

The KAPD and the Proletarian Movement – Jacques Camatte

1987 Preface

By republishing texts from *Invariance*, Series II, No. 1, on the KAPD and the proletarian movement, and from Series I, Nos. 7 and 8 on other topics, we do not only intend to serve an immediate purpose, by making them available to interested readers, but a more far-reaching one: it is our purpose to make these texts serve as a means of bringing our understanding of the question of the long revolutionary process up to date, a task that we shall undertake in the future. The year 1989 will mark the bicentennial of the French Revolution, as well as the centennial of the birth of such persons as Bordiga, Hitler and Wittgenstein. It will also mark the fortieth year since the communists seized power in China. In mentioning these anniversaries we do not intend to give the impression that we confer any special importance to them in and of themselves, but rather that we want to use them as points of reference to provide a context for our claim that the revolutionary process has definitely come to an end.

The other studies of the proletarian movement are:¹

- “Les caractères du mouvement ouvrier”, Series I, No. 10
- “Bref historique du mouvement de la classe prolétarienne dans l’aire euro-nordaméricaine des origines à nos jours”, Series I, No. 6
- “Le mouvement prolétarien dans les autres aires: les révolutions coloniales”, Series I, No. 6
- “Le gauche communiste d’Italie et le parti communiste international”, Series I, No. 9
- “Prolétariat et révolution”, Series II, No. 6
- “Prolétariat et Gemeinwesen”, Series III, No. 5-6
- “À propos de la dictature du prolétariat”, Supplement (1978)

Glossary

AAU: Allgemeine Arbeiter-Union (General Workers Union)

¹ Respectively: “The Characteristics of the Workers Movement”, “A Brief History of the Proletarian Class Movement in Europe and North America from Its Origins to the Present”, “The Proletarian Movement in other Areas: the Colonial Revolutions”, “The Communist Left of Italy and the International Communist Party”, “Proletariat and Revolution”, “Proletariat and *Gemeinwesen*” and “Concerning the Dictatorship of the Proletariat”. These texts have yet to be translated into Spanish [Note of the Spanish translator]. [Subsequent footnotes are the author’s except where otherwise noted, and except for brief explanatory notations in brackets (American translator’s supplemental note).]

- AAUD: Allgemeine Arbeiter-Union Deutschlands (General Workers Union of Germany). Founded in February 1920
- BO: Betriebs-Organisation (Factory Organization)
- GIC: Groep van Internationale Communisten (Group of Internationalist Communists). Serge Bricianer contributes some interesting insights on this Dutch group in his book, *Pannekoek and the Workers Councils* (see pp. 259, *et seq.*)²
- CI: Communist International. Founded in 1919
- IKD: Internationale Kommunisten Deutschlands (International Communists of Germany). Founded in late 1918 by the Internationale Sozialisten Deutschlands (International Socialists of Germany), which included the militants of the Bremen group that published *Arbeiterpolitik* (Workers Politics), which was the first organization to break with the SPD, leading the Berlin group that published *Lichstrahlen* (Rays of Light) to do the same. These groups did not agree with the decision of the Spartakusbund to join the USPD. For its part, *Arbeiterpolitik* embraced Pannekoek's positions and was the first group to advocate the idea of creating a unitary organization (June 1917). The Hamburg group was strongly influenced by the American IWW (Industrial Workers of the World)
- SI: Internationale Situationniste (Situationist International)
- KAI: Kommunistischen Arbeiter-Internationale (Communist Workers International). Founded in 1922
- PO: Potere Operaio (Workers Power). An Italian movement founded in the late 1960s
- SDS: Sozialistische Deutsche Studentenbund (German Federation of Socialist Students). Founded in 1946; dissolved in 1970
- SPD: Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (Social Democratic Party of Germany). Founded in 1875
- USPD: Unabhängige Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany). Founded in April 1917
- VKPD: Vereinigte Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands (Unified Communist Party of Germany). Founded in December 1920

² *Pannekoek and the Workers Councils*, edited by Serge Bricianer, translated by Malachy Carroll, Telos Press, St. Louis, 1978 [American translator's note].

The German workers movement of the 20th century—not including the official, pro-Soviet communist party—possesses the distinction of being slandered or praised without being understood.³ Understanding it, and correctly evaluating it, are nonetheless essential for an understanding of the history of this century and for discerning the fundamental characteristics of the international proletarian movement that has begun to emerge over the last few years.

The Communist Workers Party of Germany (KAPD) is one of the most interesting currents of the German workers movement. It constitutes the point of convergence of a process in which the proletariat, beginning in the late 19th century and amplified in actions during the war and by the Russian Revolution, broke with social democracy. A new political form appeared in the Russian Revolution of 1905 and spread throughout Russia: the soviet (or council). The German revolutionary movement likewise assumed the form of the creation of sailors and soldiers councils, first in Kiel and then throughout Germany. However, the generalization of a more or less superficial form of organization, the council, initially contributed to the obfuscation of the more profound phenomenon: the attempt to discover a mode of activity that would be really proletarian and communist and would advance beyond the old forms that were the legacies of a stage in which the proletariat was still quite undeveloped.⁴

³ This essay is a chapter from the book, *Le mouvement communiste en Allemagne*, scheduled for publication in the near future by La Vieille Taupe. The book will contain texts of the KAPD (including the texts published in *Invariance*, Nos. 7 and 8), Herman Gorter, and Otto Rühle, as well as the theses of the main currents discussed in this chapter. [This book was never published; instead, Invariance-La Vecchia Talpa published a pamphlet containing texts of the German Left translated by Denis Authier (Author's note added in 2009)]. [This essay was published under the title, "La KAPD et le mouvement prolétarien" in *Invariance*, Series II, No. 1 (1971). Most of the texts contained in the book on the German Left mentioned by Camatte above may be found in English translation at: <https://www.marxists.org/subject/germany-1918-23/dauve-authier/> (American translator's supplemental note).]

⁴ Beginning in 1890, with the revolt of the *Jungen* [Youth] (shortly after the repeal of the anti-socialist laws), an anti-parliamentary current became active in the SPD as a result of the increasing penetration of parliamentary politics in the party. This current's position does not appear to be a simple *remake* [in English in the original] of an anarchist position. We believe that Engels was unable to discern what was essentially new about what he called "the new literary and student revolt in our party" (Reply to the editors of the *Sächsischen Arbeiter-Zeitung* [*Sozialdemokrat*, September 13, 1890]). This new element was the rejection of parliament in the name of the theory of the proletariat, Marxism, rather than due to a rejection of organization, of the political struggle, etc.; it was the rejection of the parliamentarism that gave rise to opportunism and which mobilized the proletariat solely for a movement in favor of reforms. It was during this period that two important themes first made their debut in the leftist milieu: the party's descent into parliamentary paralysis, and the dictatorship of the leaders.

The aspect of the German revolution that would prove to be most persistent, however, would be the superficial phenomenon, the claim that the councils could be imposed later with the party. What emerged in the end was the image of a German Communist Party with all its weaknesses, its uncertainties, its ineptitude, while the more profound phenomenon was obfuscated, buried, almost annihilated. This is what almost always happens when victory cannot be achieved; and so it is with respect to every momentary rupture (breach) in the cycle of class struggles. For this reason, before presenting the positions of the KAPD as they relate to today's proletarian movement, we have to first provide a brief historical account.

The founding of the German Communist Party (KPD) marked the unification of the different left-wing currents of the German proletariat: the Spartakusbund and the IKD (International Communists of Germany), which was largely composed of militants in Bremen and Berlin, and the Hamburg group. While trade unionists remained outside the Party at first, they were not really excluded, but maintained relations with these currents.⁵ At the founding congress of the KPD, the movement appeared to have overcome the past and addressed the urgent questions of the moment.

This break with the practice of parliamentarism was to be found to a certain extent everywhere in Europe, along with the rejection of bourgeois democracy, a phenomenon that was registered, although to various degrees, in the important countries of Europe and in the United States. Revolutionaries were becoming aware of the fact that the workers movement must fight with its own weapons and that it must not become bogged down in parliament, the terrain of shifting sands where anything and everything seems possible but where all revolutionary will is overwhelmed by the dynamic of capital.

The refusal to work in the trade unions is a more specifically German phenomenon, particularly with respect to its vehemence. This is due to the fact that the trade unions were extraordinarily integrated into the operations of capital and the State, and, with the

⁵ We are speaking mainly of the trade unionists of the Freie Vereinigung deutscher Gewerkschaften (Free Federation of German Trade Unions), from which the FAUD(S) (Freie Arbeiter-Union Deutschlands (Syndikalisten)) split in December 1919; these currents rejected trade union bureaucracies and were advocates of the dictatorship of the proletariat conceived as the dictatorship of the party. The FAUD(S) sought to pick up the thread where the First International left off. This category also includes, however, the Union der Hand- und Kopfarbeiter Deutschlands (Räteorganisation) [Union of Manual and Intellectual Workers of Germany (Council-organization)], which focused on the unity of the proletariat and the creation of councils.

The rapprochement between syndicalists and left communists took place in the context of the following two positions: rejection of parliamentarism and the trade unions that preached the social truce; and more or less general acceptance of *unionism* and the quest to form a unitary organization. There was also a certain convergence with the anarchists (during the war) who adopted Robert Michels' critique of the party, and proclaimed the need to fight against "an organization that has become an end-in-itself".

exception of the revolutionary syndicalists of the FAUD, had actually signed actual peace treaties with the employers. The precondition for any revolutionary action therefore implied the abandonment of the trade unions. Hence, the widespread spontaneous movement of workers who resigned from the trade unions, a movement that would crystallize into its own structure, taking the form of a positive affirmation, thanks to the Russian Revolution and its soviets. The German movement borrowed the latter form, even if it did not really correspond to the German reality.

In any event, at the end of 1918—at the Congress of the Communist Party of Germany (KPD)—one could discern the victory of the left and the movement of radicalization that swept the working class—although diminished somewhat by the power of the SPD and the USPD—which allowed one to predict the growth of the communist current with the accession to a clearer consciousness of the precise historical moment then affecting the worldwide workers movement, in the country where capital had assumed its most highly developed form, Germany. At the KPD's Heidelberg Congress in 1919, however, the communist movement suffered its first defeat: the expulsion from the KPD of all those who rejected parliamentarism and trade unionism, who were suddenly cast out of the party that they had themselves created. This indicates that they were not the determinant, leading element in the party; they no longer had the advantage. The process of unification of the revolutionaries had been stymied; they had to start afresh from a new basis.

The defeat at Heidelberg was merely the echo of the defeat of January 1919 (the deaths of Luxemburg, Liebknecht and a multitude of workers, the best elements of the time) and the events of March 1919. After these setbacks, the moderate position came to prevail that claimed that the revolution was beaten and that it was necessary to return to the old methods in order to reorganize the proletariat. This was Levi's position—he predicted the decisive crisis would take place in 1926—which was completely supported by Radek as the official spokesman in Germany of the Russian current in the CI. Russia needed help to relax the pressure of the rope around its neck; a Germany enraged by the Versailles Treaty was an objective ally and, furthermore, the reconstruction of Germany, and the rebuilding of its industry, would be conducive to a strengthening of its proletariat, thus creating the optimal conditions for a subsequent assault. The important thing, now that it was no longer possible to seize power in Germany, was to reinforce a current that was favorable towards the Soviet Union by putting pressure on the German government to recommence the war against the Entente. In a way, what was needed was a “sacred union” of the entire proletariat—obviously for the purpose of coming to the aid of the socialist State of Russia—and therefore the practice, beginning in 1919, of sending “open letters” (from the KPD) to all the “working class organizations” calling for a joint struggle against capitalism—the first tactical manifestation of the “united front”.

Considering, however, the importance of the KAPD when it was founded, and that of the AAUD (General Workers Union of Germany) and the FAUD (Free Union of German Trade Unions), it was not yet clear that the exclusion of the left-wing currents from the KPD implied their first defeat and thus signified the elimination of the left and the definitive derailment of the constitution of the proletariat as a class on the basis of the development attained by capital in Germany during the early 20th century.

The founding congress of the KAPD was held in April 1920, after the founding of the AAU (February 1920), at a time when the revolutionary troops in Russia were engaged in offensive operations after having defeated the various reactionary coalitions, and had crossed the Russian border and were approaching Warsaw. The failure of the Soviet troops to take that city, however, would prove to be a setback for the growth of the revolutionary phenomenon on an international scale, and would prove to be the determinant factor in the decision of the Communist International in favor of retreat in Germany.

In 1920, Lenin's *Infantile Disorder* was published, conveying the message of the impossibility of generalizing the revolution, and of establishing one's pure communist positions by firmly rooting them in western conditions. The Russian Revolution must become the point of reference and the Bolshevik Party the model party: the first instance of real Bolshevization. In other words, by relying on their own forces the western proletarians had not carried out a successful revolution; yet some of their positions were convergent with those affirmed by the Bolshevik Party, positions which had enabled the Bolsheviks to be victorious; the conclusion: it is necessary to provide assistance to the western proletarians by offering them a safe paradigm. They will have to forget about the Russian Revolution.

Russia as the model country of the victorious revolution was a theoretical precedent for the theory of socialism in one country. Lenin's *Infantile Disorder* is the expression of the non-convergence of the revolutionary phenomenon of the Slavic regions with that of the West; and it is simultaneously the rejection of the western revolutionary phenomenon, which was nonetheless breaking with social democracy and was therefore more adapted for communism. Lenin denounced all the positions of the western communists as anarchist, infantile, etc., including those of the KAPD, the Italian abstentionist fraction, the Dutch Tribunists, Sylvia Pankhurst, etc. At the same time, the CI intervened to inhibit the further development of a theoretical tendency whose purpose was to devote serious thought to the revolution in the West: the Amsterdam Bureau was shut down, and the activities of the Vienna Bureau were curtailed, while *Kommunismus*, which published the theses of the left wing, was shut down, at least in part, in 1922. From then on, the KAPD was driven into a defensive position as the target of the attacks of the SPD, the USPD and the KPD. The impact of the Russian Revolution, the lack of support from the CI, and above all the worldwide absence of a significant movement that might have been able to turn the tide, in short, the consolidation of the dual Russian Revolution as a bourgeois revolution, would isolate the KAPD and reduce it to a sect.

The KAPD did not give up when it was faced by these first coordinated counterattacks of the counterrevolution. It tried to publicize its positions and tried to make them more persuasive by engaging in scathing criticism of the other movements in the CI. This would lead the KAPD to break with the CI, unlike the other movements (except for the Dutch and a few small groups like the Bulgarians), which either rapidly capitulated by accepting Lenin's positions in their totality, or else opted to take a defensive, rearguard position, without abandoning their critical stance (opposition in theory, acquiescence in

practice). This was the case with the Italian left (Bordiga was opposed to Lenin's theses on parliamentarism, but he agreed to participate in elections, and as late as 1922 he served as the representative of the CI at the Congress of the French Communist Party at Marseilles. His speech at the Congress was published in *Rassegna Comunista*, No. 24-25).

In 1921 the Third Congress of the CI drew the definitive line of demarcation between the western communists like the KAPists and the positions of the Bolsheviks. The KAPD was rejected and during that same year the theory of the united front was victorious. From then on, the conversion of the CI to Stalinism became possible, as it was becoming a veritably Russian institution, submissive to the orders of the Russian Communist Party, and thereby fully vindicating Luxemburg's concerns. The KAPD tried to form an opposition fraction within the CI (practicing Luxemburgist-style entryism), but this proved to be impossible. As a result, all dissent, embodied in Germany by the KAPD and in Italy by the abstentionist fraction, was buried. The unification congress at Halle where the USPD left merged with the KPD, and the offensive launched by the CI in favor of the unification of the PCI and the socialist left (the *terzinternazionalisti* [Third-Internationalists]), merely expressed the re-absorption of the communist movement into the old social democratic current.

The KAPD's break with the CI led some of the KAPD's members to implicitly consider the need for creating another revolutionary organization. The KAI (Communist Workers International) was founded in 1922, but only at the cost of splitting the KAPD into two currents (later that same year). It was in fact at the Congress of September 1921, after the fiasco of the "March Action" (which seemed to play the same role for the German workers movement as the Kronstadt insurrection did for the Russian workers movement⁶)

⁶ The Kronstadt insurrection marked the moment when the attempt of the Russian proletariat to become the effective ruling class in association with the peasantry came to an end. In a way, what the Kronstadt rebels wanted was to make Lenin's proposal a reality: the "democratic dictatorship of the workers and the peasants". "The workers and peasants no longer want to live at the behest of Bolshevik decrees: they want to be the masters of their fate" (*La commune de Cronstadt*, Bélibaste, p. 8). "The socialist republic of the soviets will never be strong as long as it is not administered by the working classes with the help of the rejuvenated trade unions" (*ibid.*, p. 51). And finally, this slogan: "Down with the deceitful slogan of the 'dictatorship of the proletariat'" (*ibid.*, p. 55).

Furthermore, in issue no. 13 of the Kronstadt *Izvestia* [published by the Kronstadt rebels—Spanish translator's note], one finds a critique that is almost indistinguishable from the critiques published by Otto Bauer and Kautsky—to the effect that the Bolsheviks are incapable of organizing and administering Soviet Russia—along with a virulent attack on Lenin and Trotsky for their proposal at the Tenth Congress of the Russian Communist Party that Russia should request foreign aid. The Kronstadt rebels, however, thought that Russia and the Revolution could be saved by relying exclusively on domestic soviet resources, on the condition that the so-called democratic dictatorship of the workers and peasants was really implemented. This position enjoyed broad popular

and therefore after the indefinite postponement of the revolution (which would be accompanied by the expression of doubts concerning the theory of the death crisis of capitalism), when a fraction was formed that sought to create a new international as soon as possible and was opposed to the participation of the AAU in struggles for higher wages. Some of the members of this fraction would subsequently constitute the Essen directive committee of the KAPD, which was essentially devoted to organizational work on behalf of the KAI. This same “directive committee” would undergo a split in November 1923, leading to the formation of the *Kommunistische Rätebund* (League of Council Communists), which assumed an anti-intellectualist position against the “executive power” of the KAPD over the AAU, which would lead many of its members to join the AAUE, which had been founded in October 1921 (in fact, the majority of the League’s militants would join the AAUE after the dissolution of the League).

