Friends of the Classless Society
28 Theses on Class Society
2007

Retrieved on 2021-04-07 from
https://www.kosmoprolet.org/en/28-theses-class-society
The following theses, written by a circle in Berlin, *Friends of the Classless Society*, were originally published in German in the journal Kosmoprolet (No. 1, 2007).

theanarchistlibrary.org

28 Theses on Class Society

Friends of the Classless Society

2007

ary headquarters, but from awareness. This free association is first made possible by the compulsory organization of capitalism, but its existence is already an anticipation of free humanity. This historical party, however, dissolves itself into the class-conscious proletariat; a proletariat which is already fighting worldwide for its self-abolition.

For the dispersed malcontents who come together at dismal times in communist circles and occasionally compose long theses, this means firstly, that they must refuse to proceed tactically, vie for "credibility" and chum up to others by means of "realistic" programs in order to transcend their separation from the mass of wage laborers. "Adaptation to false consciousness has never changed it" (Hans-Jürgen Krahl). They are able to distinguish between mere swearing at "fat cats" and the critique of the wage system, and do not regard this difference as negligible. They agree with Rosa Luxemburg's understanding that nothing is more revolutionary than recognizing and stating what is. But, secondly, they know that this is not a monologue of organizations that stylize themselves as preserve jars of revolutionary class consciousness; critical materialism knows no fixed and complete truths that must simply be spread among the people.

As much as there exists a diversity of proletarian ways of life and strategies of survival on a world scale, these differences exist within the world proletariat. Communist critique makes allowances for them. However, critique would remain a chimera, merely abstract, rudimentary and incomplete, without the knowledge and experience of proletarians in production, without their knowledge of production. The global appropriation and revolutionizing of the production of material life ultimately depends upon this knowledge.

What unites the communists scattered across the globe is not membership in a formal organization, not to speak of a world party. And the self-application of the label communist is also inessential. What is decisive is the ability to relate the separate struggles worldwide to one another, communicating the experiences made, and separating the debilitating from the foreward- looking aspects, the egoist-localist and corporatist aspects from those that aim at extension and communization. This makes necessary the association of communists that allows them to do locally what is right for the whole, not on the basis of orders from an all-knowing revolution-

Contents

the work of humans, determinate forms of social practice that can be transcended.

Communist critics of the existing conditions perceive themselves as separate from the overwhelming majority of proletarians, and initially they are. But to exaggerate this separation by declaring the critique of society to be an enormously difficult affair means denying the basic experience shared by all from which communist critique emerges; and above all it means denying that today, justifying the existing conditions requires far more effort than refusing them: the contradictions of society that critical theory attempts to conceptualize are experienced by all, and secretly recognized by many.

The power of ideology is rooted neither in the supposed impenetrability of social relations, nor in the ignorance of individuals, but rather in the fact that it rationalizes the domination of capital, individuals' repression of their own needs, as inevitable destiny, therefore making it more bearable. Since other social relations are blocked, everyday consciousness acquiesces to the existing conditions.

Attempts at enlightenment, that attempt to help people along with good arguments, remain therefore powerless. It is an old misunderstanding that Marx initiated class struggle, even "invented" communism. Class struggles preceded their own theorization and expressed the possibility of communism which was reflected by theory and carried back into the struggles as a sharpened position. Even today, proletarians must make the first step in order to develop a desire to understand and ultimately transcend the existing relations. That which appears absurd to powerless, atomized individuals becomes conceivable as soon as collective action destroys the illusion that relations are immovable; sometimes, cowards become rebels and people who have never read a single line of Marx become the best communists. The avant-garde is comprised simply by those who do the right thing at the right moment and therefore shine a light upon the possibilities that lie in the petrified relations.

oretical consecration through the ideology of the "multitude." The correct recognition of the absence of a central segment of the working class, and correct refusal to subsume individuals to a unity leads only to a new conservatism of identity politics. The overthrow of existing relations is no longer strived for, but rather merely a "world in which many worlds have their place." A world in which all continue to be what they already are: workers, peasants, artists, computer scientists, indigenas, and so on. Identities have multiplied, but an iron grip is kept on them, just as the stone-age Marxists clung to proletarian identity. The socialist affirmation of the working class has become the reformism of the "multitude," the "fair day's wage" has become the guaranteed income for all, the fatherland of all working people has become the right to universal citizenship — the postmodern return of every- thing that was rotten in the labor movement of the 19th and 20th centuries.

28.

The modern communist perspective — which does not wish to maintain the proletariat for eternity, but rather to sublate it; that does not want to distribute money more justly, but rather to transcend it; that does not wish to democratize the state, but rather to abolish it — appears lu- dicrous alongside the countless leftist attempts to re-functionalize these social forms in a more humane manner. But it is in no way utopian, since it merely carries out the objective con- tradictions of society: a society characterized simultaneously by the total socialization as well as the complete atomization of people; that engenders unprecedented wealth alongside indescribable misery; a society which is the product of all, yet which follows its own laws and eludes all control. In contrast to the academic left, the communist perspective refuses to repeat really existing reification in the realm of theory; whereas confused professors mystify society with terms like "power," "structure," and "discourse," the communist perspective sees only

In the '28 Theses on Class Society,' we outline the historical changes that the concepts of proletariat, class struggle, and revolution have undergone, while still retaining their validity. Just as we borrow the notion of the "classless class society" from Adorno, one finds in the theses a few things that, without attribution in every single case, have been plundered without fanfare from the texts of the critical communist tradition. One serious deficiency surely consists in the fact that we tiptoe around the concept of crisis, a problem particularly noticeable in our attempt to summarize the contemporary changes in class relations. The theses merely constitute the provisional state of our discussion process. We publish them in the hope of entering into debate with others who are struggling with similar problems.

I. The Triumphal Procession of the Classless Class Society

1.

The provisional result of the history of capital in its advanced zones presents itself as a classless class society, in which the old workers' milieu has been dissolved into a generalized wage- dependency: everywhere proletarianized individuals, nowhere the proletariat, not as a recognizable group of people and certainly not as a collective actor, as the negative, disruptive side of society. Sporadic labor conflicts do not turn into class struggles in which the future of society is at stake, since the old proletarian movement has been absorbed without a trace into the dominant order, and a new movement is not in sight.

