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Thesen:

1. "Nach der militärischen Niederlage des Hitler-Faschismus (der eine verfrühte und isolierte Form der kapitalistischen Reorganisation war) teilt sich die Welt in ein neo-faschistisches und sowjetisches Lager auf. Die noch existierenden Überreste demokratisch-liberaler Formen werden zwischen den beiden Lagern zerrieben oder von ihnen absorbiert. Die Staaten, in denen die alte herrschende Klasse den Krieg ökonomisch und politisch überlebt hat, werden in absehbarer Zeit faschisiert werden, die anderen in das Sowjet-Lager eingehen."
2. "Die neo-faschistische und die sowjetische Gesellschaft sind ökonomisch und klassenmäßig Gegner und ein Krieg zwischen ihnen ist wahrscheinlich. Beide sind aber in ihren wesentlichen Herrschaftsformen anti-revolutionär und einer sozialistischen Entwicklung feindlich. Der Krieg mag den sowjetischen Staat zu einer neuen radikaleren "Linie" zwingen: eine solche Wendung wäre nasserlich, dem Widerruf ausgesetzt, und würde, wenn erfolgreich, von der ungeheuren Machtsteigerung des Sowjetstaates aufgehoben werden."

† The manuscript which I am calling “33 Theses” was found in the Max Horkheimer archive with no title, and a handwritten “H.Marcuse. febr. 1947” in the top righthand corner. In the center of the page, “Teil I.” (Part I) is written. The manuscript contains 33 theses on the current world situation which were intended as a contribution for a possible relaunching of the Institute journal *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*. Although an October 17, 1947 letter to Horkheimer (see page 257) indicates that Marcuse is working on the theses, this manuscript has not been found. Thus we are publishing the February 1947 draft found in the Horkheimer archive. Thanks to Gunzelin Schmid Noerr for making accessible this document.

33 THESES[†]

Translated by John Abromeit

- 1 After the military defeat of Hitler-Fascism (which was a premature and isolated form of capitalist reorganization) the world is dividing into a neo-fascist and a Soviet camp. What still remains of democratic-liberal forms will be crushed between the two camps or absorbed by them. The states in which the old ruling class survived the war economically and politically will become fascistized in the foreseeable future, while the others will enter the Soviet camp.
- 2 The neo-fascist and the Soviet societies are economic and class enemies and a war between them is probable. But both are, in their essential forms of domination, anti-revolutionary and hostile to socialist development. The war might force the Soviet state to adopt a new, more radical "line." This type of shift would be superficial and subject to revocation; if successful, it would be neutralized by the massive increase of power of the Soviet state.
- 3 Under these circumstances there is only one alternative for revolutionary theory: to ruthlessly and openly criticize both systems and to uphold without compromise orthodox marxist theory against both. In the face of political reality such a position would be powerless, abstract and unpolitical, but when the political reality as a whole is false, the unpolitical position may be the only political truth.
- 4 The possibility of its political realization is itself a part of marxist theory. The working class and the political praxis of the working class, and changing class relations (at the national and international level) continue

to determine the conceptual development of theory, as they in turn are determined by it—not by the theory without praxis, but by the one which “seizes the masses.” Realization is neither a criterion nor the content of marxist truth, but the historical impossibility of realization is irreconcilable with it.

- 5 The position alluded to in thesis #3 acknowledges the historical impossibility of its realization. Outside the Soviet camp there is no workers’ movement “capable of revolution.” The social democrats have become more rather than less bourgeois. The Trotskyist groups are divided and helpless. The communist parties are not willing (today), and thus also not capable of revolution, but they are the only anti-capitalist class organization of the proletariat and thus the only possible basis for revolution (today). But they are at the same time the tools of Soviet politics and as such hostile to the revolution (today). The problem lies in the unity within the communist parties of forces potentially capable of revolution with others hostile to revolution.
- 6 The total subordination of the communist parties to Soviet politics is itself the result of changed class relations and the reorganization of capitalism. Fascism, as the modern form of the class dictatorship of capital, has completely changed the conditions of revolutionary strategy. Capital has created (not only in the fascist states) a terroristic apparatus with such striking power and ubiquitous presence, that the traditional weapons of proletariat class struggle appear powerless against it. The new technology of war and its strict monopolization and specialization turns the arming of the people into a helpless affair. The open identification of the state with the economy, and the integration of the union bureaucracy into the state, both work against political strikes, particularly the general strike—perhaps the only weapon against fascistized capital. This development has led to the fact that the only possible way to successfully oppose the massive military-political apparatus of capital is to construct and implement an at least equally powerful military and political counter-apparatus, to which the traditional revolutionary strategy is subordinated. The Soviet Union will be seen as this kind of counter-apparatus.
- 7 The question, whether or not the rulers in the Soviet Union are even still interested in revolution, was secondary in the context of this argument. The argument was upheld, even when it was assumed that a subjective tie no longer existed between Soviet power and the revolution. Soviet power would, so it was said, inevitably be forced into an increasingly heated conflict with the capitalist states—even if they were only representing and pursuing national interests. The Soviet Union would be