The Essen tendency agreed with Gorter in its estimation of the degree of reformism of the German proletariat, since the majority of the proletarians only fought for reforms and for reconstruction (*Aufbau*), and therefore concluded that there was a need for at least one group to stand firmly on the side of the principles of the class consciousness of the proletariat, in order to build, with the new emergence of the revolution, the nucleus of the movement of proletarian emancipation.⁷

Many of the members of the KAPD-Essen tendency rejoined the SPD in 1925 and formed a revolutionary circle within the party, the *Roten Kämpfer* (Red Combatants), which was still active even under fascism. The rest of them retired from political activity.

The Berlin directive committee, which presented itself as the authentic continuation of the traditions of the party, approved a new program for the party at its congress held between September 9 and 11, 1923; it restricted its activities to criticizing the KPD

support in the USSR. There is therefore nothing mysterious about the triumph of the theory of socialism in one country and, above all, in order to explain this triumph it is not necessary to appeal solely to Stalinist violence. Stalin reproached Trotsky not only for allegedly underestimating the peasantry, but also for having doubted the revolutionary capacities of the Russian proletariat to solve the problems of “building socialism” on its own. Demagogically, and in a different context, Stalin used the demands of the Kronstadt rebels against Trotsky.

The March Action was the last independent action of the German proletariat. After its defeat, the importance of the spontaneous movement would steadily diminish, while the KPD would be increasingly subjected to the control and orders of the CI. This is why these two movements that occurred at approximately the same time played, in our estimation, a similar role within the German and Russian workers movements. After Kronstadt and the March Action, the revolutionary impulse was broken. (The above observations constitute merely a preliminary attempt to address these issues.)

⁷ This position is quite similar to the one held by the Italian left after 1945, especially the position defended by Bordiga. It is also similar to the position that was supposed to be adopted by the “working groups” advocated by Pannekoek (see note 34).

without engaging in any significant activity. The party underwent yet another split in 1927 due to the fact that the Berlin leadership had been holding discussions with the group that published *Entschiedne Linke* (Resolute Left), founded by E. Schwartz and Korsch, who had been expelled from the KPD. The tactical position of this tendency thus became more “flexible”, since it was open to the possibility of participating in the Reichstag, as Schwartz, who was a Reichstag deputy, proposed. The oppositionists published a newspaper in which the emphasis was once again placed on anti-parliamentarism. Immediately thereafter, the importance of the Berlin directive committee was even further reduced. Some groups, however, continued to exist until the Nazi seizure of power.⁸

The movement of the AAU, which was founded, as we mentioned above, before the KAPD, was inseparably bound to the KAPD. It also underwent splits, the most important of which was the one that gave rise to the AAUE (Unitary Organization) in 1921 as a result of a dispute over the AAU’s relation to the KAPD. The elements that created the AAUE—especially Otto Rühle—rejected all parties, since it was the party that engendered bureaucracy and fostered opportunism among the masses, an opportunism linked to the existence of its leaders. Some elements also rejected the struggle for higher wages (as in the case of the splinter group discussed above). The AAUE also underwent splits and its remnants merged with the remaining members of the AAU in 1931.

We may summarize the positions of the KAPD as follows: the crisis that was then convulsing the capitalist system was its death crisis; minor recoveries might ensue, but they can only be temporary; we are necessarily and inexorably proceeding towards the end of capitalist society. The revolution was therefore still possible, and had not been definitively brought to an end with the defeats of January-March 1919. Its continuing relevance was connected with the fact that the objective conditions for the revolutionary struggle still existed. It was the subjective conditions that were lacking, the proletariat was divided and rendered stupid by bourgeois democracy, and cynical by the military dictatorship. It adopted the soviets (councils) only superficially and more or less without awareness of their meaning. To reconstitute the revolutionary impulse, new organizations were necessary, organizations that would tend to directly overcome the contradiction of the old movement between political and economic organization. With this goal in mind, the factory organizations (BO) must replace the trade unions, the principal strongholds of capital, which were in fact being deserted by the workers themselves at the time. A party of a new type was necessary, a party that was not centralized, or a leadership party in the

⁸ All of the most important historical information reviewed above is taken from the book by Hans Manfred Bock, *Syndicalismus und Linkskommunismus von 1918-1923*, Verlag Anton Hein, Meisenheim am Glan, 1969 [Syndicalism and Left Communism, 1918-1923]. The author, having been informed by a veteran KAPist, Alfred Weiland, that some resistance groups like the Revolutionary Men of Confidence [Revolutionary Shop Stewards] and the Group of International Socialists continued to exist after 1933, and that the KAPists of East Germany were still active until 1950, when they were imprisoned.

Leninist sense, a party that would be the center of the reception of the different currents of thought and of the struggle that were then present in the class, a party that would be, in a certain sense, the brain of the class, the organ that can point out to it the right road to follow. Above all, the proletariat must be organized at the point of production, the factory, in order to fight against the new opportunism that consisted in the utilization of the economic institutions within the capitalist framework. Instead of allowing itself to be absorbed by bourgeois democracy, it must instead engage in exemplary actions that can constitute the first steps in restoring class consciousness, since the essential problem of the revolution in Germany was the development of the class consciousness of the proletariat (hence the party's support for the "March Action"). The direct action the party advocated which, in some respects, is reminiscent of anarchism, simply shows that the position taken by the anarchists was premature (they lacked the idea of organization). Such activity is all the more necessary insofar as the proletariat in Germany stands alone, no other class can be its ally.

At the international level, the essential points were: Germany, seen as the heart of the revolution and as the decisive factor for the realization of communism on a world scale. The other factor was Russia, where the revolution that had shaken the country to its foundations was at first hailed as a socialist revolution, then viewed as a dual revolution and finally characterized as a bourgeois revolution. The KAPD claimed that it was capitalism that was being developed in the USSR, which in turn led it to assume a position of open opposition against the CI, which it considered to be an instrument of that bourgeois revolution.

If we compare the various positions summarized above with the positions of the other currents of the German workers movement of the same period and with what remains of that movement today, one is struck by the degree to which the KAPD posed the essential questions of the western workers movement, questions that it was incapable of resolving on either the theoretical or the practical level. However, these questions are still being posed, and the mere fact that this stage has yet to be surpassed testifies to the backwardness of contemporary revolutionary thought. The majority of the councilist current, in particular, which takes from the KAPD only what is useful to its opposition to Leninism, has not succeeded in apprehending the specific quality of that movement; at most it can repeat, in an attempt to magically bring it back to life, the soviet system, when in reality what is needed is an understanding of the fact that this whole complex of questions is bound up with a distinct stage of the global workers movement. In support of this last claim, we will compare some of the positions that we have presented here in summary form, with the positions of a few contemporary groups.⁹

Almost all revolutionaries thought that the crisis that capitalist society was undergoing between 1917 and 1920 was the final crisis. The difference between the KAPists and

⁹ Here we can clearly see that this whole essay is a study of the theoretical side of the KAPD in relation to the proletarian movement. It is lacking a detailed analysis of the evolution of capitalist society and classes in Germany and throughout the world during the first decades of the 20th century [author's note].

other elements of the revolutionary movement was the fact that they remained faithful to this view much longer than the others and, furthermore, the fact that this position was the very foundation of their praxis and theory. The second program of the KAPD adopted in 1924 is largely devoted to an analysis of this question; many KAPists thought that capitalism was incapable of recovery.¹⁰ This position was both correct and false: correct, because capital in fact had to wait until its victory in 1945 to finally overcome its crisis (25 years later, we have only the symptoms of the next major revolutionary crisis); and false, because capitalism did in fact recover. The crisis of 1917-1920 was therefore not the final crisis. On the other hand, however, the workers movement was itself in a state of crisis, as it was incapable of launching the decisive attack against its mortal enemy. Otto Rühle, who had resigned from the KAPD in 1920, was one of the few people who were aware of the historical drama of the incapacity of the proletariat, and in 1924 he wrote: "For the German proletariat the revolution is, for the present, lost." (*Von burgerlichen Revolution zur proletarischen Revolution* [In English: "From the Bourgeois Revolution to the Proletarian Revolution", online at: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/ruhle/1924/revolution.htm> (American translator's note)]).

After having theoretically analyzed the periods of ascent, prosperity, crisis, stagnation, etc., Trotsky made the sensational discovery (in "The Transitional Program", 1938), that the productive forces had ceased to grow, which was also an article of faith of the death crisis theory, and would also allow him to save his "theory of permanent revolution". This was taken up by a large part of the Trotskyist movement and, by the way, how many times have we seen in the newspapers of the various little sects the repeated declaration: the final crisis of capitalism is the herald of its death agony!

The essential point of the economic analysis of the KAPists is its insistence on situating the clash between the proletariat and capital as a fundamental factor for understanding economic dynamics, while for Trotsky, for example at the Third Congress of the CI, his analysis passes almost effortlessly into a superficial phenomenology. This is the case with the characterization of unemployment; for the KAPists, the unemployment of that era was not simply the usual structural unemployment, but was instead intentionally fostered by the bourgeoisie as a weapon of the ruling class to starve the proletarians into submission and thus break their resistance; the economy was seen as the fundamental

¹⁰ Pannekoek, however, wrote in 1917: "Capitalism is far from being at its last gasp. According to those who think that it is, it is enough simply to wait awhile and then the final victory will come. But this is just sugar coating the pill. The hard fact is that an arduous climb still lies before us; we have only reached the foot of the mountains." ("Prinzip und Taktik" [Principles and Tactics], in *Pannekoek and the Workers Councils*, Serge Bricianer, ed.). He does not offer any explicit perspective and, to the extent that he ventures to suggest one, he adheres to a totally mechanistic schema of the explosion that must inevitably lead to the crisis. "And [he adds] with the crisis, the revolution will reappear. The old revolution is finished, we must prepare the new one." This last declaration suffices to illustrate all the differences between Pannekoek and the Trotskyists, who never understood that the revolution was finished.

class weapon in the battle between the proletariat and capital. This phenomenon then gives rise, according to the KAPists, to a new conflict that now appears within the ranks of the class between those who have a job and those who do not. It is obvious that the ruling class finds this conflict to be advantageous. Later, when the proletariat was totally defeated, the solution for the integration of the proletariat, now reduced to its function as variable capital, would consist in assuring jobs for all (and therefore the resurgence in one form or another of the right to employment), and establishing the society or the republic of labor: fascism.

With respect to these issues, it is undeniable that the KAPD had a largely accurate view and as a result the antagonism between the proletariat and capital was reaffirmed. This explains its intention, as well as that of the AAU and later of the AAUE, to unite all the proletarians in the BO (Betriebs-Organisation). This exposes all the more starkly the reactionary character of the proposal for the united front issued by the CI, which implied that the proletariat would willingly allow itself to be harnessed and yoked to fascism; correspondingly, all apologetics for and all deification of the proletariat comprise the greatest obstacle for the rise of a revolutionary class.

The KAPists admitted that capital might avail itself of a different solution, and even gave it serious consideration for a time: Russia could become the safety valve for capital, as they declared at the Third Congress of the CI, when they called attention to the dangers of the construction of capitalism in Russia. The KAPists admitted that the Bolsheviks were at an impasse, but they did not think that it was possible to find a revolutionary solution solely within the borders of Russia; they did not challenge the measures applied by the Bolsheviks. Only after the report by Kollontai did they change their opinion on this matter.¹¹ Their subsequent evolution was rapid indeed: not long afterwards they defined the Russian Revolution as a dual revolution, and then as a bourgeois revolution.

Trotsky did not respond with any serious arguments to contest the analyses of the KAPists. Later, at the Fourth Congress of the CI (1922), he would expound his argument on the monopoly on foreign trade.¹² Economic development on a world scale was stronger than all the guarantees that Trotsky talked about and, effectively, England did indeed use the Russian safety valve. With respect to this question, it is salutary to recall

¹¹ Kollontai represented the group called the Workers Opposition. A translation of her text entitled “The Workers Opposition” was published in *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, no. 35, 1964. [In English, see: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/kollonta/1921/workers-opposition/index.htm> (American translator’s supplemental note).]

¹² Trotsky’s speech at the Fourth Congress of the CI (1922), “The Economic Situation of Soviet Russia” [“The New Economic Policy of Soviet Russia and the Perspectives of the World Revolution”]; see, in particular, the fifth section, “The Forces and Resources of the Two Camps” (the two camps being capitalism and socialism). In 1966 long extracts from this speech, along with commentaries by Bordiga, was published in *Il Programma Comunista*, Nos. 6-10, as well as an article by Trotsky commenting on his speech in issue No. 11, and, finally, the “Theses on the Economic Situation of the USSR”, in issue No. 12.

all the incoherence of the revolutionaries of the early decades of the 20th century and how they broke with the perspective of Marx, who denounced the evil Anglo-Russian alliance that had been in effect since before the French Revolution, and who approached the Russian revolution as the prelude to the revolution in Europe. The destruction of Czarist Russia was a considerable blow to England and, considering the revolutionary movements taking place on a continental scale, one could even foresee these discordant effects making themselves felt in old Albion.¹³ This relation was never examined and, forced by the events, the Bolsheviks reinforced the enemy. The proof that this relation was never clearly perceived resides in the absurd policy of the CI towards the English workers movement. Lenin wanted the English CP to enter the Labour party in order to gain a wider audience, to go to the masses. This implied having a short-term view of social relations and not having any perspectives for a strong mobilization in England. In this manner Lenin and the CI stifled the revolutionary force that was in the process of distinguishing itself from the other currents and making itself independent of the paralyzing and stupefying democratic relations (which is more or less what Sylvia Pankhurst¹⁴ pointed out at the time) in the reformist movement. The revolutionary upheavals that had also affected England, when the proletarian revolution had been contained in the USSR and continental Europe, provided new impetus for the revolution, but the Anglo-Russian Committee,¹⁵ the crowning achievement of the CI's whole policy towards England, saved it from the revolutionary crisis.

If the KAPD was right to define the Russian Revolution the way it did, it was mistaken in its hasty assessment that the revolution was immobilized, in disregard of potentials that were not yet entirely exhausted. For Russian society was in fact very unstable until the Second World War and the KAPD's forecast was by no means absolutely assured of being verified. It is not that Stalin was able to choose, at any particular moment, between advancing towards socialism or towards capitalism, but the fact that the peasants and the proletarians were not yet completely subjugated, so that an impulse arriving from the West, a crisis that would affect western society, would have been capable of restoring the impulse to the proletarian revolutionary movement of the Slavic regions. This was Bordiga's position when he analyzed the Russian experience after 1921.¹⁶

¹³ An old name for the island of Great Britain [Spanish translator's note].

¹⁴ An English left communist who edited and wrote articles for the *Workers Dreadnought*. She was criticized by Lenin in *Infantile Disorder*. One of her articles from 1919 was published in *Invariance*, No. 7: "Pensée et action dans la III Internationale".

¹⁵ The Committee was founded in 1925 after an agreement between the British and Russian trade unions for the purpose of putting pressure on the English government to reduce its hostility towards the USSR. During the general strike of 1926, which was sabotaged by the trade unions, the Soviets never resigned from the Committee, which implicitly signaled their support for this sabotage. Even after the defeat of the widespread strike movement, Bukharin thought that it was necessary not to dissolve the Anglo-Russian Committee in the interests of the diplomacy of the Russian State!

¹⁶ Concerning this question, one may refer to the letter from Bordiga to Korsch written in 1926, published in *Invariance*, No. 10; and to a lesser extent, the 1926 "Lyon Theses"

With the Second World War and the massacre of twenty-two million Russians, capital finally obtained its great victory over the Russian proletariat and peasantry. From then on, Russian society no longer harbored any possibilities of deviating from its capitalist course. A cycle had come to an end. Now the revolutionary conditions would have to be born from the development of capital itself.

The KAPists, blinded by their theory of the death crisis of capital, did not deduce all the implicit conclusions from their determination of the role of Russia in the capitalist system. In other domains, this determination has proven to be very productive. This was the case when it came to parliamentarism, with their rejection of bourgeois democracy. Because the conditions were then mature for the revolution, it was no longer possible to employ the old methods of the workers movement. This was not deduced from an analysis of democracy and parliamentarism, however. The KAPD did not therefore arrive at the position endorsed by Marx, of communism as a positive solution, which is why it would also call for a workers democracy.

The position of the KAPists is similar to that of Lukács and the Belgian and Swiss communists,¹⁷ who maintained that parliament must be abandoned as soon as soviets are formed. The KAPD endorsed the replacement of the old forms of struggle with new ones and justified the latter with reference to the fact that they prevented the dictatorship of the leaders, the delegation of powers, and corruption. This would allow for a more proletarian affirmation, and hence the addition of the adjective “workers” to the name of the party, which resulted in the KAPD being frequently accused of workerism, without taking into consideration the parallel reason why this adjective was added to the party’s name. It is true that this addition might give the impression that the revolution was a process that only concerned the proletariat and that the party must be exclusively working class, etc., but the position of the KAPists could by no means be reduced to a mere resurgence of the workerist position, of the “calloused hands”. However, it is quite ironic that those who surrender most willingly to the idolatry of the proletariat are often the same people who advance these criticisms of the KAPD.

The break with parliamentarism was accompanied by the break with the trade unions. The critiques published by the KAPD, Pannekoek, Rühle, etc., were most decisive in this regard,¹⁸ since they demonstrated the extent to which the trade unions had become

published in *Programme communiste*, No. 38, pp. 25-65, and the 1945 “Theses of the Left” published in *Invariance*, No. 9.

¹⁷ The theses of these communists were published in *Kommunismus*, a journal published in Vienna between from 1920 to 1921. They were translated into French and published in *Invariance*, No. 7, with the exception of the theses of the Swiss communists.