2.

The classless class society is the child of the old workers' movement and the modern state. Time and again there were flashes

of further-reaching moments within the class struggles of the 19th and 20th centuries, but the overwhelming majority of the workers were well-served by organizations whose politics, regardless of all revolutionary rhetoric, amounted to achieving the emancipation of the workers upon the foundation and with the means of bourgeois society — in the trade unions as well as the socialist and communist parties of the Second and Third Internationals, who soon discarded revolutionary principles such as anti-parliamentarism and were ultimately thoroughly Stalinized. Only small radical minorities constituted an exception, such as the IWW in the USA, the anarcho-syndicalists, and the radical left in or outside of the socialist parties. Thus, the successes of the old workers movement ultimately dissolved the old proletarian milieu to which it was anchored; a milieu whose indisputable heart was the factory, but which through workers' sports clubs, a workers' press, working-class neighborhoods etc. constituted nothing less than an independent society within bourgeois society. State social policies, from social insurance to urban planning, aimed at grinding down this milieu — in the case of Germany the importance of National Socialism can hardly be overestimated — but its decline in all advanced countries is ultimately due to the capitalization of society, which allowed the emancipation of the working-class from political disenfranchisement and material poverty. This historical development only followed the "logic of capital" insofar as this logic is understood to include class struggle.

3.

Central to this confrontation is the conflict concerning wages and the length of the working-day. Only the resistance of the workers forces a gradual decrease in the length of the working-day and erodes the formerly overwhelming centrality of work to their lives, without ever really being able to transcend it. The capitalists can no longer increase exploitation, the extraction of surplus-labor, by in-

But activism, which considers itself above academicism because it ultimately does something, is just the flipside of this doctorate-clad failure. As much as the occasions that elicit its mobilization might be worthy of critique, so little is activism able to fundamentally change the social relations that give rise to such grievances. With a great uproar, campaigns are launched against summit meetings, for the EuroMayDay, for a guaranteed income and the like.

This social engagement is not fundamentally distinct from any other political activity, and politics is social activity that is separate from society. It takes place in that higher sphere in which everyone is, abstractly, already a social individual, without having to account for the respective concrete interests of the lower depths. A position is not developed from social praxis, butrather imposed upon it. The point is then to win adherents, which sometimes seems to be the sole aim of such cam- paigns, however often the content changes. Similar to the sale of commodities, marketing tricks are applied in order to bring one's newest product to the masses. The latter are expected to gather behind symbolic actions. Even where people are supposed to be stimulated to action, they are only objects, material to be pedagogically manipulated. Politics is only the external unification of separate individuals to achieve alien goals.

27.

In the classless class society, the search for a central segment of the proletariat has become obsolete. The considerable productive power at the disposal of the industrial working class is no guarantee that its struggles are transmitted to and extended by the countless other wage-laborers. Less than ever can the point be to find a supposedly key sector of the proletariat.

Consequentially, the contemporary social movements against so-called neo-liberalism have in mind the multiplicity of places of proletarian reality, without however thinking of them as moments of a single class; they are kitschified into diversity and obtain the-

point does not approach the class from outside, it does not wish to paternalistically grant it salvation, nor does it devotedly expect salvation from it. It knows rather to objectively interpret its subjective motivation towards communism, understanding rationally and systematically its sociality, a sociality however that it shares for the moment only in abstracto with all other proletarians, and whose knowledge therefore remains unreal. It must prove its reality and power, the worldliness of its critique, in praxis. Without the collective praxis of class struggle, in which proletarians and communists can enter into communication and interaction among one another and with one another, communist critique remains thrown back upon itself, upon the ulteriority of an abstract citoyen-standpoint which is not practically capable of taking a stand within the class.

26.

Theory and praxis, whose mutual embrace is foreshadows in revolutionary moments of history, today mutually exclude one another in petrified opposition. This finds an expression in that which one could call the critical or radical public sphere. On the one hand in an academicism which despite all of its correct partial insights is never able to penetrate the totality of relations, since it does not grasp the importance of praxis as a means of acquiring knowledge, and on the other hand in a short-winded activism which is only able to mobilize itself and not society.

Whoever does not understand cannot really act, and whoever does not wish to act will also not understand. One only has to read the printed matter of the student left, attend their ghastly lecture meetings, in order to immediately understand where the hostility to theory draws its nourishment from, as well as how the resentment prevails among more than a few self-styled radical academics that the decisive insights concerning social relations cannot be obtained below a university diploma.

creasing the length of the working-day; the resistance of the workers also prevents a decrease in wages. The value of the commodity labor-power is rather decreased by reducing the value of the means of subsistence of the workers. This increase of relative surplus-value means that the rate of exploitation, the ratio of unpaid to paid labor, can be increased even though the workers work shorter hours and can buy more with their wages. The triumphal march of reformism is based upon the possibility thus created of a partial reconciliation between capitalists and workers, since the former can continue to accumulate without the latter necessarily losing more, the latter in fact no longer being mere have-nots. As important as the history of colonial violence might have been for the emergence of capitalism: the wealth of the developed capitalist societies is not based upon super-profits extracted from the colonies, the super-exploitation of the workers and peasants in the so-called Third World, but rather in the enormous increase in the productivity of labor. Wages and profits are not a zero-sum game. Just as illusory is the contrary notion that this state of affairs is stable and free of crisis, generalizable and on top of that permanently expandable, until the society of capital is transformed into a workers paradise. We are contemporary witnesses to the decline of this constellation to which this reformist illusion owed its power.

4.

