

Tailism and the Dialectic

Georg Lukács

Translated by Esther Leslie

Some critiques of my book *History and Class Consciousness* have appeared (written by Comrades L. Rudas and A. Deborin in issues IX, X and XII of *Arbeiterliteratur*) which I simply cannot let pass without a response. In and of themselves, the harshest criticisms would have been quite welcome. In the introduction to my book (p. xlvi) I characterised it explicitly as a discussion document. There are many things in the book that I deem needful of correction. I would formulate many of the things contained therein quite differently today. It is certainly not my intention *to defend the book itself*. I would be only too glad if I could regard it as completely redundant, if I could see that its purpose had been fully accomplished. What is this purpose? To demonstrate *methodologically* that the organisation and tactics of Bolshevism are the only possible consequence of Marxism; to prove that, of necessity, the problems of Bolshevism follow logically – that is to say logically in a dialectical sense – from the method of materialist dialectics as implemented by its founders. If the discussion of my book had left not one stone standing, but had meant that some progress had been achieved in this respect, I would have silently enjoyed that progress, and not defended one single claim in my book.

But my critics move instead in the *opposite direction*. They use their polemics to smuggle Menshevik elements into Marxism and Leninism. I have to retaliate. I am not defending my book. I am attacking the open Menshevism of Deborin and the tail-ending of Rudas. Deborin

sticks to his guns: he was always a Menshevik. Comrade Rudas is, however, a Bolshevik. I know him from many years of communal party work. But precisely because of that I am in no position to reciprocate his acknowledgement ('He never wavered for a minute. He was always an avowed enemy of opportunism', *Arbeiterliteratur* IX, p. 493)¹ with comments on his activity. Questions about the development of the Hungarian Communist Party do not belong in this debate, so instead I will develop Comrade Rudas's – permanently present – inclination towards tail-ending out of his philosophical arguments. And I will draw on only his latest political article, which he wrote 'after a two-year apprenticeship in the Russian CP' ('Comrade Trotsky on the Hungarian Proletarian Revolution', *Inprekorr* IV, p. 162), in order to illustrate his way of seeing. In no way am I complaining, as Comrade Rudas suspects (*Arbeiterliteratur* XII, p. 1080), about 'misunderstandings'.² No. I agree with him that 'misunderstandings are not of a logical type'. But precisely because of that I find it completely understandable that he does not understand me: he does not understand *the role of the party in the revolution* and has therefore been *unable* to notice that my whole book is concerned with that question. That is no surprise in the case of the Menshevik Debordin. The opposite would be more surprising.

I. Problems of Class Consciousness

1. Subjectivism

Every time an opportunistic attack is made on the revolutionary dialectic, it proceeds under the banner – against subjectivism. (Bernstein against Marx, Kautsky against Lenin.) Among the many *isms* that Debordin and Rudas attribute to me (idealism, agnosticism, eclecticism, etc.) subjectivism takes pride of place. In the following exposition I will prove that what is at stake is actually always the question of the role of the party in the revolution, and that Debordin and Rudas wage war against Bolshevism when they believe that they are fighting my 'subjectivism'.

First of all, then: what is to be understood by the term 'subject'? And – the next question is inseparable from the first one, indeed its

answer allows one to answer the first question correctly – what is the function of the subject in the historical process of development? Rudas and Debordin share, in part, the vulgar standpoint of bourgeois everyday life and its science: inflexibly and mechanistically, they split subject from object. They regard as worthy of scientific investigation only that which is free of any participation on the part of the subject, and they protest in a tone of extreme scientific indignation if an *active and positive* role is accorded to a subjective moment in history. It is only logical then that Debordin assigns to me (*Arbeiterliteratur* X, p. 629) the theory of the identity of thought and being, of subject and object,³ even though in my book it expressly states that: '... their identity is that they are moments of one and the same real historical and dialectical process' (HCC, p. 204). The intentional and unintentional perversion of my thoughts into their opposite becomes understandable if we recall Debordin's own conception of subject and object. He says (p. 639): '... that the *sole* [! my italics] materialist sense of this "mutual influence" can only be its conception as a process of labour, as a process of production, as activity, as *the struggle of society with nature*' (my italics).

So, for Debordin, there is *no class struggle*. 'Society struggles with nature' and that is it! What takes place within society is mere appearance, subjectivism. Therefore for him – quite logically – subject = individual and object = nature, or subject – society and object – nature (*ibid.*). Debordin does not acknowledge that a historical process takes place *inside* society, which alters the relationship between subject and object. To put it mildly, historical materialism is hereby revised and turned into something out of Comte or Herbert Spencer.

Comrade Rudas does not go quite so far. He admits that classes and class struggle exist. Indeed, there are even passages in his writing where he mentions the existence and importance of proletarian activity and the role of the party. But it always remains a formal acknowledgement of the Leninist theory of revolution. In general he quite consistently represents the opposite position. Let us hear it from him himself: 'What is a "historical role"? A role that like every other one, *takes place independently of* – although also through – *human consciousness* of this role' (*loc. cit.*, p. 678, my italics).

Or: 'People have thoughts, feelings. They even set themselves goals –

and they even imagine that these thoughts, these feelings play an important and independent role in history; these aims are the same ones as those that are accomplished in history' (ibid., pp. 685ff).

The most important thing to note here is that Comrade Rudas speaks continually of 'history', 'the' person. He 'forgets' – which follows as a logical consequence of his basic argument – that the issue is not 'the' person, but the proletariat and its leading party, that it is not history in general, but the epoch of the proletarian revolution. He 'forgets' that the crucial point of my formulations, against which he rails, lies in the fact that the relationship of consciousness and being is ordered differently for the proletariat than for every previous class that has emerged in society. The active function of proletarian class consciousness gains a new significance in the epoch of revolution.

This belongs to the ABC of Marxism, and in particular to the ABC of Leninism. Unfortunately, one is forced to repeat this ABC in the face of the renewed attempts of Menshevism to turn Marxism into a bourgeois sociology, with formal, trans-historical laws that exclude all 'human activity'. According to Rudas, characteristic of the historic role is that it 'takes place independently of human consciousness'.

Let us look at how Lenin describes the essence of the historic role: 'The bourgeois regime is going through an extraordinary revolutionary crisis across the whole world. We must now "prove" through the praxis of revolutionary parties that they are sufficiently self-conscious to forge organisations, contacts with the exploited masses, that they possess determination and knowledge to exploit this crisis for the benefit of a successful, a victorious revolution' ('Speech on the World Situation at the 2nd Congress of the Comintern', *The Second Congress of the Communist International*, Volume 1 (London, 1977), p. 24). And, after he has described the objective preconditions of a revolutionary situation, 'which are independent of the will of not only single groups and parties, but also single classes', he speaks of why, given the presence of such conditions, a revolution is not always bound to break out: 'Because it is not the case that out of every revolutionary situation a revolution transpires, but only out of such a situation where, in addition to the objective conditions outlined previously, a subjective factor comes along, namely the capability of the revolutionary class to carry out revolutionary mass

actions that are of sufficient strength to break the old government (or shake it), which never, even in a period of crisis, "collapses" unless one "rattles" it' (*Against the Stream*).

Comrade Rudas does not share this opinion. His 'youthful error' – that the Hungarian proletarian revolution of 1919 failed first and foremost because of the absence of this subjective moment, the Communist Party – is completely withdrawn. Nobody, not even Rudas in his 'subjectivist' period, maintained that it was because of that fact alone that it failed. In the past, as in the present, Rudas shows himself to be a faithful Kantian: whether he over- or underestimates 'the subjective moment', he always carefully *separates* it off from the 'objective' and guards against regarding the two moments in their *dialectical interaction*. Now he wants to show that the Hungarian Dictatorship of Workers' Councils failed because of 'objective' obstacles. As examples of these, he introduces the diminutive size of the territory, which provided no opportunity for a military withdrawal, betrayal on the part of the officers, and the blockade. All three things are facts. All three played an important role in the demise of the Hungarian dictatorship. However – and this *methodological* point of view is decisive for our controversy – if we want to remain revolutionary dialecticians, Leninists, none of these moments can be considered in their mere facticity, independent of the question of whether or not there was a Communist Party. Blockade, hunger! Yes indeed, but Comrade Rudas must admit that the hunger, the lack of commodities, etc., do not come even remotely close to the deprivations of the Russian proletariat, and the standard of living of our workers did not even sink to the level of conditions in Vienna. What was fateful for the Dictatorship of Workers' Councils, in terms of the blockade, was the social-democratic demagogy that insisted that a return to 'democracy' would mean an end to the blockade and the raising of the workers' standard of living. What was fateful was the fact that the workers believed this demagogy – precisely because there was no Communist Party there. Officer betrayal! But Comrade Rudas, as a leading active comrade, must have known that in all places where reasonably capable communists were among the army's ranks, their corps remained reliable and ready to fight until the end. Was it really 'objectively' impossible for our eight divisions (and corresponding regiments, etc.) to find

communist commandants and commissars? It was impossible because no Communist Party was there to make the choices, carry out the appointments, and determine the correct course of action. The diminutive size of the territory! Comrade Rudas evokes Trotsky as an authority for this. If I wanted to be spiteful I would draw from his formulations an 'objective sociological' conclusion: in a small country, a country without Russia's possibilities of retreat, no dictatorship is possible at all, because of the imperialist neighbours. (This is, then, the situation of every European country.) I simply want to remind Rudas that the fall of the dictatorship was not a purely military affair. On 1 August the Red Army found itself embarking on a very promising counter-offensive, with some successes (the recapturing of Szolnok), just as the Workers' Council Republic stepped down in Budapest, precisely because no Communist Party existed.

Obviously, the fact that there was no Communist Party in Hungary during the Dictatorship of Workers' Councils has objective causes. However, these objective causes were, on the one hand, in part previously subjective ones (*sic!*) (moments from the history of the workers' movement). On the other hand, the significance of the subjective moment is only banished from the world by Kantians who inflexibly and undialectically separate out subject and object, by making the subject's appearance, the possibility of its effectiveness, the possibility of its decisive significance, rest on objective causes. In fact the opposite is true. It is precisely their linkage that demonstrates the dialectical relationship of interaction that I was concerned to address in my book, and whose existence is – more or less openly – repudiated by Deborin and Rudas.

Put as a general philosophical statement (that is to say, in this case, put wrongly) this interaction is meant to indicate that the subjective mirroring of the objective process is an actual, operative moment of the process itself, and not only something imagined. Such subjective mirroring does not only form an unavoidable link between any two objective moments, a link that might be, however, disregarded in an 'objective' consideration of things, since it is not important for 'objective' analysis. It also shows that people actually – and not only in their imagination – make their own history. We said 'put as a general philosophical

statement means, in this case, put wrongly'. Why? Because this state of affairs *comes into being only with the emergence of the proletariat*, because the proletariat is the first, and until now, the *only* subject in the course of history for whom this perception is valid. All thinkers, then, who have ascribed to real or fantastic subjects (great men, national spirits, etc.) such an effect on reality, on the course of history, were necessarily idealist in their method and, in their findings, they could only arrive at false constructions, historical mythologies.

Of course, bourgeois science, and the Menshevism that is completely influenced by it, denies any possibility of influencing reality, even on the part of the proletariat, or it admits it only in a fantastic mythological form. Both cases are underpinned by the same *unhistorical* conception of reality. Just as medieval, feudal ideology forged a trans-temporal relationship between the person and god, so bourgeois and Menshevik ideology constructs a trans-temporal 'sociology'. Hereby the fundamental forms of existence of bourgeois society appear (of course in a more or less distorted ideological form) as forms of existence in the past and the future, as *ur-communism* and social revolution. In contrast to this, precisely because it is an instrument of its revolutionary practice, it is vital for the proletariat's body of knowledge to liberate itself from this way of seeing. It must discover in reality the concrete role inherited by the proletariat as the subjective factor in history, and it must be clear about the function that its (and *only* its) class consciousness possesses in the historical process.

Comrade Rudas places himself among the ranks of those who deny this possibility and in the process he gets embroiled in the greatest contradictions. With the help of quotations ripped out of context – he makes out that I think that the decisive moment in every class struggle is the capacity of the class *adequately* to grasp the totality of society. But I emphasise quite explicitly in my book that the class that is called upon to rule, and the class that is wavering, doomed to defeat, are distinguished by whether or not from each class point of view 'the totality of the existing society is *not visible at all*'⁴ (HCC, p. 52), or whether the class possesses the capacity to 'organise the whole of society in accordance with [its] interests' (*ibid.*). And in respect of this totality, I say that every class has to be looked at in terms of 'an exact study of the point in the

total process of production at which the interests of the various classes are most immediately and vitally involved. Secondly, we would have to show how far it would be in the interest of any given class to go beyond this immediacy, to annul and transcend its immediate interest by seeing it as a factor within a totality. And lastly, what is the nature of the totality that is then achieved? How far does it really embrace the true totality of production?' (HCC, p. 54). In this way, it will be possible to distinguish the various forms of 'false consciousness' from each other. On this basis I set out thoroughly (pp. 55–9) how in pre-capitalist societies every class can *only* possess 'false consciousness', after the analysis of classes in bourgeois society has attained this *special* sort that has *never* existed before in history (an adequate conception of the social whole) and function (a real and conscious influence on the historical process), in the form of proletarian class consciousness. Ignorant of both the historical grading of questions of class consciousness and the special meaning of these questions in the case of the proletariat, Rudas triumphantly counters my 'idealism' and my 'subjectivism'. I am, of course, completely in agreement with him that misunderstandings are not of a logical type. And so I ask: why did the misunderstanding arise for Rudas, what is its source, and what is its political aim? His conclusions reveal quite clearly the source: his tailist fatalism.