¹⁸ For Pannekoek (1873-1960), one may consult the work cited above, edited by Bricianer, as well as “Le développement de la révolution mondiale et al tactique communiste”, in *Invariance*, No. 7. [In English, see “World Revolution and Communist Tactics” (1920), online at: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/pannekoek/tactics/index.htm> (American translator’s supplemental note).] As for Rühle (1874-1943), many of his most

institutions integrated into capitalism, organs of its State. They only lacked the rigorous proof (although the attempt was made) of the inevitability of such a process, in view of the fact that, essentially, the trade union is an institution of social democracy, since it participates in the decisions concerning the allocation of surplus value. It is therefore situated in the heart of the system: to haggle over the division of the surplus value, it is first necessary for the proletariat to have produced it.

Some currents pursued the critique further to the point of rejecting wage struggles, a dangerous position when advanced by a small group, because it is an inviting target for the demagogy of the existing apparatuses that will try to discredit all radical movements by saying that the latter are not really seeking any kind of emancipation of the proletariat, nor are they concerned with improving its living conditions. We have seen this disgusting demagogy in May and June of 1968, as it was proclaimed by the leaders of the concentrationist organizations [*organisations concentrationnaires*]¹⁹ such as the PCF and the CGT. Moreover, such a reaction is typical of the ruling class. This critique can also mean that the groups that support it have not at the same time defined (or have only done so superficially) the essential goal: the destruction of the proletariat. Thus, Tronti (a theoretician of Potere Operaio) asserts that a new strategy is necessary, that we have to refuse to “actively collaborate in capitalist development”, and positively reject any “program that makes demands for better working conditions and higher wages”. We have to refuse to address our demands to capital in order to halt its development (*Operaio e*

interesting texts have yet to be translated into French, such as *From the Bourgeois to the Proletarian Revolution*, and his last writings, published recently in Germany (*Schriften*, Rowohlt Verlag, 1971). After 1923, Rühle rejoined the SPD. From 1936 until his death, he lived in Mexico.

We must also mention Franz Pfemfert (1879-1954), a very close collaborator of Rühle's. He was a left-radical critic of the SPD before the war. Since even before the war of 1914, he was an editor of the journal, *Die Aktion*, which was the focal point for a circle of artists and writers (expressionists) who formed an “anti-national socialist party” (1915). Its purpose was to criticize the “social truce” of the SPD. In November 1918, this movement moved closer to the Spartacus League. In the KPD, Pfemfert belonged to the left wing with Rühle and the elements who would later form the KAPD. Beginning in 1920, *Die Aktion* defended Rühle's program in favor of unitary organization. Pfemfert remained faithful to this position after his resignation from the KAPD (early 1921). In 1926 he participated, with Ivan Katz (and his left wing opposition group within the KPD), in the formation of the second Spartacusbund (Spartacus League). In 1927, *Die Aktion* defended the platform of the Trotskyist Left. In 1933, Pfemfert emigrated from Germany and finally arrived in Mexico, where he died in 1954.

It should also be noted that, in May 1968, the journal that best represented the immediate movement of the time was called *Action*.

¹⁹ *Concentrationnaire*: A French term used specifically to refer to anything related to concentration camps [Note of the Spanish translator].

Capitale, pages 247 and 150).²⁰ Correspondingly, we must “obstruct the economic machinery, render it incapable of operating at the decisive moment” (*ibid.*, p. 251). Unfortunately, neither Potere Operaio nor Tronti overcame the following contradiction: exaltation of the proletariat/elimination of wage labor.

This way of approaching the question only admits *a posteriori* that the proletariat was the motor force in the dynamic of capitalist development (until science confronted this role with its own growing importance in the process of production and circulation), the “structural” cause, the efficient cause in a certain sense. With its demands, with its struggle, the proletariat forced capital to develop until it attained its real domination and no longer needed this stimulant (the point of no return); then its terrifying realization poses a threat to the very future of the species. It is therefore necessary to directly destroy capital, and, in order to do so, we no longer need to pursue the mediation of demands for reforms or fairy tales from the reformist arsenal; what we need to do is to eliminate the proletariat, the real reified existence of capital. Such an intention is incompatible with the deification of the proletariat indulged in by Potere Operaio and Lotta Continua, or by the proletarian Left.

The KAPD’s anti-parliamentarism and anti-trade unionism are complemented by its “unionism”. The fundamental concept of the party’s theory is the *union*. The KAPists wanted to unify the proletariat, but only a revolutionary proletariat, not infested with democracy, not stupefied by militarism. They thought that the place where this proletariat can be exempt from all pernicious influences is the workplace. This is why it was necessary to create the BOs (Betriebs-Organisationen) and then unite them in larger units. If the KAPD, the AAU and the AAUE privileged the point of production, this is because they defined the proletariat by means of the factory. “The worker is a proletarian in the Marxist sense only in production, in his role as a wage worker”, he acquires his class consciousness in the factory. Outside of the factory, however, “he exists, lives, thinks, acts and feels like a petty bourgeois” (Otto Rühle, *Schriften*, Rowohlt Verlag, p. 167. The same definition may be found in almost the same words in his 1924 text, *From the Bourgeois to the Proletarian Revolution*).

²⁰ There are in fact various currents within Potere Operaio, among which the most important were those of Pisa, Porto-Maghera, and the Turin group that published an interesting pamphlet: *Trade Unions and Committees of Workers Struggle* (1969). The journal *Potere Operaio* was the successor of *La classe*, which was itself the successor of *La classe operaia*, published in 1964. These various publications were connected with student agitation and the workers struggles that took place during the early 1960s in Italy.

We must also mention the magazine, *Contropiano*, which was always associated with this current. The main idea animating this magazine was that the working class must seek to implement its own plan in opposition to capital’s plan. The book by Tronti, *Operaio e capitale* (Workers and Capital, Akal, 2001 [Note of the Spanish translator]) was first published in Italy in 1966 (Einaudi). The book by F. Berardi, *Contro il lavoro* (Against Work), Della Libreria, 1970, is also associated with this current.

These concepts remain circumscribed within the apology for production and labor. The worker, however, is a proletarian because he does not have any reserves, because he is deprived of the means of production and therefore of any possibility for engaging in any activity except in the most reduced form, that is, deprived of a multitude of determinations: wage labor. The workplace is where the possibility of his dispossession, his spoliation, his alienation, is effected. There, he only acquires one thing: a wage. It is in precisely this manner that he can be integrated. It is true that the environment outside the enterprise is the location of a vast operation of democratic mystification. In the factory itself, however, apart from the mystification of the wage, another mystification develops, derived from the reinforcement of capital: the contribution of the proletarian, that of his labor, is becoming increasingly more intangible due to the growing importance of dead labor, and due to the socialization of labor.²¹ This is why the search for guarantees against the impoverishment created by the capitalist atmosphere fails, even if you want, as some propose, to bring democracy to the factory. This is obviously the weakest point in the KAPD's theory, which led it to embrace an ideology of the producers. And this was also the point where the defeat of the German revolution was manifested, for it was urgently necessary for the revolution to rapidly proceed to the negation of the proletariat; however, as a consequence of the setback it suffered after being defeated in its first battles, which was certainly a major defeat, the proletariat retreated to the factory.

The KAPD defined, and exalted, the proletariat as worker. If capital, however, in its vital process is the cause of the separation of the worker from his means of production, it then becomes the element that allows unification, which is no longer the unification of the individual worker and his corresponding individual instruments of production, but of the collective worker and the socialized means of production. The value-capital (*Kapitalwert*) mediation, like all mediations, rapidly becomes the preponderant factor and determines the new unity at a different level than the starting point of the process, capital is anthropomorphized and the worker is capitalized. The wage is the essential element of this mystifying transformation. It is like the certificate that accredits the rediscovered unity of man and means of production, insofar as it takes the form of payment not for labor power, but for the function performed by the worker in a particular process of production.

As long as this process has not reached its culmination, the workers' activity is absolutely revolutionary, even if their goals are not consciously revolutionary, in the sense that the

²¹ We must point out that for Marx, value can no longer be defined in an immediate way when the capitalist mode of production reaches its full development (real domination). Marx writes: "The value of a commodity is determined by the total labour-time of past and living labour incorporated in it. The increase in labour productivity consists precisely in that the share of living labour is reduced while that of past labour is increased, but in such a way that the total quantity of labour incorporated in that commodity declines; in such a way, therefore, that living labour decreases more than past labour increases." [*Capital*, Vol. III, Part III, Chapter 15, Section IV]. This question has already been addressed in *Invariance*, No. 6, "Thèses sur le capitalisme".

struggle against the despotism of capital forces the latter to constantly perfect its rule and, in order to do so, it is driven to make itself independent of labor power and therefore to become the automated monster concerning which Bordiga spoke in his commentary on the chapter of the *Grundrisse* on the means of labor and machinery.²² This is why trade union struggles are important not only for the improvement of the living conditions of the exploited multitudes, but also for their indirect consequences.

Now, in Europe and North America, the proletariat can no longer be revolutionary from an immediate point of view, since it no longer has to develop capital and, paradoxically, a general rise in wages, while it is favorable for the class in these regions, has disastrous consequences for the countries with weaker organic compositions (the Third World).²³

At this point we must clarify Marx's position on the proletariat. Marx did not abstractly assert the revolutionary nature of the proletariat; he declared that the proletariat is revolutionary or it is nothing. One may add: for a whole era, the proletariat was the necessary class; now, the persistence of this class—a synonym for the persistence of capital—is an obstacle for the further development of the species. The necessity for this class is only true in the sense that it entails the destruction of classes, which can only disappear by way of the self-suppression of the proletariat; the communist revolution is still a class revolution.

Potere Operaio glorified the proletariat in its immediate reality, in a way, insofar as this group considered that it must undergo the transition from proletarian to worker because “in this way the leap of the proletarian to worker presupposes on the plane of social

²² See “Trajectoire et catastrophe de la forme capitaliste dans la classique et monolithique construction théorique du marxisme”, *Invariance*, No. 3, particularly p. 94. In the first volume of *Capital*, Chapter 4, “The General Formula for Capital”, we find the expression, “automatic subject” (“automatisches Subjekt”; cf. *Werke*, Vol. 23, p. 169). The expression is absent from the French edition. [It is also absent from the English-language editions I have consulted on the Internet—American translator's supplemental note.]

²³ Marx effectively demonstrated, in Chapter 11 of Volume III, that a generalized increase in wages translates into an increase in the price of production of the commodities produced by the enterprises whose capital has a lower than average organic composition, prices remain unchanged in the enterprises with an average organic composition, and finally, that prices decline in the enterprises that have a higher than average organic composition. In other words, the latter obtain surplus value at the expense of the disadvantaged sectors. A study of this kind shows that the trade union struggle, in order to be effective when the capitalist mode of production has spread over the whole planet, must be waged on the same scale.

“When one speaks of the fall or rise of wages one must never lose sight of the whole world market or of the position of the workers in the various countries” (Marx, “Wage Labour and Capital”, 1849 [the citation is incorrect: the quotation is from an essay entitled, “Wages”, written in 1847—American translator's supplemental note]).

violence the transition from revolt to class struggle” (*Potere Operaio*, No. 1?). The important aspect of PO’s view, however, is its recognition that the proletariat must fight against labor, against its own existence.

The dangerous side of this apology for the worker and his workplace, the factory (this is clearly expressed when it was thought to be necessary to add the adjective “worker” to the word “party” or “power”), is the fact that it contains the potential threat of the glorification of labor and ultimately the starting point for a re-writing of history for the purpose of conjuring in a certain sense what has happened and magically justifying it. Capitalism only exists because there are two complementary elements, capital and wage labor. Up until now, capital has occupied the first tier, as it seems to be the determinant element (and is becoming ever more determinant). It is the proletariat, however, that produces the surplus value that will be capitalized and therefore turned into capital. On this basis, we make the transition to a symmetrical assertion: we have to put labor on the first tier, the proletariat (Tronti). This is what Chaliou was thinking²⁴ when he said that Marx forgot to mention the class struggle in his book, *Capital*.²⁵ Ultimately, this position is nothing but a return to the positions of the Ricardian socialists like Gray, Bray or Hodgskin, who were criticized by Marx in *The Poverty of Philosophy*. It is not a mere re-appropriation of these old ideas, however. In Tronti we find the *a posteriori* understanding of the importance of the working class, and its political intervention.²⁶ The

²⁴ Pierre Chaliou is a pseudonym of Cornelius Castoriadis [Spanish translator’s note].

²⁵ “Marx, who discovered the class struggle, writes a monumental work analyzing the development of capital in which the class struggle is totally absent”, *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, No. 31, p. 79. [Another version of this quotation may be found in the pamphlet, “Modern Capitalism and Revolution” (tr. Maurice Brinton, Solidarity, London, 1965), written by Cornelius Castoriadis under the pseudonym of Paul Cardan: “Marx, who discovered and ceaselessly propagated the idea of the crucial role of the class struggle in history, wrote a monumental work (*Capital*) from which the class struggle is virtually absent!” “Modern Capitalism and Revolution” is available online at: <https://libcom.org/library/modern-capitalism-revolution-paul-cardan> (American translator’s supplemental note).]

²⁶ Marx and Engels always emphasized the importance of the intervention of the proletariat in situations that were not directly revolutionary, but where its activity could nonetheless accentuate a social-economic development that would subsequently be in its interest. Thus, Marx called upon the French and English proletarians to put pressure on their respective governments during the Crimean War to intervene more effectively and seriously against Russia. They issued the same kinds of appeals during the U.S. Civil War. Marx thought that the working class had to support the North against the South, without harboring any illusions about the positions of a man like Lincoln. This is why we should not be surprised to read, in a letter from Marx to Engels dated February 25, 1865: “I answered through our Council that the working class has its own foreign policy, which is most certainly not determined by what the middle class considers opportune.”

The definition of working class politics can only be addressed in connection with the study of the historic party and the formal party. In any event it is a thing of the past,

Ricardian socialists engaged in theoretical reflections on the future that they sought to bring about; Tronti wants to re-write history to realize his desires.

It is no longer a matter of supporting either of the two poles or aspects of capital; what we have to do is destroy both of them. In this sense, the autonomy of the working class is an empty demand if it is not posed in the context of the process of the suppression of that class.

The KAPists, just like Rosa Luxemburg, had no illusions about the state of mind of the proletarians (the “masses”, as they said at the time), which was counterrevolutionary and, as Luxemburg pointed out, immature. There is no contradiction between this assertion and the claim that the proletariat had to be mobilized to bring about the revolution. The recognition of its counterrevolutionary state of mind is also the recognition of the momentary victory of capital. Based on this diagnosis, and in view of the fact that the objective conditions for the revolution were mature in the opinion of the KAPD, they arrived at the following conclusion: we must develop the consciousness of the proletariat;²⁷ one can only rescue the workers from the cretinism in which they have been plunged by democracy and militarism with exemplary acts; hence the theory of the offensive. From somewhat different premises, Lukács arrived at the same conclusion:

“The question, rather, is *how, through independent initiatives on the part of the United German Communist Party, the ideological crisis, the Menshevistic lethargy of the proletariat, the dead-point of revolutionary progress, can be overcome.*”²⁸

because 1) currently the working class is too integrated to have its own politics and 2) the day when it will be capable of mobilizing autonomously of capital, will be for the purpose of destroying the capitalist mode of production. Today, revolutionaries can only engage in strategic analyses: to study the most favorable outcome for the intervention of the proletariat when there are conflicts comparable to the ones analyzed by Marx.

The Bremen newspaper, *Arbeiterpolitik*, addressed this question by opposing the compromises made by the SPD (leadership politics). “The politics of the directive committees has experienced its great historical fiasco. The era of workers politics has commenced” (No. 1, 1916).

²⁷ Trotsky would address this question in his own way. For him, it was a matter of selecting cadres so that, when the movement gathers momentum, they can constitute the general staff of the revolution (see “Lessons of October”, 1924). This is why the crisis of the revolutionary movement was always, as far as he was concerned, the crisis of its leadership: the lack of cadres.

²⁸ “Spontaneity of the Masses, Activity of the Party”, *Die Internationale*, May 1921. [See Georg Lukács, *Tactics and Ethics, 1919-1929: The Questions of Parliamentarism and Other Essays*, tr. Michael McColgan, Verso, London, 2014, p. 102. Available online at: <https://thecharnelhouse.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Georg-Luka%CC%81cs-Tactics-and-Ethics-Political-Essays-1919-1929a.pdf> (American translator’s supplemental note).]

More than 40 years later, Rudi Dutschke, who had read the above passage, took the same position.²⁹ And he even added: “To revolutionize the revolutionaries, this is the necessary condition for turning the masses into revolutionaries”.³⁰ This position was shared by the SDS, the Japanese students and the left-wing movement in the United States, and has been theoretically addressed by various elements, for or against; how to find a way forward when the working class has been well-integrated, since Dutschke effectively analyzes, based on the work of Marx, this dynamic of integration. As diagnosis, his viewpoint is irrefutable. This is not the place to examine the process of development of the phenomenon; our purpose is to establish the extent to which the different groupuscules that arose during and after the 1960s discovered their theory and their practice in the German left of 1920. Some of them, of course, are aware of this and even proclaim the need to go even further back into history: “The meaning of this thesis: it is necessary for the extra-parliamentary and anti-authoritarian opposition to start all over again where the workers movement left off a hundred years ago” (Bernd Rabehl).³¹

To awaken the proletariat, and then to intervene, not to be concerned with the crisis: this is also the position of Potere Operaio, for whom the theory of the catastrophe is reactionary. It calls for the subjective intervention that presupposes the contemporary applicability of a correct tactic, which leads it to divinize politics.

²⁹ Rudi Dutschke: “Les étudiants anti-autoritaires face aux contradictions présentes du capitalisme et face au tiers-monde”, in *La révolte des étudiants allemands*, Gallimard. This same anthology contains texts by Uwe Bergman, Wolfgang Lefèvre and Bernd Rabehl.

³⁰ This formulation is similar to the position of Régis Debray (*Revolution in the Revolution*). There is a major difference, however, between the research of Dutschke, which is for the most part oriented around a reconsideration of Marx, and the Third-Worldist position of Debray, who superficially examines a reality—the need for Latin America to free itself of its past, to ditch old formulas, and hence his critique of Trotskyism, which is quite trenchant—but hardly even approaches the road of critique and remains trapped in the dominant ideology. Thus, he writes that history advances in the dark. A long time ago, Marx had already said: history does nothing....

