Marxism, Prefigurative Communism, and the Problem of Workers' Control

Carl Boggs

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A conspicuous deficiency of the Marxist tradition has been the failure to produce a theory of the state and political action that could furnish the basis of a democratic and non-authoritarian revolutionary process. The two most widely-tested strategies for advancing revolutionary goals — Leninism and structural reformism — provide no real alternative to the bureaucratic hierarchy, the power of the centralized state, and the social division of labor characteristic of bourgeois society. While Leninism did furnish a mechanism for overturning traditional structures, it has reproduced within the party-state a bureaucratic centralism that retards progress toward socialism. And structural reformism, as expressed in traditional Social Democracy and the Communist parties of the advanced capitalist societies, has led to the institutionalization of working-class politics, into bourgeois electoral, judicial and administrative structures. Both strategies have actually reinforced the growth of modern bureaucratic capitalism through their obsession with state authority, "efficiency" and discipline.

Because these models lack a conception of the particular socialist forms that would replace the established models of domination, and since both mirror and even extend some of the most repressive features of the bureaucratic state, they are never really able to escape the confines of bourgeois politics. Thus "Marxism-Leninism" and Social Democracy, which in the U.S. have been the main strategic responses to the disintegration of the new left, are actually two sides of the same coin. Despite their ideological contrasts, they rest upon many of the same theoretical (and even programmatic) assumptions.

It would be easy to attribute this phenomenon to the temporary aberrations of "Stalinism" and "revisionism", but the problem has deeper roots. It stems from the failure of Marxism to spell out the process of transition. Note that Marx thought communism on a world scale would appear organically and quite rapidly. One finds in Marx scarcely a hint of what forms, methods, and types of leadership would give shape to the unfolding socialist order; whatever strategic directions can be unravelled from his work are ambiguous and often inconsistent.[1] At times he seemed to indicate that socialist transformation would resemble .the passage from feudalism to capitalism, to the extent that changes in civil society would necessarily precede, and anticipate, the actual transfer of political power — but he did not set out to conceptualize this process or take up the problem of strategy.

The crude determinism that overtook European Marxism in the period between Marx's death and World War I did little to clarify this task. The presumed mechanics of capitalist development undercut the need for a conscious scheme of transition; "crisis", collapse, breakdown-these fatalistic notions propelled Marxism toward the most naive faith in progress. Since that capitalism was expected to disappear through its own contradictions (the falling rate of profit, crises of overproduction, concentration of wealth, immiserization of the proletariat), the transformative process was never viewed as problematic. The ends and methods of socialist revolution were assumed to be determined by the logic of capitalism itself, as automatic mechanisms that side-stepped the issue of political strategy and subjective intervention. Obstacles that stood in the way of this historical advance toward socialism — bureaucratic domination, the social division of labor, lack of mass socialist consciousness — were viewed as merely reflections of an outmoded production system. Attempts to confront such obstacles directly, or to specify the actual character of the transition, were dismissed as exercises in Utopian speculation.

[1] Stanley Moore, Three Tactics: The Background in Marx (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1963).

Leninism overcame this strategic paralysis, but its "solution" was an authoritarian and power-oriented model that only further repressed the democratic and self-emancipatory side of Marxism. In the past century, the most direct attack on statist Marxism has come from what might be called the prefigurative tradition, which begins with the nineteenth century anarchists and includes the syndicalists, council communists. and the New Left. By "prefigurative", I mean the embodiment, within the ongoing political practice of a movement, of those forms of social relations, decision-making, culture, and human experience that are the ultimate goal. Developing mainly outside Marxism, it produced a critique of bureaucratic domination and a vision of revolutionary democracy that Marxism generally lacked. Yet, wherever it was not destroyed by the bourgeois state or by organized Marxist parties, it fell prey to its own spontaneism, or wound up absorbed into established trade union, party and state institutions. These historical limitations, along with a powerful critique of Leninism and Social Democracy, are the legacy of prefigurative radicalism that commands renewed attention today.

1. Socialism or Statism? The Problem Defined

The eclipse of traditional Social Democracy was hastened by the Russian Revolution and the endurance of the Bolshevik state. Leninism always stressed the danger of "spontaneity" and the need for a centralized and disciplined organization to correct the immobilism of the "open" parties of the Second International. The Bolshevik party was constructed less for underground combat (a theme that is often over-exaggerated) than for carrying out a "minority revolution". Two conditions shaped this strategy: a small proletariat co-existing with a large peasantry in a pro-industrial society, and a weak state subject to extreme crises of legitimacy. For Lenin, everything hinged on the immediacy of the struggle for power. As Lukacs noted, Lenin's main accomplishment was to defy the "laws" of capitalist development and to inject political will into Marxism: the strategy was one of Realpolitik.[2] The party-state is more central to Leninism than the vaguely anarchistic vision of mass participation that Lenin sketched in State and Revolution. Since the Bolsheviks conquered power at a moment of grave crisis, and without a sustained build-up of popular support beyond the cities, their schema did not call for a transformation of civil society preceding the transfer of power. They achieved immediate power objectives, but the isolation and opposition they faced made their socialist goals unrealizable. To preserve a revolutionary regime under such conditions meant solidifying the party-state; beyond that, the project of transforming such a society would call for massive use of control, manipulation, and coercion.

The Leninist monopoly of power in Russia had two main consequences: it transformed the masses "represented" by the party into manipulated objects, and it generated a preoccupation with bureaucratic methods and techniques. Lenin's whole approach was that of the technician who stresses the organizational means of political struggle while downplaying the ends themselves.[3] This suppression of values permits the utilization of capitalist methods to advance "socialist construction": hierarchical structures, Taylorism, the authoritarian-submissive personality, alienated labor. All stirrings from below were thus dismissed as "Utopian", "ultra-leftist", or "anarchistic". The very means which Bolsheviks used to lay the economic-technical basis for the

[2] George Lukacs, Lenin (Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press, 1971), Passim.

[3] Francois George, "Forgetting Lenin", Telos #18 (Winter, 1973–74). See also Frederic and Lon Jean Fleron, "Administrative Theory as Repressive Political Theory: The Communist Experience", Telos #12 (Summer, 1972), pp. 89–94.

transition to communism, inevitably subverted those ends and encouraged the growth of bureaucratic centralism.

Lenin equated workers' power with the fact of Bolshevik rule, mocking the "petty bourgeois illusions" of leftists who clamored for democratic participation. By 1921, the regime had already destroyed or converted into "transmission belts" those popular and autonomous institutions — the Soviets, trade unions, factory committees — that played a vital role in the revolution. Before his death, Lenin recoiled from the bureaucratic tide, but the Bolshevik tradition offered no alternative strategy. The only conception of transition in Lenin was the one followed in practice — an adaptive, flexible tactics that, when combined with the primacy of the party, favored centralism.