the most dangerous and seductive object of the imperialist politics of capital and as such the given enemy, who sooner or later would be forced to take up arms. The common opposition against capital would be the basis for a future reunification of revolution and Sovietism—just as the current alliance of capitalism and Sovietism is the basis for the separation of revolution and Sovietism.

- 8 This justification of the communist line is open to the objection, that education in anti-revolutionary, national politics makes the working class hopelessly incapable of revolution—even if it is mere “tactics.” It creates “vested interests” which have their own dynamic and come to determine tactics. It undermines class consciousness and strengthens submission to national capital. It contravenes the unity of economy and politics and subsumes class relations under political dictates.
- 9 The rejection of the political justification of the subordination of revolutionary strategy to Sovietism is only the first step in returning the problems to their actual sphere—that of real class relations. The communist line points back behind its own political justification to these relations: it is the expression and result of a structural change within the working class and in its relation to the other classes. The transformation of the form of the domination of capital (upon which the political justification of the communist line is based) should be understood in terms of this structural change as well.
- 10 It has found its most obvious expression in the fact that Social Democracy has victoriously survived Fascism (whose rise to power it facilitated), that it has once again monopolized the entire organized workers’ movement outside of the communist parties, that the communist parties are becoming more social democratic themselves, and that up to now no revolutionary workers’ movement has emerged from the collapse of Hitler-Fascism. Thus, Social Democracy seems to be the adequate expression of the non-communist workers’ movement. Social Democracy has not radicalized itself either, but has instead essentially followed its pre-fascist politics of class-cooperation. The non-communist workers’ movement is a bourgeoisified [*verbürgerlicht*] (in the objective sense) workers’ movement, and workers’ voices against the communist parties are voices against the revolution, not just against Sovietism.
- 11 The bourgeoisification, or the reconciliation of a large part of the working class with capitalism cannot be explained by pointing to the (growing) “workers’ aristocracy.” The workers’ aristocracy and the factors which make it possible have certainly played a decisive role in

the development of Social Democracy, but the depth and breadth of bourgeoisification goes far beyond the level of the workers' aristocracy. In Germany and France the carriers of bourgeoisification in the post-fascist period are not by any means primarily exponents of the workers' aristocracy. The depth and breadth of bourgeoisification cannot be explained with the domination of the bureaucracy over the organizational apparatus (of party and unions) either. The organizational apparatus was dismantled by Fascism, and yet the vacuum which defeated fascism left behind has not been filled by a counter-movement, rather this same bureaucracy is back in power again.

- 12 One of theory's most urgent tasks is to investigate bourgeoisification in all its manifestations. To say it again: bourgeoisification must be seen as an objective class phenomenon, not as the Social Democrats' insufficient will to revolution or their bourgeois consciousness, but rather as the economic and political integration of a large part of the working class into the system of capital, as a change in the structure of exploitation. The basis of this investigation can be found in Marx's references to surplus profit and the monopolizing position of certain producers and spheres of production. The development results on the one hand in the direct fusion of the state with capital, and on the other in state-administrative regulation of exploitation, which leads to the replacement of the free labor contract with binding public collective contracts. These factors define the boundaries within which the economic integration of the working class is proceeding. With it the working class's portion (quantitative and qualitative) of the social product is growing to such an extent, that opposition to capital is being transformed into extensive cooperation.
- 13 In the course of this same development the full weight of exploitation falls upon groups which occupy a marginal or alien position within society, those "outsiders" excluded from the integrated part of the working class and its solidarity, and, in the extreme case, "enemies." They are the "unorganized," "unskilled workers," agricultural and migrant workers, minorities, colonized and half-colonized, prisoners, etc. Here war must be seen as an essential element of the capitalist process as a whole: rapacious reproduction of monopoly capital through plundering of conquered countries and their proletariat; creation of foreign concentrations of surplus exploitation and absolute impoverishment. The fact that the rapacious plundering makes use of the most advanced modern technology and strikes highly developed capitalist countries strengthens the power of monopoly capital and its victorious state to a previously unheard of degree.