³¹ In Lukács we find (“Entretien avec Lukacs”, Cahiers libres 160, Maspéro, 1969, pp. 48-49) a similar idea: “We must consider that this transformation of capitalism into the domination of relative surplus value [Lukács is referring to the unpublished Sixth Chapter of *Capital*, in which Marx makes the distinction between the “formal submission and the real submission of labor to capital”; see note 47] creates a new situation in which the workers movement, the revolutionary movement, is condemned to make a new start, in which, under caricatural and comical forms, ideologies that had apparently disappeared a long time ago, like the machine-breakers of the late 18th century, once again become popular.... We must recognize that we have to confront a new beginning, or, to use a comparison, that we are not living in the 1920s but, in a sense, at the beginning of the 19th century, when, after the French Revolution, the workers movement began to slowly develop.” This question has been addressed from a somewhat different perspective in *Invariance*, No. 6, Thesis 4.6, “Le rajeunissement du capitalisme”.

The only way to obstruct the economic machinery, to render it incapable of functioning at the decisive moment, is the political refusal of the working class to function as an appendage of capitalist society (*Potere Operaio*, No. 11).³²

In France the March 22 Movement defended this position by embracing situationist theory.

In this position we find an underestimation of the role of ideology and the economy, which are presently totally intertwined. Ideology has become a material phenomenon or an essential aspect of the infrastructure, the foundation of the whole system; from the moment when it penetrates the masses, it becomes a reactionary force of the first order.³³

To destroy this force, neither emulation nor populist propaganda suffices, what is needed is a total break with capital: for example, when a large number of people realize the absurdity of labor, when they sense the irrationality of all scientific development because the life of each and every individual is directly threatened by it, when fictitious capital has become totally independent of its basis and society-capital plunges into an inextricable “monetary confusion”. Not all contemporary struggles are susceptible of being integrated into the schematic frameworks of the various groupuscules, which simply want to use the force mobilized in these struggles while rejecting their original impulses for not being political or for not conforming with the schemas of Marxism-Leninism.

It can definitely be said that for the last fifty years the discourse of the left has been characterized by a combination of revolutionary objective factors and non-revolutionary subjective factors: a scholastic magic trick that must exorcise the death of the old workers movement.³⁴

³² Curiously enough, we now see left wing intellectuals rehabilitating politics. Their standard, all-purpose formula is: the economic is becoming the political. This is the very foundation of the neo-Leninism of *Potere Operaio*, *Lotta Continua* and various sects in France.

³³ As capital develops, ideology is replaced by science. Capital cannot be satisfied with justifications and simple representations, which imply that the presuppositions of capital can still be challenged. That is why it is necessary to assert its rationality, its apodictic character and therefore a discourse must be introduced that is not ideological, but scientific, in which man is nothing but a leftover residue of the past. It is thanks to science (especially the mathematical sciences) that the totalitarianism of capital is being realized.

The above statements require further proofs and extensive discussion. We merely want to call attention to the “problem”, and will address this topic in more detail in a forthcoming work.

³⁴ “The alleged analysis according to which all the preconditions for revolution are present, but a revolutionary leadership is lacking, therefore makes no sense. It is correct

The most outstanding feature of the KAPist discourse on consciousness (like that of Potere Operaio or the Situationist International) is that it addresses a fundamental question. With a greater effect than it had in the past, the conscious factor is predominant in the revolutionary process if only because the proletarian revolution is what produces consciousness (consciousness of the social relations and therefore the production of human life as a whole) and can only come to fruition through the simultaneous appropriation of this consciousness. The way these currents confront consciousness, however, implies that they have understood it as something external to the class and that it must therefore be brought to the class from the outside, as for example by means of exemplary acts (KAPD), by the correct tactics (PO) or by way of practices such as *détournement*³⁵ (SI). Consciousness can only be produced over the course of its own process, however: “Consciousness can never be anything else than *conscious* existence, and the existence of men is their actual life-process” (Marx and Engels). Therefore it is impossible to conceive it as being external to the class that must conquer consciousness. One therefore takes up a position external to the class when one’s theory calls for the need for an organization to constitute a vanguard.³⁶

to say that the organ is indispensable, but its emergence depends on the general conditions of the struggle, and never on a genius or a courageous leader or a vanguard” (Amadeo Bordiga, “Le renversement de la praxis dans la théorie marxiste”, *Invariance*, Series I, No. 4, p. 4).

³⁵ *Détournement* is a practice proposed by the situationists that consists in the de-contextualization, appropriation and reorganization of an object of capitalist society—especially a cultural object—in order to change its meaning and produce a critical effect [Note of the Spanish translator].

³⁶ It is obvious that the refutation of the theory that holds that consciousness originates externally to the class calls for more extensive discussion. We shall return to this topic later. Nonetheless, one should keep in mind that this theory:

a) Either implies that consciousness is a fixed factor; existence is separated from it. It can undergo various modifications but, at a certain moment, thanks to a change in the historical conditions, it rediscovers its consciousness because it recognizes it.

b) Or else it presupposes a permanence of existence. The proletariat is revolutionary by nature. It only goes astray because of perverse ideologies, or if one part of the class has been successful in its efforts to sell itself (the labor aristocracy), but the very process of becoming of society compels the proletariat to become revolutionary. Consciousness then seems to appear, more or less spontaneously, just like the groups that have assumed responsibility for instilling this consciousness in the class-existence.

In both cases, the activity of existence is one of rediscovering itself; consciousness is the truth of this existence. Hence the Sisyphean labor of the various groupuscules that,

The dichotomous conditions of the revolution imposed the need for the party on the KAPD, and this party was supposed to be the vanguard that must “guard the compass” and, through its conduct, develop class consciousness and educate the proletariat. It would, however, be a mistake to conclude from this that the KAPD thought that the revolution could only be carried out by a minority. The KAPD was supposed to be the unifying element, the engineer of the unification of the masses. It is curious that in 1919 Radek and Levi opposed, in the name of the vanguard, the concepts of those who would later found the KAPD. Levi rejected the positions of the German left because he thought that “it seeks to replace the clear understanding of the vanguard of the working class by the chaotic drive of the mass that is in ferment”, and Radek added: “the party must not be the masses of unconscious communists who become intelligent after a street fight, but must represent the consciousness of the proletariat.”

In fact, these opposed positions that would later be reversed arose from different views of the complex process of unity/division (unification/separation). The KAPD would remain faithful to its position: it is necessary to break with the old workers movement; unity must be attained on the basis of the new organizations that the revolutionary proletariat has created, the BO, the *unionen*, the councils. The CI, on the other hand, wanted to induce splits and initiate a process of separation on the basis of certain theoretical and political considerations: the 21 Conditions.³⁷ However, the CI also realized that it was in

finding themselves on the periphery of the class-existence, want to be the magician-mediators of this self-recognition. The results:

- a) In the face of the subsequent non-recognition, they appeal to their permanent justification: we are the only ones who ... we correctly predicted that ... etc.
- b) Established in the exterior, consciousness must be transmissible so that it can be inoculated in the class-existence. Consciousness can only exist in an organized form; thus, the discourse of the groupuscules on the organization of the organization: the apologetics for the vanguard.

³⁷ “Soviet Russia’s unexpected resilience to the onslaughts of reaction has both compelled the Entente to negotiate and also made a new and powerful impression upon the labour parties of the West. The Second International is breaking up; a general movement of the centre groups towards Moscow has set in under the impulsion of the growing revolutionary mood of the masses. These groups have adopted the new name of communists without their former perspectives having greatly altered, and they are transferring the conceptions and methods of the old social democrats into the new international... with their entry into the Third International or declaration in favour of its principles, as in the case of the USPD mentioned above, the sharp distinction between communists and social democrats is once again fading... This is how every ruling stratum behaves: rather than allow itself to be cut off from the masses, it becomes ‘revolutionary’ itself, in order to deflate the revolution as far as possible by its influence.

the minority, and that the revolution could not take place without the masses, who were still under the influence of the socialists; and this explains the return to the old movement, and the dispatch of “open letters” to the socialist leaders calling for a united front, etc., giving the impression that the socialism/communism split was based merely on disagreements over tactical and organizational questions.³⁸ For the KAPD, however, behind the question of organization lies a theoretical question.

In 1921, the CI began to advocate the theory of the mass party. With reference to Marx, however, we see that the expression “mass party” is a contradiction in terms, since the party is the class as a class, it is no longer a mere conglomeration of individuals, a mass. A mass party, however, simultaneously implies a party of bosses and leaders, for who else can keep the masses in line? The class party, on the other hand, becomes a historical subject, the indispensable condition for the suppression of the class in itself, since only the abolition of the latter can make the new human community possible: human existence. The use of the term “masses” obliges one to assume the bourgeois and capitalist theoretical-political framework as one’s starting point; its use by the Leninists is indicative of the idiocy of their theory, in both the ordinary and etymological senses of the word.³⁹ Furthermore, by speaking of the mass party, of its necessity, constituted an admission that the party did not include the masses and that the situation was in fact an existential negation of the party. The masses exist, this is a fact, but the turning point to the revolution is when these masses constitute themselves as a community, not when they finally receive messiahs or leaders who keep them in their status as masses at the end of a leash.

And many communists tend to see only the increased strength thus accruing to us, and not also the increase in vulnerability” (Anton Pannekoek, “World Revolution and Communist Tactics”).

It would therefore seem that Pannekoek might have found the 21 Conditions satisfactory; unfortunately, they retained a provisional character, since they were only applied against the KAPD.

³⁸ “Even today the profound opposition between communists and social democrats is not theoretical, but practical. That is why we do not spend much time speaking about it. This opposition is a tactical and organizational opposition, rather than an opposition between Marxism and anti-Marxism; to the contrary, it involves the opposition between democracy and dictatorship. On this question we social democrats can confidently refer to Marx, who intervened in party and trade union debates in favor of the most complete democracy and in questions relating to national politics in favor of the democratic republic” (Kautsky, “Les trois sources du marxisme”, *Cahiers Spartacus*, May 1969, No. 35. This quotation is from the Preface added by Kautsky to the 1933 edition of his essay).

³⁹ The word “idiot” is derived from the Greek ἰδιώτης, *idiotes*, whose root is ἴδιος, *idios*, (“private”), used in ancient Greece to refer to any citizen who was concerned only with his own personal business and had no interest in public affairs [Note of the Spanish translator].

The KAPD resolutely championed and privileged the concept of the vanguard. The party is something different from the mass of the proletarians, since it must educate them, and instruct them (the social democratic content survives here in a modified form). This concept of the vanguard, however, having now become a mere magical incantation, an article of faith, is present in all our contemporary groupuscules; it is the goal-word (and word-goal) of their justification. In the pursuit of this justification the old opposition between ultra-left, left and CI was resuscitated, in the following form: on the one hand, those who proclaim the vanguard in the strict sense, like the International Communist Party, some councilists, and the Trotskyists; and on the other hand, currents like Potere Operaio and Lotta Continua who talk about the vanguard of the masses, which is no longer a contradiction in terms but just plain nonsense. The most coherent discourse reflecting this latter concept is that of PO, where we find all the essential themes of the Leninist system reactivated in the wake of the struggles of the 1960s: “When capital attacks, generally and individually, the vanguards of the masses of the working class, they will have to throw themselves head first into political work, without fear, with all the force of protest, and all the nuclei must organize to break with the despotism of the system” (*Potere Operaio*, No. 1).

In Potere Operaio we find a theory of the vanguard that does not want to be only a vanguard, which is why it always adds the magic word: masses. Just as the CI always added this same word to the word “Party” (vanguard of the masses and mass party express the dissolution of the vanguard and the party), the German left always added the word “workers”. Among the groups of the Italian left, a theory arose after 1945 (Bordiga) which postulated a party that could not really be a party, since the real party would only exist in a distant future. These “diverse theoretical lines” are similar to those of the KAPD. With Rühle and the AAUE, however, we discover the truth of the KAPD, its realization in the form of a resolution of the contradiction: a party that is not a party (with reference to both Leninist theory and practice as well as their Social Democratic versions), the terms of the contradiction actually being embodied by the simultaneous existence of the KAPD and the AAU. For Rühle, the party is absorbed by the class, which must itself be responsible for carrying out its mission to emancipate itself without intermediaries. “The German proletariat must finally realise that the proletarian revolution has nothing to do with parties and trade unions, but is the work of the whole proletarian class” (*From the Bourgeois to the Proletarian Revolution*). He also said that the proletariat “must finally resolve upon slipping the halter of its leadership and taking into its own hands the work of its liberation, in order to complete it with its own energies and methods, on its own initiative and under its own leadership”. Next, he discusses the councils, but they are nothing but the expression of this process of becoming autonomous of the proletariat, the immediate expression of the revolutionary proletariat. Here it would seem that he returns to Marx’s position: the class that becomes a class for itself when it exists as the negation of society, but in Marx this moment was that of the formation of the party, since the proletariat can only attain this conscious negation of the prevailing order by rediscovering revolutionary theory, which by no means implies that theory must be brought from outside the proletariat, but rather that the class re-appropriates its own theory over the course of the struggles against the existing order and thus engages in revolutionary activity through which it constitutes itself as a historical subject. Rühle’s

position starts from and leads back to a perception of the class in its immediacy. It is true that this is also the starting point of all the councilist groupuscules, while the Marxist-Leninists of every stripe present themselves as mediators, as magical elements that will make the class exist.

Rühle's theoretical work is not lacking integrity. It is normal that at the end of the revolutionary process the party which was supposed to be the class (at the peak of the revolutionary struggle) and then its organ (in this respect we already detect a retreat, because this produces a split within the existence of the class) should be reabsorbed into the class, since from then on the struggle was lost and the proletariat was under the heel of capital. From then on the important thing was to foresee the conditions under which a new revolutionary phenomenon will arise that make the emergence of a new party possible (according to Marx's definition). Here, however, the question becomes complicated, because, like all classes, the proletariat does not remain the same over the passage of time, but evolves, which is why we cannot turn the clock back and relive the past. Rühle understood this quite well, but he saw the solution in a movement oriented towards immediate tasks, linked to the immediate circumstances of the proletariat, and he harbored illusions, along with many other people, concerning the possibility of a revolution taking place at the end of the Second World War. The movement had to start all over again from the start, from the class itself, in its immediate circumstances, in its composition and its structure as determined by the degree of development attained by the capitalist mode of production of the time. This was the message conveyed in Italy, at first in a very limited way, by the movement that first published *La classe* and then *Potere Operaio*. In any event, Otto Rühle predicted the death of a particular kind of formal party, and in this respect he was entirely correct.

For the KAPists, the need for the party is linked with a phenomenon of will: to try to accelerate the process of formation of consciousness in order to bring about a reversal of the general trend. For them, if the proletariat does not fulfill its historical mission, humanity will succumb to barbarism. This view had already been expressed by Rosa Luxemburg.⁴⁰ This attempt to overcome the social democratic mentality reflects the

⁴⁰ "In this hour, socialism is the only salvation for humanity. The words of the Communist Manifesto flare like a fiery *menetekel* above the crumbling bastions of capitalist society: Socialism or barbarism!" (Rosa Luxemburg, "What Does the Spartacus League Want?", in *Spartacus and the Commune of Berlin, 1918-1919*). In the "Communist Manifesto", however, Marx and Engels did not posit any such alternative. Luxemburg was certainly quoting the text from memory. It is true that barbarism is mentioned in various parts of the "Manifesto", but it is never explicitly contrasted with socialism.

Later, other authors would also claim that Marx had spoken explicitly about socialism or barbarism, but never gave any specific references to any of the texts of Marx or Engels that would allow us to locate this famous alternative in space-time (see, in particular, V. Fay, Altaver, and J. M. Vincent in *En partant du capital*, Anthropos, 1968).

recognition of the real condition of the proletariat. It does not involve the kind of barbarism described by Morgan and, after him, Engels, nor is it the barbarism characteristic of the period of the barbarian invasions (although there are assertions concerning a possible regression to the stone age), but rather barbarism in the sense that the victory of capital will mean an increase in the oppression of men, their degradation, an increasingly more terrible denial of their humanity, in view of the fact that the power

On various occasions Marx pointed out the triviality of the society in which the capitalist mode of production prevails, and how inferior it is to ancient societies in which the goal of production was man himself. In *The Civil War in France*, he speaks ironically of the fact that the bourgeoisie boasts of having abolished the *lex talionis* that was once enshrined in the law, and shows just how similar is the repression it exercises to the old vendetta, only multiplied in force and violence by modern means, and he even speaks of savagery (*Wildheit*).

The concept of barbarism, to the extent that it designates a period of human history, is a concept that is alien to Marxist theory. Engels was certainly correct when he demonstrated the importance of Morgan's work, by highlighting how the latter, independently of himself and of Marx, had discovered the fundamental principles of communism; he was, however, mistaken, when he embraced Morgan's concept of barbarism (along with his concepts of savagery and civilization), since, besides the ambiguities we have already mentioned, all traces of the mode of production and of the form of the human community are effaced in them. On the other hand, the concepts used by Marx for serialization-periodization (which by no means implies any kind of millenarianism) take such circumstances into account. We have: primitive communities (rather than primitive communism, a term that is insufficiently precise), Asiatic communities (the Asiatic forms) and, next, for the West, the slave systems of ancient society, feudalism and the capitalist mode of production.

It would therefore seem to be quite unlikely that Marx spoke of socialism or barbarism. It is quite possible, however, that he evoked the possibility of regression. History shows the validity of such an idea. We shall briefly mention two examples in which there was a regression to a "previous stage": Italy at the end of the Middle Ages, after the shift northward of the main trade routes, experienced the temporary paralysis of the capitalist mode of development and underwent a kind of regression to feudalism; similarly, Germany after the Thirty Years War. That Marx had postulated this possibility of regression merely proves—at the level at which we are approaching the question—that he was not a child of the Enlightenment for whom progress is cumulative and continuous.