Beyond references to the "dictatorship" of the proletariat", the Bolsheviks scarcely raised the question of structures. Aside from futile internal protests from the left communists, there was no analysis of what political forms and authority relations were comparable with the Marxian vision of a classless and stateless society. For Lenin, the nature of the transitional period always remained unspecified; the demand "all power to the Soviets" was essentially a slogan, and in any case had no impact on post-revolutionary development. The Soviets were viewed as stepping stones to the conquest of power rather than as the nucleus of a new socialist state. The party always took precedence over the Soviets and strove to limit their autonomy; true to Lenin's administrative emphasis, his vision of revolution was anchored in large-scale organization.[4] Having "smashed" the authoritarian state, the Bolsheviks soon recreated it.

Though Marxism was originally an anti-statist theory. Soviet development since Lenin has produced what the Yugoslav Stojanovic calls the "statist myth of Socialism."[5] Revolutionary goals became inseparable from state initiative in the realm of control, ownership, planning, capital accumulation, employment of the workforce. The transition to socialism assumed a mystical quality: the consciousness, social relations, and political habits necessary to build a socialist order would seem to spring from nowhere, with no lengthy and organic process of transformation within civil society to nurture them.

Whereas Leninism has functioned best in pre-industrial countries with weak institutions of authority, the strategy of structural reforms has taken hold in advance capitalist societies where bourgeois traditions are more firmly implanted. Even where "Leninist" movements have survived in the industrialized countries, they have either abandoned their vanguard status or drifted toward isolationism.

The theory of structural reforms is often understood as a reversion from Leninism to traditional Social Democracy, but the model introduced by the Italian Communist Party after World War II contained a more positive conception of the transition. It seeks to by-pass the extremes of vanguardism and spontaneism by participating within and extending the forms of bourgeois democracy (elections, parliament, local governments, trade unions). Its premise was that Marxist governments could not gain hegemony until the political balance of forces strongly favored them; increased working-class strength would gradually modify structures, breaking down the power of the monopolies and the central bureaucracy while injecting new life into mass politics.[6] In con-

[4] See the Flerons, op. cit., and Ulysses Santa-Maria and Alain Manville, "Lenin and the Problems of Transition", Telos #27 (Spring. 1976), pp. 89–94.

[5] Svetozar Stojanovic, Between Ideals and Reality (New York: Oxford University Press, 1937), ch. 3.

[6] The Italian Communist Party, for example, advocates a two-pronged strategy of political "democratization" and economic "modernization". The first objective involves revitalizing parliament and local administration vis-a-vis central executive power; eliminating patronage, corruption, waste, and nepotism in government while building

trast to Leninism, it envisaged a gradual, peaceful democratization of the state; against the "ultra left", it offered a "tangible" strategy that looked to intermediate objectives within the prevailing culture and traditions rather than to struggles of total confrontation.

The evolution of Communist parties in the developed societies reflects the contradictions of structural reformism: electoral-parliamentary struggles have led to strategic (not just tactical) involvement in bourgeois structures and to institutionalization within system. This process has unfolded at three levels:

1. like Leninism, the strategy itself discourages prefigurative forms that would permit the masses to define the revolutionary process;

2. parliamentarism undercuts any commitment to grassroot struggle, workers' control, and cultural transformation and detaches the party from everyday life;

3. years of electoral campaigns geared to winning votes and building power coalitions favored the rise of interest-group politics based on appeals to economism, populism, and patronage.

Structural reformism thus perpetuates the division between politics and economics. One the one hand, the party mobilizes votes, creates alliances, and expands its local administrative and parliamentary representation; on the other, the trade unions attempt to advance the material demands of labor through contractual bargaining. This separation fragments the working-class movement and makes it difficult to link immediate struggles with broad socialist objectives. Electoralism minimizes popular mobilization and encourages a partial, alienated, institutional approach to politics,[7] whereas trade unionism reproduces the hierarchy, discipline, and corporativism of the capitalist factory.

There is another problem — one stemming from the concept of a "neutral" state that views the bourgeois power apparatus as standing "above" the class struggle, as a technical instrument that can be restructured and wielded for revolutionary purposes. The conservatism of structural reformist parties reveals that the state is inseparable from civil society, a product of capitalist development. The institutions that grew out of the bourgeois revolution are too deeply embedded in that tradition to be somehow miraculously lifted out of it and forged into mechanisms of socialist transformation. What Gramsci and Luxemburg noted -in an earlier period still applies: liberal democratic structures function above all to legitimate bourgeois society. The excessive reliance on the state here differs from that of Leninism, but it too fails to situate the revolutionary process in the general society and in the unfolding of new political forms.

Despite a commitment to pluralism, structural reformism merely embellishes the statist myth of socialism in a different guise — the central state itself becomes the prime mover, the source of

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a more competent professional civil service; making public agencies more open and accessible; and developing a system of national "democratic planning". The second includes rationalizing production by eliminating the vestiges of backwardness and parasitism in Italian capitalism; undermining monopoly power and imposing limits on "distorted privileges"; encouraging productive efficiency through governmental development scientific and technical programs; modernization of agricultural production; and development of a broad welfare system.

[7] As Maria A. Macciocchi writes of her own experience as a PCI candidate for parliament, electoral campaigns tended to degenerate into spectacles and oratorial contests filled with shallow platitudes. She found it extremely difficult to raise substantive issues, for the PCI was too frightened of alienating potential new recruits from its electoral constituency. See M.A. Macciochi, Letters from Inside the Communist Party to Louis Althusser (London: New Left Books, 1973), Passim.

all initiative and legitimation, the main arena of participation. In the end, structural reformism and Leninism appear as two diametrically opposed strategies that lead to twin versions of state bureaucratic capitalism. Whereas Leninism reproduced the essentials of capitalism, including hierarchy, commodity production, and alienated labor, in a new and more total form, structural reformism promises to extend, refine, and "rationalize" existing bourgeois institutions.

2. A Prefigurative Communism?

Within Marxism, the problem of bureaucratic domination and hierarchy is usually understood as a manifestation of the class structure — a conceptual weakness that helps to explain the absence of a strategy grounded in new forms of authority. Prefigurative strategy, on the other hand, views statism and authoritarianism as special obstacles to be overturned; its goal is to replace the bureaucratic state with distinctly popular institutions. Ideally, this tradition expresses three basic concerns:

1. fear of reproducing hierarchical authority relations under a new ideological rationale;
2. criticism of political parties and trade unions because their centralized forms reproduce the old power relations in a way that undermines revolutionary struggles; and
3. commitment to democratization through local, collective structures that anticipate the future liberated society.