The same process expressed economically as the implementation of the production of relative surplus-value and the resulting improvement of the material situation of the working class is consummated politically as the recognition of proletarians as citizens. The class-state of the bourgeoisie mutates into a cross-class planner of society whose policies all members of society may — formally speaking — equally determine, initially through class political parties that gradually become peoples‘ parties. Just as the supermarket does not distinguish between bourgeois and proletarian customers, but

rather only recognizes the buying power of consumers, so does the ballot box only recognize citizens. The life of the proletariat is increasingly mediated by the state — through its labor protection laws and welfare services (which are taken from a portion of wages and surplus-value, thus resting ultimately upon the labor of the proletarians), its housing construction and its schools, and not to be overlooked, its investment and employment programs. Against anarchism — to which the state only appears as an external opponent, as secret police, as prison, in short: as force — the statist currents within the workers movement assert themselves, correctly learning to understand and love this state with a proletarian face as also being their own creation. Whereas Italian fascism imagines itself as the proletarian nation, the German National Socialists declare the First of May a national holiday, and the new American industrial unions achieve their greatest success under Roosevelt's New Deal, Stalin constructs the fatherland of all workers, who once had no country. It is more than a mere side-effect that with that the bureaucratic control of society is developed to perfection. Proletarian internationalism and the self-organization of the workers milieu die out to the rhythm of the statification of society that culminates with the nationalization of the masses and two world wars.

5.

As the economic crisis of 1929 left bourgeois reason exposed and brought the Golden Twenties of Social Democratic reformism to an abrupt end, the ruling order in Germany rescued itself in the blatant insanity of race and the violence of the authoritarian state. Nowhere else was the classless class society more grotesquely and barbarously realized than in National Socialism, whose mission, in Hitler's words, was to finally transcend "the class division for which the bourgeoisie and Marxism are equally guilty." Precisely because the antagonism between social classes remained untouched, it was displaced onto the Jews, who were perceived

But the social revolution cannot be a matter of leadership or central direction. It has no management. Otherwise, it would be no different than the usual coup d'états or controlled revolutions that end in renewed oppression. The genius of subversion must be present among the great mass of those who execute it; otherwise it is not worth a toss. How should a revolution with the goal of abolishing the domination of humans over other humans and with taking life into one's own hands succeed, if at the first step it requires leadership, direction, and management? It would simply once again tread the path of passivity and repeat all the old shit.

In the history of the Marxist-Leninist sects since the end of the 1960s, it was often enough vanity, if not excessive self-estimation, that brought ambitious people to the idea that one only needs a disciplined organization in order to give the signal for revolt and then direct it. A thousand times, the party was founded, likewise by thousands who wanted to be the new Trotsky or Lenin, by people whose historical greatness contended with the diminutiveness of their little groups. Immune to historical experience, they attempted to apply to the present a concept that had already been condemned by history. The emancipation of the proletariat can only be the task of the proletariat itself.

But there is a critique of Leninism which in a workerist manner discards altogether the problem of class consciousness. Consciousness is insignificant, since according to a favorite quotation from Marx, it is not a question of what this or that proletarian regards as its aim, but rather of what the proletariat will be compelled to do historically. This optimistic historical determinism skirts the fact that the proletariat will never be compelled to make a revolution, since in the act of revolu- tion, people begin to make their own history consciously. It is precisely this "voluntarism" which is the correct moment of Leninism, a truth which is snuffed out by the elitist conception of the party.

The false alternative of Leninist self-arrogation and workerist self-denial must be transcended. The modern communist stand-

power of the trade unions is based upon the absence and limits of struggles.

This in turn calls forth a maximalist critique that defames as reformism everything that does not immediately aim for revolution. But there is a massive difference between limited struggles for this or that reform to improve one's own life, and even struggles to avert its deterioration, and reformism as such. Reformism is a political tendency that either has the direct intention of maintaining capitalism, by ameliorating its worst excesses or by steering inevitable demands into institutional channels, or it actually adheres to the illusion that one can transform this society into socialism by means of a long chain of gradual improvements. But in both cases, the state is charged with the task. Reformism is representation; it must keep all activity of the ranks within the prescribed channels. Against this, it is precisely in those struggles that the class's own interests are championed in the first place. Only within those struggles does the possibility emerge of stepping out of existence as a bourgeois legal subject, as a seller of labor-power; in these struggles, those fighting must discuss their common aims and transcend their otherwise necessary egoism. Solidarity ceases to be a social democratic Sunday school sermon. Every struggle in the here and now for the improvement of one's own life that resists representation, and in which self-activity occurs, is the experimental ground for the future society, whose forms of interaction do not suddenly emerge with the revolution.

25.

For Leninism, the limits of everyday struggle serve as a legitimization of the vanguard party. As a revolutionary theory, it is essentially a theory of the coup d'état, the assumption of leadership over the unconscious masses. If consciousness has dawned upon the masses at all, then it is according to Lenin at most a mere trade-unionist consciousness, and not the sparkling revolutionary kind.

simultaneously as being proletarian-internationalist as well as plutocratic-finance capitalist saboteurs of the national community. The attempt was made to exorcise this displaced class antagonism by means of mass murder.

Behind the mad ideological construction — that of "the Jew" agitating the German workers as a Bolshevik in order to triumph over the national economy as a stock exchange speculator — lurked not so much the naked dictatorship of capital over the German working-class as rather the intent of integrating the German working class into the racial welfare state. As indisputable as it may be that the fascist state initially took aim at the workers movement, it is undoubtedly so that it was able to extend its mass base to the working class. As racially privileged supervisors of millions of slave laborers, as the foot soldiers of the German war of annihilation, as the beneficiaries of "Aryanization," a considerable portion of the German proletariat was absorbed into the national community, which was consequently perceived by its victims not as a propagandistic lie, but as a veritable hell on earth.