Engels clearly evoked, not the alternative of socialism or barbarism, but socialism or the destruction of society: "In other words, the reason is that both the productive forces created by the modern capitalist mode of production and the system of distribution of goods established by it have come into crying contradiction with that mode of production itself, and in fact to such a degree that, if the whole of modern society is not to perish, a revolution in the mode of production and distribution must take place, a revolution which will put an end to all class distinctions" (*Anti-Dühring*).

of capital is the power of the inhuman. This alternative was subsequently evoked by Trotsky, by the Frankfurt School (Adorno devoted magnificent pages to this topic) and in France by the journal, *Socialism or Barbarism*, which made this idea the focal point of its theoretical research and the activity that it advocated. In this case, barbarism was defined through the lens of the Soviet concentration camp-style society.⁴¹

The KAPD was entirely correct to propose this alternative (once the content of barbarism was specified and therefore once the inadequacy of the generally accepted content of the concept was established), for the Nazi and Stalinist concentration camps, the Second World War and the various wars of repression waged against the peoples who have rebelled against the western metropolis, were clearly the realization of a complementary concept that was logically derived from the concept of barbarism as it was conceived by the KAPists.

When it once again evoked this alternative in 1949, the journal *Socialisme ou Barbarie* was mistaken in its theoretical conception of a transition from one stage to another. For at that time, a new stage commenced that has now fully unfolded and in which the alternative is simultaneously more dismal and more motivating: communism or the destruction of the human species.⁴²

⁴¹ In his refutation of the theses of *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, Bordiga observes—strictly in conformance with the Morgan-Engels theory of stages—that you would have to talk about the alternative of socialism or civilization rather than socialism or barbarism. He therefore relied on the essential thesis of Marx-Engels: the barbarians regenerated the West (see “Avanti, Barbari!” [Forward, Barbarians!], *Battaglia comunista*, No. 22, 1951). Bordiga was mistaken insofar as he did not take into account the “content” of this barbarism that was theoretically analyzed by *Socialisme ou Barbarie* and, furthermore, in his exaggerated advocacy, during the course of his polemic with Chaliou [the pseudonym of Cornelius Castoriadis—Spanish translator’s note], of the theory of consciousness being brought from outside of the class. On the other hand, all of his observations concerning the questions of State capitalism, bureaucracy, and Russian economic development are brilliant (see “La batrachomyomachie”, “Croassement de la praxis”, and “Danse des fantômes”, in *Il programma comunista*, Nos. 10-12, 1953).

⁴² We speak of the human species in the sense of all men. The concept of species is currently valid; but it is not valid for the future. If we were to use it in the future, this would lead us to understand humanity as a zoological concept; this would presuppose the denial of the supersession of nature. Only the communist revolution will unite the species, which will become the human community. To speak of the species is to continue to consider man to be a sensory object; this is what science does, which is the direct interpretation of reality: man as the object of capital. For the communists, Man (the unity of *Gemeinwesen* and social man) is a sensory activity.

We must also point out that in 1946 Pannekoek evoked this alternative only as a particular moment, as the final moment of capital, so to speak: “This means that the necessity of revolutionary struggle will impose itself once capitalism engulfs the bulk of mankind, once a further significant expansion is hampered. The threat of wholesale

We should examine some of the criticisms directed against the KAPD to help us put this party into perspective. In *Infantile Disorder*, Lenin made fun of the leftists and tried to make them look ridiculous, but his criticism of anti-parliamentarism, for example, which was based entirely on a theoretical concept of manipulation, is enormously banal. The same thing is true of his treatment of the trade union question. The most important bone of contention, however, was the party. The leftists subscribed to a theoretical concept of the vanguard, just like Lenin. They were also absolutely persuaded, as disciples of Rosa Luxemburg, that a revolution is not possible without the masses. Lenin was also convinced of this, since his policy of manipulation was oriented towards the conquest of the masses. The most important difference between Lenin and the KAPD lies on the following level: for Lenin, the party is always more or less external to the masses, even when they have been won over to the party's views and the party plays a role within this process in order to drive it forward. This difference would not necessarily have invited the Leninist anathemas were it not intimately connected to the parliamentary and trade union questions.

Directly related to this question, the German left posed the alternative that caused Lenin such annoyance: will there be a dictatorship of the class or of the party? In his defense of the dictatorship of the party we can clearly discern a dichotomous conception that has nothing to do with Marx's conception. We are not bringing this up to avoid answering the question but rather, on the one hand, to clearly point out the extent to which Lenin, if he was a "restorer" of Marxism, was only a "restorer" in a partial sense and, therefore, from this point of view, his work is a failure: furthermore, this allows us to place the debate in its proper context. The mere fact of speaking of a vanguard still implies the party-class distinction. Lenin did not at any time address the problem of the possibility of the party becoming autonomous after the inception of a stage of retreat. In another scenario—the party absorbed by capitalist society—to speak of a vanguard ends up concealing the fact that the vanguard group is external to the reality of the class and that the class itself is also integrated. From then on, if a revolutionary struggle were to arise, it must necessarily be a revolutionary struggle against the parties of the proletariat. In view of his assessment of social democracy, even as late as 1920, Lenin was incapable of reaching such a conclusion:

“Our theory is not a dogma, but a guide to action, said Marx and Engels. The greatest blunder, the greatest crime, committed by such ‘out-and-out’ Marxists as Karl Kautsky, Otto Bauer, etc., is that they have not understood this and have been unable to apply it at crucial moments of the proletarian revolution.... they themselves learned Marxist dialectic and taught it to others (and much of what they have done in this field will always remain a valuable contribution to socialist

destruction in this last phase of capitalism makes this fight a necessity for all the producing classes of society....” (“The Failure of the Working Class”, in *Pannekoek and the Workers Councils*, p. 288).

literature); however, in the application of this dialectic they committed such an error, or proved to be so undialectical in practice, so incapable of taking into account the rapid change of forms and the rapid acquisition of new content by the old forms, that their fate is not much more enviable than that of Hyndman, Guesde and Plekhanov” (*Infantile Disorder*).

The most strident attacks on the KAPD, as we have seen, were unleashed at the Third Congress of the Communist International. Lenin, along with Zinoviev, Bukharin, Trotsky and Radek, reproached the German left (and Terracini, the delegate of the Italian Communist Party and therefore a member of the left fraction) for its struggle against the right and the centrists. Of course, the full meaning of this accusation is more clearly revealed when, on the one hand, we take into account the fact that these right wing and centrist elements were often members of the CI, and when we recall that one year previously the 21 Conditions had been promulgated to eliminate reformists, social traitors, etc., from the Second Congress of the CI, where Serrati, the very incarnation of centrism, was a delegate. This simple observation constitutes the proof of the correctness of the position of the KAPD, which rejected the 21 Conditions as an illusory means of struggle against reformism. Finally, these Conditions were nothing but the minimum decent standards to make the CI something distinct and render it capable of winning over the proletariat to its positions. Bordiga, however, sought to have the 21 Conditions strictly applied, which implied the rejection of the unification of the Communist Parties with the left wing fractions of the social democratic parties. They could also be used against the left wing currents, however, and this was the substance of the KAPD’s complaints against them. Lenin’s attitude towards the KAPD was very manipulative, as Lenin himself admitted in his famous open letter to the German communists:

“The ‘crux’ of the situation in the international communist movement in the summer of 1921 was that some of the best and most influential sections of the Communist International did not quite properly understand this task; *they exaggerated* the ‘struggle against Centrism’ *ever so slightly*; they *went ever so slightly beyond* the border line at which this struggle turns into a pastime and revolutionary Marxism begins to be compromised” (“A Letter to the German Communists”, August 14, 1921 [available online at: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1921/aug/14.htm>]).

“Beginning with the Second Congress of the Communist International, the ‘Leftists’ or ‘K.A.P.-ists’ have received sufficient warning from us in the international arena. Until sufficiently strong, experienced and influential Communist Parties have been built, at least in the principal countries, the participation of semi-anarchist elements in our international congresses has to be tolerated, and is to some extent even useful. It is useful insofar as these elements serve as a clear ‘warning’ to inexperienced Communists, and also insofar as they themselves are still capable of learning” (*Ibid.*).⁴³

⁴³ Such manipulation is one of the essential characteristics of Leninism: “I have the impression that the first thing he wants to do is to see how things stand, even though it is

Perhaps for reasons having to do with a political balancing act, Lenin was able to accept the reformists and Cachin-type social traitors, despite the fact that they would inevitably interfere with and generate repugnance among all the revolutionaries. To the extent that Lenin did seek unification, he was unable to keep the left in line for very long. And there are those who, fifty years later, still remain faithful to the famous, stupid and dishonorable discourse on the infantilism of the KAPD, Bordiga, Pannekoek, etc.

With respect to the German question, Lenin was totally wrong, and overestimated the social democracy from the very beginning. He was even capable of writing, in 1920:

“History, by the way, has now confirmed on a large, world-wide historic scale the opinion we have always advocated, namely, that revolutionary German Social-Democracy (note that as far back as 1900-03 Plekhanov demanded the expulsion of Bernstein from the party, and the Bolsheviks, always continuing this tradition, in 1913 exposed the utter baseness, vileness and treachery of Legien) came closest to being the party which the revolutionary proletariat required in order to attain victory” (*Infantile Disorder*).

Considering the fact that Lenin discovered Kautsky’s treacherous nature in 1914, it is logical to ask the question of just what it was that he meant by “revolutionary social democracy”. Furthermore, if we also take into account the group associated with Rosa Luxemburg, it is quite odd that he could make such a statement, given the fact that he disagreed with her on fundamental points.

We have spoken of overestimation. This is effectively a judgment which is only true with respect to our current knowledge. Lenin was incapable of conceiving it in this way, given the fact that he never really understood the true nature of social democracy. For a very long time, he thought that it represented “orthodox-Marxist” thought; even after the catastrophe of 1914, his explanation, as well as his critique of those who joined the parade, never approached the heart of the matter by questioning the social democratic

true that our story is not the most important one. It is the German left, the Italian left with Bordiga, the main thing is to prevent them from uniting” (Letter from Rosmer, then in Moscow, to Monatte, June 6, 1924). “Bolshevization is taking place [referring to the Fifth Congress—Note of the Spanish translator], full steam ahead and in every language. Zinoviev’s report is the speech that Klein gave us and nothing more: even the artificial construction, even the poverty of thought, even the formula. The congress was over before it even began.... They had some problems with the German left, since its leaders were constantly arguing against this tactic in its entirety, and advocated leaving the reformist trade unions.” “This is how we are fixing everything: in an exchange between Radek and Brandler, the ‘leftists’ declared that they were in favor of the united front and of working in the reformist trade unions, and were fully in agreement with all the fundamental tactical and conceptual positions of the CI. They were thus transformed, all at once, into good, obedient little children. In addition, the real left was isolated as an ‘extreme left’ that could be smashed without compunction” (Letter dated July 18, 1924).

positions. He limited himself to speaking of an inability to proceed from theory to practice. As if theory could be a factor in and of itself, a *sui generis* product. This is one of the most convincing demonstrations of Lenin's theoretical weakness. His theory was fit to the mould of the Russian social struggle; Lenin was capable of rising to the occasion of a dual revolution, a situation similar to that of 1848, but not a purely communist revolution.

Lenin subsequently underestimated the German proletariat as a whole, since he understood none of the positions of the KAPD, the AAU or the AAUE, and he was led to see them as nothing but a resurgence of old defects, a return to anarchism. Even if it was anarchism that he was examining, however, Lenin should have been able to understand that a phenomenon can only reappear to the extent that it is connected with the process of becoming of the moment, to the extent that it is driven by an effective element of reality. This element was the pure revolution, the revolution in which the class in its totality must effectively constitute itself as a party, and in which the question of leaders is secondary (the basis of a pseudo-anarchism). Subsequently, Lenin succumbed to the fatal illusion of believing that the restoration of the German proletariat would result from the reconstruction of capitalism in that country. In this case as well, he transposed to Germany his theory designed for application to Russia:

“... On the other hand, if capitalism gains by it, industrial production will grow, and the proletariat will grow too.” (“The New Economic Policy and the Tasks of the Political Education Departments. Report to the Second All-Russia Congress of Political Education Departments, October 17, 1921” [available online at: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1921/oct/17.htm>]).

This is the point that gives rise to rendering the party autonomous. Lenin said that the working class in Russia, that is, the working class organized in factories, had disappeared:

“The proletariat is the class which is engaged in the production of material values in large-scale capitalist industry... since the factories are at a standstill, the proletariat has disappeared” (*ibid.*).

Besides the fact that this definition of the proletariat is extremely restrictive, we are here confronted—as the Workers Group ironically noted⁴⁴—with a dictatorship of the

⁴⁴ After the condemnation of the Workers Opposition as an illegal fraction at the Congress of the Russian Communist Party in 1922, an illegal group was formed that carried out its activities outside of the party, directly among the working class: “the Workers’ Group of the Russian Communist Party (Bolshevik)”. Its most well-known members were Kuznetsov and Miasnikov, an activist from the Urals. Lenin sent them a letter to refute their criticisms (dated August 5, 1921; [see *Collected Works*, 1st English Edition, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1965, Vol. 32, pp. 504-509, available online at: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1921/aug/05.htm>]). In this letter, he focused on the demand for freedom of the press for all groups, advocated by Miasnikov,

proletariat without a proletariat. It is the party that, having become autonomous, must in the meanwhile take charge, awaiting the rebuilding of the working class. In order to facilitate this, it had to construct capitalism. Lenin applied this idea to Germany, and expected the reconstruction of German industry to regenerate the proletariat. In support of this goal, it was necessary to support Germany against the Entente; the weak proletariat of that conjuncture must support its own government insofar as the latter pursued a policy opposed to that of the Entente and promoted the recovery of industrial production. This support would even include support for fascists, since it was the fascists who were the most resolute opponents of the Treaty of Versailles.

The Italian left maintained its distance from the KAPD while acknowledging the “manipulations” and tactical flexibility of the KPD,⁴⁵ but its support for the KPD was not, nor could it be, total. Disagreements gradually emerged, however, and the policy statements on this issue that were published in *Rassegna Comunista* were showing a growing tendency to align with Moscow. Yet this did not prevent the KAPist current from having a major impact on the Italian left. Several comrades founded the newspaper, *Le Réveil Communiste*,⁴⁶ which supported positions that were very close to those of the KAPD; the KAPD would have an even greater impact, indirectly, via the Dutch group, the GIC (Group of International Communists), whose texts were published in the Belgian journal, *Bilan*.

This influence is clearly reflected in the similarity of their positions on certain essential questions. Thus, for example, the concept of the party in Bordiga is quite similar to that of the KAPD. In both cases, the party is thought of as an organ (see also Pannekoek: “At each stage of the class struggle the party has a primordial role, a kind of spirit of the revolution....” [*Proletarier*, No. 8, August 1927]). For Bordiga, however, the party is

but he failed to address the really important questions, such as the relation between the party and the proletariat. The Workers Group distributed an anonymous Manifesto that took the form in the West of an article contributed by the Russian section of the Fourth International (the KAI) to the *Kommunistische Arbeiter-Zeitung*, the newspaper of the KAPD, in 1923. Here is the passage from the Manifesto: “The principal discovery of comrade Lenin is that we do not have a proletariat. We can only congratulate him. Are you, comrade Lenin, the leader of a non-existent proletariat? You are the leader of the communist party, but not the leader of the proletariat!”

⁴⁵ On the Italian left’s stance towards the KAPD, one may consult the texts by Bordiga that were published in *Invariance*, Series I, No. 7: “Le mouvement communiste internationale”, “Les tendances de la III Internationale”, and “La situation en Allemagne et le mouvement communiste”; these texts were first published in 1920 in *Il Soviet*. One may also find a number of articles about the German workers movement in the journal *Rassegna Comunista*, published in 1921-1922.

⁴⁶ The lead editor of this journal was a member of the Italian Communist Left, Michele Pappalardi. Concerning his positions one may consult the ICC’s book, *The Italian Communist Left*, and also the book by Dino Erba, *Ottobre 1917—Wall Street 1929: la sinistra comunista italiana tra Bolchevismo e Radicalismo, la tendenza di Michele Pappalardi*, 2010 [Note of the Spanish translator].

perceived as a mediating organ, which is why it must bring about the unity of the proletarians and cannot be merely the result of this process; furthermore, it must be the directive force in all the institutions of the immediate class struggle. In both cases, also, the party cannot be a mass party, something which can only take place at the expense of all theoretical rigor, if one accepts just any tactic.

Nothing is more absurd than to dismiss Bordiga as the theoretician of a concept of the party as sect, since he merely limited his efforts to verifying a particular fact: the impossibility of obtaining the support of the vast majority of the class unless the party accepts positions oriented to success in the immediate struggle, that is, positions that would imply the liquidation of all revolutionary positions. If he has been dismissed as a theoretician of the party as sect, this is because the real problem has been constantly swept under the rug: how to unify the class? By not conceiving of the party as absolutely external to the various class movements for the satisfaction of immediate demands, Bordiga thinks that the party must participate in them without abandoning its own "limits", or its contours. It is only in the theoretical and practical struggle that the party can be recognized by the class and the class can constitute itself as a party, but only if the party has not completely abandoned Marx's position on this question.

The most significant divergence between the Italian left (especially Bordiga) and the German left (KAPD, AAU, AAUE) resides in the characterization of the immediate institutions of the proletariat. With respect to the trade unions, for example, Bordiga would maintain more or less the following position: as long as they are not integrated into the State, the trade unions are susceptible of being conquered by the proletariat and they are therefore capable of playing a revolutionary role. Yet he would not expressly address the main point: are the trade unions in fact integrated into the State? It is obvious that the differences with respect to this question are strongly influenced by very different social environments: Germany and Italy (although it must be recognized that after 1945, the situation was by then quite clear).