This fatalism appears quite crassly when he directs the harshest of attacks against my so-called 'theory of the moment' (*Arbeiterliteratur* XII, pp. 1077–8).⁵ I do not want to dwell once more on his farcical 'misunderstanding', which makes out that I think the role of great personalities is what is at issue. Comrade Rudas 'misunderstands' me here in order not to have to take on board a *fundamental principle* of Bolshevism. Enlisting that tried and trusted tailist trick, he counteracts this theory of the 'blink of an eye', a 'moment' within the process, which I apparently completely neglect (*ibid.*, p. 1082). I am not going to cite the countless passages in my book (e.g. pp. 256–7, 315) where it is blindingly obvious that this is not the case. Comrade Rudas is, however, correct to the extent that he speaks of 'process' in *opposition* to 'moment', for his tailist–fatalist concept of process really does exclude any *moment of decision*. But he makes things too easy for himself, and betrays too clearly his innermost convictions: for him, there are absolutely no

moments of decision, his 'process' is an evolution mechanistically and fatally leading from one stage of social development to the next. Of course, this is never put so bluntly. Comrade Rudas (like every tailender today) is much too prudent to sever the connection with Lenin, but precisely the way in which he opposes 'process' to 'moment' communicates his view clearly. What is a 'moment'? A situation whose duration may be longer or shorter, but which is distinguished from the process that leads up to it in that it forces together the essential tendencies of that process, and demands that a *decision* be taken over the *future direction of the process*. That is to say the tendencies reach a sort of zenith, and depending on how the situation concerned is handled, the process takes on a different direction after the 'moment'. Development does not occur, then, as a continuous intensification, in which development is favourable to the proletariat, and the day after tomorrow the situation *must* be even more favourable than it is tomorrow, and so on. It means rather that at a *particular* point, the situation demands that a decision be taken and the day after tomorrow might be too late to make that decision. Comrade Rudas might like to think of Lenin's article on 'compromise', where, according to Lenin's view, several days' delay made the offer of compromise with the Mensheviks and the Socialist Revolutionaries (SR's) redundant, and where he notes 'that the days in which peaceful development was possible are already over' ('On Compromises', CW 25, p. 314). Or he might think of Lenin's anxiety that the Bolsheviks might miss the moment when seizure of power would be possible in the October days: 'History would never forgive the revolutionaries if they hesitated when today they could win (and certainly will win), while tomorrow they could lose so much, indeed everything' (CW 26, p. 235).

Of course, Comrade Rudas will deny that his view is contrary to the fundamental conception of Lenin. He prepares the ground for this reproach with noteworthy care: on the one hand, he makes out that the 'moment'⁶ stands in contrast to the 'process', as if the process does not arise out of a long sequence of moments, of which, naturally, some tower so much above the others in terms of their quantitative significance that this quantity transforms (cf. Plekhanov on the 'significance of the knotted line of mass conditions', *Neue Zeit* X, I, p. 230); on the other hand, by

ascribing to me an idealist subjectivism. And yet I stress – and I do not see the slightest cause to retract any of my reflections or to weaken them in any way – that in such moments everything depends on class consciousness, on the conscious will of the proletariat. This is where the moment of decision lies. The dialectical interaction of subject and object in the historical process consists in the fact that the subjective moment is, self-evidently as I stress again and again, a product, a moment of the objective process. It works back on the process, in certain historical situations, whose emergence is called forth by the objective process (e.g. HCC, p. 313), and gives it direction. This working back is only possible in praxis, only in the *present* (that is why I am using the word ‘moment’ – in order to highlight this practical and contemporary character). Once the action is completed, the subjective moment slots back into the sequence of objective moments. Thus for each party its own ideological development – Proudhonism in France, Lassalleanism in Germany – is an objective factor, with which each Marxist politician has to reckon as an objective fact. The dialectical interaction that I have outlined above arises ‘exclusively’ in praxis. In ‘the abstract’, that is in terms of thought severed from praxis, subject and object clearly do indeed stand cut off from each other, and each thought that ascribes this characteristic of praxis simply to theory ends up in a mythology of concepts, and must become idealist (Fichte). But just as much, all thought – and this is the case with Rudaš – that misunderstands this specific character of proletarian praxis, a praxis that is revolutionary, ends up in fatalism, if it carries over the rigid opposition of subject and object from ‘pure’ theory into praxis. Thereby, it abolishes praxis. It becomes a theory of tail-ending.

It is impossible to separate the ‘moment’ from the ‘process’. The subject does not face the object inflexibly and unconnectedly. The dialectical method does not intend either an undifferentiated unity or a definite separation of moments. On the contrary rather: it invokes an uninterrupted process of moments becoming independent and the uninterrupted abolition of this independence. Just how this dialectical interaction of moments of the process with this reiterated abolition of independence looks is demonstrated repeatedly in my book. Here it is just a matter of understanding that this (dialectical and therefore dialectically overcome)

independence of the subjective moment in the contemporary stage of the historical process, in the period of proletarian revolution, is a decisive characteristic of the general situation. It ought to be assumed that this conception is a commonplace – among Leninists. How is it possible even to imagine Lenin’s basic idea of the preparation and organisation of revolution without such an *active and conscious* role of the subjective moment? And who could possibly imagine without this function of the subjective moment Lenin’s conception of the decisive moments of the revolution – that is the doctrine that stems from Marx but is first made concrete by Lenin – that insurrection is an art? And were not all the reproaches cast against Lenin (even from Rosa Luxemburg) precisely determined by the view that the revolution would come about through economic forces, so to speak ‘by itself’, that is to say, in other words, ‘spontaneously’, ‘from the base’, without the decisive role of *conscious subjective* elements?

In his decisive formulations on insurrection as an art Comrade Lenin first of all distinguishes the Marxist concept of insurrection from the Blanquist one (‘Marxism and Insurrection’, in *Preparing for Revolt*, also ‘Letter to the Comrades’). In the course of this he emphasises how the objective development of the revolution must press on the insurrection (war, starvation, the peasant movement, the wavering of the upper classes, the revolutionary development of the proletariat), in order for the insurrection to be successful, and how this development affects the attitude of the working class. (In July the workers and soldiers ‘would not have been willing to *fight and die*, for the possession of the town’, *ibid.*) But once the objective situation has ripened to insurrection, once the ‘moment’ of insurrection is there, then the *conscious, subjective* moment of the revolutionary process raises itself to an independent activity. Lenin contrasts most sharply the merely basal and revolutionary appearance of the masses with this active, decisive intervention of the most class-conscious vanguard. This is what he writes about the situation before autumn and in autumn: ‘And, on the other hand, the silent despair of the masses *who feel* that henceforth half-measures will not bring salvation, that it is impossible to “influence” the government, that the starving will “sweep all away, will break down everything anarchically”, if the Bolsheviks do not know how to lead them in the decisive struggle’

(‘Letter to the Comrades’, CW 26, p. 210). If we look more closely now at his remarks on insurrection itself, in the passage that invokes ‘Revolution and Counter-revolution in Germany’, from a methodological point of view, which is the one that concerns us here, we see that they emphasise, on the one hand, moments that are consciously *made*, that is to say brought into being by the subjective side (by the conscious acting subject – grouping of forces, surprise attacks, etc.). And on the other hand, they point most markedly to purely subjective moments (decisiveness, moral superiority, etc.). Insurrection as an art is, then, one moment of the revolutionary process where *the subjective moment has a decisive predominance*. It is superfluous to repeat that the possibility of this predominance, the favourable objective situation for the insurrection, as well as the presence of such a subject, a Communist Party, is a product of social and economic development, though naturally none develops *independently* of the subject, none is a mere product of the basal social process of development. The subjective moment reaches in this ‘moment’ its comprehensive significance precisely because and inasmuch as it has already acted consciously and actively during earlier developments. (A good counter-example is the German October with Thalheimer as a theorist of spontaneous tail-ending.) But in that ‘moment’, the decision, and with it the fate of the proletarian revolution (and therefore of humanity), depends on the subjective element. It is impossible to understand correctly the Leninist conception of the revolutionary process without understanding this central significance of insurrection as an art. Lenin said that in the current period (but this relates to *all* revolutionary situations) ‘one cannot be faithful to Marxism, to the revolution, *without treating insurrection as an art*’ (CW 26, p. 27).

Of course, Lenin turned sharply on any form of ‘left’ subjectivism (and on one such occasion I received a well-deserved censure from him in respect of an article on parliamentarianism in *Kommunismus* in 1920). However, precisely this clash shows most clearly that Lenin did not fight recognition of the subjective moment on principle, but merely its *incorrect application* – on the one hand, each incorrect estimation of the objective situation; that is to say conceptions that in an overly simplified manner regard the decisive ‘moment’ as present, when it is objectively not there. And on the other hand, conceptions that mechanically

generalise the decisive role ascribed to the actively conscious subjective moment to the whole process, imagining such an influence would be possible at any time and under all conditions and not simply under quite particular concrete conditions. That is to say, then, as is the case with those who – in a back-to-front way, like Comrade Rudas who completely dissolves ‘moments’ into the ‘process’, and so (seen in the best light) arrives at a Luxemburgist theory of spontaneity – turn the concrete truth of particular and concrete historical ‘moments’ into the abstract falsehood of a permanently decisive influenceability of the process. Such a ‘left’ theory of moments ignores precisely the instant of dialectical change, the concrete, revolutionary essence of the ‘moment’. Insurrection as an art is turned into insurrection as a game. The well-warranted active role of the subject turns into an empty phraseology of subjectivism.

But, with the rule of the proletariat, so significant a quantitative shift comes into being that it gains a qualitative character. If the dictatorship of the proletariat is exercised by a real Communist Party (that is to say *not* as it happened in Hungary), this function of the subjective moment acquires a certain consistency, admittedly one that is dialectically restricted. It is not a question of the party arbitrarily changing the economic structure of the country, but rather that in the struggle of the various economic and social tendencies that evidently obtain ever more from the base, the party (and through it just as much the state apparatus as the mass of the workers) is in a position to influence *consciously* and *actively* the development of these tendencies. Lenin, it is true, fiercely contested at every opportunity those ‘left’ comrades who overestimated the meaning, strength and consistency of this moment, but not as a matter of principle. Rather, because the question they posed was abstract, and because this abstractness distorted the concrete, dialectical moments of the concrete situation. But he fought no less fiercely against those who mistook the significance of the subjective moment, those who capitulated in a defeatist manner before the base, before the tendencies that derive necessarily from the economy. I will simply quote the following sentences from a speech to the Eleventh Party Congress of the RCP: ‘State capitalism is the sort of capitalism that we are in a position to limit, whose boundaries we can determine. This capitalism is tied to

the state and the state is the workers, the most advanced section of the workers, the vanguard – we are that. State capitalism is the type of capitalism for which we must set certain limits, but we were in no position to set such limits before. That is all. It depends on us how this state capitalism turns out.’ (‘Political Report of the CC of the RCP(B)’, *Speeches at Party Congresses, 1918–22* (Moscow, 1971), p. 306.)

‘It depends on us,’ Lenin said. Of course not in each and every case, and not always in the same way everywhere. But it is a distortion of Lenin’s teachings, a bending of them into tail-ending and Menshevism, to maintain (as Comrade Rudas does – *Arbeiterliteratur* XII, p. 1085), that, according to Lenin, ‘an enormous step forward must be taken in developing the productive forces’ as necessary prelude to revolution.⁷ Just as it is a distortion of my views to claim that ‘only’ the class consciousness of the proletariat is the driving force of revolution. In *certain situations* (this is why I use the terminology of the moment) it is unquestionably the decisive element. Even Comrade Rudas will admit that in the course of the revolution very favourable moments were not exploited. But it is not Bolshevism, not Leninism, to maintain then, *post festum*, that the proletariat was ‘wavering’, not ‘mature’ enough to act, or even that the development of the productive forces did ‘not yet’ allow the transition to revolution. That we live in a period of revolution rests – objectively, economically – on the fact that the productive forces have already reached this level of development. If, of course, precisely in the decisive countries, the proletariat is subjectively too immature for revolution, then evidently that has objective, social causes, in whose ranks, however, an extraordinarily large role is played by subjective moments that have become objective moments. (For example, the fact that the first great revolutionary movement of English workers, Chartism, collapsed exactly at the time of the great capitalist boom and before the beginning of the successful economic and trade-union struggles; traditions of the great bourgeois revolution, Proudhonist syndicalism in France; the revolution from ‘above’ as foundation of national unity and the bourgeois imperialist state – considered economically – in Germany, etc.) If, however, economic development shakes the social foundations of such a state, *then* whether the crisis is fatal or surmountable for the bourgeoisie depends entirely *on the class consciousness of the proletariat*. ‘Only when the

“lower classes” do not want the old way . . . only then can revolution triumph’ (CW 31, p. 85). Does Comrade Rudas believe that this ‘will’ is just a decorative phrase in Lenin? (In the same fashion that in various places – . . . – he always ironically cites ‘the realm of freedom’ – he seems to adopt this from Marx and Engels.) That Lenin did not imagine this will in a spontaneous and basal way should be yet another commonplace for a communist. He should know that the vacillation or decisiveness of the masses depends to a large extent on the astute and decisive or cowardly and fatalistic behaviour of the conscious and active vanguard, the Communist Party, the ‘form of the proletarian class consciousness’ (HCC, p. 333). Here too one utterance from Lenin will suffice: ‘That the firm line of the party, its unbending resolution is *just as much a factor* of the mood, particularly in heightened revolutionary situations, is, of course, forgotten “on occasion”. Sometimes it is very *convenient* to forget that the obligated leaders through their vacillation and their tendency to forget everything that they offered the day before, import highly indecent swings of mood into certain layers of the masses.’