If Hitler was not a mere accident, and the racial-imperialist war of conquest the last salvation of German capitalism, then the failure of the German working class does not lie in its insufficient defense of legality against the dictatorship so much as its inability to break out of precisely the very same democratic order that was racing full-speed towards the fascist abyss. The historical tragedy consisted in the fact that Social Democrats and trade unions, after blowing the horn of social chauvinism in 1914 and beating the revolutionary minorities in 1918/1919, now had to yield to the national community to which they often themselves fell victim, and which resembled their own conception of a people's state in more than one respect — which was why the attempt by the trade unions to curry favor with the new rulers was not a mere gaffe by corrupt leaders. It was their own enthusiasm for the "war socialism" of 1914 — for state direction of the economy, fatigue duty and national unity — that now turned against them, since they were, how-

ever atrophied, organizations of the working class which were now to be directly incorporated into the state; the time of balancing out antagonistic interests had expired in the great economic crisis. The Communist wing of the workers movement on the other hand had not only become an organization of the unemployed and therefore correspondingly powerless; not only did it lull itself, leaning upon the insipid metaphysics of historical laws, into a false sense of certain victory and underestimate the impending barbarism of Nazism; rather, it — with its authoritarian structures and with political stupidities such as the "Program for the National and Social Liberation of the German People" (1930) — was itself unwillingly accommodating barbarism, so that "the nationalist adventure of the Third International in Germany … is one of the preconditions for the fascist victory. The workers had been educated to be fascists, since the KPD competed over a period of ten years with Hitler for the mantle of "true nationalism."" (Group of International Communists, Holland, 1935)

6.

It may have been even more fatal to the course of the proletarian movement in the 20th century that its supposed great victory in Russia in 1917 progressively yielded results that were more apt to inspire fear of revolution rather than desire for it.

Pre-revolutionary Russia was characterized by discrete proletarian islands in the middle of an ocean of peasants. The separation of the Russian Revolution into a "bourgeois" (February) and "proletarian" (October) phase is ideological. Social revolutions occur within the field of possibilities offered by the given social conditions. These do not change within the course of a few months.

In 1917, the Russian population, under the slogan "Land, Peace, Bread," rebelled against the brutality and senselessness of the war and their own conditions of existence. As soldiers at war, peasants and workers suffered the same cross-class fate and brought

the smartest wage policies within the framework of the capitalist social order. The results and compromises that result from this and which are generally accepted as the lesser evil are the logical result of a submission to capitalist constraints that is inextricably bound up with the function of the trade union, and a workforce that has learned to simply allow itself to be represented and which submits unconditionally to every decree.

The trade union can only fulfill its function as a broker of labor-power in capitalism if it is able to prove to the employers that it claims a monopoly on this representation. To this end, it must now and then prove its ability to mobilize its members and even threaten with a "termination of social peace." On the other hand, it must also prove its indispensability if dissatisfaction breaks out in action with independent forms and content. The union already prepares in advance — with its rules of order, statutes, financial means, press and functionaries — for the containment of every revolt, however rudimentary. But should revolt break out, then trade union decrees must be imposed from top to bottom, and the union assumes the role of a force of order against strikers, and arranges for the reestablishment of social peace. Also in this repressive function the union leadership can count on the support of a large part of its base.

24.

But contrary to a certain mythology of the radical left, the autonomous struggles that attempt to wrest leadership away from the trade unions do not contain a more emancipatory content per se. These struggles, just like those sanctioned by the trade unions, also often stagnate at the narrow level of maintaining the location of production facilities, a struggle which the trade unions have sometimes proven to be incapable of conducting. It is not solely the power of the trade unions that inhibits struggles. Rather, the

can still frustrate the interests of capital, and above all constitute a final reminder of the idea of not having to accept everything without a struggle, as well as serve to amass experiences of solidarity.

The extent to which these struggles merely constitute a defense against the attacks of capital and the threatening deterioration of living conditions is illustrated by the fact that the sole aim is mostly the prevention of the worst possible scenario in the case of an announced plant closing: such a hopeless struggle is concerned with the maintenance of one's job at any price — which leads to the concession of drastic wage cuts — and with the financing of safety nets or the level of severance pay. In an emergency, people struggle for "their" workplace, an approach which in its immediacy exhibits some realism.

Without an alternative social perspective being exhibited in other workplaces or anywhere else, it would simply be quixotic to strike a workplace to death or reject a severance proposal in order to play the role of the martyr. Nonetheless: despite its declining social significance, which is expressed in this confinement to defensive struggles, the trade union as such is still not dead. It is to some extent quite successfully attempting to gain attention and renewed impetus: through SMS-driven protest initiatives, assiduous banner-waving, etc. But above all else, it can rely on the fact that — notwithstanding a decline in membership — a still-important part of the workforce, as a result of lack of imagination and experience with other forms and contents of struggle, will in its fear and discontent cling to this old entity of an obsolete reformism.

In order to explain the lame policies of the trade unions and the absence of struggle outside of or against the unions, one therefore does not need a conspiracy theory about nasty bureaucrats. The workers themselves accept their role as labor-power in capitalism, in that they do not call wage- labor into question, and therefore its representation in the form of the union. The latter is responsible for negotiating the price of labor-power and makes an effort towards

about the breakdown of military discipline at the front. The men returned home and spread disobedience against authority. Everywhere, the dominant relations of power were called into question by councils of workers, soldiers, and peasants. Whereas a radical section of the factory councils rejected hierarchical decision-making structures, turned towards taking over production and distribution, and sought to coordinate between different workplaces, all of which attests to the presence of a communist current within the working class, the revolutionary peasants at best — in accordance with the historical particularity of the rural community in Russia — pressed for the creation of independent, autonomous, self-sufficient collectives, which implied the disappearance of the cities and a return to pre-capitalist relations of production. None of these two movements was in a position to guarantee the total social reproduction. The task of organizing economic survival fell to the Bolshevik Party, in a despotic form directed against both workers and peasants. Only a spreading proletarian revolution in the rest of Europe would have been able to stop this anti- communist trend.