- 14 The economical and political identification of the integrated part of the workers with the capitalist state is accompanied by a no less decisive “cultural” integration and identification. The thesis of the legitimacy of the existing society, which, even though poorly, does after all maintain and provide for the whole, should be applied to all spheres of social and individual life. Its validity has been strongly confirmed by the obvious refutation of its opposite in the development of the Russian revolution. The fact that the first successful socialist revolution has not yet led to a freer and happier society has contributed immeasurably to reconciliation with capitalism and has objectively discredited the revolution. These developments have allowed the existing society to appear in a new light, and the existing society has understood how to use this to its advantage.
- 15 The phenomenon of cultural identification demands that the problem of “cultural cement” (*Kitt*) be discussed upon a broader basis. One of the most important factors involved here is the leveling of formerly avantgarde-oppositional forces with the cultural apparatus of monopoly capitalism (the transformation and application of psychoanalysis, modern art, sexuality, etc. in the work and entertainment process). First and foremost the effects of “*Kitt*” within the working class should be investigated: “scientific management,” rationalization, the interest of the worker in increased productivity (and with it, in the intensification of exploitation), strengthening of nationalistic sentiments.
- 16 The communist strategy of party dictatorship is the reply to the bourgeoisification of the working class. If the revolution can only be brought about by the working class, which has, however, through its integration in the system of capital, been alienated from its task, then the revolution presupposes the dictatorship of the revolutionary “avantgarde” over the integrated working class. This turns the working class into the object of revolution which can develop into a subject only through party manipulation and organization. The communist dictatorship over the proletariat becomes the first step toward dictatorship of the proletariat.
- 17 The only alternative would be the objective reversal of bourgeoisification, the breakdown of integration caused by the unfolding contradictions of capitalism, which would also necessarily undermine the economic foundation upon which capital maintains integration. But in the coming crises capital will appear as fascistized or once again as fascist capital: at its highpoint the working class in America is already largely disempowered, its organization broken, and the military and police apparatus omnipresent. If England does

have an independent development then the anti-revolutionary trade union socialism will set up a middle class society there that will make bourgeoisification even more perfect. France still has the possibility of developing in any of the three ways: the fascist, the trade union socialist, or the Soviet. And Germany will remain suppressed in the near future, as the object of these three forces. The developing contradictions of capitalism tend toward fascism or anti-revolutionary state socialism—not toward revolution.

- 17a The trade union socialism dominant in England (and emerging in Germany) is not yet state socialism. The partial socializations, which are undertaken primarily for “economic” reasons (increased productivity, rationalization, ability to compete, centralization of administration) or as political punishment, have allowed the decisive positions of capital (the steel and iron industry, the chemical industry in England) to remain intact. The stage of state socialism is not reached until the government has assumed and legalized control of industry as a whole and has taken over ownership from private capital. The government, the state—not the unified producers, the working class.
- 18 The societal tendency of state socialism is anti-revolutionary. Power over the means of production has been transferred to the state, which exercises this power through the employment of wage labor. The state has also assumed the role of the direction of capital as a whole (“*Gesamtkapitalisten*”). The direct producers do not control production (and with it their destiny) any more than they do in the system of liberal-democratic capitalism. They remain subordinated to the means of production. The domination of humans mediated by the means of production continues to exist. The universal interest, for which the planned economy is designed and implemented, is the existing apparatus of production, the existing form of the social division of labor (national and international) and the existing social needs. They have not been fundamentally changed; change is supposed to come about gradually, as a consequence of planning. But in this way state socialism maintains the foundation of class society. The abolition of classes, the transition to a free society *presupposes* the change, which state socialism sets as its goal. The difference in time signifies a *qualitative* difference.
- 19 The production apparatus developed under capitalism, propelled by wage labor within the existing form of the division of labor, perpetuates the existing forms of consciousness and needs. It perpetuates domination and exploitation, even when control of the apparatus is transferred to the state, i.e. to the universal, which is itself one of domination and exploitation.