There are, then, indeed, instants in the process (‘moments’) where decision is dependent ‘only’ on the class consciousness of the proletariat. That these moments do not float freely in the air, that they cannot be brought about wilfully, but are occasioned by the objective process, that is to say, they are not to be isolated from the productive process, is evident from the preceding formulations. And according to my understanding, they allow themselves to be so little isolated from the whole process that it is indeed the case that their arrival in the process belongs as an essential characteristic of the process itself. Therefore the Bolshevism and revolutionary (and not tailist) conception of the process itself is determined by the recognition of this connection. Where, namely, the Mensheviks also discern the decisive moments when the active influence of the subjective moment comes to the fore along the lines of a ‘gradual development’, the decisive moments, as just outlined, must be discovered by the Bolshevism in the process itself. That means they discover this character of the structure of the process not as an evolutionary one or an organic one, but as contradictory, jerkily unfolding in advances and retreats in every – apparently – calm moment. ‘There

is no moment,' say the organisational theses of the Third Congress, 'when a Communist Party cannot be active.' Why? Because there can be no moment where this character of the process, the germ, the possibility of an *active* influencing of the subjective moments is completely lacking. 'And what is, for example, each strike other than a small crisis of capitalist society? Wasn't the Prussian Minister of the Interior Mr. von Puttkammer correct when he delivered the famous lines: "In every strike looms the hydra of the revolution!"?' (Lenin, 'Speech on the Revolution of 1905', CW 23, p. 246). Of course, here it is a question of quantity turning into quality. But whoever closes their eyes to the basic question will never be able to grasp properly this side of the process in large-scale events or in small ones. Whoever, like Rudas, out of a tailist fear of falling victim to 'subjectivism', categorically denies such moments will necessarily (as the Hungarian comrades who worked with Comrade Rudas had to find out time after time) react to the more concealed moments in truly fatalistic and tailist ways.

It is clear that such a tailist perspective is irreconcilable with the *preparation* of the revolution, a basic element of Leninism. Comrade Rudas is actually revising Lenin here – of course, quite consciously – in that each time that the matter that he is dealing with pushes towards this concept he foists on it the concept 'anticipation'. 'The proletariat is temporarily too immature to carry out its act of emancipation. Becoming mature depends on many circumstances; among them the role of consciousness of the proletariat plays a certain role, perhaps even a large role. That does not, however, prevent us from anticipating that the proletariat will mature, that the time must come when it fulfils its mission, when it will become aware of it' (*Arbeiterliteratur* X, pp. 696–7). That this is not just a case of a chance stylistic derailment is shown not only by the repetition of this expression, but also by the fact that Comrade Rudas triumphantly parades as a terrible conclusion of my 'subjectivism' the notion that 'the Social Democrats must be correct, then, with their theory that first the proletariat must be educated and cultivated before they can begin to bring about the revolution! The Social Democrats must be correct in their "politics" by restricting all their activity to "educational work"!' (*Arbeiterliteratur* XII, p. 1086). Comrade Rudas obviously thinks that ideological influence is

possible only through 'educational work'. Any other influence occurs through the economy, which enters the mind (automatically, without active or conscious activity). Comrade Rudas does not notice just how much of a Kantian he is, how closely he conceives the problem of ideology in a subjective Kantian manner, along the lines of a precise separation of 'pure' from 'practical' reason. I am indeed 'subjectivist' enough not to underestimate educational work, and think it extremely desirable that comrades such as Rudas should thoroughly immerse themselves in Lenin's writings on organisation, before they release an almost Bernsteinian speech against 'subjectivism' in the name of Leninism.

2. Imputation

And so we find ourselves back with one of the foremost sins that I have committed, in Comrade Rudas's opinion. I am talking about so-called 'imputed' class consciousness.

Before I embark on the actual problem, the reader may allow me to make a few introductory remarks. First of all: as with every problem that I have dealt with in my book, I lay no particular weight on the term 'imputation'. If it were to prove to be the case that what I mean by this expression – and still essentially hold to be true today and which I will defend in the words that follow – could be expressed in another way and better, with less room for misunderstandings, I would shed no tears over 'imputation'. If the expression is bad then let it disappear. If I do not follow Rudas, then, in his well-trodden deliberations on the meaning and origin of the word 'imputation' (and intend to speak only about the *matter itself*), I must still note, however, that – whether out of ignorance of the facts or intentionally – he simplifies the matter. He presents the matter as if 'imputation' means a functional dependence, that is to say, as if it were a mathematical term, whose task consists in replacing causality (*Arbeiterliteratur* X, pp. 670ff).⁸ This is factually incorrect. 'Imputation' is an old juristic term. If I remember correctly it goes right back to Aristotle. The sense in which I am using the word, however, becomes common only in later jurisprudence. Indeed it comes from an *objectivist* tendency. It is supposed to aid the singling out of the

objectively decisive, causal context from the confusion of superficial connections and subjective psychological conditions. For example, an object falls out of a window and kills a passer-by on the street below. From a juristic perspective, who caused the death, and *what* did those concerned do wrong? In the first instance, what is important is not what the person concerned thought or intended, but whether he *could* or *should* have known that his action or failure to act in a normal way *would* have to lead to these consequences. In order not to get myself caught up in what is – for this debate – a peripheral detail, I will refer to a definition, such as is the ‘*diligens pater familias*’ of Roman law. It is clear what such definitions are meant to do. They are meant to help reconstruct from the facts the *objectively* essential elements of a legal situation, in order to work out the *objectively* typical elements in such a case. (These objective and typical elements may not coincide in any way at all with what comprises the statistical and average, although it evidently tends in this direction under normal circumstances. However, it is certainly possible, for example, that in an astronomical boom the average speculator does not proceed in accord with the practice of ‘normal’ merchants, but can still, in spite of that, set a measure for juristic imputation.)

Now – whether consciously or unconsciously – this method is continually being used in the humanities. That is to say, from the facts that are presented to us, the attempt is made to reconstruct the objective situation and ‘subjective’ moments are explained from this (and not the other way round). By leaving out the inessential details of an objective situation, one can distinguish what people acting according to normal and correct knowledge of their situation were able to do or to allow. According to this measure, their mistakes or their correct insights, etc., can be assessed. I will mention as an example merely Delbrück’s war history, for here perhaps Comrade Rudas might be assuaged by Mehring’s judgement that learning something from it was not a contamination of his Marxist purity. But, if he reads up on Engels’s articles about the war of 1870–71, he can find a similar method in the critique of the campaign by Bourbaki (cf., for example, *Notes on the War*, Vienna 1923). And political critique is no different. The criticism that Marx and Engels levelled at the bourgeois parties in 1848–49 consists –

methodologically – in always showing what they could have done and should have done given the objective economic and political situation and what they, however, failed to do. One might think of the criticism that Marx exercises in the *Eighteenth Brumaire* on the politics of the Montagne and the Party of Order. His analysis of the objective situation does not merely indicate the purely objective impossibility of a certain step or of success (impossibility of proletarian victory in the Junius battle). In certain places, it also shows the subjective incapacity of classes, parties and their leaders to reach possible conclusions from the given situation, and to act accordingly. One example is the analysis of the contest between the unparliamentary ministry of Bonaparte and the Party of Order, when the Minister of the Interior spoke of the threat to the peace. ‘It sufficed’ – Marx explains – ‘for even a mere Vaisse to conjure up the red spectre, and the Party of Order rejected without discussion a motion that would certainly have won for the National Assembly immense popularity and thrown Bonaparte back into its arms. Instead of letting itself be intimidated by the executive power with the prospect of fresh disturbances, it ought rather to have allowed the class struggle a little elbow-room, so as to keep the executive power dependent on itself’ (MECW 11, p. 162).

As long as we are only talking about classes, who – because of their objective situation – necessarily act with *false consciousness*, it suffices, in most cases, to counter-balance false consciousness with the objective reality of economic life, in order to grasp correctly the course of the historical process. But even the example that was just cited can teach us that simple counter-balancing is not always sufficient. For ‘false consciousness’ too can be false in a dialectical and a mechanical way. That is to say, there are objective relations that such a class (given its class position) finds *impossible* to grasp, and, within the same objective relations, there are situations that can be recognised, situations in which it is *possible* to act correctly, consciously or unconsciously (in class terms), in correspondence with the objective situation. The actual thoughts (of classes, parties, leaders) about certain situations, however, do not always match the correct ones that these people should be able to reach from their class position. There is a distance between the consciousness of their situation that they actually possess and the consciousness that they

could have – given *their* class position. And the prospect of bridging that is the task of parties and their leaders. (I repeat, the second instance of our dilemma does *not* coincide with objectively correct, scientific knowledge of the historical situation; this is only possible on the basis of historical materialism.)

The proletariat finds itself in a different position. The proletariat *can* have a correct knowledge of the historical process and its individual stages, in accordance with its class position. But does it always have this knowledge? Not at all. And inasmuch as this distance is acknowledged to be a *fact*, it is the duty of every Marxist to reflect seriously on its *causes* and – most importantly – on the *means of overcoming* it. This question is the *actual substance* of my difference with Comrade Rudas in relation to the ‘imputation’ problem. By ‘imputed’ class consciousness, I mean the consciousness that corresponds to the objective economic position of the proletariat, at any one time, and that can be attained by the proletariat. I used the expression ‘imputation’ in order to represent this distance clearly. I repeat – while I am quite happy to let the expression go if it leads to misunderstandings – I am not prepared to budge one inch from the *Bolshevik* consideration of class struggle, in order to accommodate mechanistic–tailist objections to the *matter itself*.

As will be well known by the readers of this polemic, my exegesis derives from Marx’s phrase (*The Holy Family*): ‘It is not a question of what this or that proletarian, or even the whole proletariat, at the moment, *regards* as its aim. It is a question of *what the proletariat is*, and what, in accordance with this *being*, it will historically be compelled to do.’ (MECW 4, p. 37.) Comrade Rudas’s polemic against my understanding of this paragraph is too easy: that in it is the state of affairs outlined above and, at the same time, that the *task* of the proletarian party is to overcome the distance between being and consciousness, or more precisely: between the consciousness that *objectively corresponds* to the economic being of the proletariat, and a consciousness whose *class character* remains behind this being. According to Rudas’s reading, Marx means:

Socialist authors ascribe a particular world historical role to the proletariat. Why do they do that, and why can they do that? Because today’s

society is subjected to certain laws, which prescribe the future direction of society just as necessarily as the direction of a stone that has been thrown is prescribed by the laws of gravity. The stone does not know that its fall is prescribed necessarily by natural forces, and it might just as well be the case that at this moment the proletariat knows nothing of its role either. But only *at the moment* – says Marx. For since the proletariat consists not of stones but of people, who possess consciousness, so they will become aware of their historical mission in time. The English and the French are already beginning to become conscious of their historical tasks. And the others will follow. How do I know that? Because – says Marx – I know as a materialist that consciousness depends on social being, is a product of this social being. Since this being is constituted such that the proletariat through its suffering, etc., is absolutely of necessity forced into action, so too is it absolutely necessary that in time its consciousness will awaken. (*Arbeiterliteratur* X, pp. 695–6)

And the task of ‘Marxists’, he notes, in accord with the assertion that I have already cited, consists in ‘*anticipating* this development’ (ibid. – Rudas’s italics).

Now I believe that Marx would not have been at all satisfied with this ‘Marxist’ task of ‘anticipating’, nor with the idea that the proletariat will naturally reach ideological maturity over time. He has voiced his opinions on this matter several times quite unambiguously. I will simply quote here some words from his ‘Confidential Reports’: ‘The English possess all the necessary material preconditions for social revolution. What they lack is a sense of generalisation, and revolutionary passion. Only the General Council is in a position to instil this and to accelerate a truly revolutionary movement in this country and, as a consequence of that, everywhere else’ (*Letters to Dr Kugelmann*). Two observations are of great importance for us here. First, that for Marx it appears possible, and therefore clear, that, in his opinion, historical materialism is not contradicted by, but rather confirms that objective ripeness for revolution can be present, while the consciousness of the proletariat *remains behind objective economic development*. Second, that it is the *task* of the International, the international proletarian party to intervene *actively* in the process of developing proletarian class consciousness from its actual position to

the highest level that is objectively possible. It is impossible to stress too strongly the fact that, for the matter under consideration here – which is a quite basic *methodological* question of historical materialism – it is of no importance whether Marx was right or wrong in his judgement of the English situation at the time. Opportunists of every stripe always point out Marx's and Engels's 'mistaken' assessment of the situation, their 'overestimation of the revolutionary ripeness' of the situation. Without entering further into this discussion, we must emphasise briefly that the mere fact that a revolution was not achieved is no proof that the objective conditions for a revolution were indeed lacking; witness the Lenin quotation above. We must hold on to the *methodological core* of Marx's assertion. Now, Comrade Rudas – as we have seen – admits as fact the discrepancy in the level of class consciousness of the proletariat. And he does not only prescribe us the 'purely Marxist' formula of 'anticipating' that this fact will naturally and of necessity change over time, but also, at another point in his essay, he backs up this view. 'And if proletarians do not feel more or less "class conscious" or even feel hostile to the class, then that is because their position in the economic process is itself not purely typical. Either they are not working in large factories, or they belong to the petty-bourgeois proletariat' (*Arbeiterliteratur* X, p. 693). Classes are simply fluid forms, says Comrade Rudas, quite correctly; but the result of his formulations is a most incorrect, most undialectical conception of a fluidity flowing of its own accord, without any *conscious assistance* on the part of the Communist Party, naturally and of necessity until a correct understanding of class position 'flows in'. Or, so as not to offend Comrade Rudas's materialist and economic austerity: these differences will cease if the subjects' position in the economic process becomes 'purely typical'; if, for example, the American workers find employment in large factories, for, as we know, the technical backwardness of the American organisation of the economy is the decisive reason for their undeveloped class consciousness.

But, jokes aside, clearly my aim is not to minimise the significance of this factor. (Cf. on this point HCC, pp. 322–3.) If one considers the whole development of the proletariat from a broad perspective, embracing all epochs, then this perception could even be correct; albeit with some important modifications, which we will go into further shortly.