With the elimination of the factory councils and the smashing of the peasant movement — particularly that section of it lead by Makhno — radical demands and aims did not simply disappear; rather, in a perverted form they were integrated into Soviet society. The push for the socialization and transformation of the production process was answered with the nationalization of the factories and the militarization and Taylorization of labor. It is a theoretical joke that the Trotskyists, who correctly repudiated the ideology of "socialism in a single country," nonetheless held the idea that only a "political" revolution was necessary in Soviet Russia, that the property relations already corresponded to communism. But it is an even more macabre joke that those who insisted upon workers democracy in their struggle with the Stalinist bureaucracy had a few years before, invested with the highest authority of the Red Army, drowned the resistance of the peasants, workers, and soldiers in blood. But the commemoration of the Kronstadt rebellion

of 1921 becomes mere mythology if it exclusively emphasizes the demand for council democracy against the dictatorship of the party, while ignoring the not very revolutionary demand for "free" commodity exchange between the cities and the countryside. Immediately after the smashing of the revolt, these economic demands were taken up by the Bolshevik government and realized in the form of the "New Economic Policy" (NEP). Ultimately, bread for all — of a poor quality — was guaranteed by the extension of compulsory labor to all. The access to land was realized by the forced collectivization conducted by the state. Peace was brutally imposed in the form of social tranquility. Class-specific interests were converted into national ones. The class struggle was celebrated in the perverted form of the great patriotic war and the ideology of antifascism. The internationalist perspective of the Bolsheviks, above all during the First World War, anchored them to the revolutionary camp. And in the case of a proletarian revolution in Western Europe, they might have remained in the revolutionary camp. But the Bolshevik concept of the party, their distrust of the possibility of a communist attitude of the class emerging from the dynamic of class struggle, already indicated, even before the revolution, an authoritarian conception of communism. But a crude anti-Leninism that purports to locate the reason for the revolution's failure in the Bolshevik Party itself forgets that in the case of the Bolsheviks, social existence determines consciousness. This crude anti-Leninism does not notice how much it itself remains trapped within the conception of an all-powerful leadership that can arbitrarily direct history's course. Nobody can say what would have happened if social conflicts had taken another direction. But viewed from the perspective of historical results, the dictatorship of the party executed one of the alternatives allowed by the internal and external conditions in 1917, which can be characterized as "primitive accumulation": the social and economic integration of the mass of Russian peasants into the world market through industrialization and the generalization of wage- labor. Thus the historical achievements of the

social wealth. As a consequence, their struggles — in which they build connections of solidarity against the nihilism of everyday life — occur apart from any possibility of taking control of production: this rebellious "rabble" (Sarkozy) of the modern world are equal to Luddites, from whom the machines were wrested. They embody the tendency of capital to generate a gigantic surplus population. A large part of the global proletariat is cut off from regular production and is only partially needed as a reserve army of labor; whereas others toil until they drop. Reform struggles for the redistribution of labor, which could alleviate this lunacy, constantly run up against the limits of capital. Capital is in no way predisposed to reproduce more people than is necessary; rather, it pumps more surplus-labor out of an increasingly small number of proletarians. The future of the class as a whole depends decisively upon the ability of the superfluous to make their situation the point of departure for a generalized social movement. The actions of the piqueteros in Argentina point in this direction.

23.

As a result of capital's frontal attacks, the trade unions have fallen into a manifest crisis, even if as yet only extreme liberals go so far as to demand their complete abolition. A sign of this crisis is not only the abundance of defeats in individual struggles, but also a fact that touches upon the substance of the trade union: the members are walking away in droves.

But the increasingly small workforce of the core industries still follows the trade union when it here and there issues a call to struggle against privatization, wage cuts, and plant relocations. These struggles do not even aim for an improvement in living conditions, and remain — with demands that fall behind the standards of the bygone welfare state to which they are oriented — purely defensive struggles. But they are still better than a graveyard peace: even if they just amount to a desperate rearing up, in individual cases they

22.

As a mirror image of the emergence of new working classes in the hitherto existing periphery, the phenomenon of immiseration, long believed to have been transcended, returns to the old centers. A phenomenon is revealed for the entire world to see that was initially defined as follows: "Accumulation of wealth at one pole is, therefore, at the same time accumulation of misery, agony of toil slavery, ignorance, brutality, mental degradation, at the opposite pole." (Marx, Capital) If the absence of such living quarters in the metropolises allowed colonial pride to linger on, their massive presence in the periphery was taken as a sure sign of the periphery's backwardness. With the present-day coming home of the slums, it becomes clear that one could not exist without the other.

As much as the helpless talk of the "lower classes" attempts to preserve the elevator model of the permeability of social class that existed in the "golden years," the less believable such a possibility becomes: the entablature is creaking and the lift is out of service. Sobered by the placations of the past, those left behind experience the dawning realization of their own superfluity, which is discharged in rage-drenched eruptions beyond useless supplications addressed to the state. The peak of this development up to now has been the revolts in the French banlieues. The state with its established instruments of representation stands helpless against this segment of the proletariat; now and then the old brigade of social workers can help, but they increasingly find themselves playing the role of comic relief from the lessons of real life. Every attempt at integration of this segment miscarries because the state cannot find it in any potential labor-force to capitalize. Nothing can be offered to these enragés, they can only serve as a bugaboo to others: they serve to demonstrate either the misery of poverty or the state's monopoly of force.

The informal economy of the superfluous human-beings exhibits all sorts of inventiveness, but persists alongside the production of

Russian Revolution ultimately consist in the Orwellian dressing-up of a terror regime as Soviet power plus electrification.

7.

The Russian Revolution entered the mythology of the workers movement as the epitome of social revolution. The revolutionary uprisings in Central Europe after the end of the First World War were carried not least by the wave of enthusiasm that the Russian Revolution inspired. The open defeat of the revolutions in Central Europe and the creeping erosion of emancipatory aspirations in Russia mutually conditioned and reinforced one another. There remained the apparent paradox: whereas proletarian revolution in the developed capitalist West was evidently condemned to failure and only reformism appeared to have a future, the picture of a successful violent revolution in a relatively underdeveloped country was strengthened. The Russian Revolution was historically of great influence primarily as a point of reference and instruction manual for the modernization impulses of anti-colonial and anti-imperialist movements in the Third World. There, "Marxism-Leninism" became the ideology of the radical middle classes and radical intelligentsia. Soviet Russia advanced to the status of prototype for the national development projects of the peripheral countries in the era of imperialism. In the West, the Red October was either admired as a bearer of hope, a conception that helped to instrumentalize a sector of the working class for Russian foreign policy, or it was used as a bugaboo against any idea of transcending capitalism.

8.