The prefigurative model — at least in some of its more recent expressions — stressed the overturning of all modes of domination, not only the expropriation of private ownership. Statist attempts to introduce nationalization, central planning, and new social priorities may achieve a transfer of legal ownership but they may also leave the social division of labor and bureaucracy intact.[8]

The idea of "collective ownership" remains a myth so long as the old forms of institutional control are not destroyed; the supersession of private management by state or "public" management poses only a superficial, abstract solution to the contradictions of capitalism. As Gorz puts it: "There is no such thing as communism without a communist life-style or 'culture'; but a communist life-style cannot be based upon the technology, institutions, and division of labor which derive from capitalism."[9] Only when the workers themselves establish new participatory forms can alienated labor and subordination be eliminated. This transformation includes but runs much deeper than the problem of formal ownership — it penetrates to the level of factory hierarchy and authoritarianism, fragmentation of job skills, commodity production, and separation of mental and physical functions that grow out of the capitalist division of labor. These features, which are often thought to be necessary for greater efficiency and productivity, can better be understood as a means of ensuring control of labor.[10] The drive toward specialization and hierarchy comes

[8] See C.George Benello, "Anarchism and Marxism", Our Generation (vol. 10, no. 1, fall. 1974), pp: 55–56.

[9] Andre Gorz, ed., The Division of Labor (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: The Humanities Press, 1976), p. xi.

[10] See S.A. Marglin, "What do Bosses do?", in Gorz, op. cit. In modern societies, this bureaucratic domination increasingly permeates most spheres of everyday life to the extent that it becomes part of the psychology of the masses. See Henry Jacoby, The Bureaucratization of the World (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), p. 189.

not primarily from capital accumulation and technological development in the narrow sense, but from the need to create a bureaucratically organized and disciplined workforce.

Bureaucratization creates obstacles to revolutionary change that were only dimly foreseen by classical Marxism. The expansion of the public sphere and the convergence of state and corporate sectors has meant more centralized and total networks of power and, correspondingly, the erosion of popular democratic initiative. Bureaucratic logic, which enters every area of public existence, helps to enforce bourgeois ideological hegemony insofar as it diffuses a culture of organisational adaptation, submission, pragmatism, routine; it depoliticizes potential opposition by narrowing the range of political discourse, by institutionalizing alienation, and posing only "technical" solutions to problems. Once entrenched, bureaucracy tends to produce a rigidity that resists fundamental change. Marxist movements themselves have been repeatedly victimized by their own internal bureaucratization.

Yet this dynamic, even as it permeates new spheres of life, opens up breaches in the capitalist power structure; new points of vulnerability and new centers of resistance begin to appear. Not only production, but every aspect of social existence is brought into the class struggle. While prefigurative movements first appeared during the early stages of industrialization and bureaucratizaiion, the explosion of popular insurgency in the 1960s — the revolutionary left in Western Europe, Japan and elsewhere, the new left, rank-and-file working class struggles, oppositionist movements in Eastern Europe — demonstrated that they are still very much alive.

The institutional focus of prefigurative communism is small, local, collective organs of popular control — factory councils, Soviets, neighborhood assemblies, revolutionary action committees, affinity groups — that seek to democratize and reinvigorate revolutionary politics. Generally an outgrowth of traditional structures that express some vague commitment to direct democracy — for example, the peasant collectives in Russia, China, and Spain, the shop-stewards organization in Britain, the trade union grievance committees in Italy and France — they often become radicalized at timees of crisis and produce broader revolutionary forms. The Paris Commune, the Russian and Chinese Revolutions, the Hungarian Revolutions of 1919 and 1956, the Spanish upheaval of 1936–39, the Vietnamese Revolution, and the 1968 Revolt in France were all catalyzed by extensive networks of "dual power."

Such groups, generally called councils, can generate a leadership organically rooted in the local workplace and communities that is directly accountable to the population. They possess other advantages: for example, by collectivizing work and "management" functions, councils can more effectively combat the social division of labor; by emphasizing the transformation of social relations over instrumental power objectives, they can incorporate a wider range of issues, demands, and needs into popular struggles; by posing the question of ideological hegemony, they can furnish the context in which the masses would develop their intellectual and political potential — where a sense of confidence, spirit, and creativity would begin to replace the fatalism, passivity, and submissiveness instilled by bourgeois authority;[11] and, finally, by encouraging political

[11] The role of local councils in stimulating the development of proletarian subjectivity — and helping to overcome political fatalism — needs to be stressed. It was central to Gramsci's vision of the councils during the Ordine Nuovo period, when he saw one of their major contributions as instilling a "psychology of the producers" in the workers. It was also a common theme in Pannekoek and the German council movement, which Aronowitz sees as a drive to undermine the authoritarian personality that is created through the factory bureaucracy, and the family. See Stanley Aronowitz, "Left-Wing Communism: The Reply to Lenin", in Dick Howard and Karl Klare, eds., The Unknown Dimen-

involvement that is centered outside the, dominant structures, the capacity to resist deradicalization can be greatly strengthened.

In the broadest sense, prefigurative structures can be viewed as a new source of political legitimacy, as a nucleus of a future socialist state. They would create an entirely new kind of politics, breaking down the division of labor between everyday life and political activity. As Cornelius Castoriadis suggests, "What is involved here is the de-professionalization of politics — i.e., the abolition of politics as a special and separate sphere of activity — and, conversely, the universal politicization of society, which means just that: the business of society becomes, quite literally, everybody's business."[12]

The early prefigurative tradition, of course, rarely achieved this level of politicization. There is a striking contrast between the old European anarchist and anarcho-syndicalist movements and the postwar council insurgencies in Russia, Italy, Germany and elsewhere. The earlier variants scorned politics and celebrated spontaneity to such an extent that they could never transcend their own social immediacy or work out an effective strategy. They represented a flight from larger societal issues that often inspired contempt for "theory" and "organization" in any form (a style that was repeated in the early new left). Initially a response to organized Marxism, their fate was one of two extremes: either flailing away helplessly from the outside or assimilation into Marxism itself. The difficulty of extending local centers of revolutionary democracy within a repressive order only intensifies this problem.

Anarchism and syndicalism have responded to this problem by insisting that a lengthy period of ideological-cultural transformation could gradually erode the moral foundations of bureaucratic state power. But all such prefigurative movements were in fact destroyed because their hostility to coordination and leadership enabled the ruling forces to monopolize the political terrain. Moreover, to the extent that they arose out of a peasant or petty bourgeois world-view, they were basically romantic and Utopian, longing for a past uncorrupted by industrialization and urbanization.

From the Marx-Bakunin debates of the late 1860s until World War I, the relationship between Marxism and anarchism was one of polarised conflict: organization vs. spontaneity, leadership vs. self-activity, centralism vs. localism, etc. In some ways this polarisation was intensified by the Bolshevik Revolution, when the success of Leninism forced anarchists into retreat. At the same time, with the postwar crisis of European capitalism, prefigurative movements began to look to new models — the soviets in Russia, the factory-council struggles in Italy, Council Communism in Germany and Holland. While still suspicious of all "political" activity, the council tendency did attempt to integrate the best elements of both traditions. Council theorists such as Pannekoek and Goerter, for example, moved beyond a strict commitment to spontaneous and local movements; they sought, at least in theory, to incorporate the needs for structure, leadership, and coordination into a democratic and prefigurative revolutionary process.