However, for practical politics – and these are hopefully an important part of Marxist theory for Rudas too – it is not at all correct without qualification. If we start with the beginnings of the independent emergence of the proletariat in Germany, when the workers of precisely the biggest and technically most organised machine factories (Borsig, etc.) held on most tenaciously to organisational unity with the bourgeois and petty-bourgeois parties, while cigar workers, cobblers, tailors, etc., joined the ranks of the revolutionary movement more swiftly (cf., for example, Mehring's *History of the Social Democratic Party*, vol. III), up to the centre workers of the Ruhr district, who were truly not employed in small factories, or the Hungarian movement where Comrade Rudas might have witnessed similar alignments, we can see a similar picture everywhere: the clarity and candour of proletarian self-consciousness is not ranked exclusively, or even at all, according to big concerns and small concerns. And the class consciousness of workers, who work in the same concerns (even if they stem from similar social milieus – if they are not peasants newly moved into the towns or the children of workers), is almost always quite varied. Our consideration of the levels of consciousness in the proletariat must not rest with this obvious and captivating sounding formulation. This alone would necessarily lead to fatalism. (See Comrade Rudas.)

In the passage quoted above, Comrade Rudas alludes to the labour aristocracy, without noticing that he contradicts his own point of view, for the labour aristocracy is recruited – predominantly – out of precisely those layers of the working class who, according to his view, should belong to the 'purest type'. It is recruited from the layer of skilled workers, and mostly those from the largest and technologically most advanced factories. The pre-war theory and practice of the Social Democrats set out from a similar starting point to that of Comrade Rudas. Oblivious to energetic warnings on the part of Marx and Engels, they identified the class consciousness of the labour aristocracy with the class consciousness of the proletariat, and, in cases of conflicts, considered the interests of this layer to be the representative interests of the whole class. Their consciousness was taken to be the appropriate consciousness of the whole class. This follows logically if one conceives class consciousness as a *mechanical* product of the immediate economic

position of the workers, if one does not consider social relations in their *totality*. In order to comprehend the function of the labour aristocracy as an obstacle to the development of the revolutionary movement in its entirety, one needs to *abandon immediacy* and recognise the real dialectical forces that bring forth this immediacy and give it its function in the context of the whole. Lenin and his pupils built on and concretised the lessons of Marx and Engels. They recognised the danger that exists for the revolutionary movement if it identifies the interests and the consciousness of this layer of the working class with the class interest and class consciousness of the proletariat. I will cite just one of Lenin's many formulations. Lenin defines opportunism as 'the sacrifice of the basic interests of the mass in favour of the temporary interests of a small number of workers' (*Against the Stream*). In the same spirit, Zinoviev said:

The narrow corporate interests of this minority of privileged labour aristocrats are what the Social Chauvinists have mistaken for the interests of the working class. This mistake is, incidentally, understandable given the fact that the leaders of the trade unions and the official Social Democratic Party themselves mostly derive from the ranks of the labour aristocracy. The labour aristocracy and the labour bureaucracy are two blood sisters. When the Social Chauvinists speak of the interests of the working class they often – quite unconsciously – have the interests of the labour aristocracy in mind. But even here it is not really a case of true interests in the broader meaning of the term, but rather immediate material advantage. These are absolutely not one and the same thing. (Zinoviev, *The War and the Crisis of Socialism*)

The matter itself is presented with fantastic clarity.

For us, however, desirous of clarity on the *methodological* side of the problem, the following question crops up: with what justification does Comrade Zinoviev maintain that the genuine interests of the working class and immediate material advantage are absolutely not one and the same thing? With what justification does he speak about the 'genuine' interests of the working class at all, refusing to posit this distinction as a 'sociological' one that needs to be traced back to its economic roots, but

rather simultaneously positing one interest (and its corresponding consciousness) as correct, and the other as false and dangerous? (If he found this passage in my book, Comrade Rudas would start going on indignantly about 'judgement', Rickertian influence, etc.) The answer is simple: because one consciousness corresponds to the economic and social position of the class as a totality, while the other sticks at the immediacy of a particular and temporary interest. But this is just the starting point of the question. For, first, it is already a matter of a theoretically correct conception of the objective class position, whereby the crucial point is the *objective correctness* of the theoretical analysis. In and of itself, both points of view are causal products of social being in human minds, which are not, *in this respect*, distinguished from each other. Their difference lies in the extent to which each is a deep or superficial, dialectical or mechanical, practical and critical or fetishistically ideological analysis of the objective social being, whose product they both are. At first glance, they appear similar. Their difference only becomes noticeable when this immediacy is surpassed. Then the objective forms of mediation that remain hidden in a consciousness trapped in immediacy are penetrated. This is why a correct theory is not only able to refute a false one, but is also in a position to point to those moments of existence that spawn the incorrect theory. It can point out those moments that representatives of the incorrect theory adopted with unanalysed immediacy and then generalised in a correspondingly abstract way. (That is why the Bolsheviks are able to explain the social conditions of the advent of Menshevism, while the Mensheviks in return could only repeat phrases about putschism, sectarianism, etc.; and this is why Comrade Lenin, in his polemic about the right to self-determination, uncovered the historical roots of the mistakes of the Polish and Dutch 'left-radicals', while simultaneously countering their false theories – *Against the Stream*.)

Second, a mere analysis of the objective economic situation, even if theoretically correct, is not enough. The correct *guidelines for action* must be developed out of the analysis. If, however, the objective economic situation is not immediately apparent in its *objective correctness*, then the guidelines, and the slogans that follow from them, must be *found* deliberately. In no way do they arise 'spontaneously', and even the spontaneity

of their influence among the workers is in no way a certain criterion of their correctness. (Comrade Lenin points out that under certain circumstances specious 'left' slogans exercise a stronger immediate influence than correct communist slogans, 'but that is', he adds, 'still no proof of the correctness of their tactics' – '*Left-Wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder*.) Precisely the often repeated necessity to swim 'against the stream' – as much in Marx as in Lenin – proves the unfoundedness, the objectively unrevolutionary nature of all 'theories of spontaneity'. But what are then the correct slogans, if they are not simply the thoughts and feelings of the majority of workers, or those of the average worker? They are precisely 'the thoughts and feelings that men would have in a particular situation if they were *able* to assess both it and the interests arising in it in their impact on immediate action and on the whole structure of society. That is to say, it would be possible to infer the thoughts and feelings appropriate to their objective situation' (HCC, p. 51). And so, fortuitously, we have arrived at 'imputed' class consciousness. For that – no more and no less – is what it means to say, irrespective of whether it is called 'imputation' or anything else.

Of course, Comrade Rudas objects: with what justification do I rank precisely this consciousness as class consciousness? 'But' – he says – 'one does not call the consciousness of the proletariat class consciousness because it correctly or falsely reflects their situation. But rather because this consciousness, with all its peculiarities, *is restricted to the proletariat*' (*Arbeiterliteratur* X, p. 690). The second part of the sentence has nothing to do with our argument. Self-evidently both correct and false consciousness are restricted to the proletariat in this case. But any agitator or propagandist could teach Comrade Rudas a lesson on the first part of the sentence. He would ask Comrade Rudas whether he may not speak of class-conscious workers *in contrast* to those who are not class-conscious (who are just as much workers whose thought is just as much determined by their proletarian being). He would ask Comrade Rudas whether he had the right to dispute the proletarian class consciousness of a strike-breaker, indeed even a wavering worker. And, in appealing to the class consciousness of workers through an analysis of the objective situation and the slogans that follow from it, does he have the right to awaken or heighten this class consciousness? Will he be satisfied then

with just establishing that economic development has only produced a certain level of class consciousness in the average worker and he – as Marxist – 'anticipates' that this development will gradually develop class consciousness as well to a higher level? With stuff such as this we find ourselves in the swamp of Kautskyist theory, where the 'level of the productive forces' is fate, an attitude that Comrade Stalin has quite rightly labelled a falsification of Marxism. If nothing happens, it is 'because, given the "level of the productive forces" that we had then, nothing else could have been undertaken; the "productive forces" are "to blame" . . . And whoever does not believe this "theory" is simply not a Marxist. The role of the party? Its significance in the movement? But what can the party do in the face of such a crucial factor, as the "level of the productive forces"? . . .' (*Lenin and Leninism*).

Comrade Rudas could perhaps retort: it might occur that, under certain circumstances (although this is not compatible with a spontaneist–tailist perspective), objectively correct theory and the correct slogans that follow from it are not taken up by the workers. It would be, however, the purest idealism to ascribe to this correct knowledge ('a knowledge': *Apagē satanas!*) a decisive role in the real class struggle, in actual history. I already responded to this argument when I dealt with the so-called theory of 'moments' and analysed the Marxist–Leninist concept of 'insurrection as an art'. That is why here only a few relevant quotes from Lenin's long list of similar formulations must suffice. Comrade Lenin said at the Eleventh Party Congress of the RCP: 'The communists are a drop in the ocean of people. They will only be in a position to lead the people, to take them down their path, *if they correctly define the path*' (*Speeches at Party Congresses, 1918–1922*, p. 319 – my italics). And, in his '*Left-Wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder*, when he summarises the experiences of the RCP for the benefit of non-Russian communists, he begins his response to the question about the main conditions for the success of the Bolsheviks by emphasising the need for correct theory. All of this belongs to the ABC of Marxism and Leninism, and it is both sad and laughable that I have to explain all of this in such detail. But it has to be done, for now we have hit upon the question of the *party*, a question that for every fan of the spontaneity theory constitutes – consciously or unconsciously – the real stumbling block. (Once

more I am referring to the essay by Comrade Rudas on the Hungarian dictatorship.) I concur with Marx: class consciousness is not 'a matter of what this or that proletarian or even the whole proletariat *imagines* for itself as a goal at any point'. Class consciousness is, then, neither a psychological nor a mass-psychological problem, but rather – but here Comrade Rudas interjects indignantly: 'Now one might believe that Comrade Lukács has discovered a third place, where class consciousness realises itself. Perhaps in the head of a God or many gods, perhaps in the head of Madame History, or some such thing' (*Arbeiterliteratur* X, p. 681) – you see, I apparently turn consciousness into a historical demon, a 'demi-urge of actuality, of history' (*ibid.*, p. 687). I am apparently an old Hegelian and so on, and so forth. But let me mollify Comrade Rudas (or, better put, let me upset his tail-ending): this 'third place' is not that difficult for a communist to find: it is the *Communist Party*.

We all know the definition that the *Communist Manifesto* gives of communists, and which the Second Congress of the Comintern took up into its theses almost word for word. As a result of that, it has become a commonplace in the Communist Party to appreciate the need for an organisation of class-conscious elements of the proletariat. Sentences that are repeated frequently run the risk of being unquestioningly accepted and echoed, even when, as in this case, they contain nothing but the truth. But what about that moment when they are not repeated word for word, when their true meaning is ignored, indeed when it is declared that they mean exactly their opposite. This is what has happened to Comrade Rudas. Articulating noble indignation, Comrade Rudas gets worked up about the fact that, in the incriminating passage of my book – 'As we stressed in the motto to this essay the existence of this conflict enables us to perceive that class consciousness is identical with neither the psychological consciousness of individual members of the proletariat, nor with the (mass-psychological) consciousness of the proletariat as a whole; but it is, on the contrary, *the sense, become conscious, of the historical role of the class*' (HCC, p. 73) – I confuse consciousness and content of consciousness (*Arbeiterliteratur* X, p. 682). I understand perfectly Comrade Rudas's indignation: his Kantianism that is always arduously repressed has to come up for air now and again and rebel against the practical entwinements of form and content. For it is part of

the essence of Kantianism to separate form and content from one another exactly, inflexibly and mechanically, a fact that is very significant in the context of the present discussion:

whatever happens to be the contents of consciousness, for the thoughts, feelings, aims, etc., which people have may change permanently – in each given period of time they have a complex of these things in their head, and it is this complex that is called 'consciousness'. And this consciousness can *only* be realised in the individual person psychologically or, in the many, mass-psychologically. What this 'psychological or mass-psychological realisation' means is decided by another science, and to be precise a natural science, psychology (mass psychology). (*Ibid.*, pp. 682–3)

To put it simply: the content of consciousness is a 'sociological question', consciousness itself is a 'psychological' question; both questions have only a loose, distant and complicated relationship to one another, for they belong to 'different sciences'. Comrade Rudas says:

Only that which becomes conscious for them, that is to say, only the content of consciousness is further defined by Lukács in the second part of the passage: that is the 'sense of the historical role of the class'. But that is a different situation, if you please! What the content of consciousness of the person is at any one moment, whether this content corresponds to reality or not, that is a question in itself, which has absolutely nothing at all to do with the question of whether consciousness is psychological or mass-psychological! May the content be true or false, expressing a 'sense of the historical role of the class' or not, the consciousness that accommodates this content is either an individual psychological or mass-psychological one! (*Ibid.*, p. 682)

Anyway, Comrade Rudas thinks that an explanation of the relationship of 'psychology' to Marxism might be an 'extremely interesting' question, but in the way that he phrases this question it is extremely unlikely that anything sensible would come of it.

If we attempt to move away from the schematic, Kantian treatment

of the question in Rudas, then we have to ask if class consciousness (for class consciousness and not consciousness in general is what is under investigation here!) is an issue that really can be treated *separately* from the *content* of consciousness? The formulations expressed so far have already shown that this is impossible. Let us go back to the previous example. If we deny that a strike-breaker has proletarian class consciousness then we are neither denying that he is a worker according to his social being, nor that within him (in his worker's head, Comrade Rudas!) a process of consciousness is taking place (even a causally necessary process of consciousness) that has led to the strike-breaking. We are simply contesting whether the content of *his consciousness corresponds to his objective class position*. For a dialectician, the concept of consciousness is necessarily *inseparable* from its content. It is a *concrete* concept, while the Kantian – however carefully he disguises himself as a materialist – will always seek a general, formal definition (in Comrade Rudas's case this is the psychological), which can be related to an arbitrary content whose explanation is a task for 'another science'. And because he is absolutely unable to imagine a dialectical relationship between content and form, a determination of form by content, a correspondingly dialectically changing form, his noble indignation is (psychologically or – if Comrade Rudas prefers it – mass-psychologically) quite understandable. For it follows necessarily from his mechanical dualistic perspective that this 'third place' where class consciousness is realised can only be a 'demon' or a 'god', since this 'third place' has to remain transcendent for mechanistic and dualistic thought. The real social basis is, of course, tail-ending, in whose eyes the party is always somewhat transcendent.