After the Second World War, the state-oriented workers movement's misconception that it was heading towards the transcendence of capitalism evaporates. The radical tendencies are

everywhere smashed, pulverized, and absorbed. As dead-as-a-doorknob the workers movement may be as the supposed bearer of a new society, it is all the more powerful as the bureaucratic representation of the proletariat within bourgeois society. A few successful decades lie ahead for it, perhaps its best decades, in which the governments of the free West act as the ideal personification of the total Social Democracy and the Communist Parties are merely the most committed Social Democrats, trade unions eke out double-digit wage increases and the children of the working class no longer inevitably end up in the factory in which their fathers, and often enough mothers, toiled away. The sociologists declare the end of class society.

9.

It is pure mysticism to construe the course of the workers movement as the handiwork of "traitors," as a history of corruption and deviation from the correct path. Just as the German Social Democracy shot down the Spartacists in 1918/1919, Stalinism crushed the social revolution of 1936/37 in Spain. Both leaned upon the support of masses of loyal proletarians. The proletariat has no revolutionary essence that was merely prevented — repeatedly — by reformist machinations from finally erupting full-force. Only a movement of the overwhelming majority of the wage- dependent class can revolutionize society. But only emotionally needy metaphysicians therefore apotheosize the proletariat as "the revolutionary subject." The proletariat is its struggle; and its struggles have to this day not led it beyond class society, but deeper into it.

It is just as little the case that with the integration of the proletariat the possibility of revolution is extinguished. According to such legends, the possibility existed in some sort of alleged golden age of liberalism, when angry workers and robber barons clashed, and the culture industry and welfare state were still unknown. This history of decline, with its melancholy tone, cannot be confronted

alliance to exorcise this specter, which suits the class that owns the means of production just fine. The hopelessness of this endeavor, forthrightly admitted by the agents of the state when they speak of "base unemployment," nonetheless does not prevent them from attempting to force through at a breathless pace the utopia of full employment, nor does the fact that the earliest cultural and religious traditions of humanity regard work as a curse.

What unites workers and the unemployed is permanent fear. In regions with an as yet reasonably well-stocked social welfare system, the state is still the central object of a jealous love-hate. The mistrustful and rejected nostalgically pine for the politically and economically caretaking patriarchs, but the latter brush all indulgence aside and insist upon the discipline required by the system of wage-labor in order to realize its program: extirpating idleness, debauchery and excess. The more the welfare state is needed, the more impossible it becomes, and the struggle against unemployment necessarily turns into a struggle against the unemployed. To the extent that the tired remnants of the old workers movement even raise an objection, it is built on sand: namely, the acceptance of the very system of wage-labor, the flipside of which is unemployment, and which drives every human need through the needle eye of financial feasibility. The seduction of idleness, which is thereby completely forgotten and nonetheless felt instinctively by all, comes to the fore — alongside the vague recognition of its own possibility on the basis of the development of productivity — in another political model: a little bit for everyone, and provided by the state! In the conception of the movement for a "guaranteed income," capitalist society is transformed into a giant charity ball. The recognition that full employment is illusory as well as undesirable leads to an even more grotesque illusion: the dream of the state as a super-paternalist, expected to abolish the compulsion to wage-labor that constitutes its own foundation by generously distributing money.

If previously, Chinese walls were demolished by the artillery of cheap prices from the West, today the golden sun of capital shines from the East: the new "yellow peril" is no longer the square bourgeois phrase of anti-communist geo-strategists, but rather a massive threat to the living standards of Western workers through the transfer of production.

More producers than ever before are separated from their means of production and therefore dependent upon the sale of their labor power; the idiocy of rural life gives way to the brutality of rural exodus. Thus emerges a global working class, whose members might equally feel the fact that they are in global competition with one another for jobs that, if not in absolute numbers, then in relation to the number of workers are declining. With that, the proletariat finally commences its worldwide triumphal march, and the geographical borders of center and periphery begin to disappear.

The insecurity that appears as a special problem in the familiar talk of the "precariat" is therefore the global normality of the proletariat. Today's sanctuaries of capital that strike terror in the hearts of both statesmen and workers are tomorrow already deserted territory once the wage standard rises; India is already poised to take the place of Poland. But soon capital also discovers that wherever it may roam, it carries class struggle in its luggage. After a few years, the new wage- laborers in New Delhi or Shanghai prove to be intractable and unappreciative fellows, who constantly drive up the price of exploitation. In these class struggles lies the hope that after a century of anti-imperialist mythology, a new era of proletarian internationalism is dawning.

21.

The global universalization of proletarian existence, along with the constant, rapid increase in 'productivity also awakens a specter that haunts not just Europe: the specter of unemployment. All the political powers of the old order have indeed entered into a holy

with a historical-philosophical construct of inevitable ascendancy. The materialist conception of history assumes that things could have been different, that class struggles could have had different outcomes. But the view of history is inevitably conditioned by its further progression, in which the dialectic of repression and emancipation has not ceased.

10.

An earlier radical once commented sarcastically: "the communards allowed themselves to be shot down to the last man so that you could buy a Philips High-End Stereo Console." But the successful history of the welfare state rests upon the fact that it was able to meet a real need of the proletariat: that of a life that does not hang by the thread of the successful sale of one's labor- power. The extension of the welfare state that occurred mainly in the period after the Second World War and the enormous increase in productivity of that time allow the starving pauper to disappear from the scene in Europe and parts of North America and pushes the material entitlements of the propertyless class to a level which is today a source of complaint (thus continuing a time-honored tradition) for bourgeois ideologues on all channels. When these very same ideologues now sing the praises of the individual and immediately denounce even the most modest of welfare benefits as socialism, which supposedly liquidates the very same individual, then it is not only the case that they succumb to the same error — with plus and minus signs reversed — as that section of the Social Democratic fraction of the Reichstag that claimed to recognize the beginning of socialism in Bismarck's welfare laws. In addition, they also fail to recognize that the modern individual, to a considerable degree, owes its existence to the state, which has created the minimal conditions for the free development of the individual within the limits of commodity society. Unemployment benefits, welfare benefits, sick pay, retirement pensions, etc. were introduced in order to maintain an

industrial reserve army between business cycles, and also in order to keep the class under control, to not leave it to its own devices, in order to defend bourgeois order from criminality and revolts. But it also allowed many to pursue a life beyond wage-labor which was not merely identical with the most bitter poverty.