Councillism marked a distinct advance beyond the earlier approaches on three levels. First, despite a general differentiation between party and council communism, the general direction was toward fusing popular organs of self-management with larger systems of coordination and planning — called in German a Raetesystem, or federated network of councils. Local assemblies

sion (New York: Basic Books, 1972). See also Daniel Kramer, Participatory Democracy (Cambridge, Mass.: Shenkman, 1972), ch. 7.

[12] Cornelius Castoriadis, "The Hungarian Source", Telos #30 (Winter 1976–77), p. 15.

were understood as part of a broad political strategy. Second, while contestation for state power was never defined as the overriding goal, nor viewed in vanguardist or electoral terms, neither was it contemptuously dismissed. The process would be different: established structures would have to be undermined from below and replaced by collective popular structures. Third, councillism did not look to an idyllic past rooted in a primitive collectivism but to a Marxian vision of the future — to the unfolding potential of the working class, and to economic-technological development as the basis of human liberation.

But even councillism failed to produce a mature revolutionary strategy that could be translated into a sustained movement. Born out of crisis, the councils rapidly disappeared once stability returned; explosive advances were crushed and neutralized. In Russia, they were destroyed by the Leninist party-state, in Italy by an isolation bred of localism and factory centeredness, and in Germany by a narrow interest-group politics that was the expression of a rising stratum of highly skilled, professionalized workers in crafts occupations. These failures, in one form or another, have been repeated elsewhere many times since the original postwar council upsurge. The prefigurative dimension of revolutionary politics has repeatedly clashed with the instrumentalism of bureaucratic power struggles.

3. Russia: The Triumph of Jacobinism

The Russian working-class movement, though small and lacking in political maturity by general European standards, first emerged as a radical force at the turn of the century. Politicized by the repressive apparatus of the authoritarian Tsarist state, it naturally sought autonomous forms of proletarian organization. Such forms initially appeared on a large scale during the 1905 Revolution, when factory committees and local Soviets (councils rooted in the factories and/or communities) organized strikes and mass demonstrations; but they quickly subsided after the insurgency was bloodily repulsed by Nicholas II, and they did not reappear until 1917. In 1905 they were limited to a few urban areas, and while some grew to enormous size (the Moscow soviet recruited more than 80,000 workers) they were generally short-lived. In the months immediately preceding and following the October Revolution, however, they were able to establish a powerful geographical and institutional presence as organs of "dual power."

By March of 1917, more than 140 Soviets were thriving in Russia and the Ukraine; only a few months later the number mushroomed to about 200, many of them in the countryside. Factory committees also appeared by the hundreds, in the industrial center of Petrograd and elsewhere. More closely tied to the daily lives of workers and peasants than was the feeble Provisional Government, the Soviets and factory committees became the legitimate decision-making bodies in many important communities and factories.

Radicalized by the wartime disintegration of economic and political life, they developed into vital agencies of revolutionary mobilization and potential centers of collective political power. They were the primary catalysts of the October Revolution.

The Soviets were defined as primarily political assemblies. Even in areas where they became the ideological battleground for the three main leftist parties — the Bolsheviks, the Mensheviks, and Social Revolutionaries — they nonetheless reflected a broad social base, with delegates elected from virtually all popular strata. The number of delegates varies greatly — from less than 100 in some villages and town councils to 3000 in the Petrograd Soviet. Meetings were held reg-

ularly, sometimes daily, and debate over local issues was usually open and heated. In the larger assemblies, of course, the executive committee assumed free rein over everyday matters and sometimes developed centralist tendencies, but the rapid turnover of delegates together with the quick pace of events imposed limits on bureaucratization. More than anything else, the Soviets helped to legitimate the left by virtue of their stable grassroots presence in the midst of crisis; they must have been indirectly responsible for recruiting hundreds of thousands into the leftist movements — a task that the parties themselves could probably not have achieved.

As the crisis of 1917 brought Russia closer towards revolution, councillism ran into three serious problems. The first involved a split between the soviets and factory committees, between politics and economics. For the most part, soviets assumed decision-making powers over the general affairs of the community, while the committees were more directly concerned with workplace issues at the point of production. Although both lacked ideological homogeneity and strategic direction, the factory committees were consistently to the left of the soviets. The factory organs were more militant — and pushed for workers' control and mass action — strikes, demonstrations, occupations. The soviets, on the other hand, exercised a moderating force; they generally pressed for legal tactics, partly owing to their more diverse social composition and partly because of their commitment to institutional politics. The Petrograd soviet, for example, was slow to take up the popular struggles that built toward the October Revolution.[13] At the same time, the committees were inhibited by a narrow emphasis on daily economic demands that tended to exclude political objectives. Acting through the committees, workers physically ousted the management of many factories and established their own system of control, but "politics" was left to the soviets and the council movement remained fragmented.[14]

The second problem was closely related to the first: how to build geographical and political coordination. Without political unity, prefigurative politics was bound to disintegrate on its own or succumb to the logic of Jacobinism. In fact, the events of 1917 moved so rapidly that there was little chance for such a dispersed and ideologically-diffuse mass movement to construct nationwide structures of popular self-management. The idea of a Central Soviet was entertained, and several regional meetings produced debates around the proposals for federative coordinating bodies, but no consensus emerged. Strategic paralysis was thus hardly avoidable, given the power of regionalism, the cultural gulf between cities and countryside, and the rivalry between Soviets and factory committees.

This brings us to the third problem — the conflict between prefigurative structures and leftist parties (notably the Bolsheviks), which ultimately led to the demise of the popular assemblies after the revolution. What was involved here was the capacity of the Bolsheviks to establish their political hegemony within the Soviets and committees and then transform these organs into instruments of its own consolidation of state power. The general pattern was for the Bolsheviks to build a majority base of support, form a revolutionary committee that would be subjected to party discipline, and then utilize the local organs as a legitimizing cover for establishing party

[13] On the moderate character of the Petrograd soviet, see Oskar Anweiler, "The Political Ideology of the Leaders of the Petrograd Soviet in the Spring of 1917", in Richard Pipes, ed., Revolutionary Russia (New York: Doublcday and Co.. 1969). p. 148.

[14] On the distinction between Soviets and factory committees, see Peter Rachleff, "Soviets and Factory Committees in the Russian Revolution", Radical America vol. 8, no. 6. Nov.-Dec., 1974, especially p. 94, 103.

domination.[15] These tactics worked admirably, given the tightly-knit, disciplined character of the party and the open, ill-defined nature of the Soviets and factory councils. By the time of the Revolution, the bolsheviks controlled about half of all Soviets and most of the large urban ones, including the crucial Petrograd soviet that played a major role in catapulting the party to power. And they were from the outside the most influential force in the factory committees.