Concerning other institutions like the Turin factory councils and the BO in Germany, Bordiga rejected the idea that it was possible to constitute a dual power based on the conquest of the factories and, above all, that this could constitute the basis for the development of socialism. His position is utterly hostile to the self-management of the enterprise. He defines socialism as the destruction of the limits of the enterprise, which is effectively identified as the place where the rationality of capital is imposed. While it is true that the proletariat cannot just take the machinery of the State into its own hands and make it operate in its interests, the same thing may be said of the machinery of the economy. All the proponents of self-management, and particularly all our contemporary mystics of self-management, have yet to understand that there is a discontinuity between capitalism and communism. In fact, the movement of the occupation of the factories and the theory of the BO correspond to a stage of proletarian retreat, a stage in which the totality of capital represented by the State can no longer be confronted directly, since it is not simply a matter of a handful of individuals. The factory occupations movement is a movement that binds the proletariat to the means of production, that makes it dependent on them. By occupying the factories, the proletariat does not escape the socialization of

capital, which makes all human beings interdependent, but puts itself at its service. The proletariat has withdrawn, defeated, to the places of its immediate existence and, instead of calling it by its real name, all kinds of theoreticians have presented this retreat as a new form of struggle, a new means to attain a really revolutionary consciousness. The occupation of the factories without the destruction of capital in its existence (the community of capital) can only lead to the paralysis of capital; but the working class is also paralyzed, immobilized, remaining so to speak within capital. If production in the factories is resumed (self-management), then one implicitly accepts the rationality of capital, since one restores capital without the capitalist and his repressive appendages: foremen, psychologists, etc.; one approves of the division of society into enterprises and therefore one accepts the resumption of production even in those factories whose products are contrary to the interests of humanity, like automobile factories.

It is obvious that the discourse concerning the destruction of the State, considered simply in its anti-state dimension, is limited to exposing the generalized state-worship that has swept over the vast majority of the population. On the one hand, if society engenders a State—society is the totality of social relations—the State tends to become society as the inevitable correlate of the access of capital to the material community.⁴⁷ Capital, Marx says, develops a coercive relation; as a result, this element is found in all organizations dominated by capital and therefore it is also characteristic of the State in its activity as coercive agent that springs into action when economic coercion, derived from the rationality characteristic of a particular process of production, is no longer sufficient. That is to say, employing the old terminology, the situation is no longer characterized by having civil society on one side and the State on the other, but rather by the penetration of the latter into all of society's organizations.

Recalling what Marx said about the nationalization of the land, that the land cannot belong to either the direct producers or even to any particular generation of humanity, but rather to the species as a whole, Bordiga emphasized the fact that the communist revolution cannot serve to benefit a single class, regardless of how universal that class may be. Were it to do so, it would remain in the stage of the generalization of the proletariat and would not proceed towards its abolition. If one then declares that every person should become a producer, one mutilates humanity at the same time that one casts aside an entire historical-practical acquisition; man does not have to intervene directly, personally, in order to produce! And furthermore, such a demand is revealed to be more and more contradictory with each passing day. As a consequence of the enormous productivity of labor, the act of production can no longer define man; only human activity, the development of the human forces as ends-in-themselves, can be the fundamental determination of a humanity that is finally liberated from capital.

His critique of the devotees of self-management and of the ideology of the producers, of enterprise socialism, is one of Bordiga's most essential contributions. This contribution, however, is tainted by an a-critical glorification of the Bolsheviks, which caused Bordiga

⁴⁷ See *Invariance*, Series I, No. 2, 1968: "Le VI chapitre inédit du *capital* et l'œuvre économique de Karl Marx", pp. 133-142.

to renounce his famous “leftist” positions that were also those of the KAPD: to force a break with the reformist past of the proletarian class.⁴⁸

As for the councilists, we see, on the other hand, a certain exaltation of the KAPD because it championed the councils, but they have not engaged in any serious analysis of the positions of this party. Instead, they prefer to quote Pannekoek and, with increasing frequency, Otto Rühle, in whom one no longer finds even the least trace of the “problematic” of the party. What we said above with respect to Rühle also applies to Pannekoek. It must be pointed out, however, that Pannekoek’s break with the theory of the KAPD-style vanguard party took place later than Rühle’s (see “Party and Working Class”, in Serge Bricianer, ed., *Pannekoek and the Workers’ Councils*, tr. Malachy Carroll, Telos Press, St. Louis, pp. 261-267).⁴⁹ Moreover, at the same time that he embraces a normal, logical rejection of the party in the form it assumed when seen through the distorting lens of the Leninist, Stalinist or Trotskyist perspective, he undergoes a theoretical regression in the sense that he returns to the old time-worn categories of freedom and equality. “Now [in the new society], however, all producers are free and equal”, Pannekoek writes in *Workers’ Councils*. This ideology of the producer transports us back in time to the era of the Ricardian socialists,⁵⁰ and an in-

⁴⁸ See “Le programme révolutionnaire communiste élimine toute forme de propriété de la terre, des biens de production et des produits du travail”, (resolution approved at the 1958 Turin conference, published in *Il Programma Comunista*, No. 16-17, 1958). [An English translation of this text is available online at: <https://libcom.org/library/revolutionary-program-communist-society-eliminates-all-forms-ownership-land-instruments-> (American translator’s note).] A bad translation was published in *Le fils du temps*, No. 7. See also: “Le contenu original du programme communiste est l’anéantissement de la personne singulière en tant que sujet économique, titulaire de droits et actrice de l’histoire humaine” (third part of the conference of Parma of 1958, published in *Il Programma Comunista*, No. 21-22, 1958). A long excerpt from this text was published in *Invariance*, No. 5, pp. 77-83.

With respect to his a-critical apology for the Bolsheviks, one may consult Bordiga’s text, “Lenin’s Text on ‘The Infantile Disorder of Communism’ (Leftism): The text that has been most exploited and most falsified for more than forty years by the whole mob of opportunist scum and whose shameless invocation characterizes and defines that scum” (1960), which is more than anything else a eulogy of Lenin. [In English, see “‘Left-wing communism, an infantile disorder’ - Condemnation of the Renegades to Come”, at: http://www.quintern.org/lingue/english/historical_en/left_wing_communism_00.htm (American translator’s supplemental note).]

⁴⁹ A Spanish translation of *Pannekoek and the Workers Councils* was published by Anagrama in 1976 [Note of the Spanish translator].

⁵⁰ The Ricardian socialists were socialists who basically wanted to have a capitalist society without all of that society’s disadvantages. In conformance with what Ricardo said concerning the law of value, they sought to put into practice the logical corollary of that law: because labor is the determinant factor of value, it must be preponderant in society. Marx refuted these positions in the *Manuscripts of 1844*, and also when he

depth critique of his book would clearly demonstrate the pertinence of this assertion. Here, once again, the retreat of the class leads some individuals to posit it as a class against capital in the places where it exists as such. The essential question of the abolition of the proletariat is not even broached. Pannekoek's analysis, like that of the other councilists, is the premise for a restoration of the proletariat as a class within capital's society.

The counterrevolution is always situated on the terrain of the revolution. The revolutionary proletarian movement rose up against parliamentarism and bourgeois democracy, and fascism exploited this attitude, this sentiment, and claimed that its intention was to eliminate democratic defects and bring about a cheap government, a people's community (echoing, with some historical distance, the famous formula of the people's state [*Volkstaat*] of the social democrats). The workers movement represented for the most part by the KAPD, the AAU and the AAUE sought to direct production through the BO (on this point they coincided with the revolutionary syndicalists), they wanted working class management; fascism proposed a participatory scheme in which, paradoxically, the old corporativism seemed to be restored, but which took the form of chaining of the worker to his factory, the limitation of his vital space to a place where an attempt was made to introduce personal, and personalized, relations, in order to inhibit the negative movement that the proletariat harbored.⁵¹ In a mystified way, it was the

opposed the community of labor (see p. 86 in the Sociales edition) in the *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, and in the first part of the *Grundrisse*, but above all in *The Poverty of Philosophy*, where he rejects this concept, which had been adopted with some distortions by Proudhon. In capitalist society, labor can only be wage labor; however, this is nothing but the other face of capital. This is why we do not agree with Rubel's assertion (in the Preface to the second volume of the Pléiade edition of the *Economics* [Karl Marx, *Œuvres*, tome II: *Économie*): "The conclusion of the first volume is the conclusion of the whole economics, concerning which Marx did not dissimulate his 'subjective tendency': the triumph of labor over capital". This is of Ricardian socialist rather than Marxist inspiration. Nor can we accept the conclusion R. Dangeville offers in his summary of the Sixth Chapter: "The characteristic of human labor to create increasingly larger quantities and constantly more novel qualities can be neither contained nor sterilized: labor will smash into pieces the chains that constrain it" (*Un chapitre inédit du Capital*, 10/18, p. 69). At present, however, human labor is wage labor. We do not see how labor can destroy capital without destroying itself, since it is the other face of capital. If you want to talk about labor in general, you introduce an abstraction of thought (*Verständige Abstraktion*), as Marx said, which is independent of the means of production. Then we can ask ourselves why labor has not been able to "smash into pieces", after so many years, "the chains that constrain it".

⁵¹ In order to bring about the most comprehensive possible adaptation of the individual to "industrial society" and its "technostructure", Galbraith thinks that we have to improve, or develop, as the case may be, the identification of the individual with the industrial

realization of the theory that maintained that the worker is only really a proletarian in the factory, at the place of production. Correspondingly, the fascists claimed that there are no political problems, just managerial questions, and this concept has become fully operational today at every level of society. It is at this conjuncture that the trade unions are definitively integrated into the State.

Fascism, however, is not the only system that fed on the proletarian revolutionary tradition; Stalinism—which did not suddenly appear from out of thin air—did, too. The KAPD, the AAU and the AAUE sought to unify the proletariat; the CI called for the united front and the mass party (after having criticized, through Lenin, the concept of the “mass party” as the KAPD understood this term; see *Infantile Disorder*). The KAPD criticized the trade unions because it considered them to be the strongholds of capital; the CI created a red trade union international (July 1921). Even so, the CI was in this respect only one step ahead of the German revolutionary syndicalists of the FAUD (who rejected all parties), who founded an international workingmen’s association in 1922 which included representatives from Germany, Argentina, Chile, Denmark, Holland, Italy, Mexico, Norway, Portugal and Sweden.⁵² The currents of the German left that wanted to

organization, in which we find “four other circumstances inducing identification, as follows:

- (1) If the prestige of the group or organization attracting identification is high and widely perceived.
- (2) If there is frequent interaction between the individuals who comprise the organization.
- (3) If a large number of the needs of the individual are satisfied within the organization.
- (4) If competition between members of the organization is minimized.”

(John Kenneth Galbraith, *The New Industrial State*, Princeton University Press, 1967, p. 191).

This adaptation is merely the most acute phase of the domestication of man by capital, the phase that commenced in the late 15th century in England (see Marx, Volume I of *Capital*). This question was addressed in *Invariance*, No. 5, pp. 84-86.

⁵² This was the IAA: Internationale Arbeiter Association (International Workingmen’s Association—the IWA). “It is incumbent on this new IWA to carry on the work of the First International, for the overthrow of the State and of the domination of the wage workers, and the construction of a free society, without a State” (*Der Syndicalist*, No. 1, 1923). “Only in the economic and revolutionary organizations of the working class are there forces capable of bring about its liberation and the necessary creative energy for the reorganization of society on the basis of libertarian communism” (“Principles, Goals & Statutes of the International Workers Association”, Section II: “The Principles of

organize the struggle at the point of production were dealt with by the CI when it announced its Bolshevization policy in 1925: it called for the formation of factory cells and for abandoning any attempt to establish a presence on a local or regional basis, which was considered to be a cause of the reformism of social democracy. All the theoreticians who suddenly converted to this new orientation whose purpose was to form a party of a new, Bolshevik type, never noticed that the question had already been addressed by the German comrades and the Italian Ordonovistas.

As a result, the two components of the proletarian counterrevolution—fascism and Stalinism—plagiarized the immediate demands of the proletariat and satisfied them in a mystified way, so that today, too, we see that, in accordance with the same modality, the class domination of the proletariat (of its immediate existence), with the mythology of the proletariat and the glorification of labor, first developed by fascism and Stalinism, are now rehabilitated by all the leaders of capital all over the world. Hence the incommensurable idiocy of all the groupuscules that fall into the trap of the mythology of the proletariat and, for some, even the divinization of labor, of a labor that merely has to be liberated from the infamies of capitalist society. This stupidity is just as advanced among those who are led by their mechanistic attitude and shortsightedness to assert, in contrast to the “theoreticians”, that everything is political.

This is why it is important to summarize the CI’s positions and its assessments of the KAPD, for a better understanding of how the CI’s tactics and activities assumed the social democracy’s role in containing the growth of a proletarian movement on really revolutionary foundations (not exempt, however, from weaknesses). In addition, this clearly demonstrates the error and the foolishness of those who want to explain the victory of fascism while ignoring the essential phase of the struggle of the German proletariat (and this also applies to the Italian case) during the years 1918-1923, when it attempted to constitute itself as a class and to negate the existing society.⁵³ Proceeding in

Revolutionary Unionism”, Article 10). [See: <http://dwardmac.pitzer.edu/dward/anarchy/rebelworker/spunk041.html> (American translator’s supplemental note).]

This IWA was opposed to the dictatorship of the proletariat, centralization, participation in parliament, and all participation in the “legal associations”, but it was in favor of direct action. After its founding congress, it attracted, besides the groups mentioned above, Belgian federalist syndicalist circles, Bulgarian anarchosyndicalist groups, the Polish anarchosyndicalist trade union opposition, the propaganda groups of the FAU (Free Workers Union) in Austria, the Syndicalist League of Japan, and, in May 1929, the largest group in the IWA, the Asociación Obrera Continental Americana [Workers Association of the Continental Americas], which included groups from Argentina, Paraguay, Bolivia, Mexico, Guatemala, Brazil, Uruguay, Peru and Chile.

⁵³ As a recent example of this kind of approach to the question of fascism, we shall cite the work of Nicos Poulantzas, *Fascism and Dictatorship*, published by Maspéro. We dedicate the following quotation to authors of this type: “Considering that it would be imprudent, and unrealistic, not to take into account the popular discontent, which is a

this manner obviously confers the advantage of avoiding the essential question: how the conjoint action of fascism and Stalinism destroyed the proletarian movement for such a long historical period.

Stalinism even rehabilitated a theory that was originally one of the major flaws of the German movement: the National Bolshevism advocated by Wolffheim and Laufenberg,⁵⁴

necessary consequence of the war, or of trusting to a vague formula like ‘bringing the future activity of the party into line with its activities as they have been carried on until now’; considering that the present popular discontent is being exploited as a last hope for pseudo-democratic and republican interventionism with the goal of turning this discontent towards non-socialist, or more precisely, anti-socialist insurrectionary action, which would lead Italy to a crystallization of essentially bourgeois republican programs; the desire is expressed that the leadership of the party—inspired by the events in Russia and America and by the state of mind created by the war—should draft a precise line of conduct that would lead, coordinate and unify the spirit and the action of the Italian proletariat” (Motion of the Federation of Italian Socialist Youth, 1917).

The Italian left can be reproached, as is certainly true of almost all those who have concerned themselves with fascism, for not having emphasized a derivative feature characteristic of the capitalist mode of production as a world system, a characteristic that was most provocatively proclaimed by Césaire: “what he [“the very distinguished, very humanistic, very Christian bourgeois of the twentieth century”] cannot forgive Hitler for is not crime in itself, the crime against man, it is not the humiliation of man as such, it is the crime against the white man, the humiliation of the white man, and the fact that he applied to Europe colonialist procedures which until then had been reserved exclusively for the Arabs of Algeria, the coolies of India, and the blacks of Africa” (Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, tr. Joan Pinkham, Monthly Review Press, New York, 1972 [Available in English online at: http://abahlali.org/files/_Discourse_on_Colonialism.pdf (American translator’s supplemental note)]). More recently, Hosea Jaffe has revisited the theme in *Colonialism Today*.

⁵⁴ Wolffheim and Laufenberg (Laufenberg was the president of the Hamburg workers council between November 11, 1918 and January 21, 1919) were the two leading representatives of National-Bolshevism, a current whose stronghold was the Hamburg region. They called for an alliance of the German people in arms with the Soviet Union in order to launch a people’s war against the Entente powers, which they considered to be the embodiment of the power of finance capital, which was in their view the main enemy. For this reason, they were against the revolution in Germany, because it would weaken Germany too much vis-à-vis the Entente. Years ahead of the Nazis, they identified Jews with finance capital and, in a pamphlet entitled “Communism versus Spartacism”, denounced Levi as “an agent of international Jewish finance”. The other component of the position taken by Wolffheim and Laufenberg was “unionism”. They introduced the ideas of the IWW to Germany; and this is why that movement would have so much influence on the AAU and the AAUE.

who called for an alliance of revolutionary Germany with Russia to defeat the power of the Entente. We saw above how this position was implicitly rehabilitated by Lenin. Stalinist diplomacy (counseled by Radek) merely conferred upon it its own distinctive nuances. Nonetheless, this illusion survived all the zigzags of Stalinist diplomacy, until the day of harsh disillusionment: Hitler's invasion.

The defeat of the German proletariat can be explained by the fact that it was incapable of proceeding beyond the immediate understanding of a particular historical situation that was all the more difficult to grasp insofar as it was "impure" and contained different historical moments (*dyscronia*). In particular, for the first time ever, the proletariat was confronted by the task of effectively and immediately abolishing itself. The German proletariat was incapable of adequately confronting this situation, and therefore borrowed the form of the soviets (councils) from the other revolution, which was developing in a backward geo-social area. The conquest of the councils by the SPD and the USPD, however, and its first defeats (these phenomena were connected) caused the proletariat to take a more "corporative" path, always preserving the demand of the councils: the BO. This is why, instead of effectively working on its own negation, it affirmed itself as a proletarian class bound to capital, which was the first step towards its really becoming an object of capital.

It is manifestly impossible to analyze the characteristics of the KAPD without referring, as we did previously, to the international movement. These few commentaries are hardly exhaustive; they instead constitute a point of departure rather than an analysis (a point of departure for subsequent analysis). However, even if we were to engage in such an analysis, we would still run across the stumbling block of immediate practice, since we have not precisely situated the history of this movement with its determinations in the process of becoming of the class and in its struggle against capital. It is therefore important to characterize the total historical movement in which the period of the history of the German workers movement that is of interest to us here must be considered in context, without being able, however, at this time, to engage in a profound labor of research, and only briefly considering a few topics of discussion.