If, however, one refuses to follow the Kantian separation of form and content slavishly, in the manner of Comrade Rudas, then the question is really quite simple. We repeat: the concept of class consciousness is one that contains content. It is a concrete concept and the famous 'third place' where the concept is realised is *the organisation of the Communist Party*. Comrade Lenin clearly emphasised this task of the party from the very beginning and defended it clearly versus tailist disciples of the theory of spontaneity. He puts it thus: 'If it is to be a conscious spokesman *in fact*, the party must be able to work out such

organisational relations as will *ensure a definite level* of consciousness and systematically raise this level' (*One Step Forward, Two Steps Back*, CW 7, p. 273). Of course, this process takes place inside party members' heads. But this alone, however, cannot settle the question decisively, for opportunistic perspectives and forms of organisation take place as much inside the heads of opportunists as revolutionary ones take place inside the heads of revolutionaries, *formally* in the psychological sense. Both perspectives are just as 'conscious' or just as little 'conscious'. Thus Rosa Luxemburg, as representative of the theory of spontaneity, consistently, that is to say consistently incorrectly, could say: 'Since however the Social Democratic movement is a mass movement and the threatening obstacles stem not from people's heads but from social conditions, opportunistic aberrations cannot be prevented . . . Regarded from this perspective opportunism appears to be a product of the workers' movement itself, and an inevitable phase of its historical development' ('Organisational Questions of Russian Social Democracy' in *Rosa Luxemburg Speaks*, ed. Mary Alice Waters (New York, 1970), p. 129). But, really, the decisive question is *how*, on the one hand, correct recognition of the class position of the proletariat ('level of consciousness' in Lenin, 'sense of the historical role of the class' in me) can be raised to an ever higher level, that is to say, become ever more correct in terms of content, ever more appropriate to the actual situation. And, on the other hand, how this consciousness can be *made* conscious in as large a section of the class as possible (ensuring and raising of the level in Lenin).

Of course this relationship must be conceived as a relationship between permanently moving moments, as a process. (I hope that the dialectical meaning of the word 'process' has already been adequately explained so that there is no more room for the tailist suppression of evidence.) This means that economic being, and, with it, proletarian class consciousness and its organisational forms, find themselves transformed uninterruptedly. In the process, the determinations sketched here are valid for every moment of this process of transformation, and are, in each phase, products of the previous phase and, at the same time, determinate causes of the coming phase. That is why determinations such as level of class consciousness, the sense of historical role are not abstract and formal, not concepts that are fixed for all time, but express

concrete relationships in concrete historical situations. 'The fact that proletarian class consciousness becomes autonomous and assumes objective form is only meaningful for the proletariat if at every moment it really embodies for the proletariat the revolutionary meaning of precisely that moment' (HCC, p. 333). This development, this raising of the level of class consciousness is, then, not an endless (or finite) progress, not a permanent advance towards a goal fixed for all time, but itself a dialectical process. Not only does it take place in uninterrupted interchange with the development of social reality in its totality (for example, an unsuccessful action of the proletariat, caused by vacillation or the low level of consciousness of the vanguard, can change the objective situation in such a way that further development – in a certain sense – sets in at a lower level), but correspondingly it does not proceed in an unequivocal, upwards rising line. Precisely, Bolshevik self-criticism with its unprecedented significance for the development of parties, and mediated to the whole proletariat through those parties, shows this most clearly. For what does self-criticism mean – methodologically? The knowledge that the actions of the party, at any given moment, were not on the same level as might have been objectively possible in the given situation. In examining the causes of this discrepancy in level between actual activity and its concrete and objective possibility, one must not stick simply to establishing the objective cause, for such 'objectivism', as Comrade Zinoviev correctly points out (*Against the Stream*) looks, at best, like fatalism. Examination of the causes of a mistake is, on the contrary, directed towards the eradication of the causes. Which is why it is utterly possible that the development of the level of class consciousness can be more strongly encouraged through mistakes that are correctly recognised and, correspondingly, thoroughly corrected, than through a partially correct activity that has, however, merely arisen spontaneously.

Lenin's *organisational forms* are essential for this. In no way are they, as Comrade Rosa Luxemburg thought, useless 'paper' guarantees. On the contrary, they are a decisive moment in the emergence and further development of proletarian class consciousness. The organisational forms of the proletariat, in first rank the party, are real *forms of mediation*, in which and through which develops and *is* developed the consciousness that corresponds to the social being of the proletariat. The

organisational forms of the proletariat arise, in part, spontaneously, from the base, out of the class struggle, and in part they are created, in (correct or false) consciousness. If, however, the spontaneous basal mode of emergence is understood to be the only possible one, or the only correct one, then the danger arises that the mediating function of organisational form will be left out of the picture. On the one hand, organisation is underestimated, and deliverance is brought about only by the spontaneous mass movement, who also create organisational forms (Rosa Luxemburg, *op. cit.*) while the organisation is demoted to an inhibiting, 'conservative moment' (*ibid.*). On the other hand, an organisation conceived in this way and led in this way does indeed develop conservative and inflexible moments, which disconnect it from living, permanently changing historical existence. Both sides of the question are closely connected. If bourgeois sociologists, for example Michels, bring out this 'conservative' moment of 'party sociology', then, from a bourgeois point of view, they are operating quite consistently and overlook, of course, just as consistently the *specificity* of proletarian class organisation. And Comrade Rudas who, on the question of proletarian class consciousness, *that is to say*, on the question of organisation, privileges a Kantian dualism of form and content that hopes to solve the question of class consciousness in a 'general' psychological or sociological way, acts just as consistently, when at every turn he adopts a purely contemplative, reflective perspective in respect of history, when he – of course without admitting it, indeed perhaps without even being aware of it – stands continuously in the camp of spontaneity theory. For, seen from a methodological point of view, spontaneity theory is nothing other than a way of seeing that, applied to the class struggle of the proletariat, sets out (supposedly) from the class standpoint of the proletariat, and yet is contemplative, that is, bourgeois, dualistic and undialectical.

What is the significance of my labelling the organisation a real form of mediation? Once again it is part of the ABC of Marxism, but, unfortunately, has to be repeated yet again: the actual make-up of social phenomena is *not immediately* apparent. The direct forms of appearance of social being are not, however, subjective fantasies of the brain, but moments of the real forms of existence, the conditions of existence of capitalist society. It seems obvious to the people who live in capitalist

society, indeed it strikes them as 'natural', to stick with these forms and not to strive to fathom the more hidden interconnections (intermediary terms, mediations) through which these phenomena interconnect in reality, and through whose identification they can be understood only in their *correct context*. If Comrade Rudas (*Arbeiterliteratur* X, pp. 673–4) conceives Marxism simply as an empirical science,⁹ then he falls victim to – to put it mildly – bourgeois one-sidedness, since he sets empirical and aprioristic ways of seeing inflexibly and dualistically against each other in a Kantian manner. It is true that Marx stresses the empirical character of historical materialism in contrast to the constructive philosophy of history. Nevertheless, countering economic empiricism, he emphasises, for example, that 'all science would be superfluous if outward appearance and the essence of things directly coincided' (*Capital* III, Ch. 48, MECW 37, p. 804) and he stresses that Ricardo's main error is 'not going far enough, [. . .] not carrying his abstraction to completion' (*Theories of Surplus Value* II (London, 1969), p. 106). And these correct abstractions, as is known, do not grow directly in empirical reality like blackberries, commonplaces and Comrade Rudas's fraternally embraced donkeys (*Arbeiterliteratur* XII, p. 1070).¹⁰ (In his enthusiasm about fraternising with the donkey, Comrade Rudas overlooks the catholicising, Franciscan, Biedermeier-style facets of F. Jammes's 'materialist soul'.) They are also in no way so independent from the *standpoint* of theory as Comrade Rudas (*Arbeiterliteratur* X, p. 673) assumes.¹¹ Of course their discernibility does not depend on any 'aim of knowledge' in a bourgeois sense, but rather on the class standpoint and the 'aims of knowledge' that are conditioned by it. In the criticisms that Marx voices against Smith or Ricardo one can read what role their class standpoint and the knowledge aims determined by it play in their – often empirically correct – conception of actuality. (I am deliberately not speaking about the apologists here.) If, in contrast to this, historical materialism alone is in a position to offer objective and correct knowledge of capitalist society, it does not deliver this knowledge independently of the class standpoint of the proletariat, but rather *precisely from this standpoint*. Whoever is unable to see this interconnection, and therefore separates historical materialism from the class standpoint of the proletariat, is either an undialectical dualist (who separates theory from praxis *à la*

Hilferding) or an idealist (like Lassalle). Comrade Rudas seems to belong to both groups alternately. The consequences that flow from an idealist, undialectical linking of class standpoint and historical materialism will be dealt with later.

Lenin worked out the concrete possibilities of *proletarian praxis*, through detection of the *real links of mediation* between class position and conscious correct praxis – this must count as one of his undying theoretical achievements. (Whereas Rosa Luxemburg, to cite a contrasting example, clung to an unmediated and mythological way of seeing.) For the class consciousness of the proletariat is never supplied directly, neither in terms of its content nor in its emergence and development. For as long as the real mediating links of its growth remain unrecognised, and therefore unanalysed in practical terms, it develops spontaneously and elementally. (The effectiveness of unrecognised real social forces assumes, as form of consciousness, a spontaneous character.) And in order to abolish this spontaneity it is not at all sufficient to recognise the general, economic and social forms of existence which bring out and determine class consciousness, not even if they are worked out economically right down to the smallest detail. Rather, those *specific* real forms of mediation that are suited to promote *this* process or to inhibit it – of course, on the basis of and in connection with the whole process of economic development – must be recognised concretely and applied concretely. Marx is not only the author of *Capital* but also the founder of the Communist League and the First International. And Lenin is especially in this respect his greatest, indeed his only pupil of equal standing; he is the founder of the Russian Communist Party, the Third International; and, verily, not just as a 'theoretical development' but precisely as an *organisational form*.

From the very beginning the organisational forms recognised and applied by Lenin were resisted by – and are still today resisted by – all opportunists as 'artificial' forms. The reason is easy to see – it is the *same* reason that the tail-ender Rudas wheels out of his mind in order to counter my definition of class consciousness. These organisational forms, namely, are not simply mental formulations of the unmediated state of consciousness of the average worker (even if his situation is 'thoroughly typical'). That is to say, they are 'neither psychological nor

mass-psychological' perceptions, but work out rather practical measures from a correct knowledge of the historical process as a whole, from the totality of its economic, political, ideological, etc., moments. These practical measures are those with whose help, on the one hand *one part* of the proletariat is raised to the level of consciousness that correctly corresponds to its objective position in the totality, while, on the other hand, the broad mass of workers and other exploited people can be led correctly in their struggles. It must be underlined at once that only a part of the workers can be raised to this level. Lenin says it repeatedly: '... it would be Manilovism and "tail-ending" to think that at any time under capitalism the entire class, or almost the entire class, would be able to rise to the level of consciousness and activity of its vanguard, of its Social Democratic party' (from: *One Step Forward, Two Steps Back*. 'Paragraph One of the Rules').¹² But even in this portion of the working class consciousness does not only not arise 'by itself', but not even as an immanent result of its immediate economic position and the inevitable class struggles that develop from it at the base. As Lenin explains – in *What is to be Done?*: 'Correct class consciousness' (he uses the term social-democratic consciousness here) 'would have to be brought to them from without. The history of all countries shows that the working class, exclusively by its own effort, is able to develop only trade-union consciousness, that mean conviction of the necessity of organising as trade unionists, i.e., the conviction that it is necessary to combine in unions, fight the employers, and strive to compel the government to pass necessary labour legislation, etc.' (*What is to be Done?*, CW 5, p. 375). However, this is a historical process, and the spontaneous element is the germ seed of a conduct that is conscious of its aims (*ibid.*). Moreover the transition cannot take place elementally.

In spite of this, there is, of course, a dialectical interrelationship between this 'from without' and the working class. For while Marx and Engels stem from the bourgeois class, the development of their doctrine is, nevertheless, a product of the development of the working class – of course not in any immediate way. And not only the doctrine itself; even elements of its foundation (Ricardo, Hegel, French historians and socialists) more or less consciously summarise in thought that social being out of which and as a part of which the proletariat arose. With

the predecessors of Marx and Engels, it is only this objective social foundation of existence that combines theory and class struggle, such that – in immediate terms – they appear to run side by side independently, until theory becomes 'a conscious product of historical movement' and with that becomes revolutionary (*Poverty of Philosophy*). But – according to Lenin's profound and correct conception – even this theory influences the proletariat from without. And even if the economic development of society makes possible a proletarian party founded on this theory, its influence on the spontaneous movements of the class will still come – albeit, of course, quite decisively dialectically qualified – 'from outside'. For it would be un-Marxist to think that as long as capitalism exists (and even for some time afterwards) the whole working class can 'spontaneously' reach the level of consciousness that corresponds objectively to its objective economic position. Development consists in the fact that this 'from outside' the class is brought ever closer to the class, such that it loses its exterior character, without being able – given the present stage of development – to abolish the dialectical relationship that Lenin pinpoints. For the social being of the proletariat places it *immediately* only in a relationship of struggle with the capitalists, while proletarian class consciousness becomes class consciousness proper when it incorporates a knowledge of the *totality* of bourgeois society. At another point in the same piece of writing Lenin explains this thought in the following way: 'Class political consciousness can be brought to the workers *only from without*, that is, only from outside the economic struggle, from outside the sphere of relations between workers and employers. The sphere from which alone it is possible to obtain this knowledge is the sphere of relationships of *all* classes and strata to the state and the government, the sphere of the interrelations between all classes.' And he adds: 'the spontaneous struggle of the proletariat will not become its genuine "class struggle" until the struggle is led by a strong organisation of revolutionaries' (CW 5, p. 423). And this organisation is comprised of people who have *recognised* this, and who want to work actively in this direction, professional revolutionaries: 'in view of this common characteristic of all members of such an organisation, all distinctions as between workers and intellectuals, not to speak of distinctions of trade and profession, in both categories, must be effaced'

(ibid.) Therefore, for Lenin the revolutionary social democrat is 'a Jacobin who maintains an inseparable bond with the *organisation* of the proletariat, a proletariat conscious of its class interests' (*One Step Forward, Two Steps Back*, CW 7, p. 381).