The revolutionary conquest of power was actually taken in the name of the Soviets; the party was envisaged as the global "expression" of local structures, as only one of the mechanisms through which the revolutionary process would occur. In reality, however, the Bolsheviks were always suspicious of the Soviets — especially those which retained autonomy vis-a-vis the party — and began to wage an all-out assault on them in early 1918. Independent local organizations of all sorts were denounced as havens of "parochialism" and "anarchism" (not to mention Menshevism), and workers' control was dismissed as a "leftist illusion". The Bolsheviks were now in a position to subordinate the remaining Soviets, even where they lacked a clear majority, though not without stiff resistance. These councils, along with others that had come under Bolshevik hegemony in the pre-revolutionary period, were gradually emptied of collective-democratic content and transformed into "transmission belts" for implementing decisions made by the party leadership. The factory committees were dismantled by the trade union apparatus, which had already become an adjunct of the party. By mid-1918 the "leftists" of the Supreme Economic Council had been purged opening the way to decrees which terminated workers' control in certain key industrial sectors.[16]

This was perfectly consistent with general Bolshevik strategy. The rise of bureaucratic centralism and the suppression of prefigurative structures was accelerated by the civil war and the post-revolutionary crisis, but the dynamic had been set in motion much earlier, before the seizure of power. Lenin saw workers' control as a tactical objective to be exploited before the party took over state power — as a means of limiting capitalist hegemony in the factories, of spurring insurrection, and, ultimately, as a step toward nationalization and a top-down state-planned economy. Popular self-management, whether through the Soviets, factory committees, or some other form, was never viewed by the Bolsheviks as a principle of socialist state authority. Already in early 1918, Lenin argued that the survival of the Bolshevik government — not to mention the development of a productive economy — depended upon central planning and coordination, a rationalized administration "one-man management", labor discipline, and strict controls over local organizations.[17]

The bureaucratic centralism implicit in this strategy could only lead to what leftist critics of the regime were already calling "state capitalism". Many felt that bureaucracy itself was a crucial enemy of socialism and insisted that the revolutionary goals of the Bolsheviks had already been forgotten. They stressed workers' control, local autonomy, and open debate within the party. In response, the Bolsheviks dismissed these critiques as "utopian" and "syndicalist"; they looked upon the soviets, factory committees, and even trade unions as disruptive impediments to the

[15] See Dietrich Geyer, "The Bolshevik Insurrection in Petrograd", and John Keep, "October in the Provinces, in Pipes, op. cit., pp. 245–46.

[16] See Robert V. Daniels, The Conscience of the Revolution (New York; Simon and Schuster, 1969), p.84. Daniels sees this process as a crucial turning point in the evolution toward bureaucratic centralism.

[17] The economic strategy of this period was in fact a subordinate part of the general militancy strategy designed to maximize Bolshevik control. See Daniels, op. cit., pp. 121–25 and Maurice Brinton, The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control (London: Solidarity, 1970). p. 46.

main task of consolidating the party-state in the face of grave political threats. In the period 1918–1920, the regime moved to eliminate left opposition with the party (culminating in the ban on factions at the 10th party congress in March 1921) and subordinated the hundreds of mass organizations that were the backbone of revolutionary struggle. The soviets became structures of government power; the factory committees either disappeared or lost their management functions; the trade unions became auxiliaries of the party and the workers' opposition was defeated by 1921; and the left Communists were finally driven from the party or crushed by force (as at Kronstadt).[18]

In the battle between Leninist and prefigurative forces in Russia, the former rapidly gained the upper hand. The party was unified and disciplined while the popular organs were terribly fragmented. Moreover, a central premise of the prefigurative movement — that revolutionary initiative should be taken away from the party and "returned to the class" — was unrealistic given the smell and isolated proletariat in Russia and the historical pressures that favored centralism. Conflict and crisis strengthened the Jacobin tendency toward restoration of order, and the compelling demand for "unity" could only reinforce the vanguardist and statist strategy that Lenin had outlined as early as 1902.

4. Italy: The Limits of Spontaneism

The Italian council movement sprang up out of the Biennio Rosso (the "Red Two Years") that swept the northern part of the country during 1918–1920, ending with the collapse of the factory occupations in Turin. The crisis of the bourgeois order had actually begun in the prewar years, when the ideological consensus that Premier Giovanni Giolitti manipulated (through the political art called trasformismo — the molding of broad elite alliances which served to absorb leftist opposition) started to crumble. Rapid economic growth after 1900, with the development of the "industrial triangle" of Milan, Turin, and Genoa, established the basis for a highly class-conscious end militant proletariat.

Industrial workers joined the Socialist Party (PSI) and the trade unions in large numbers, though many were attracted to syndicalism and some even looked to anarchism. Like other parties of the Second International, the PSI proclaimed a revolutionary strategy that masked a reformist practice; it struggled for liberal reforms in the political sphere and social welfare measures in the economic sphere — an approach that produced large membership and electoral gains that by 1919 give the party 156 seats (roughly one-third) in the Chamber of Deputies. The PSI's trade union partner, the General Confederation of Labor, (CGL) functioned mainly as a bargaining instrument with capitalist management; it sought to strengthen working-class economic power with the idea of precipitating a general crisis that would hasten the "natural death" of capitalism.

Such a reformist scenario might have advanced the fortunes of the PSI had it not been for the outbreak of the war and the Russian Revolution. The military defeat left Italy in a state of paralysis. Defeat led to social disruption and severe economic decline, characterized by food shortages, unemployment, inflation, and a sharply falling lira. Popular militancy spread rapidly; by 1917–1918 a wave of strides, street demonstrations, and land occupations began to erode the PSI-CGL reformist domination and inspired an outpouring of syndicalism. (Working-class struggles confined to the point of production). Proletarian rebellion was centered in Piedmont,

[18] For a detailed account of this development, see: Brinton, op. cit., pp. 15–47.

notably Turin, where the rise of a skilled, concentrated, and relatively homogeneous proletarian culture prompted comparisons with Petrograd on the eve of the Bolshevik Revolution. News of the October upheaval fueled these struggles, which reached a peak that would irreversibly transfigure the old political terrain.

What evolved was a movement directed as much against the established Marxist organizations as against the capitalist order, and basing itself on a total, uncompromising break with all bourgeois institutions. It inspired three major tendencies — Leninist vanguardism, syndicalism, and, above all, a council communism born out of the Turin working-class movement. By mid-1919 tens of thousands of workers were recruited into the consigli di fabbricca or factory councils, that grew out of the trade union grievance committees at Fiat and other enterprises once proletarian demands could no longer be absorbed within the union framework. These council-based struggles inspired new modes of class warfare and ultimately pressed for a revolutionary strategy that challenged the PSI-CGL reformist model.

Though distinct from syndicalism, the council movement assimilated much that was positive in the syndicalist critique of hierarchical and vanguardist Marxism and emphasized many of the same goals: direct democracy at the point of production, working-class solidarity, and collective self-management of factories. In May 1919 Turinese council revolutionaries founded the journal L'Ordine Nuovo, which through the Efforts of Antonio Gramsci and others sought to establish a new theoretical grounding for what was an explosive but still amorphous popular insurgency. The journal set out to analyze and facilitate the conditions making possible the transition to socialism; the factory councils were seen as the first step toward more comprehensive forms of socialist democracy, as the "embryo" of a new proletarian state. In the period 1918 to 1920 Gramsci outlined an organic or "molecular" conception of revolutionary process distinct from both the Social Democratic and Leninist model.

