible." What a splendid insight! In this one observation revolutionary consciousness expanded from a critique of a specific class society to a critique of hierarchical society as such. The pre-Marxian socialist and radical theorists began to occupy themselves with domination, not only exploitation; with hierarchy, not only class rule. With Fourier, consciousness advanced to the point where the goal of society was viewed as pleasure, not simply happiness.

You must see what an enormous gain this was. Exploitation, class rule and happiness are the *particular* within the more *generalized* concepts of domination, hierarchy and pleasure. It is theoretically—and, in great part, actually—possible to eliminate exploitation and class rule or to achieve happiness, as these concepts are defined by Marxism, without achieving a life of pleasure or eliminating domination and hierarchy. Marx, by "scientifically" anchoring exploitation, classes, and happiness in the economic domain, actually provided the rationale for a theoretical regression from the original socialist values. Marxian economic solutions, such as nationalization of property, may even create the illusion that hierarchy has disappeared. One has only to study the torment of the Trotskyist movement over the nature of the Russian state to see how obfuscating Marxian theory can be.

This particularization of the general is precisely what Marxism achieved. As I noted in reply to the previous question, socialism was given greater theoretical depth by the acquisition of dialectical philosophy, but it was narrowed disastrously by Marx's economic emphasis. Even Marx's writings shrivel in content as the man "matures." They increasingly center on the "objective" economic elements of society, until Marx sinks into a grotesque fetishi-

zation of economic theory of the kind we find in volume two of *Capital*. With Marx's death, an immense exegetical literature emerges on capitalist circulation, accumulation and "realization theory." Even Rosa Luxemburg was caught in this swamp, not to speak of the Keynesian Marxists who churn out their papers for the *American Economic Review* and *Science and Society*.

Marxism created a stupendous intellectual furniture that one must clear away to make contact with reality. The field abounds with "experts" and heavies, with academics and authorities whose bullshit makes original, indeed dialectical, thought virtually impossible. Once we rescue the essentials, this theoretical garbage must be junked. It is vitally necessary that we return to the generalized terrain that pre-Marxian socialism established, and then go forward again.

The youth culture has already posed the "social question" in its richest and most meaningful terms—"Life versus death." I would say, with an eye towards the insights of Marxism, "Life versus survival." In any case, we have to get away from the one-sided, repressive jargon of Marxism, which defines our perspective in a limiting manner. I am reminded of a fine passage from Paul Avrich's recent book, *Kronstadt 1921*, in which the language of the revolutionary Kronstadt sailors is contrasted with that of the Bolsheviks. "Rebel agitators," Avrich notes, speaking of the sailors, "wrote and spoke (as an interviewer later noted) in a homespun language free of Marxist jargon and foreign-sounding expressions. Eschewing the word 'proletariat,' they called, in true populist fashion, for a society in which all the 'toilers'—peasants, workers and the 'toiling intelligentsia'—would play a dominant role. They were inclined to speak of a 'social' rather than a 'socialist' revolution, viewing class conflict not in the narrow sense of industrial workers versus bourgeoisie, but in the traditional *narodnik*

sense of the laboring masses as a whole pitted against all who throve on their misery and exploitation, including politicians and bureaucrats as well as landlords and capitalists. Western ideologies—Marxism and liberalism alike—had little place in their mental outlook."<sup>39</sup>

The point, of course, is not Western ideologies versus Russian, or "homespun" versus "foreign-sounding" language. The real point is the *broader* concepts with which the "masses" worked almost intuitively—concepts drawn from the experience of their own oppression. Note how the sailors had a broader view of the "laboring masses" and their "oppressors" than the Bolsheviks, a view that included the elitist Bolsheviks among the oppressors. Note well, too, how Marxist jargon made it possible for the Bolsheviks to exclude themselves as oppressors in flat denial of the real situation. For my part, I am delighted that the New Left in America has replaced the words "workers" and "proletariat" by "people." Indeed, it is significant that even professedly Marxian groups like the Panthers and Weathermen have been obliged to use a populist language, for this language reflects the changed reality and problems of our times.

To sum up: what I am talking about is a human condition reflected by the word "power." We must finally resolve the historic and everyday dichotomies: man's power over woman, man's power over man, and man's power over nature. For inherent in the issue of power—of domination—are the contradictory, destructive effects of power: the corruption of life-giving sexuality, of a life-nourishing society, of a life-orienting ego, and of a life-sustaining ecology. The statement "power corrupts" is not a truism because it has never been fully understood. It may yet become understood because power now *destroys*. No amount of theoretical exegesis can place power in the service of history or of a revolutionary organization. The only

act of power that is excusable any longer is that one act—*popular* revolution—that will finally dissolve power as such by giving each individual power over his or her everyday life.

New York  
August 1970

# The May-June Events in France: 1

France: a Movement  
for Life