When one considers the initial condition of the German workers movement in the mid-19th century, and its condition in 1945, we can see that Marx's worst fear was finally realized: Russian power destroyed the German proletariat. It was not the power of Russian feudalism, but that of a young capitalism, which we shall call Stalinist for the sake of convenience (in order to pin it down chronologically). The final defeat was the

After their exclusion from the KAPD in August 1920, they remained in the AAU and founded a "Communist League". Laufenberg refused to have any relations with the Nazis right up until his death; Wolffheim was at one time a member of the Strasser circle (on the left wing of the Nazi party) and died in a concentration camp. Stalinism's adoption of the National-Bolshevism of Wolffheim and Laufenberg augmented its antagonistic convergence with fascism.

work of the Russo-American Holy Alliance, which allowed Germany to be divided into five parts: the two Germanies, Austria, part of Poland and part of the USSR. This historical fact necessarily implies certain theoretical-strategic observations.⁵⁵

- It is necessary to approach this question by specifying the possible outcome of the current situation to prevent the rise of anti-Russian chauvinism that might find deep and serious roots among the ranks of the proletariat, which there would be no need to justify.
- One cannot think that the reunification of Germany would automatically “reconstitute” the proletariat of that country. Such a belief would entail the risk of falling prey to Lenin’s illusion, when he thought that the recovery of the German nation after 1919 would also be the restoration of the proletariat.
- With the previous point, the possibility exists that a critical view of the attitude of the different revolutionaries when faced with the rise of the Russian revolution, and later, of the counterrevolution, can begin to take shape.

The question is important. We shall merely point out that, in relation to Marx’s prediction concerning the Russian revolution as the prelude of the revolution in Europe, Kautsky acknowledged the future revolutionary role of the Slavic region, but this did not lead him to deduce the corresponding position of the German social democracy; the Russian revolutionaries locked themselves in the unilateral affirmation of the need to destroy czarism, without availing themselves of the modality of Marx’s perspective: a war of the Germans against the Slavs. With regard to this question, not even Engels was concerned with the modifications that had since transformed the situation since the time of Marx’s

⁵⁵ Basically, the entire history of Europe was determined by the German question. The Balkanization of Europe and Germany issued from the defeat of the great revolutionary wave that swept over the whole continent in the early 16th century (the defeat of 1525). With the Thirty Years War, Germany was divided and forced to regress on the level of social relations. By losing Holland, the German nation lost the first great opportunity for rapid development of the capitalist mode of production, which would not really commence until 1870. Thus, the question of German unity has been posed since the early 16th century. The fact that, after the Second World War, the “Allies” thought that it was necessary not to destroy German militarism, since the Federal Republic of Germany rearmed after 1950, but rather to create a situation where the power of the proletariat would be fragmented in the various concentration camps called capitalist nations, which proves that the capitalist class had understood the lessons of the past. In 1953 the repression of the insurrectionary movements in East Berlin and Poznan, and later in Poznan again and in Hungary, and finally in 1970-1971 in Poland (and to a much lesser extent the uprising in Czechoslovakia in 1968) proved that capital on a world scale cannot tolerate any resurgence of the violent class struggle in these countries. The dictatorship there will always be draconian. Only if the tension of the rope around their necks held by the U.S. and the USSR is relaxed can there ever be a resurgence, but in no case can their situation be described by taking as a model the situation of the years following the First World War.

prediction. The Russians relied on the Germans for these analyses and only after the debacle of 1914 did they directly address these issues.

The German revolution developed in a particular phase of the life of capital, in its passage from formal domination to real domination on a social scale.⁵⁶ During the stage of formal domination the proletariat must generalize the proletarian condition, it must become the ruling class; in the stage of real domination, on the other hand, it must proceed directly to its own abolition.

This is a perception of an ongoing phenomenon; when it is analyzed once it has reached its conclusion, when it is a fact, one realizes that this same revolution allowed for the process of development mentioned above. Fascism stood on the plane of revolutionary immediate demands manifested by the proletariat and it made them real by giving them a mystified form.

If the proletariat in Russia did not succeed in really constituting itself as the ruling class, as Marx conceived this process in the “Manifesto” and the way Lenin viewed the same question prior to the revolution in 1917—a phenomenon that allowed the party to become autonomous, the conquest of the party from within by the supporters of a strictly national revolution, the construction of socialism in one country—in Germany the proletariat

⁵⁶ In the original German edition of *Capital* (Dietz Verlag, Chapter 23, p. 533), we find the distinction between formal subordination and real subordination to capital, but this distinction-periodization is only explained in detail and placed at the heart of his presentation—since it is, after all, found throughout all of *Capital*—in the unpublished 6th chapter of *Capital*.

This distinction concerns Book I and Chapter 6, “Results of the Direct Production Process”. In issue No. 2 of *Invariance*, Series I, we have extended the validity of these concepts to society, considered an initial moment when capital only formally dominated society and must therefore reach compromise agreements with all the political-social forces, and a real domination in which capital constitutes itself as a material community (see note 47 above).

There is a certain degree of imprecision in Lukács (see note 28 above): capital does not dominate society by way of relative surplus value—this takes place in the direct process of production—but in order to obtain surplus value, an increase in the productivity of labor is necessary, which implies the development of mechanics and therefore of science, etc. In other words, in order to increasingly impose its real domination in the direct process of production, capital must dominate the total process, the unity of the preceding process and the process of circulation. That is when it passes from value to the price of production, which produces a transformation of the means of transport, managerial methods, the transformation of the State into a capitalist enterprise, etc. In short, this does not eliminate the production of absolute surplus value, but places it on a new basis. At another time we shall examine these concepts, and the different levels on which they are operative.

failed to negate itself, which led to the mystification of the proletariat-ruling class, which would also be realized in Russia later, but in a completely different form, with a different content, but the development of capitalism tends to bring about their convergence with respect to both content and form.

In the period of 1918-1923 (1926 at the latest) the political phase came to an end, that is, the phase in which one could still pose questions from a political angle and also, at the same time, this period saw the end of the debate over the following questions: can the ruling class accept the full realization of universal suffrage, can it accept democracy?; and would it not rather resort, at least its more right wing elements, to a coup d'état to crush the phenomenon of democratization?; and should this happen, shouldn't we appeal to the masses to fend off and suppress the offensive of the right, and perhaps to use this effort as the springboard for unleashing the revolutionary process that leads to the destruction of the system?⁵⁷

None of these possibilities would be realized. Not even for the right-wing was the putsch an effective tool, if it was not nourished by a favorable situation—and it is hard to deliberately create such a situation. Otherwise this putsch would be the culmination of a process prepared by the conditions that are beyond the powers of its authors, and it would thereby lack the true character of a putsch. The Kapp Putsch is a case in point. Reciprocally, it demonstrated that a mere response to an attack cannot directly create a revolutionary situation if there is no strategy and no tactic, defined from the beginning, capable of grasping the phenomenon at the moment of its appearance (hence the failure of all comparisons with Kornilov's attempted seizure of power).

This debate, which first arose at the end of the 19th century, and which was fueled by the mass strikes in Belgium and Holland and was subsequently resumed with greater insistence with the study of the lessons of the revolution of 1905, finally culminated in Germany with the founding of the AAUE, which signaled the impossibility of re-unifying the proletariat, of uniting politics and economics. The question had to be approached from a different angle.

What we refer to as the groupuscular phase began within the German workers movement, and it is notable that our contemporary non-Trotskyist and non-Leninist groupuscules have, consciously or unconsciously, returned to the positions of the groupuscules of the 1920s, although our categories might not be so cut and dried, since even the neo-Leninist groupuscules like Potere Operaio have resuscitated certain aspects of the theory of the KAPD.

⁵⁷ See *Die Massenstreikdebatte*, the debate over the mass strike, with contributions from Parvus, Luxemburg, Kautsky and Pannekoek, Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1970. The article by Parvus is particularly noteworthy: "The Coup d'État and the Political Mass Strike" (1895-1896). Parvus was one of the first people to highlight the important role of the general strike: "And what is the significance of the political general strike that sooner or later will inevitably be the response to the coup d'état? It means the seizure of political power by the proletariat" (p. 59).

This phase indicates that the proletariat, as proletariat, can no longer play a fundamental historical role, since it has been integrated into capital and negated as a revolutionary proletariat. At the present time, however, we are witnessing an almost mystical exaltation of its role, of its importance as proletariat and how, historically, this no longer corresponds to anything real, and what we have instead are merely sects, monasticism, groupuscules and, finally, *rackets*. The proletariat can only manifest itself in a revolutionary way if the movement that it inspires is a movement for its own self-negation; this task is now a possibility insofar as the vast, universal revolutionary class that Marx discussed in *The German Ideology* has now been created. Today, the classical proletariat has been reduced in size, but there has been an increase in proletarianization, a growth of the proletarianized class, which as a whole has no reserves—hence the absurdity of talking about de-proletarianization. This implies that the cycle of the proletarian class has entered its final phase and that it must therefore be conceived as such, in its specificity.

This phase makes the critique of the theory of consciousness coming from outside the proletariat, by means of which the current fragmentation is supposed to be overcome by importing class consciousness, even more relevant. This theory, first articulated by Kautsky and then codified by Lenin, is accepted by almost all the groupuscules, even the anti-Leninists. There are actually groupuscules that present themselves directly as the conscious base from which the emanations of consciousness that aim to transform the proletariat must originate, and there are groupuscules that rehabilitate, without even knowing that this is what they are doing, the old social democratic puppet, that offspring of the bourgeoisie, education. Education can be carried out either via written or oral propaganda, or else by exemplary actions. However, just as it has been said that the revolution is not a question of organizational forms, it must also be proclaimed that it is not a question of pedagogy, either, not even “modern” pedagogy.

Furthermore, as we have already pointed out, one cannot separate consciousness from existence, in this case class consciousness. Anyway, what is the proletarian class today? An object of capital. How can it then be made susceptible to the influence of revolutionary consciousness? Besides, this existence evolves in time and it is not identical in all of its determinations with its existence fifty years ago. The proletariat is potentially proletarianized humanity. Only over the course of the revolutionary crisis does this class become effective, the universal class, by means of the unification of all of its components which are now separated, and even mutually opposed. It is this existence that will produce its consciousness, rather than receive it from any of our contemporary groupuscules.

We can discern the content of this consciousness in its broad outlines: the need for the negation of the proletariat, coexisting with the idea of the destruction of the capitalist mode of production. The proletariat needs the theory that contains, as far as possible, this moment of consciousness. Only if it tends to demonstrate how the real movement is moving towards the realization of this possibility, can it fight against the destruction of the theory of the proletariat, communism.

One could say that one lesson should be learned: theory arises at a privileged moment of the history of class struggle. By saying this, however, we risk transforming it into a simple watchman, for guarding a secret recipe. The assertion of this lesson can only be defended effectively to the extent that it is not an obstacle to the perception of the modern process of becoming of society. In this case, at the present time we must be capable of understanding, of grasping, how, in the actual conditions, we can negate the proletariat. As a result, in a formal or informal group, in an individual, consciousness only exists in a state of possibility and at every instant is susceptible of being perverted, destroyed by reality. Only with the mobilization of the proletariat for the struggle against the capitalist mode of production is consciousness produced, it becomes effective, both for the class as well as for certain elements (not separated from the class) who had recognized and defended the theory in its invariance.

If the group or the individual believes that they have effective consciousness, they then seem like a demiurge that does not even attain the level of a sorcerer's apprentice, since they only mobilize their derisory desires.

Precisely because action precedes consciousness, existence produces consciousness and any organizational creation engenders an obstacle to the unification of the universal class, because with its coagulation of consciousness it tends to crystallize, and to render perennial, the tendency of the proletariat to split into groupuscules.

The split in the proletariat's existence was manifested most clearly and most overwhelmingly within the German workers movement: the duality between its integrated existence that was employed, enrolled in the trade unions, and supported the SPD or the USPD; and the proletariat that was the negation of existing society and therefore communist, which was found outside of the trade unions, was often unemployed, and was active in the AAU, the AAUE or the FAUD. The problem then was how to restore the lost unity. However, in view of what we discussed above, we maintain that the attitude of the KAPD was more correct than that of the CI, which proclaimed the united front between irreducibly opposed fractions.

The KAPD as a vanguard party attracted the unemployed proletarians and those whom the anti-KAPD factions called the lumpenproletariat. This explains the power, and almost the fascination, exercised over this party by the theory of the death crisis of capitalism; most of its members really experienced the decomposition of the society of their time.

The sociological background of the KAPD's membership explains, furthermore, how it was capable of highlighting this split in the proletariat's existence, but also why it was incapable of clearly proposing the solution: not the formal or real unity of the whole proletariat, but the suppression of the proletariat. Because of the specific conditions of the German situation, however, the KAPD was far ahead of the other factions, especially with regard to the famous question of the lumpenproletariat. Lukács, too, when he reproached the "Dutch Communist Workers' Party and the 'KAP' ... [for] exaggerating utopian expectations" and "anticipating later phases in the process" (*History and Class*

Consciousness, MIT Press, p. 291), was really wide of the mark, because it was the German reality itself that the KAPD anticipated and the merit of the KAPD was to have been its expression.

Most Marxist theoreticians have accepted Marx's theoretical statements concerning the lumpenproletariat, without realizing that the lumpenproletariat of his time was an entirely different thing compared to the lumpenproletariat of the 20th century. For Marx, the lumpenproletariat was a fringe of the working class population that did not submit to the capitalist mechanism of production and that, to escape it and to survive, resorted to theft and the black market. In a certain sense, this layer existed already during the very beginnings of capitalism (see Marx's comments on the *lazzaroni* (lumpenproletariat) who crushed the Neapolitan revolution) and later constituted part of the reserve army of labor. During this period, the lumpenproletariat could either side with the ruling class, or with the proletariat itself. Potentially, however, by escaping class unification and standing in the way of the "generalization of wage labor", the lumpenproletariat constituted a reactionary layer. In any case, we must also point out that the various discourses directed against the lumpenproletariat were inspired for the most part by a morality of labor that was even more degrading than the very existence of the lumpenproletariat itself, and was all the more degrading insofar as the founding assumption of this morality was total obliviousness to the causes of human degradation.

Today the morality of labor has lost its basis and to speak of the lumpenproletariat no longer makes any sense. The workers are constantly exposed to the threat of sooner or later being expelled from the productive process and therefore, in view of the rule of capital, to the threat of losing their very livelihood. More precisely, once expelled from the productive process, or, in the case of young people who in many cases never even enter it in the first place, two attitudes are possible: to demand full employment and the right to a job, and therefore to call for the preservation of capital (ever since Keynes, this is the dream of all the managerial capitalists who have replaced the economists, because in their world political economy no longer exists); or to reject this society by destroying and rejecting labor as a possibility of survival. The latter attitude is not yet an affirmation of communism, but it is an immediate negation of capital that the latter is certainly capable of accommodating. Its generalization, however, indicates that the consciousness of the wage workers is dissolving, because wage labor, just plain labor (you earn your bread by the sweat of your brow!), from now on stands in the way of the development of human forces. And "the dissolution of a given form of consciousness sufficed to kill a whole epoch" (Marx, *Grundrisse*).

The same phenomenon is expressed in the "new middle classes". In other words, the vast majority of proletarianized humanity will be driven to this criminal status (with respect to bourgeois capitalist law), much to the dismay of most leftists who deify the proletariat-worker. They reproach this new proletariat particularly for its blind violence, its thoughtless destruction. But if we situate ourselves on a theoretical plane, we must confront the theories of the various groupuscules. By doing so we become aware of the fact that they amount to an ideology of labor, i.e., of capital. The proletarians who engage in actual struggle make it possible, by means of their allegedly blind destruction, for

consciousness to arise. If one were to be content with praising these struggles as such, this would obviously lead to a cult of violence and terror. It is undeniable that communism cannot make progress without the simultaneous production of consciousness, yet the social nihilism that is invading many proletarians indicates, and expresses, the vacuum that exists in society, the desperation of the old working class and the first faltering steps of the universal class that includes the new middle classes.

The real proletariat is the representative of the dissolution of society. Accepting the lumpenproletariat as a category for theoretical reflection presupposes the denial of this phenomenon as a general tendency and its confinement to the periphery of society in order to be able to tranquilly exalt the figure of the proletarian-worker.

The dissolution of society is currently underway in the United States. The unity of the proletariat as a universal class can only be achieved after a tenacious and resolute struggle, without concessions, against capital and, in a certain way, through a struggle within the universal class itself. We must not demand the reconstitution of the classical proletariat, which would amount to wanting to bring back the past, as some black American revolutionaries understand it (Boggs, for example). The universalization of the proletariat by way of the generalization of the wage form is the transitional stage to the negation of the classical proletariat.

The same thing can be said with respect to the unification of the proletariat on a world scale. The process that led to wanting to create another International was ill-conceived. The creation of the KAI, the real Fourth International (the Trotskyists, along with their great man, have always arrived at least a little too late), proves this; the attempts made by others, such as Korsch, also failed and, finally, the perpetual and constantly renewed farce of the Trotskyist Fourth International constitutes the most damning argument in favor of the superfluity of the very idea of an international. The movement of the proletariat no longer needs this institution to recognize its international nature: it is worldwide from its very inception.⁵⁸ In our time, the efforts of the revolutionaries must be directed towards attempting to see to it that the preconditions for the formation of consciousness, for the affirmation of the need for the negation of the proletariat, are clarified as rapidly as possible (supersession of the concept of unity). This consciousness can only arise with the simultaneous apprehension of communism. Hence the importance of theory.