One reason the factory councils became a vital force in postwar Italy, aside from their very dramatic expansion in the Pisdraont region, was the sense of impending upheaval that overtook the left. Gramsci especially sensed this, at times adopting an almost religious optimism towards the new opportunities created by the political chaos. The council movement based its hopes on a simplistic crisis theory: bourgeois society was crumbling everywhere, capitalism had lost the initiative, and oat of the catastrophe would come the seeds of a revolutionary order implanted in the councils and other popular assemblies.

Class strife in Italy exploded into the open in early 1920. The increased scope and militancy of the council movement set the stage for a powerful counter-offensive by industrialists in Piedmont and Liguria, which involved massive lockouts and troop occupations of many factories. What followed was a general strike in Piedmont, "defensive" in its origins, that mobilized more than 500,000 workers for the entire month of April. Strikes spread throughout Northern Italy, but went no farther. The appeal for an Italian general strike went unheeded. The hostility of the PSI and CGL leaderships was too much for this localist movement to overcome, and defeat was unavoidable. Isolated geographically and politically, exhausted, and with depleted financial resources, the workers returned to the factories.

The collapse of the Piedmont general strike, however, was followed five months later by a series of factory occupations that seemed to push Italy to the edge of revolution. An upsurge again engulfed most of Northern Italy: the occupation of more than 200 factories by 600,000 workers revitalized the sagging council movement. As in April, the upheavals began mostly as a defensive move to preempt a lockout by industrialists over a bargaining stalemate. But the struggles

that grew out of attempts to take over and manage the factories, under chaotic and burdensome conditions, quickly politicized the workers and broadened the agitation beyond its earlier limits. From Milan, Genoa, and Turin the occupations spread to other areas. While the council structures as such did not spread beyond their Piedmont origins, the occupations everywhere were infused with a sense of proletarian solidarity and a drive toward workers' control. The occupations proceeded in an orderly and peaceful fashion, and a revolutionary euphoria was in the air. The industrialists too thought revolution was imminent; Giovanni Agnelli, convinced that capitalism was too badly maimed to resurrect itself, was on the verge of surrendering Fiat-Centro to the occupying workers, asking, "How can you build anything with the help of 25,000 enemies?"[19]

The failure of the occupations resulted, not so much from their abandonment by the PSI hierarchy, and even less from actual or threatened state repression, but mainly from skillful cooptation carried out through collaboration between government, progressive industrialists, and trade unions. Historian Paolo Spriano called it "Giolitti's Masterpiece" — a final, gallant effort to save Italian capitalism through an elite-engineered "reformist solution". Out of the Biennio Rosso came the vague formula of "union control", which on paper meant equal trade union participation in enterprise management and state economic planning, but which in reality meant little since the fascist avalanche would soon make a mockery of such agreements.

The factory council movement won great victories in Turin, but lacked the strategic thrust and resources to sustain them. The organs of workers' control that galvanized the entire Piedmont proletariat one moment vanished the next. The masses that had so resolutely detached themselves from bourgeois institutions were just as completely reintegrated into them, and the initiative soon passed back into the hands of the bourgeoisie. This sequence of events seemed inevitable, owing to the ideological and political weaknesses of the factory councils themselves.

The weaknesses were many, the most fatal being a geographical isolation rooted in Piedmont (and even Turin) "exceptionalism." During this period the region was the base of Italian industrialism, typified by a system of factory production and an urban working class culture duplicated nowhere else on the peninsula. Predictably, the council movement produced by these conditions was itself unique; it nourished a regionalism and a certain arrogant provincialism that negated attempts to expand beyond its Piedmont origins. Within Turin itself, a phenomenon known as "factory egoism" appeared, thus destroying the possibility of unified organization even among the Turinese Workers. As Gwyn Williams has pointed out, "Every factory looked to its own defenses, like a militia. There was no coordination."[20] Cut off from the rest of Italy and politically alienated from, the PSI and CGL, the council movement was ultimately confined by its own narrowness as much as by the force and cunning of the bourgeoisie.

In the end, the failure of the Italian council communists to build a mature revolutionary movement was largely an internal one. The proletariat, though militant, could not transcend its own divisive parochialism; in the absence of any coordinating centers, without any real links of communication, the insurgency would up immobilized by its spontaneism. The fragmentation of social forces from factory to factory, city to city, and region to region arrested the movement short of the political-institutional sphere. In contrast with Russia, where local movements were rapidly subordinated to the vanguard party, in Italy they withered away in the absence of integrated leadership and strategic direction — the same dilemma seen from a different side.

[19] Quoted in Paolo Spriano, The Occupation of the Factories: Italy 1920 (London: Pluto Press, 1975), p. 123.
[20] Gwyn Williams, Proletarian Order (London; Pluto Press, 1975). p. 253.

The Italian case thus dramatically reveals the limitations of a narrowly prefigurative strategy. Gramsci himself soon realized that the factory councils alone were not enough; after the defeat of the Biennio Rosso, he paid more and more attention to the role of the party, seeing it as a counter to the spontaneism of the councils. Yet Leninism was clearly no solution to the failures of 1918–1920. To whatever extent the crisis might have permitted a seizure of central state power, in retrospect it is clear that there was no cohesive popular force to carry out the process of general socialist transformation. The very amorphousness and localism of even the most advanced Piedmont struggles was itself a sign that ideological preparation among the masses was lacking — or had only just begun — suggesting that a vanguardist seizure of power would probably have reproduced the old divisions and resulted in the same kind of centralized power that occurred in Russia.

5. Germany: The Corporativist Impasse

The German factory councils, or Arbeiterraete, also had their origins in the postwar crisis and played a vital role in the strike wave that swept the country in 1917–19. Hundreds of councils appeared in the most important industrial centers (for example, in Hamburg, Berlin, Frankfurt, and the Ruhr area) during this period, and many subsequently spread into the small towns and countryside in regions such as Saxony and Thuringa. The movement for popular self-management, which grew out of years of proletarian struggles at the point of production, also mobilized large sectors of the military and the peasantry. As in Italy, the councils were the radicalized expression of more traditional structures: shop committees, cooperatives, neighborhood associations, and strike committees. They were associated with the left wing of the German Communist Party (KPD) and with the independent Social Democratic Party (USPD) and the "ultra-leftism" of Ernest Dauemig. The powerful Social Democrats, on the other hand, dismissed workers' control as "council anarchy" and attempted to neutralize and assimilate it through the strength of its party and trade union organizations.

In theory, the main political tendency of German councillism differed little from its Russian and Italian counterparts; the strategy was essentially prefigurative. The councils championed "proletarian autonomy" and "industrial democracy" as the basis of revolutionary transformation, which naturally placed them in an adversary position vis-a-vis the state, the parties, and the unions. Some theorists envisaged workers' councils as the first step toward a future socialist state; others saw them as limited to managerial functions within particular enterprises; but most viewed them as agencies of democratic counter-power in a rigidly authoritarian society, as the dialectic between class consciousness and proletarian institutions that would directly confront capitalist domination in Germany.