Prior to the revolution the universal is not a factor in socialism: its domination is not freer and not necessarily more rational than that of capital. Socialism means a determinate universal: that of free persons. Until developed communist society has become real, the universal can only take the form of the domination of the revolutionary working class, because only this class can negate all classes, it alone has the real power to abolish the existing relations of production and the entire apparatus that goes with it. The first goal of the communist dictatorship over the proletariat (see #16) must be to surrender the production apparatus to the proletariat: the council republic.

- 20 This goal, and all the politics that go with it, is not in the program of any communist party today. It is irreconcilable with social democracy. In the given situation it is advanced only as pure theory. This separation of theory and practice is demanded by practice itself and remains oriented towards it. That is to say, negatively, theory does not ally itself with any anti-communist group or constellation. The communist parties are and remain the only anti-fascist power. Their denunciation must be purely theoretical. It knows that the realization of theory is only possible through the communist parties and that it needs the help of the Soviet Union. This consciousness must be contained in all of its concepts. More: in all of its concepts the denunciation of neo-fascism and social democracy must outweigh that of communist politics. The bourgeois freedom of democracy is better than total regimentation, but it has been literally purchased with decades of prolonged exploitation and delayed socialist freedom.
- 21 Theory itself is faced with two main tasks: the analysis of bourgeoisification (#12–15) and the construction of socialism. The reasons which moved Marx to omit this type of construction must be reconsidered in light of the harm being done by the spurious and semi-socialist constructions. The construction of socialism is faced with the task of rethinking the two-phase-theory or the difference between socialism and communism, which dominates the discussion today. This theory itself already belongs to the period of bourgeoisification and social democracy, as an attempt to draw this phenomenon into the original conception and to rescue the conception from it. It presupposes that the socialist society will “emerge” from the capitalist, and that the latter will work its way into socialism. It accepts, for the first phase, the continuation of the subordination of labor to the division of labor, the continuation of wage labor and the domination of the production apparatus. It remains oriented toward the necessity of technological progress. It can strengthen the dangerous view that, regarding the development of the forces of production and efficiency,

socialism is an intensified capitalism, and that the socialist society has to “surpass” capitalism.

- 22 The two-phase-theory gained historical justification in the Soviet Union’s struggle against the surrounding capitalist world, and in the necessity to “construct socialism in one country.” It justifies the non-existence of socialism in this situation. Beyond this it is false. By accepting capitalist rationality, it plays out the weapons of the old society against the new one: capitalism has better technology and greater wealth (technological); this foundation allows capitalism to let people live better. Socialist society can imitate and outdo this only if it forgoes the costly experiment of abolishing domination and imitates and outdoes the capitalist development of production and the productivity of labor, i.e. the subordination of wage labor to the production apparatus. The transition to socialism becomes *rebus sic stantibus*¹ pointless.
- 23 In contrast to this, the two-phase-theory can only project a change into the future. Its value is very small for European and American workers in the grip of trade union ideology; positivism has triumphed here as well. And the value becomes smaller the longer the “first phase” lasts. Its extension breeds a spirit of submission and accommodation in the affected workers, who themselves uphold the perpetuation of the “first phase” and extinguish revolutionary desires. Under these circumstances, the end of the “first phase” and the transition to communism can appear only as a miracle or as the work of external, foreign forces (see #7).
- 24 The construction of socialism should place its difference, not its “emergence” from capitalism in the center of discussion. The socialist society should be presented as the determinate negation of the capitalist world. This negation is not the nationalization of the means of production, nor their better development, nor the higher standard of living, but rather the abolition of domination, exploitation and labor.
- 25 The socialization of the means of production, their administration by the “immediate producers” remains the precondition of socialism. This is its first distinguishing characteristic: where it is missing, there is no socialist society. But the socialized means of production are still those of capitalism: they are objectified domination and exploitation. Not only in the purely economic sense. What was produced with them bears the mark of capitalism: it is also stamped upon the consumer goods. Certainly, a machine is only a machine; the process of wage labor first makes it into capital. But

1 Things being this way.

as capital the given means of production have also formed people's needs, thoughts and feelings, and determined the horizon and content of their freedom. Socialization as such changes neither the horizon nor the content: if production continues uninterrupted, what was there before the moment of socialization will also be reproduced. Habituated needs continue to influence the new conditions and the socialized means of production. Socialization of the means of production becomes socialism only to the extent that the method of production itself becomes the negation of its capitalist counterpart.