State intervention in production in order to improve the working conditions of the proletariat, the introduction of minimum wages or the legal restrictions of the working day were intended as protections against super-exploitation, so as not to endanger the reproduction of the class which the capitalists intended to also exploit in the future. On the other hand, the possibility of living beyond the age of 60, rather than ending up in a coffin at the age of 30 after spending one's life in the factory, increased enormously. The reduced physical deterioration of the working class first opened up the possibility of it even being able to think about its own interests.

Compulsory education was also introduced due to the needs of modern administration, so that everyone in the most remote corner of the country would be able to read state decrees, sign contracts as a free wage-laborer, and learn counting as a merchant of one's own labor-power. But through this, the masses were also able to educate themselves, read theoretical texts, and communicate with one another collectively and over broad distances, to which the diverse press of the old workers movement is an eloquent testament. And finally, in the second half of the last century, the possibility of higher education was opened to a previously unknown extent for the offspring of the proletariat. A critique of the integration of the class cannot disregard these aspects, which are also in the interest of the proletariat, and which were also not simply conceded by the state, but rather were obtained by struggle.

11.

Among the divisions consolidated by the triumphal procession of capitalism is that between the spheres of production and reproduc-

relations in post-fascist Germany received a few cracks thanks primarily to apprentices, young workers, and migrant laborers. In the entire Western world, the 1970s existed under the omen of the refusal of labor and an explosion in wages. The workers had joyfully forgotten the moderation they had learned that constituted the secret of the success of the social democratic "golden age" after 1945. This forbidden decoupling of wages and productivity intensified one of the unavoidable periodic crises of capital that arose right as the ideal total capitalist began to groan under the strain of social expenditures, which it was forced to drive to unimagined levels in order to appease the proletarians.

Soon, it was all over for autonomy and workers power. The militant core was subject to a frontal attack, the bastions of workers power automated, disassembled, and transferred elsewhere. Growing unemployment disciplined the employed, while the state emerged from the role of the ideal total social-worker into that of the taskmaster of the class. Thus began in the Western centers cycle upon cycle of counter-reforms that continue to attack the proletariat on an increasing number of fronts. At this moment, the weakness of the reformist labor movement is revealed which, completely dependent upon the weal and woe of the class enemy, was able at best only to soften the blow of the rollback.

III. Time without Promise

20.

Even as the state now attempts at lightning-speed to repeal its earlier concessions and protective measures, capital is already one step ahead: technological progress and the fall of the iron curtain make possible the transfer of entire production facilities to grateful recipient countries. With that, there is a tendency for every worker to be placed into a relation of competition with every other worker for the lowest wage and the highest level of productivity.

19.

Nevertheless, the global wave of class struggle that broke out in the late 1960s in the advanced capitalist centers should not be falsified in the manner of revolutionary mythology into a movement for the conscious abolition of the old world. Only minorities wanted to finish off capital, and only a minority within this minority understood what they were talking about. Alongside these most advanced elements, all sorts of dubious figures crawled out of the dustbin of revolutionary history, Lenin and Mao coming together with anti-imperialism and the self- management of wage-slavery, and to make the confusion complete, revolutionary reason and left ideology merged often enough into curious hybrid beings such as anti-authoritarian Maoism and Leninist Operaismo. The modern concept of social revolution that flashed in the advanced currents of 1968 was never more than a weak tendency in a time of great commotion.

The real movement of the wage-laborers, however, consisted in terminating the beautiful dream of the classless class society by literally taking it seriously. Driven primarily by hatred for stupefying drudgery, hatred for the harassment on the assembly line, and hatred for the existence as human material for the restless process of valorization, the workers desired, if not everything, then at least more wages and less work. Largely disinterested in the leftist costume ball, the class struggles of the 1970s pushed institutional reformism to its limits and ultimately threw it overboard. Autonomy, the keyword of those years, meant wildcat strikes — or striking with the union, but without regard for losses. In the agglomerations of "workers power," a second keyword of those years, in the great factories of Detroit all the way to Turin, the bosses were no longer masters in their own homes, assembly lines were sabotaged, and shifts were arbitrarily shortened by the workers; even in the traditionally trade-unionist United Kingdom, a creeping crisis had been reached, a Winter of Discontent, and even the petrified

tion, a sexually coded separation that, accompanied by all sorts of ideologies of legitimation bolstered by anthropology or biology, became a social model in the form of the bourgeois family. Even though in the 19th and early 20th century the great majority was dependent upon the income of women — and often enough, children — the ideal of a gender- specific division of labor with a male bread-winner prevailed. The proletarian milieu was no exception.

The universalism claimed by the bourgeoisie in its declarations of human rights and the rights of citizens, was, as already noted by clear-sighted contemporary critics such as Olympe de Gouges or Mary Wollstonecraft, initially a highly particular one, since the free human individual whose birth was celebrated was male. For this insight, de Gouge at least was granted a public appearance — she was guillotined.

Education in public schools and universities, the participation in political life, as well as the right to private property were denied to women far into the first half of the 20th century in most metropolitan countries, and had to be obtained through struggle. The second wave of the women's movement which formed in the late 1960s brought into focus, alongside the issue of the medical regulation of the female body (for example, in the form of abortion laws), primarily more subtle, private forms of the oppression of women. In the course of its progressive institutionalization, it arranged for laws that are not bound by the principle of gender equality, but which rather made gender-specific crimes justiciable, such as sexual harassment in the workplace or rape within a marriage.