Well then? So this mysterious 'third place', this 'historical demon', the Communist Party – which even to invoke just as a possibility seems impossible to the tail-ender Rudas – possesses a curious characteristic: it is a *content* that is necessarily tied to becoming conscious. That means that, on the one hand, it depends on the content become conscious whether the consciousness that thinks can be recognised as conscious (class conscious), while, on the other hand, *at the same time*, the content must become conscious, must become effective in the heads of people, in order to be realised. Forms of organisation are there in order to bring this process into being, to accelerate it, in order *to make* such contents conscious in the working class (in a part of the working class), which once made conscious turn the workers into class-conscious workers, precisely those contents that correspond as adequately as possible to their objective class situation. Here we can see that 'simple contradiction' which Comrade Rudas (*Arbeiterliteratur* X, p. 679) finds in this definition of class consciousness, as a *dialectical state of affairs*;¹³ that is to say it is only saddled with a contradiction – a dialectical contradiction – to the extent that the reality that underlies it is itself dialectical and contradictory. And the 'idealism' that he accuses me of (ibid.) proves to be the *Bolshevik form of organisation of the class-conscious proletariat*. The discrepancy between the 'process' and its 'sense' (ibid.) is not at all, as Comrade Rudas would have me say, a discrepancy between causal connection and 'purpose', but rather the difference between the immediately given, empirical reality of the working class (in whom, Comrade Lenin explains, has grown up only a trade-union consciousness) and the concretely developing totality of all social determinations, which occasion this immediate reality. Comrade Rudas might easily have grasped what is meant by this difference if he had been in a position to read the relevant passages in my book without tailist prejudice: out of the analysis of the relationship between momentary particular interests and class interests which follows on directly from that and which culminates in the Marxist distinction between trade-union struggles and the real

emancipation of the proletariat. For any unbiased reader, the term 'sense' means here nothing other than, on the one hand, highlighting this distinction, and the other hand, and *at the same time*, that this difference points to the forms of mediation of activity, of praxis, that is to say, of real class consciousness. The 'contradiction' that is supposed to exist here is present only for the non-dialectical thinker. For him a contradiction issues from the 'objectivity' of this class consciousness (i.e. its content, its real forms of mediation *are not determined* by its being thought) and its 'subjectivity' (i.e. the contents become conscious, the form of consciousness must be taken up in order to become real). Of course, if form and content are mechanically separated from each other, in Kantian fashion, then their dialectical interrelationship must appear incomprehensible.

Since content separated from consciousness in this way is only a kind of channel through which objective processes flow in full spontaneity, Comrade Rudas evidently finds it incomprehensible that I hold the emergence of proletarian class consciousness to be a decisive, indeed under certain conditions, the most decisive question of historical development. 'But up until now nobody has yet called the class struggle of the proletariat a struggle for consciousness' (*Arbeiterliteratur* XII, p. 1081). I do not want to pile up quotes pointlessly and so I will simply cite something said by Comrade Zinoviev: 'The communist vanguard of the working class struggles against social democracy (labour aristocracy, petit bourgeois fellow travellers) *for the working class*. The working class, at whose head stands the Communist Party, struggles with the bourgeoisie *for the peasantry*' ('Proletariat and Peasantry', *Inprekorr* V, no. 5). Does Comrade Rudas think that this is not a struggle over consciousness? If at all possible, Comrade Lenin and his pupils refuse violent measures against the peasantry. They hope to *convince* the peasantry of the necessity of forming an alliance with the proletariat – and it would be useful to find out whether here too consciousness is only a channel and from where and to where the 'process' spontaneously flows. Comrade Rudas's mistakes become understandable if we remind ourselves that, by influence on consciousness, he only understands 'educational work' (and that in its social-democratic sense). A conception that he will not find in Marx, in Lenin, nor in me. Every Bolshevik knows exactly that 'the

struggle over consciousness' embraces the whole activity of the party, that its struggle against the class enemy is *inseparable* from the struggle for the class consciousness of the proletariat and for making conscious the alliance with the semi-proletarian layers (as much in these layers as in the proletariat). For the consciousness of the masses at any one time does not develop independently of the party's politics, and the class consciousness embodied in it.

It is self-evident that the actions of the class are largely determined by its average members. But as the average is not static and cannot be determined statistically, but is itself the product of the revolutionary process, it is no less self-evident that an organisation that bases itself on an existing average is doomed to hinder development and even to reduce the general level. Conversely, the clear establishing of the highest possibility *objectively* available at a given point in time, as represented by the autonomous organisation of the conscious vanguard, is itself a means by which to relieve the tension between this objective possibility and the actual state of consciousness of the average members in a manner advantageous to the revolution. (HCC, p. 327)

And Lenin derives the potential wavering of the mood of the masses (their psychological or mass-psychological consciousness) precisely at a decisive moment from the behaviour of the party; compare the example cited earlier from 'Letter to a Comrade'.

3. *The peasantry as class*

Of course, everything that has been said here relates to the consciousness of the proletariat. And this is another point that excites the noble indignation of Comrade Rudas. His 'exact' and 'scientific' soul demands that consciousness (the form of consciousness precisely separated from its contents) must be examined in a psychological laboratory, while the questions of content are obviously to be left to – a just as 'exact' – 'sociology'. However, for this sociology – self-evidently! – the class consciousness of all classes, of all times is simply class consciousness; a form of consciousness that is called forth by the economic situation. At night all cows are

black. He notes 'only in passing' (*Arbeiterliteratur* X, p. 691) my doubt as to whether peasants can be labelled a class at all in the strict Marxist sense of the term. This observation refers to one passage in my book (HCC, p. 61), whereby Comrade Rudas 'forgets' to quote the previous page, for there, indeed I cite from the *Eighteenth Brumaire*:

In so far as millions of families live under economic conditions of existence that separate their mode of life, their interests and their culture from those of the other classes, and put them in hostile opposition to the latter, they form a class. In so far as there is merely a local interconnection among these small-holding peasants, and the identity of their interests begets no community, no national bond and no political organisation among them, they do not form a class. (MECW 11, p. 187)

This view is still today the communist view. In his theses on the peasant question (accepted at the last session of the expanded ECCI, *Inprekorr* V, no. 77) Comrade Bukharin formulated the class position of the peasants exactly along the lines of the passage just quoted:

The peasantry, which in the past was the basic class of feudal domination, is not a class in the actual sense of the word in capitalist society . . . Therefore taken as a *whole* the peasantry is not a class in capitalist society. But in so far as we are dealing with a society that is in transition from relations of a feudal character to production relations of a capitalist character, the peasantry as a *whole* frequently finds itself in a contradictory position: in relation to the feudal landed possessors it is a class, but inasmuch as it is in the grip of and displaced by capitalist relationships, it ceases to be a class.

This matches exactly the economic analysis of Marx who saw the bourgeoisie and the proletariat as the typical, real classes of bourgeois society, whose expansion tends to reduce the whole society to these two classes. In line with this conception, Marx analyses the social being of the peasantry: 'As owner of the means of production he is capitalist; as labourer he is his own wage-labourer' (*Theories of Surplus Value* I, p. 408). And by going through all the contradictions that follow from this, he indicates the

fundamental contradiction in the social being of the peasantry. In any case: in capitalist society every social being must rest on a contradiction. One would be un-Marxist, abstract, acting in accordance with the methods of merely formal bourgeois 'sociology' if one remained at the level of the simple, abstract concept of contradiction. Contradiction is not always simply contradiction, and all cows are black actually only in the night of bourgeois thought. The contradiction in the economic basis of existence of both the typical classes of capitalist society (whereby we are now – for the sake of contrast – not forgetting for a minute the difference between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat dealt with so thoroughly in my book) means that this economic base progresses in contradictions. It means that its development is always an ever broader and deeper unfolding, an ever more expanded reproduction of the *immanent* contradictions of the foundations (crisis). That does not, however, mean that this economic basis that progresses through contradictions is split into *heterogeneous parts*. It means that the *dialectical* contradictions of the capitalist order of production come to light in the social being (and consequentially in the consciousness too) of the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, but not in the *contradictions between two different orders of production*, as with the peasants. The contradictions of such a social being as that of the peasantry are, therefore, not immediately dialectical, like the contradictions of capitalist society itself, but they become dialectical only in a *mediated* way through the dialectic of the total development of capitalist society. Therefore it is only from a class standpoint that they can be grasped as dialectical, can be made conscious, a standpoint that – as a result of the social being that lays at its basis – is in a position to understand the total development of capitalist society as a dialectical process. That is to say, from the standpoint of the proletariat. The standpoint of bourgeois class is unable to recognise this total movement (that is the necessary development of capitalism from pre-capitalist forms of production, the necessity of the development of this form of production alongside capitalism, the necessity of the transition of this total complex into socialism, etc.). If, at points, the bourgeoisie has also acted – economically and politically – correctly in class terms, then it has done this, however, with 'false consciousness'. 'We are not aware of this, nevertheless we do it,' Marx once said of bourgeois praxis (*Capital I*, MECW 35, p. 85).

And what of the peasants themselves? Let us look at their social being rather more closely from the standpoint of Marxist theory. Directly before the passage that I quoted earlier, Marx says: 'They (the peasants) therefore belong neither to the category of *productive* nor of *unproductive labourers*, although they are producers of commodities. But their production does not fall under the capitalist mode of production' (*Theories of Surplus Value I*, p. 407). He explains this state of affairs more concretely in another passage: 'In the first place, the general laws of credit are not adapted to the farmer, since these laws presuppose a capitalist as the producer' (*Capital III*, ch. 47, MECW 37, p.1085). In what follows he goes on to provide a thorough overview of this situation. I will cite only the most important sentences:

On the other hand, this development takes place only where the capitalist mode of production has a limited development and does not unfold all of its peculiarities, because this rests precisely upon the fact that agriculture is no longer, or not yet, subject to the capitalist's mode of production, but rather to one handed down from extinct forms of society. The disadvantages of the capitalist mode of production, with its dependence of the producer upon the money-price of his product, coincide here therefore with the disadvantages occasioned by the imperfect development of the capitalist mode of production. The peasant turns merchant and industrialist without the conditions enabling him to produce his products as commodities. (*ibid.*, pp. 1086–7)

And in conclusion he says of the smallholding that it 'creates a class of barbarians standing halfway outside of society' (*ibid.*). What is the consequence of all this? Not at all Comrade Rudas's assertion that I say the peasants do not constitute a class at all. Certainly though there is an essentially different concrete relation between their social being and their consciousness compared to other classes; presupposing that we do not – as does a good Kantian like Comrade Rudas – stick to the pure formula that, in any case, social being (in general) determines consciousness (in general), but rather seek to understand how this being determines the *concrete particularity* of this *specific* social being. I have attempted to characterise this particularity by finding – in contrast to the

dialectical contradiction between class consciousness and class interest with the bourgeoisie – a contradictory contradiction (HCC, p. 61). I do not, I hope, need to repeat what I have already [said] about class consciousness (but just to be on the safe side I point once more to the ‘in so far’ of Marx on the peasantry as a class, to the theses of Bukharin and the view of Lenin on *when* the immediate economic struggle of the proletariat too can be termed class struggle). The immediate day-to-day interests of the working class arise from their social being in such a way that they *can* be linked to the wider interests of the class as a whole with correct consciousness, although as we have seen, according to Lenin’s view, this does not come about of its own accord. In the case of the bourgeoisie, a corresponding linking is possible only on the basis of ‘false consciousness’ (whereby once again I must point out the expressly dialectical character of this ‘false consciousness’). For the peasantry such a linking is – from its own class point of view – not at all possible. Rudas introduces various statements from Lenin to counter my conception (as he understands it) (*Arbeiterliteratur* X, p. 691).¹⁴ Whoever studies these sentences closely will find that without exception they speak in my favour and against Rudas. Comrade Lenin points, for example – just as Marx does in the passages above – to the fact that the peasant ‘is half-worker and half-speculator’. What is then the consequence of that for the peasantry’s praxis? Even Comrade Rudas admits: ‘It is just as clear that the peasants cleave at one point to the capitalists, and at another point to the workers’ (*ibid.*, p. 692). But: does this wavering really *correspond* to their correctly understood *class interests* or does it rather mirror the fact that the peasants – in relation to their immediate momentary interests – are ‘realists’, hardboiled empiricists, but in terms of their class situation, *only* empiricists, who are unable to hold properly in view the real issues of their own class as a whole? Does it prove that at best their class consciousness has reached only that *level* that Comrade Lenin, in relation to the proletariat, called trade-union consciousness – *in contrast* to proletarian class consciousness? What I claimed was precisely this: the peasants cannot have a class consciousness that corresponds to the level of the proletarian one. In light of their class position, they are *objectively incapable* of leading and organising the *whole* society on the basis of and in line with their class interests. The contradiction of their social being

(*half-worker* and *half-speculator*) is mirrored in their consciousness: ‘Inasmuch as only a local contiguity exists amongst peasants with plots of land, the unity of their interests creates amongst them no community, no national ties, and no political organisation. They do not form a class.’ One is reminded of Engels’s presentation of the strategy of the peasant war – just to allay another objection of Rudas while we are at it. I said: ‘But it often turns out that questions of class consciousness prove to be decisive in just those situations where force is unavoidable and classes are locked in a life-and-death-struggle’ (HCC, p. 53). Comrade Rudas thinks (*Arbeiterliteratur* XII, pp. 1070–1) that this conception contradicts that of the military theorist Engels.¹⁵ He should read *Peasant War* carefully for once. Engels remarks of military decision (and *only* this was up for discussion):

Truchsess’s cunning saved him here from certain ruin. Had he not succeeded in fooling the weak, limited, for the most part demoralised peasants and their usually incapable, timid and venal leaders, he would have been closed in with his small army between four columns numbering at least from 25,000 to 30,000 men, and would have perished. It was the narrow-mindedness of his enemies, always inevitable among the peasant masses, that made it possible for him to dispose of them at the very moment when, with one blow, they could have ended the entire war, at least as far as Swabia and Franconia were concerned. (*The Peasant War in Germany*, ch. 5, MECW 10, p. 459)

One is reminded also of Stambulisky’s leadership, to use an example from the recent past.¹⁶ This is interesting for two reasons, for, on the one hand, the incapacity of the peasants to lead is drastically apparent, and, on the other hand, precisely the mistakes of the Communist Party make clear how the peasants can and must be shown their *own* way by the proletariat alone.