- 26 This includes, to begin with, the abolition of wage labor. The bureaucratic-state administration of the means of production does not do away with wage labor. This does not become the case until the producers themselves directly administer production, i.e. themselves determine what, how much, and how long objects are produced. This step is, under the conditions of the modern economy, probably tantamount to the transition to anarchy and disintegration. And precisely this anarchy and disintegration is probably the only way to break capitalist reproduction in socialism, to create the interregnum or even the vacuum, in which the change of needs, the birth of freedom can take place. The anarchy would testify to the abolition of domination, and the disintegration would eliminate the power of the production apparatus over humans, or at least mean the greatest chance for a total negation of class society.
- 27 When the workers take production into their own hands (and do not immediately submit themselves again to a new bureaucracy of domination), perhaps they will abolish wage slavery first, i.e. shorten working hours. They might also decide what to produce, whatever appears most important to them in various locations. This would lead automatically to the dissolution of the national economy in its integrated form; the production apparatus would disintegrate into separate parts, in many instances the technical machinery would remain unused. A backwards movement would begin, which would not only break the national economy out of the world economy, but would also bring poverty and affliction. But the catastrophe signals that the old society has really ceased to function: it cannot be avoided.
- 28 This would mean that the leap into socialism would entail a leap into a lower standard of living than that reached in capitalist countries. Socialist society would begin at a technologically "surpassed" level of civilization. The starting criterion of socialist society is not technological—it is progress in the realization of the freedom of producers, which expresses itself in a qualitative change in needs. The

will to abolish domination and exploitation appears as the will to anarchy.

- 29 The beginning of socialism at a “surpassed” level of civilization is not “backwardness.” It differs from the beginning of Soviet society in the fact that the setback is not an economic necessity (determined by the technical level of production), but rather an act of revolutionary freedom, a conscious interruption of continuity. The present production and distribution apparatus is suspended by the workers, not fully utilized, perhaps even partially destroyed. If the proletariat cannot simply “take over” the state apparatus, then the same is true for the modern production apparatus. Its structure demands specialized and differentiated bureaucracy, which necessarily perpetuates domination, and mass production, which leads necessarily to standardization and manipulation (regimentation).
- 30 The problem of preventing a state-socialist bureaucracy must be seen as an economic problem. Bureaucracy has its social origins in the (technological) structure of the production apparatus; the removal of its heteronomous form presupposes changing this structure. A general socialist education would certainly make specialized roles interchangeable and thus break the heteronomous form of bureaucracy, but this type of education cannot succeed in an established bureaucracy of domination. It has to precede the functioning bureaucracy—not replace it. Such an education is only possible when the heteronomously structured production apparatus is surrendered to the producers for “experimentation.” The rational authority, which has to lead this experimentation, must remain under the direct control of the producers.
- 31 The revolutionary disintegration of the capitalist production apparatus will also disintegrate workers’ organizations, which have become a part of this apparatus. The unions are not only organs of the status quo, but also of the maintenance of the status quo in the new forms of state socialism and Sovietism. Their interests are bound to the functioning of the production apparatus whose (second-rate) partner they have become. They might exchange masters, but they need a master to share their interest in the taming guidance of the organized-workers.
- 32 While the unions in their traditional structure and organization represent a force hostile to revolution, the political workers’ party remains the necessary subject of revolution. In the original Marxist conception the party does not play a decisive role. Marx assumed that the proletariat is driven to revolutionary action on its own, based on the knowledge of its own interests, as soon as revolutionary conditions are present. In the

mean time monopoly capitalism has found the ways and means of economically, politically and culturally leveling [*gleichschalten*] (#12–15) the majority of the proletariat. The negation of this leveling *before* the revolution is impossible. The development has confirmed the correctness of the Leninist conception of the vanguard party as the subject of the revolution. It is true that the communist parties of today are not this subject, but it is just as true that only they can become it. Only in the theories of the communist parties is the memory of the revolutionary tradition alive, which can become the memory of the revolutionary goal once again; only its situation is so far outside the capitalist society that it can become a revolutionary situation again.

- 33 The political task then would consist in reconstructing revolutionary theory within the communist parties and working for the praxis appropriate to it. The task seems impossible today. But perhaps the relative independence from Soviet dictates, which this task demands, is present as a possibility in Western Europe's and West Germany's communist parties.