This last point brings us to the key assumption of the German movement. By establishing themselves as a strong counter-force to bourgeois hierarchy in the factory and by undermining the collaborative role of the unions- that is, by subverting the ideological legitimacy and narrowing the economic options of a fragile capitalist system — it was assumed that the councils could push the society toward fatal crisis. To the extent that the proletariat was able to overcome a traditional submissiveness to authority through the democratizing impact of the councils, it would prepare to take control of the economy and establish its own hegemony once the crisis

destroyed the capacity of the bourgeoisie to rule.[21] This schema held sway until 1923, when it became evident (even to the "ultra left") that European capitalism had recovered from its postwar breakdown.

The political scenario constructed by the German revolutionary left was never a serious historical possibility, even with the crisis; the prefigurative dimension was feeble from the outset There were in fact two types of factory councils in Germany already in 1917–18: one that stressed the expansion of direct proletarian democracy and a commitment to mass insurrection (in the tradition of Luxemburg), another that held out the possibility of advancing workers' interest (and even "workers' control") within the existing managerial structure. It was this latter — the interest-group or corporativist approach — rather than the autonomous model that increasingly prevailed after 1919.

As Sergio Bologna has shown, the largest and most significant elements of the Germany council movement were composed of highly-specialised machine workers who were concentrated in medium-sized enterprises (e.g., chemicals and tool-making) that had not yet experienced high levels of rationalisation. These were not the assembly-line workers of mass production but the skilled craftsworkers who had been since the turn of the century a predominant force in German industry. As a skilled and professional stratum, they took on the narrow, self-interested outlook of a privileged "aristocracy of labor" and tended to set themselves apart from the unskilled "mass" workers of the large factories.[22]

In those regions and enterprises where technicians, engineers, and machine-workers became a leading force in the factory councils, the movement rapidly assumed a "managerial" character; the goal of workers' control, which emphasized job freedom and creativity, was closely associated with the struggle to attain or retain professional status. These workers understood their councils to represent the specific interests and aims of one sector of the proletariat against the whole. (In contrast, the Russians and Italian councils — despite strategic problems stemming from localism and spontaneism — viewed workers' control as a process of socialist transformation that would unite the struggles of all workers.) Many German councils were shaped by a provincialism that looked to proletarian control over single factories; others wanted to convert the trade unions into structures that could take over factory production.

This was the essence of corporativism. It left intact the social division of labor within the factory, even intensifying it by broadening and institutionalizing the separation between mental and physical labor, "experts" and mass workers. In replacing the old managerial structure with a new one based upon expertise and job "autonomy" — that is, by implementing a system of co-management — these councils merely reconstituted hierarchy. Moreover, the corporativist model accepted the basic capitalist practice of contractual bargaining; as long as the wage contracts existed, "workers' control" actually reinforced managerial exploitation and commodity production in the total economy.[23] It is hardly surprising that the leading sectors of the German workers-councils movement, lacking a general class perspective, could never generate broad struggles directed against capitalist domination in either specific industrial enterprises or in German soci-

[21] On the relationship between the German council movement and the theory of the crisis, see Sergio Bologna, "Class Composition and the Theory of the Party at the Origin of the Workers-Council Movement", Telos #13 (Fall, 1972), p. 26

[22] Bologna, op. cit., p. 6

[23] Guido De Masi and Giacomo Marramao, "Councils and State in Weimar Germany", Telos #28 (Summer 1976), p. 27

ety as a whole. The failure to raise proletarian struggles to the political sphere was merely one aspect of this problem.[24]

Corporativism, even had it led to the overthrow of the propertied class within individual factories, would not have mobilized the German proletariat toward socialist goals; and even had the skilled technicians been able to achieve some "autonomy", they would not have achieved structural leverage over the entire economy. Indeed, Gorz has argued that this limited defense of technical and professional interests — however cloaked in the rationale of proletarian self-management — necessarily inhibits politicization of the skilled stratum itself. Instead of socializing or collectivizing technical expertise, the corporativist tendency reifies bourgeois divisions. In Gorz's words: "The capitalist division of labor, with its separation of manual and intellectual work, of execution and decision, of production and management, is a technique of domination as much as technique of production."[25]

The postwar development of the German Raete bore little resemblance to the council theory developed by Daeumig, Pannekoek and Gorter in the 1920s. Their theoretical approach, which transcended the factory-centered ideology of syndicalism, moved toward an organic merger of politics and economics; the councils would perform both economic and political functions, they would ideally represent the movement of the entire working class, and they would be integrated Into regional and nationwide federative networks of assemblies that would supply the necessary element of strategic planning and coordination.[26] By 1921, however, this theory had become detached from the actual politics of the working-class movement, and the gap between the vision of council communism and the corporativist degeneration of the real living councils widened irretrievably.

According to Bologna's analysis, the growing rationalization of German industry after the postwar crisis undercut the prospects of council communism from the beginning; the skilled technicians, bent on preserving their creativity against encroaching bureaucratization, constituted a phenomenon of the early stages of capitalist development. From the viewpoint of prefigurative revolution, this is true enough. Yet the German councils, far from disappearing, in reality adapted smoothly to the capitalist schemes of rationalization, proliferated as they became absorbed into the reformist Social Democrat apparatus, and eventually would up as a (corporativist) model for the future. Where the Raete survived, they lost all independence and increasingly assumed narrow, economistic functions.

Recent attempts to institutionalize "workers' participation" in West Germany, Scandinavia, and Czechoslovakia all bear the mark of the original council experiments in Germany. These modern versions of corporativism all have in common a managerial concept of workers' control. It entails an input into enterprise decision-making by the most skilled and "responsible" employees according to the principle of comanagement; worker involvement is limited to the enterprise itself and does not extend to the overall shaping of public policy. The councils assist in management, but they are in no sense autonomous organs, having become fully absorbed into the

[24] See Brian Peterson, "Workers Councils in Germany, 1918–1919", New German Critique No. 4 (Winter 1975), pp. 122–23.

[25] Gorz, "Technology, Technicians, and the Class Struggle", in The Division of Labor, p. 174.

[26] On the theories of Pannekoek, see Richard Gombin, The Origins of Modern Leftism (London: Penguin Books, 1975), pp. 88–97, and Aronowitz, op. cit.

party-union-state directorate.[27] Such reforms have historically functioned to integrate workers into a more streamlined and "democratized" capitalist production apparatus — a fate that the early Russian and Italian council movements, whatever their strategic weaknesses, resisted until they were either destroyed from above or disappeared.

6. Conclusions

Though the council movements were crushed, died out, or were absorbed into capitalist structures in Russia, Italy and Germany after World War I, their tradition lived on, to reappear in new contexts: in Spain during the Civil War; in Italy again during the Resistance; in Hungary in 1956; and in many advanced capitalist societies during the 1960's. These more recent versions of prefigurative politics encountered the same obstacles and dilemmas and experienced similar patterns of decline: Jacobinism, spontaneism, and corporativism.