After the defeat of the Paris Commune, Marx predicted that the heartland of the revolution would shift to Germany and that there the question would involve the victory of its theory. This shift did indeed take place; Marxism—or the theory of the

⁵⁸ “The international activity of the working classes does not in any way depend on the existence of the International Working Men’s Association. This was only the first attempt to create a central organ for the activity; an attempt which was a lasting success on account of the impulse which it gave but which was no longer realizable in its historical form after the fall of the Paris Commune” (Marx, “Critique of the Gotha Program”, 1875. See also: Marx-Engels, *Sur l’organisation*, Spartacus).

proletariat—registered important successes, but it was not victorious and it was negated at the end of the 19th century. The struggles of 1918-1923, during which the proletariat attempted to reverse the defeat of 1914, were at the same time a manifestation of its will to re-appropriate its own theory. In 1933, when the defeat of the German proletariat was definitively consummated, a profound anxiety reigned among the revolutionaries. They were assailed by overwhelming doubts. The Trotskyists took advantage of this by stepping up their propaganda campaign for the formation of a new International; the other currents survived as best as they could. In neither case was there any evidence of anyone predicting the eventual shift of the heartland of the revolution. At the time, this was a delicate question. Besides, most revolutionaries were too deeply immersed in the immediate struggle or in the depths of pessimism to be able to rise to the challenge of confronting the future. The revolutionary movement was broken in the USSR, but the instability of the Soviet regime indicated that the game was not over yet. The various trials and the subsequent liquidations of revolutionaries confirmed this. Beyond this, it was quite vague.

This clarification took place after 1945:

1. The impossibility of the USSR playing a revolutionary role in the near future.
2. In Germany there was at first a period of confusion; the events of 1953 seemed to prove the validity of the thesis that affirmed that Germany was still the heartland of the revolution. They were in fact part of a phase of response to that more important series of events that had taken place in the interwar years, and constituted a moment in the readjustment process linked to the partition of the country.
3. China, engaged by necessity in carrying out its capitalist revolution in the name of the proletariat, could by no means be the heartland of the revolution of the proletariat. Even now, China is still far from having become the heartland of the revolution.

It has been evident since the early 1960s that the whole movement of opposition within society emanates from the United States and, furthermore, the insurrectionary movement of the black proletariat of the U.S. since 1963 has clearly defined the location of the most explosive contradictions of capital: the U.S.—in making this claim, we are taking into account the extraordinary levels reached by the productive forces in that country. In this geo-social area of the rule of capital the mission of the proletarian movement is unquestionably revealed: the abolition of the proletariat. And thus Marx's theory is fully confirmed. All the nonsense generated about the revolution starting in a backward country (the revolution against *Capital*, Gramsci), as well as the litanies about the weakest link, all of this is nothing but a theoretical deviation that overlooks the essential thing: for Marx, as well as for all the Bolsheviks at first, the Russian revolution, a dual revolution, could only be the prelude to the communist revolution. By associating in different ways the word, revolution, with one or another backward country, weak link, etc., our diverse revolutionaries have merely associated themselves with stupidity.

The question that remained in suspense in 1933 was answered thirty years later. Now, it is no longer possible to look to the movement of the past for models for the struggle of the future, whether to the Bolsheviks, the KAPD, the AAU, the AAUE, etc., because none of these movements ever posed the real question, whose solution is presently on the agenda: the negation of the proletariat. The theoretical importance of the KAPD, however, is to have correctly emphasized the factors of the situation of its time and to have thus historically connected with the real movement.⁵⁹

In 1871 Marx thought that the revolutionary phase of the bourgeoisie had come to an end. Did he mean that the productive forces could no longer be developed on a planetary scale, that revolutionary transformations not oriented towards communism, but towards capitalism, were impossible? No. These transformations, however, could no longer be led by the bourgeois class, but had to be carried out by the enemy class, the proletariat. Then the era of the anti-capitalist revolutions began, led and inspired directly by the proletariat, carried out in its name and in the name of socialism. The development of capital would be propelled by the proletariat, which had to replace the deficient bourgeoisie, just as it had to intervene in the revolution of 1789 to compensate for the weaknesses, the fears and the vacillations of the bourgeoisie. In geo-social areas like the Slavic regions, and in Asia, communitarian forms and Asiatic despotism inhibited the development of the bourgeoisie. The central power, the Czar or the emperor, fostered the development of their empires that were under threat from the capitalist West. These efforts were cloaked in forms borrowed from the capitalist economy. Capital could always dominate the capitalist enterprises formed in these countries, but in no case could it attain the formal domination of society. On the other hand, on a world scale, capital's expansion slowed, thus limiting its range, which precipitated its catastrophe. Afterwards it would be the proletariat that was created in these zones that would overcome the obstacles to the development of capital. In Russia, it shattered the barrier of the counterrevolution, which

⁵⁹ In 1946, Pannekoek wrote: "And henceforth it is on the working class of America that world-revolution depends" (Bricianer, p. 288). We did not have to wait for the allegedly sensational essay by Revel, *Without Marx or Jesus*, to see that the heartland of the revolution is the U.S. And this book certainly has nothing sensational about it except the fact that it is an attempt to present the revolution as possessing the characteristics of a radical's excretions to the Young Socialists. What makes the revolution inevitable in the U.S. is the end of all the reformism whose main representatives—and its "worthy" martyrs!—were Kennedy and King. It is also the end of utopia. In the 19th century the United States was the place where utopia finally made its home, a country where there could no longer be class differences, where each individual could freely develop and attain happiness. It was only after the Second World War that this myth would really be destroyed both domestically and overseas: with the war in Vietnam, the U.S. and the whole world discovered that this country was just as capable as Germany of giving rise to a kind of "Nazism" (since everyone thought that the massacre of the Indians, when it comes right down to it, was nothing more than a problem of the dissemination of civilization!). In the U.S., the utopian dreams of the workers of Europe who were starving and hounded by political persecution were turned into reality, but in a perverted way. It is in the U.S. where theory will encounter its true movement of realization.

had been standing since the French revolution, and was temporarily breached. It was also after 1917 that the capitalist mode of production would finally penetrate the East; the repercussions of this trend are hardly exhausted with the end of the anti-colonial revolutions. Throughout this phase, the revolutionary proletariat of the West would only help (directly or indirectly) the Russian proletariat to perform a task that was not specifically its own.

The counterrevolution feeds on the revolution, which is why it must carry out and further develop the very thing that the proletarian revolution sought to prevent: the domination of capital in the zones of the planet that capital had not yet penetrated. The historical development of humanity has had to consummate the mission of the bourgeoisie and, for its part, capital is now compelled to realize the immediate demands of the proletariat (it is in this way that it overcomes its limits).

The society of capital develops thanks to the force of the proletarians. Does this mean that the proletariat has renounced its historical mission?

It is in fact true that many of the features of the “future society” that were proposed in the rational policies of the transitional program in a time more favorable for utopia, were realized in an appalling and terrible way, and in such a way that might be described as the mutilation of man, on the plane of practical policies, in the world of war and the world of the police with which we are so familiar. But that might not even be the worst thing about this tendency. Due to the “unfaithfulness” of the proletariat to its historical mission—underscored with the blood of the Spartacists—and due to the rise of a Fourth Estate in the Social Democracy, the confessed “faith” in the “eternal pages” of the Manifesto suffered a mortal blow. No good purpose can be served by trying to conceal this fact. And if there is a question that must be asked, it is undoubtedly this: “What remains that is humanly valid in the human hope that we placed, with Liebknecht and Luxemburg, in the proletarian revolution? And another question is no less important and demands an answer: What confidence can the workers still have in the collective responsibility of their own class?” (pp. 112-113).

The quotation is from “La tragédie de Spartacus”, written by André Prudhommeaux as the concluding chapter of the pamphlet, “Spartacus et la commune de Berlin, 1918-1919”, (Spartacus, No. 15). It has the merit of highlighting the negative side of the domination of the proletariat and foreshadows the discourse that would flourish later concerning the integration of the proletariat.

Curiously, Prudhommeaux’s theoretical analysis culminates in a recapitulation of the revolt of the “Spartacus of old”, as if the truth of the Spartacist movement resided in the slave revolt led by Spartacus, a revolt that had no prospects of success due to the immaturity of the world of that time, both on the economic and social plane as well as the spiritual plane. The conclusion would be that the Spartacist movement had gone astray due to the illusion of the proletariat concerning the importance of its intervention in the process of growth of the economic-social forces. Thus, Prudhommeaux concludes:

“Perhaps this does justice to Marx, in the terms of Marxism, by identifying the epic of the proletariat with the steam engine” (p. 117).⁶⁰

We have quoted passages relating to the Spartacists because the fundamental positions of the Spartacists were also those of the KAPD, the AAU, etc., and because Prudhommeaux’s reflections constitute one of the most categorical condemnations of the mission of the proletariat; he even broaches the question of the Messianism that would later be stirred up hundreds of times by diverse authors, intent on destroying all specificity of the theory of the proletariat by drowning it in the amorphous ideology of the oppressed who rise up against their oppressors.

It can be said that the proletariat as a class that is necessary for a certain development of the productive forces has become superfluous. If the role of the proletariat is limited to this factor, then its historic mission has become a fraud, because the growth of the productive forces is simultaneously bringing about the generalized enslavement of all

⁶⁰ Twenty-two years after Prudhommeaux, M. Gallo, in his article, “L’abus du mythe” (*Le Monde*, April 14-15, 1971) (see also his book, *Tombeau pour la Commune*), once again took up the thread of this discussion: “the myth of the proletariat” and the need to destroy it. Prudhommeaux saw the solution of the social question in the “common program of the pre-Marxist libertarian socialists”, whose first point, as he indicates, is “the equalization of classes based on the division of labor” (*op. cit.*, p. 116). For his part, M. Gallo wants to avoid another commune, “desperate madness” on a planetary scale, that might be the outcome of the uncontrolled growth of the human population. He also wants humanity to solve its own problems and control its development, as if a humanity with any kind of power actually exists. Power is the power of capital.

Opposing the myth of the Commune, and trying to demolish it, is a good thing (although it is necessary to call attention to the components of this myth, to discover it in Marx is a mythological reading of his work), but where does it lead M. Gallo? To the revitalization of the myths of humanity, and of politics; to overlooking, in his impassioned polemics, the existence of capital. And in this case, overlooking capital amounts to an apology for capital! Is it not a sinister myth that suggests that men can be liberated without the destruction of capital?

In an article published in 1946, “L’échec de la classe ouvrière” [The Failure of the Working Class], Pannekoek also addresses this question. For him, this failure is due to the predominance of State socialism and the impossibility of the development of the councils. This is quite superficial, but he adds the following contribution that shows that he had, if not understood, at least intuited the specificity of our epoch: “Thus what is called the failure of the working class is the failure of its narrow socialist aims. The real fight for liberation has yet to begin; what is known as the workers’ movement in the century behind us, seen in this way, was only a series of skirmishes of advance guards. Intellectuals, who are wont to reduce the social struggle to the most abstract and simple formulas, are inclined to underrate the tremendous scope of the social transformation before us” (p. 286 in Bricianer).

men, which also implies, according to the theory, that another point needs emphasizing: the proletariat has developed the productive forces within the capitalist mode of production, until it has driven that mode of production, as Marx said, beyond its limits; now, any increase of the productive forces can only take place by rendering men redundant as well, put on the shelf by capital. This is why the proletarian revolution is an evolution on the scale of the human, this is why it must refer to man, re-appropriate him, tend towards the acquisition of consciousness, to seek in it, in all men, the spiritual forces negated by the domination of capital and suffocated under the façade of Marxism. To re-appropriate human existence, is not merely to pick up something that had been abandoned and thus lost; since this human existence resides in all the “possibilities” produced by the development of the productive forces; this re-appropriation is the act of rendering these possibilities effective⁶¹ and will take place from the very beginning of the communist revolution, when the universal proletariat-class constitutes itself into a party of community outside the community of capital.

The greatness of the German movement (KAPD, AAU, AAUE, etc.) resides precisely in its attempt to reconquer consciousness and to abandon the capitalist terrain by rediscovering its existence as the negation of capital.

All the currents whose positions we have briefly summarized had an enormous disadvantage to overcome. They originated during the times of German unity, which was imposed from above and therefore superficially, without transforming the ways of life of the Germans from top to bottom (by ways of life, we also mean ways of thinking). This construction project from above came to an end only with the two major events for the

⁶¹ “But this antithetical form is itself fleeting, and produces the real conditions of its own suspension (*Aufhebung*). The result is: the tendentially and potentially general development of the forces of production – of wealth as such – as a basis; likewise, the universality of intercourse, hence the world market as a basis. The basis as the possibility of the universal development of the individual, and the real development of the individuals from this basis as a constant suspension (*Aufhebung*) of its *barrier*, which is recognized as a barrier, not taken for a *sacred limit*. Not an ideal or imagined universality of the individual, but the universality of his real and ideal relations. Hence also the grasping of his own history as a *process*, and the recognition (*Wissen*) of nature (equally present as practical power over nature) as his real body. The process of development itself posited and known as the presupposition of the same. For this, however, it is necessary above all that the full development of the forces of production has become the *condition of production*; and not that specific *conditions of production* are posited as a limit to the development of the productive forces” (Marx, *Grundrisse*). Thanks to the real domination of capital that despoils (*entäussert*) the individual who labors, it has created the very basis of his universal development. It is interesting to compare this quotation with another one from the *Manuscripts of 1844*: “Only through developed industry—i.e., through the medium of private property—does the ontological essence of human passion come into being, in its totality as well as in its humanity; the science of man is therefore itself a product of man’s own practical activity” (*Economic & Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, Section XL, “The Power of Money in Bourgeois Society”).

workers movement, in 1918 with the victory of the Social Democrats, and in 1933 with the victory of Nazism. The evolution of the workers movement proceeded in parallel with “Lassalle’s ill-starred illusion that a Prussian government might intervene with socialist measures” (Marx to Engels, February 18, 1865), which led to the situation described by Engels: “But one can see that Izzy [Lassalle] has given the movement a Tory-Chartist character, which it will be difficult to get rid of and which has given rise to a tendency in Germany which was previously unheard of among the workers. This nauseating toadying to the reaction comes through everywhere. We shall have some trouble with that.” (Engels to Marx, February 13, 1865).

Lassalle’s influence was never expunged. To the contrary, it was reinforced by Bernstein, who, in a certain sense, brought it up to date. The confluence of these two factors (Lassalleism and revisionism) led to the defeat of Marxism. When the revolutionary phenomenon emerged years later, it had to cast aside the whole social democratic tradition that had even distorted the thought of outstanding socialists such as Luxemburg. It had hardly begun to carry out its mission, however, when it clashed with Leninism, and then with Stalinism, and was defeated.

The proletarian movement of our time must once again break with tradition. It has an immediate task to encompass, different from the one it confronted in other revolutionary phases: its own destruction. The negation of the proletariat is on the agenda in the U.S. and is apparently becoming increasingly more applicable to our European countries, too.

We must make one final contribution to our discussion of the defeat of the German proletariat (and this applies even more broadly to the alleged defeat of the historical mission of the proletariat): is there any historical justification for this defeat, or more precisely, was it necessary for this defeat to finally take place so that the real solution could triumph (take place)? We must raise this question because we have been engaging in too much hair-splitting with historical necessities to allow ourselves to justify the worst infamies. Marxist theory does not resort to any justification, since it posits no problem of rights. The proletariat does not demand the right to revolution, the right to unleash anything within society besides what, for the sake of brevity, we shall call the human revolution. The revolution derives from an internal need within the capitalist mode of production and if, in the struggle to satisfy this need, the revolution is defeated, it cannot have any justification. Only the following argument, which we can find in the “Preface to the *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*”, might make sense: “No social order ever disappears before all the productive forces for which there is room in it have been developed.”

What are the productive forces that the capitalist mode of production must develop and that it was capable of embracing? The productive forces must replace man in the process of production, and therefore lead to automation. The productive forces that cannot be embraced by capital are those of men themselves. Communism, on the other hand, is defined as the mode of production in which the goal of production is man himself.

Was the defeat inevitable, then? Did the proletariat not waste its efforts in foolhardy adventures since the beginning, right up until its defeat? Should it not have simply waited for the productive forces to develop so that it could finally manifest itself?

We have already pointed out the role that the resistance of the proletariat plays in the domination of capital, as an essential stimulant to make capital develop the productive forces that will allow it to replace the mere labor process with a process of the production of capital, which implies the transition from cooperation to manufacture, and to industry, culminating in automation. Thanks to science, capital tames the natural forces to domesticate the proletarians, and in this way inert matter achieves its domination over man in the capitalist mode of production.

This intervention of the proletariat takes place above all in the situation of being the object of capital, but this intervention is of a different kind altogether when the proletariat becomes a subject and therefore is not opposed to capital from within, but becomes autonomous. The proletariat has attempted to fight capital (first represented by the bourgeois class, then the capitalist class) from very early in its history, with the intention of attaining the same result as capital but without all the sufferings and infamies with which the capitalist mode of production has been so generously endowed. This is clearly the program included in the “Manifesto” of the communist party (1848). In 1871 the proletariat tried to seize power from capital in order to bring about not social emancipation, but its preconditions. In 1917 the proletariat in the Slavic regions attempted (and this attempt might have been generalized to Asia and Africa) to impose the solution which could not be realized in 1848, in conditions that were favorable from the point of view of the productive forces (on a world scale). With respect to the German proletariat, the latter would have been capable—replacing capital—of rationalizing the development of the productive forces and propelling automation towards its complete development, which would have to be realized with the real domination of capital.

In any case, the proletariat was defeated. The counterrevolution has realized the immediate goals of the proletariat, but only by increasingly reducing it to an object of capital.

There was therefore no ineluctable destiny that weighed upon the proletariat. On each occasion the struggle was useful, and necessary. Defeat led to resignation and fatalism, and it also led certain people to attempt to find justifications or conciliatory solutions, like that of Lassalle who wanted to use the Prussian State to realize socialism, or that of Bernstein who wanted to confine the workers struggle to the electoral circus, etc.

In other words, the development of the material productive forces (as distinct from those of men) was absolutely necessary, but it was not inevitable that this would have to be accomplished under the aegis of capital. Now, this necessity no longer exists. To maintain otherwise is to argue on behalf of the eternal life of capital.

No inevitability, no justification or compromises with the forces of capital, there are no longer any presuppositions that will lead us to defeat: the mode of production still has

zones that can be developed! When the crisis, the rupture, the fracture in the community of capital arrives, there will be a possibility of destroying the capitalist mode of production; all the conciliators, open or concealed, deliberate or not, like those who still dream of managing capital in a different way (this work is already underway on the theoretical level), will have to be swept aside, for it is these accommodationist conciliators, by deflecting or bottling up the momentum of the erupting forces of the proletarian class, who are the progenitors of inevitability!

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