One would not say that the proletariat has not acted wrongly in many situations. I admit it. But the proletariat is able to develop further, to reach a real class consciousness that is no longer merely a trade-union consciousness, objectively, *through its own power*. The peasantry has to be *led*. It should be self-evident that this leadership is not carried out

forcibly, and that thereby a continual interaction takes place between the transformation of social being and the consciousness of the peasantry. However: the dialectical contradictions of the development as a whole become conscious *in* the proletariat (or the party). The proletariat *mediates* for the peasants the link to further evolution, an evolution that corresponds to the social being and corresponding development of consciousness of the peasants, but would not be locatable by this consciousness. This passage relates to such classes: 'it might turn out that the masses were in the grip of quite different forces, that they were in pursuit of quite different ends. In that event there might be a purely coincidental connection between the theory and their activity, it would be a form that enables the masses to become conscious of their socially necessary or coincidental actions, without ensuring a genuine and necessary bond between consciousness and action' (HCC, p. 2),¹⁷ wherefrom Comrade Rudas derives my idealism, along with other things (*Arbeiterliteratur* IX, pp. 505–6).¹⁸ He forgets thereby that for the dialectical method – indeed for it alone – 'coincidentally' in no way means something causally unnecessary. On the contrary: coincidence is the form of appearance of a given type of causal determination. If Rudas is not familiar with Hegel, he might know it from Engels. Coincidence is, according to Engels, 'only one pole of an interrelation, the other pole of which is called necessity' (MECW 26, p. 273; cf. also Marx's Letter to Dr Kugelmann, 17.4.1871). That the consciousness appropriate to the social being of the peasants is established by the proletariat and is mediated to the peasantry by the proletariat and is activated in them by the proletariat, and that the peasantry must be led by the proletariat, that on their own they can only act 'spontaneously', 'coincidentally', does not mean by a long chalk that the peasantry has no consciousness that springs of necessity from its social being. It is just that this is not class consciousness in the sense in which *only* the proletariat *can* possess it. Therefore the points when the proletariat connects with the development of the peasantry need not necessarily be always the economically most expedient moments of development. On the contrary. The doctrinal mistakes of the young Communist Parties (e.g. the Hungarian party in the dictatorship) consisted precisely in the fact that their starting point was the objective economic superiority of the

modern managed agricultural large-scale industry, and they overlooked the fact that it is only after prolonged revolutionary instruction that the peasantry can be brought to understand the advantage (for the peasantry!) that this large-scale organisation means economically. We overlooked – doctrinally – the specific forms of development, the specific forms of mediation of consciousness of the peasants. Comrade Lenin keenly and repeatedly drew our attention to this point: 'Right up until today they have stuck to this prejudice against large-scale agriculture. The peasant thinks: "large-scale agriculture – I will be a land worker again". *Of course this is wrong.* But for the peasants the idea of large-scale agriculture is bound up with hatred, with the memory of how the population were oppressed by the landowners. This feeling persists. It is not dead' ('On Work in the Countryside; Speech at the 8th Congress of the RCP', CW 29, p. 210 – my italics). But to comply with this *utterly correct* politics in the case of the proletariat would mean the same as making concessions to the extant syndicalist tendencies of broad layers of the workers, and would encourage just such a sinking of the level that Lenin justifiably saw as an essential characteristic of opportunism. Methodologically, to recognise this difference means: to recognise that the relationship between social being and class consciousness in the proletariat and in the peasantry is *structurally* different. And our theory treats the different forms of consciousness of different classes concretely and dialectically, in historically dialectical ways, and not in formal sociological ways or formal psychological ways.

I hope that with all this I have sufficiently explained my use of the term 'imputation'. I will not go into the ins and outs, the sauce that Comrade Rudas serves with his tailist cabbage. He knows very well that I have broken with my past completely, not only socially but also philosophically, that I consider the writings that I wrote before my entry into the Hungarian Communist Party to be mistaken and wrong in every way. (Of course that in no way means that I hold everything that I have written since 1918 to be correct today. The selection that I made in 1922 in the edition of HCC is also a criticism of earlier writings.) Comrade Rudas also knows perfectly well that, for example, I have never accepted that there is a general human consciousness. He knows my position on Max Adler (cf. my critique in *Wjestnik der Sozialistischen Akademie* 1923,

pamphlet 3 and *Inprekorr* IV, no. 148), etc. etc. If, in spite of all this, he still upholds the same position on me, then he is doing that as a result of the actual bone of contention: he wants to *obscure* the Bolshevik conception of the party by tail-ending; and that is why he touched on everything he possibly could in his long criticism of me – except for the crucial essay in my book ('Towards a Methodology of the Problem of Organisation').

II. Dialectic of Nature

In the previous considerations again and again we came up against the problem of mediation. We were able to see how hopelessly Comrade Rudas confuses all the questions, how he is continually driven to opportunistic conclusions, because he misunderstands the decisive moment of the dialectical method. This misunderstanding – I repeat: on this point I am in full agreement with him – is in no way of a purely logical nature. The knowledge of mediations, that is those *real* forms of mediation, through which the immediate forms of appearance of society are produced, presupposes a practical–critical, a dialectical–critical standpoint *vis-à-vis* social actuality: the practical–critical standpoint of the revolutionary proletariat. The bourgeois class, even its most significant scientific representatives, sticks to the immediacy of social forms and is therefore not able to recognise society in its totality and in its becoming, that is to say, at one and the same time, as theoretically and historically dialectical. The opportunistic streams of the labour movement have sensed instinctively why they have to direct their attacks precisely against the dialectic: only by getting rid of the dialectic has it become possible for them to forget historical materialism's advance beyond the immediacy of bourgeois society, and for them to complete their ideological capitulation in the face of the bourgeoisie. The philosophical question, the overcoming of immediacy, corresponds in many respects to the earlier question, where Lenin was cited in order to present the difference between trade-union consciousness and class consciousness. For, from the standpoint of the (unovercome) immediacy of bourgeois society, the conclusions that correspond to the class position of the bourgeoisie

follow of their own accord. They are nothing other than the logical (of course, in the main merely formally logical) demands of this uncritically accepted, unovercome immediate state of affairs of capitalist development.

Of course, the borders here, as everywhere, are just as fluid, and there are a whole number of mediating terms ranging from historical materialism to the theoretical forms of expression of the most superficial immediate sphere of circulation (e.g. marginal utility theory). And which real forms of mediation already exist objectively in a particular stage of development, or are present in a recognisable way is also a dialectical, i.e. a concrete, historical problem. But leaving out of the picture forms of mediation must lead to a debasement of coherent methods of knowledge: to idealism, to agnosticism, to subjectivism, etc. That is why Engels (and after him Plekhanov) emphasised distinctly that the old materialism that accepted historical appearances immediately had to become inconsistent, idealist, 'the old materialism becomes untrue to itself because it takes the ideal driving forces that operate there as ultimate causes, instead of investigating what is behind them, what are the driving forces of these driving forces. The inconsistency does not lie in the fact that *ideal* driving forces are recognised, but in the investigation not being carried further back behind these into their motive causes' (MECW 26, p. 388). Comrade Rudas fell into such idealism in his polemic against my 'idealism'. After introducing that beautiful and profound passage by Marx about the one unified science: the science of history, whose *every word I underwrite*, he says suddenly: 'If up until this point natural scientists have pursued natural science ahistorically, then it is much less the case today. They too are gradually realising that their science is "drumming" dialectics into them. But nature and natural scientists are two different things anyway' (*Arbeiterliteratur* XII, p. 1071). I will come back to that last sentence because it is of great significance in our difference of opinion. For the moment, though, I only want to point out the following: Comrade Rudas assumes an immanent development of the natural sciences. It is the *development of science* that drums the dialectic into the natural scientists. *Undoubtedly this also happens immediately*. The dissolution of the idealist dialectic in Germany, just like the dissolution of the Ricardo School in England and France, took place – immediately and apparently – in this fashion. It is

Notes

1. Rudas writes:

In Germany's philosophical world Comrade Lukács enjoyed a well-earned name as a philosopher, long before he was a communist, and indeed he is known as a philosopher who followed his own path, who thinks independently, and does not simply chew over what great thinkers have bequeathed to posterity. Then, Comrade L. became a communist. As such he worked illegally for our party already before the Hungarian proletarian revolution. In and after the Hungarian revolution he always occupied an exposed position. He never wavered for a minute. He was always an avowed enemy of opportunism. If his philosophical past awakens a quiet mistrust of his philosophical future, it must be noted that he did fight as a communist for the proletarian revolution in dangerous posts, as both people's commissar and as soldier at the front, and he proved himself in other ways too.

2. Rudas writes: 'A word on the "misunderstandings" – they are not at all, as people commonly erroneously think, of a logical type. No – Bernstein was "misunderstood" by Kautsky, Kautsky, for his part, by Lenin ("The Renegade Kautsky etc.") and Trotsky ("Anti-Kautsky"). In fact, the misunderstanding arose from the fact that Lenin showed that Kautsky is *objectively* a renegade. But Kautsky is *subjectively* still of the opinion today that he is not one. That is indeed a small misunderstanding.'

3. Deborin writes:

As genuine 'orthodox thinkers', in contrast to this Engels fellow, they reproach 'naïve' materialism, defending instead the identity of subject and object, of thought and being. Hereby, as we have already seen, they call on Marx, whose teachings were perverted or misunderstood by Engels. We have already satisfied ourselves as to how far this is fitting. The wholly unfounded counterpoising of Engels and Marx must be decisively refuted. Marx never argued for the identity of subject and object, of thought and being. That is pure *idealism*, which may be proclaimed by devout Hegelians after the fashion of Lukács and his followers, but which was completely alien to Marx. Lenin quite correctly protested against just such a position as represented in A. Bogdanov, with whom Lukács has a great deal in common. On the identity of being and knowledge, Lenin writes: "Social being" and "social consciousness" are not identical, just as being in general and consciousness in general are not identical. From the fact that in their intercourse men act as conscious beings, it *does not follow* that social consciousness is identical with social being. In all social formations of any complexity – and in the capitalist social formation in particular – people in their intercourse are *not conscious* of what kind of social relations are being formed, in accordance with what laws they develop, etc. . . . Social consciousness *reflects* social being – that is Marx's teaching.

A reflection may be an approximately true copy of the reflected, but to speak of identity is absurd. Consciousness in general *reflects* being – that is a general principle of *all* materialism.' (From Lenin's *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*.)

4. Lukács now italicises the words 'at all' in this citation from HCC. Rodney Livingstone does not translate the original 'überhaupt' in this passage, so here the quotation has been modified. [Trans.]

5. Rudas writes:

Indeed, even the transition from the realm of necessity to the 'realm of freedom', so beloved of him and so important to him, is imagined as a 'moment'. ('When the moment of transition to the "realm of freedom" arrives . . .' HCC p. 70). But one would be pretty despairing of the 'fate of the revolution, indeed of humanity' – if it really depends on moments. For some moments may be correctly apprehended, but most of them will certainly be missed! We no longer have a Lenin at our disposal who would be in a position to correctly assess the moments. What is to be done? The revolution is doomed to defeat and along with that humanity is probably condemned to ruination. What a tragic prospect! This irrevocable theory of the moment has a desperate similarity to the theory of great personalities, on the one hand, and on the other hand to Max Weber's various non-repeating constellations. The entire bourgeoisie hoped that with the death of Lenin the proud edifice of the Russian Revolution would collapse. But no, it stands stronger than ever. The bourgeoisie made a mistake because the role of even the most epochal personalities is not that ascribed to them by the bourgeoisie. But the role of the 'moment' cannot be a different one or a greater one than that of the greatest personalities. In an entire epoch of social revolution, where the powerfully developed productive forces of modern economy push for a resolution – and do so ever more strongly – even the most important 'moments' cannot contain enough to 'crucially decide' the outcome of class struggle. (Rudas, *Arbeiterliteratur* XII, pp. 1077–8)

6. The word Lukács uses for 'moment' in this context is 'Augenblick'. On other occasions, he uses the philosophical term 'Moment'. It has been impossible always to preserve this distinction in the present text, as the edition of HCC quoted in the text does not allow observation of the difference between 'Augenblick' and 'Moment'. [Trans.]

7. Rudas quotes Lenin against Lukács: 'The economic foundation of this use of revolutionary force, the guarantee of its effectiveness and success is the fact that the proletariat represents and creates a higher type of social organisation of labour compared with capitalism. *This is what is important, this is the source of the strength and the guarantee that the final triumph of communism is inevitable.*' ('A Great Beginning', 1919.) Rudas adds: 'And not in consciousness or "only" with conscious will!' He then continues with the quote from Lenin.

Clearly, in order to abolish classes completely, it is not enough to overthrow the exploiters, the landowners and capitalists, not enough to abolish *their* rights of ownership; it is necessary also to abolish all private ownership of the means of production, it is necessary to abolish the distinction between town and country, as well as the distinction between manual workers and brain workers. *This requires a very long period of time. In order to achieve this an enormous step forward must be taken in developing the productive forces . . .* for this ability does not come of itself, but grows historically, and grows *only* out of the material conditions of large-scale capitalist production. This ability, at the beginning of the road from capitalism to socialism, is possessed by the proletariat *alone*. (Ibid.)