The Spanish and Hungarian councils, like the Russian, fell victim to bureaucratic centralism. In Spain during the Civil War, the rapid expansion of syndicalist and anarchist collectives — inspired by a long prefigurative tradition in the countryside — helped to define the strongest left-wing insurgency in Europe between the wars. But the drive toward popular control was cut short by political forces (including the Communist Party) within the Popular Front coalition that sought to establish bureaucratic control over the movement in order to mobilize the masses against fascism. The military crisis spurred the development of bureaucratic management, leading to a dismantling of local democratic structures even in the liberated areas.[28] In Hungary before the Soviet intervention, hundreds of factory committees appeared in the few months preceding the October upheaval. It has been suggested that this was the first total revolution against bureaucratic capitalism in any country.[29] But the councils never became institutionalized; they lasted no longer than it took the Soviet occupation authorities (with the assistance of Hungarian party leaders) to destroy them.

The French upheaval of May 1968 gave birth to an unprecedented number and variety of local groups — action committees, factory councils, student communes, neighborhood groups — most of which collapsed from their own spontaneism. In Italy the revolt was not so spectacular, but the forms that grew out of it, such as the comitati di base, survived longer. This new period of popular insurgency helped to rejuvenate a European left that had long been suffocated by the Soviet model; it kept alive the prefigurative ideal and illuminated the bankruptcy of the established Marxist parties.

Most significantly, the radicalism of the sixties brought a new political content to the prefigurative tradition. It affirmed the importance of generalizing the struggles for self-management beyond the point of production, to include all spheres of social life and all structures of domination. It sought to integrate personal and "lifestyle" issues into politics — especially in the area of feminism — more extensively and more immediately than was true of past movements. (Since

[27] For an analysis of factory councils in the advanced industrial societies, see Adolf Sturmthal, Workers' Councils (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1964), chs. 4–6.

[28] These developments are examined by Murray Bookchin, 'Reflections on Spanish Anarchism', Our Generation vol. 10. no. 1, Fall, 1975. pp. 24–35, and Daniel Guerin, Anarchism (New York; Monthly Review Press), pp. 139–143.

[29] Castoriadis, op. cit., pp. 7–14. He argues: "Thus, like the few weeks of the Paris Commune, for us the Hungarian events are more important than three thousand years of Egyptian history because they constituted a radical break with the inherited philosophies of politics and work, while prefiguring a new society." Ibid., p. 14.

very few women participated in previous movements — the workforce and therefore the various proletarian organizations being overwhelmingly male — the issue of patriarchy was scarcely raised.) And it focused on a wider range of issues that confronted the social system as a whole: health care, culture, ecology, etc.

At the same time. the new left was close to traditional anarchism in its glorification of spontaneity and subjectivity, in its celebration of everyday life, and in its hostility to "politics" and all forms of organization. It brought out the limitations of spontaneism in even more exaggerated form. The French May provides a good example: mobilized by the millions, students and workers were unable to translate their uprising into a force possessing leadership, structure, and direction, and popular energy dissipated quickly. The French Communist Party played an important role, but the new left nonetheless had its own logic, this wax the fate of the new left everywhere: in its fear of centralism, in its retreat into extreme subjectivism, and in its uncompromising abstentionism, it gave little strategic expression to its vision of liberation. It effectively attacked the ideological underpinnings of bourgeois society, but the means it employed — mass direct action politics on the one hand, small isolated groups on the other — were politically primitive.[30]

The corporativist development of modern councillism has followed three distinct paths. In certain Western European societies — West Germany and Sweden, for example — workers have been integrated into bourgeois managerial structures through elaborate schemes of co-participation that leave intact the features of capitalism as a whole. In other countries, such as Italy and France, workers' councils that emerged as autonomous centers of struggle in the late 1960's and early 1970's underwent bureaucratization and were absorbed by trade union and administrative structures. Finally, in Communist systems such as Yugoslavia, Poland, and Czechoslovakia, where proletarian self-management is an accepted objective end where councils have become institutionalised fixtures, the party-state has curtailed the autonomy of popular institutions, limiting them to narrow "co-management" functions within a broad economic plan imposed from above. The separation between economics and politics is estab1ished in each case: the corparativist councils have restricted decision-making within Specific enterprises but have little or no impact on societal-wide public policy.

The dilemmas of modern prefigurative movements came from the legacy of the entire prefigurative tradition, which in contrast to Leninism and structural reformism sought to affirm the actuality of revolutionary goals. In rejecting a vanguardism, they often ignored the state and the problem of power; in stressing the prefigurative side, they downplayed the task of organization. And like the organized Marxist movements, they ultimately failed to articulate a democratic socialist theory of transition. The instability and vulnerability of dual power necessitates rapid movement toward a broad system of nationwide revolutionary authority; without this, as history shows, local structures are unable to translate popular energies into a sustained movement that is both prefigurative and politically effective. What is required, and what the entire prefigurative strategy lacks, is a merging of spontaneism and the "external element", economics and politics, local democratic and state power struggles. But the recent experiences of radical movements in capitalist countries reflect a continued polarization between prefigurative and statist strategies that is harmful to such a possibility.

[30] This tendency was more pronounced in the U.S. than in Europe, where the strong presence of Marxism tempered the extremes of new left spontaneism. For example, commitment to the goals of workers' control and self-management — more or less taken for granted by the European extraparliamentary movements — received little attention in the U.S. See James Weinstein, The Ambiguous Legacy (New York: New Viewpoints, 1975). ch. 7.

There have been attempts — for example, in the Chinese Revolution — to democratize Leninist vanguard strategy by combining the centralizing features of this revolutionary party with the localist elements of the prefigurative approach. Mao stressed the "national-popular" character of the party and the role of ideological struggle to counter-balance the primacy of the party-state. He envisaged a process rooted in grassroots structures of authority (e.g., revolutionary committees, communes) as well as the party itself. But the Maoist alternative really constitutes a modification of classical Leninism rather than a new synthesis. Insofar as a fusion between Jacobin and prefigurative elements exists, the Jacobin side is clearly hegemonic, with the party-state directing the process of revolutionary transformation from above.

An alternative schema would reverse this relationship by asserting the prefigurative over the Jacobin. For the party is essentially an instrumental agency preoccupied with concrete political tasks rather than the cultural objectives of changing everyday life and abolishing the capitalist division of labor; it tends naturally to be an agency of domination rather than of prefiguration. Since emancipatory goals can be fully carried out only through locs1 structures, it is these organs — rather than the party-state — that must shape the revolutionary process. Centralised structures would not be super-imposed upon mass struggles, but would emerge out of these struggles as coordinating mechanisms. Only popular institutions in every sphere of daily existence, where democratic impulses can be most completely realized, can fight off the repressive incursions of bureaucratic centralism and activate collective involvement that is the life-force of revolutionary practice.

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