8. For example, Rudas writes:

As is evident in the name, something that is unknown is 'imputed' from something else that is known. The name stems from mathematics, where it means the easiest thing in the world. Suppose that two rows of numbers x and y have a particular relationship to one another such that to each value of x corresponds a value of y . This is known to be the case when x and y stand in a functional relationship to one another, such that, we say

$$F(x) = y.$$

If I know various values of x , whereby x takes on the values 1, 2, 3 in succession, then the values of y are *imputed* to those values of x . This is not always an easy mathematical task. Whether it is difficult or easy is not an issue for us here, since we aim only to clarify the concept. In every problem of imputation therefore there must be something (x) that is known and something (y) that is unknown and which must be 'imputed' from the former. Right now I need to emphasise something else, which will be of importance to us in what follows, for it is an *essential* feature of this problem and we will have much cause to stress precisely this feature: *both amounts x and y stand, of course, in mathematics not in a causal relationship, but in a functional relationship to each other.* A causal relationship would not make sense in mathematics. Irrespective of what the cause of the transformation of x may be, this transformation pulls the transformation of y along with it without one having to say that the *cause* of the transformation of y is x . To each value of x a value of y *corresponds* – but not every transformation of x *causes* the transformation of y . In mathematics, where nothing happens, this is quite befitting. But now the philosopher and the sociologist, Rickert and Weber, have not only appropriated this concept of 'imputation' from mathematics into philosophy and sociology, but they have taken it over with all its mathematical logic and precisely with the intention either to totally eradicate or at least demote to a second (insignificant) rung *causality* from the world of social appearances! In history too (at best) the causal relation is turned into a functional relation. The 'problem of imputation' is used by them to deny the exact causal obedience to law precisely of social occurrences, to make

history a philosophy of history, i.e. a *metaphysics* of history. And sociology is demoted from a science which contains the general laws of social occurrence to a 'science' which denies any lawful knowledge of social occurrence. And, as if given by god, they receive the mathematical concept of 'imputation' and precisely the characteristic of this concept, which in mathematics is its highly logical consequence – the characteristic namely that known and unknown, which are imputed from each other, stand in no causal connection with each other! For they who deny social appearance's obedience to laws, indeed, precisely the *concept of causality* is a thorn in the eye! (Rudas, *Arbeiterliteratur* X, pp. 670–71)

9. Rudas writes:

Just as in the natural sciences, so in the Marxist science of society, causality (or mutual interaction) is a natural or social force that is effective in reality. It brings phenomena into certain relationships with each other, and this relationship is *given* in reality, is *not alterable*, and our task can only consist in seeking out this relationship *empirically*, and not to *construct* it according to an 'aim of knowledge'. This relationship is a general one, i.e. it is not only a singular fact, but rather whole rows of facts are in causal dependence on each other. Such relationships can therefore be expressed through a *general law*. Such a law is, for example, Darwin's law of development or the Marxist law of the dependency between the process of production and the political, or where relevant, spiritual process of the social realm. Therefore, neither in the natural sciences nor in Marxism does the problem of 'imputation' appear as it does in the Rickertians and in Weber. *What* is cause and *what* is effect in a complex of social events is never questionable in Marxism; nor is what is significant and what insignificant in this complex. Mind you, a question can perhaps arise about whether a concrete fact is to be derived from this or that cause. *However, the law-bound sequence of the connection of the complex of events is not in doubt.* Neither that they stand in a causal connection, nor *how*, nor in what sequence they are connected. This sequence is clearly fixed in Marx's social doctrine. And this doctrine is an empirical theory, devised from experience, which wishes only to express what is, and what is really embodied in the phenomena. In this respect Marxism is pure natural science.

10. Rudas writes:

A sheep and a person – they are both components of nature. Or, as the French poet, Francis Jammes, in whom lives a materialist soul, has expressed it: 'Oh, you poor donkeys, you are all my brothers!' And if natural laws have so worked dialectically with sheep that they have 'instinct', then it is the case with humans that their 'instinct' has become a 'consciousness'. What Marx and Engels always want to stress is clear: nature and society (sheep and person) are not only not different from each other, but they are *fundamentally the same*. They say it quite concisely . . .

11. See note 9.

12. The German translation of Lenin speaks of 'dreamy sentimentality' where the English translation uses 'Manilovism'. Manilovism is from the name of the landlord Manilov in Gogol's *Dead Souls*, who was the embodiment of philistinism, smug complacency and futile daydreaming. [Trans.]

13. Rudas writes:

What is a 'historical role'? A role that like every other one, takes place independently of – although also through – human consciousness of this role. What can it mean to speak of the 'sense' of this role? It means two things. The *materialists* say: the same thing, which is objective, that is to say independent from, how people understand it, occurs, is simultaneously grasped by people who have the capacity to think. If stones fall on an inclined plane – then the laws of gravity are known. If thrones and human heads fall – then the social laws, the laws of revolution, are known. This 'knowing' is its 'sense' – nothing else. And this sense is – as already said – a psychic process in people, whose capacity for thought is stirred by events. But just as this psychic process is itself only another (particularly qualified) side of the physiological process, and not something *above* this physiological process, something *supersensuous*, so too a knowledgeable, purposive process is nothing other than the *objective process itself, as it is known by people*. Therefore the materialists say: 'The historical role' of a class and the 'sense' of this historical role are *not* different from one another. But the idealists say: They *are* different from one another. Every 'process' must have a 'sense', that is, *strive towards a goal*. It is not possible that the world (nature and society) should have no end goal towards which it strives; no purpose: that would be 'senseless'. If we investigate a natural or historical process, then something else exists outside the causal connection of events and above it: the goal towards which the event in question strives. The purpose that nature and society possess, and which the event in question helps to accomplish. And only those events that help to accomplish this aim or purpose are 'significant' or 'historically significant'. As we see, these are the so-called 'values', 'cultural values' etc. that we got to know in Rickert and Weber. But when Comrade L. says: 'class consciousness is the sense, become conscious, of the historical role of the class', then he says – according to the citation above – either this, that the 'sense of the historical role' is such value judgements, or, simply, he is referring to knowledge of the unfolding of social events and their tendencies in obedience to the law. Even in this case class consciousness is something more. We will have more to say about this. By and large I would be in agreement with him, of course. But, then, what is so astounding is that this simple fact is formulated in such an idealistic and misleading way. Precisely in order to avoid this evil-smelling danger, Marxists would favour another language. That would say: each stage of the productive forces that is achieved pushes society in a certain direction (perceivable by theory). This direction is 'higher' or 'lower', 'progression' or 'regression', according to circumstances. That is its 'sense' – nothing else. This direction (= tendency) is

knowable, it can be made conscious. . . . But I ask: 'where is it become conscious? In whom is it become conscious? How has it become conscious?'

Either it has become conscious in single individuals (let us say proletarians) or it has become conscious in the whole class. Is there a third possibility? Until now people were not conscious of their historical role. Why not, and what they were conscious of instead is quite another question. Now they become aware of it for some reason or another. Does that not amount to saying that now can be found in their heads different, *real-psychological* thoughts, feelings, aims, etc., which correspond better or more perfectly to reality than those of days gone by? Can the words 'become conscious' mean something else too? That these new thoughts, feelings, aims, etc., can be *summed up* in the phrase 'sense of the historical role' changes nothing about the fact that it will be and must be consciously experienced, that is to say, *psychologically*, if it has become conscious. If that is, however, the case, then Comrade L. commits once more – as so often – one of his usual logical (side)steps. Just for a change, this step is not called equivocation or *quid pro quo*, but quite simply – *contradiction*. And, to be sure, it is not a dialectical contradiction. Comrade L. denies in the first part of his sentence what he acknowledges in the second part. The first part of the sentence *completely* contradicts the second part. In the first part it is claimed that class consciousness is neither the psychological consciousness of individual people nor the mass-psychological one of many people. Now one might believe that Comrade L. has discovered a third place, where class consciousness realises itself. Perhaps in the head of a God or many gods, perhaps in the head of Madame History, or some such thing. No. In the second part of his sentence he admits what has been denied in the first part. For it says: class consciousness is 'the sense, become conscious, of the historical role of the class'. It can, however – as said – be the head of the person (whether as an individual psychology or mass-psychologically) only where class consciousness is realised, where something becomes conscious for them. Only that which becomes conscious for them, that is to say, only the content of consciousness is further defined by L. in the second part of the passage: that is, the 'sense of the historical role of the class'. But that, if you please, is a different situation! What the content of consciousness of the person is at any one moment, whether this content corresponds to reality or not, that is a question in itself, which has absolutely nothing at all to do with the question of whether consciousness is psychological or mass-psychological! The content may be true or false, it may express a 'sense of the historical role of the class' or not, but the consciousness that accommodates this content is either an individual psychological or mass-psychological one! There is only one case where it is not so: if the 'sense of the historical role of the class' 'becomes conscious' such that it itself, this sense, becomes a separate, special consciousness, different from the individual consciousness of the person and enthroned above the heads of people. Then we have a (hidden) god before us! (Philosophically that is called hypostatizing.) In the best (or worst) scenario the 'imputed' consciousness of Comrade L. is a hypostatized consciousness – which is, very similar to a divine consciousness. (Rudas, *Arbeiterliteratur* X, extracts from pp. 678–82)

14. Rudas writes:

Let us listen to how Lenin characterises the situation and the consciousness of the peasants. We will see immediately where the difference lies between a Marxist materialist and a philosophical Idealist:

'The situation of the peasants is constituted according to their being, their conditions of production, their life conditions, the conditions of their economy, such that the peasant is a half-worker, half-speculator.'

'*The peasants – are a particular class.* As workers they are enemies of capitalist exploitation, but at the same time they are themselves property-owners. The peasant has been brought up for hundreds of years in the belief that the bread belongs to him and that he is at liberty to sell it. That is my right – the peasant thinks, for that is my labour, my sweat and blood. *To quickly overcome his psychology is impossible, that is a long and difficult struggle.*'

'The question is such that the peasant is used to free trade in bread.'

'The peasant is half-worker, half-speculator. The peasant is a worker because he attains his bread through sweat and blood; he is exploited by the landowners, capitalists and traders. The peasant is – a speculator because he sells the bread, this use object . . .'

(Lenin, 'On Deceiving the People with the Slogans of Liberty and Equality')

Firstly: here the peasantry is recognised to be a 'particular class'. According to L., it is however questionable whether 'it can be considered a class at all in the strict Marxist sense'. But I note that only in passing.

Secondly: what does the particular class psychology signify here ('To quickly overcome his psychology is impossible'), other than the class consciousness of the peasants? (Rudas, *Arbeiterliteratur* X, p. 691)

15. For example, Rudas complains:

Adler, as a Kantian, perceives in consciousness something that is prior to any socialisation and that even before socialisation already possesses the character of – being socialised! As is known the consciousness of humans arose long *after* their socialisation, long after humans had not only lived communally, but also worked communally. It arose after or at least at the same time as language. This, for its part, arose slowly, through a painstaking development lasting thousands of years. It emerged from animal sounds, which slipped out of people as they expended purely mechanical, biological effort while they worked, and these sounds were fixed for the purpose of understanding during the communal labour process and thus became 'words'. This is what Marx and Engels say:

'From the start the "spirit" is afflicted with the curse of being "burdened" with matter, which here makes its appearance in the form of agitated layers of air, sounds, in short, of language. Language is as old as consciousness, language is practical consciousness that exists also for other men, and for that reason alone it

really exists for me personally as well; language, like consciousness, only arises from the need, the necessity, of intercourse with other men. (*German Ideology*)

That is the language of materialists. (Rudas, *Arbeiterliteratur* XII, p. 1070)

16. This is a reference to the leader of the Bulgarian Peasant Party, Alexandur Stambulisky. Stambulisky, Prime Minister of Bulgaria between 1919 and 1923, attempted to create a 'dictatorship of the peasantry'. He was murdered in June 1923. [Trans.]

17. Translation slightly altered from Rodney Livingstone's version in order to fit in with what follows. [Trans.]

18. Rudas quotes Lukács:

'For only "when consciousness stands in such a relation to reality can theory and praxis be united". For this to happen the emergence of consciousness must become the decisive step which the historical process must take towards its proper end (an end constituted by the wills of men, but neither dependent on human whim, nor the product of human invention). The historical function of theory is to make this step a practical possibility. Only when a historical situation has arisen in which a class must understand society if it is to assert itself; only when the fact that a class understands itself means that it understands society as a whole and when, in consequence, the class becomes both the subject and object of knowledge; in short, only when these conditions are all satisfied will the unity of theory and praxis, the precondition of the revolutionary function of the theory, become possible.' [HCC, pp. 2–3]

One must excuse me this long quote. It had to be cited, for here Comrade L. displays himself, not only in his covert conclusions, but also quite openly as an idealist, an idealist, to whom 'theory' represents what for the idealists of the old stripe was the idea. For firstly his starting point, for all that he says about the historical process, is always and consistently theory and never praxis. The practical essence of theory must be extracted from theory and not from praxis. (Just let me mention in passing: that is a contradiction in terms, if the practical essence of theory must be extracted out of theory and not developed through theory.) Its relationship to objects and not the reverse is the decisive thing. (In the second extract we will see that Comrade L. denies praxis altogether, when, according to the pattern of all genuine idealists, he simply dissolves it into theory, or even into thought.) Theory is the motivating force behind the masses and there is 'no necessary connection' with other factors. If the masses are 'in the grip of quite different forces' than those of theory 'they act towards different goals' than those of theory; that is to say: if they are motivated by social laws, which are 'necessary or fortuitous' – then theory is not 'genuinely and necessarily' bound to the masses. Secondly, though, consciousness is the decisive step, which the historical process makes towards its proper end; the historical function of theory consists in making the step of history towards its proper end a 'practical possibility' etc. etc. (Rudas, *Arbeiterliteratur* IX, pp. 505–6)