Optimistically, one could believe that the emancipation of women and their achievement of the status of bourgeois subjects has been concluded. The material foundations for the maintenance of hierarchical gender relations are largely obsolete: pregnancies are now amenable to planning, and thus no longer constitute an incalculable risk from the perspective of capital; the individual reproduction of labor-power can be achieved through the commod-

ity form, at least in the metropolises. And in fact, the tolerance for lifestyles that do not correspond to the traditional bourgeois family model has grown considerably, although the resounding cry, predictable in times of crisis, of "back to the kitchen" and the demographically motivated appeal to female academics to please have more children, as well as a glance at various executive bodies, tell a different story. Today, women are subject to all the tribulations of existence as owners of labor-power, but on average they earn less than men, often work part-time, and primarily in the service sector. The boom of the service sector in the last few decades is not least due to a strengthened capitalization of the reproductive sphere. But just like before, an overwhelming percentage of unpaid reproductive labor is performed by the proverbial "doubly burdened" women.

The production of ideology concerning gender difference and the characteristics and abilities allegedly arising from it has also in no way come to a standstill; rather, sociobiology, which derives every last quirk from hunter-gatherer society, is experiencing a renewed heyday and is a fixed component of everyday consciousness. The question of whether the liberation of humanity from its sorting according to chromosome sets can still be achieved on the foundations of bourgeois society is not least a question as to the tenaciousness of this ideology.

12.

Developed capitalism can appear to be classless, because at one pole, the class antagonism becomes abstract, and at the other pole it becomes diffuse. Ironically, this has equally confused both adherents and deniers of class struggle. The latter, who call themselves Wertkritiker, or critics of the value-form, crudely cling to the surface of society, the real illusoriness of the sphere of circulation, in which in fact only indistinct bourgeois subjects roam about. The value-critical farewell to the proletariat elevates the pro-

great that labor could immediately be reduced to an incidental fact of human existence, rather than being declared the 'foundation of human existence.'"

18.

In late capitalism, the contradiction between forces of production and relations of production intensifies furthermore in that figure already familiar to the old workers movement as the opposition between guns and butter and which Guy Debord referred to in 1967 as the "tendency of use-value to fall": not only the internal life of the shop floor, but also its output increasingly bears the marks of the inverted social form. If Marx could still celebrate industry as "the open book of man's essential powers," the products of labor have in the meantime become direct pieces of evidence against the society that generates them; the anachronism of capital becomes tangible in its products, which are of no use for a liberated humanity, and which are disagreeable to unliberated humanity. The gap between possibility and reality has never been wider than it is today, where the bulk of proletarians worldwide vegetate in misery, while the productive capacities of global society have long ago rendered material poverty superfluous. What is tedious about the pacifist ministers is ultimately not their declaration that for the price of a single atomic bomb, five hospitals could be built, but rather the naiveté with which they attempt to apply human aims to an antagonistic society.

For class consciousness, this development means that the knowledge that one creates the world through one's labor no longer generates pride in increasing numbers of workers, but at most embarrassment — or a justified hatred for a society that condemns them to be producers of garbage: this is the rational moment of the slogan of the "struggle against labor" that could be heard around 1968.

this new one, created by large-scale industry itself. As soon as labour in the direct form has ceased to be the great well-spring of wealth, labour time ceases and must cease to be its measure, and hence exchange value [must cease to be the measure] of use value. The surplus labour of the mass has ceased to be the condition for the development of general wealth, just as the non-labour of the few, for the development of the general powers of the human head." (Marx, Grundrisse der Kritik der Politischen Ökonomie)

17.

Taking the contradiction between forces of production and relations of production as a point of departure has fallen into disrepute, and not without reason. In its most vulgar version, this contradiction was so understood that the victory of socialism was guaranteed by laws of technological progress. A milder version dispenses with this certainty of victory, but still perceives the apparatus of production existing in the here and now as a harbinger of socialism, the introduction of socialism requiring merely a change in the title of ownership. Against this, Operaismo proceeded from the mass experience of the factory workers, which did not directly present the organization of labor and machinery as allies on the road to socialism, but rather as sheer despotism. The notion that beneath the external shell of capitalism a knotless productive apparatus has matured overlooks the fact that the aim of surplus-value production is incorporated into machinery and the organization of labor. But as opposed to the green turn of the contemporary left, which perceives every hint at the potential of the achieved level of the mastery of nature as an expression of a straw-man called "traditional Marxism," workerist critics were well aware that the development of the productive forces does not exhaust itself in the concrete manifestation of the factory, and that it can serve the producers under other social relations. Thus, in 1969 the Comitato Operaio di Porto Marghera noted that "the quantity of accumulated science is so

letariat's deferral as a subversive actor to the level of an irreversible historical law. The only consolation is that offered by the yearly prospect of an immediately impending collapse of the commodity-producing system — Amen.

On the other hand, some sympathizers of class struggle have dissolved the objective definition of class into the subjective conception that the class creates itself ex nihilo in the act of struggle; class is an "open concept" and everything else is "sociological." But an "open" concept is an indeterminate one; that is to say, it is not a concept at all. Also widespread is the watered-down notion that class is a relationship and is therefore not objectively determinable. But a relationship of what?

The class relationship is a relationship between capital and proletarians, between self-valorizing value and labor-power. Capital is not an "automatic subject" to the extent that it cannot do anything by itself and therefore always requires beings equipped with a will and consciousness, up to now humans, who organize its valorization in their own interests. But capital is not necessarily bound to capitalists. The bourgeoisie is undoubtedly mercurial and acutely class-conscious, but it is not the ultimate reason for all social ills. All money is potentially capital, and becomes capital as soon as it is no longer gobbled up for the sake of consumption, but rather enters into production. Clever entrepreneurs have arrived at the idea of partially compensating their work forces in the form of stocks, and not a small number of hedge funds dispose of the retirement savings of American proletarians, who "let their money work for them" (the fetishistic circumlocution of the fact that by means of this money, somewhere labor is being commanded). But this effectively inherent democratic character of capital has as its precondition that which it is supposed to refute according to the world view of ideologues: the existence of proletarians, that is to say people who must carry themselves to the marketplace, in order to valorize capital through their labor and surplus-labor. If capitalist class society, as distinct from its predecessors, thrives on the — in principle

— permeability of class boundaries, it is nonetheless the case that the situation for proletarian small shareholders is not better than that of most dishwashers.

Proletarian existence appears to be nowhere visible precisely because it is just about everywhere. The generalized imposition of wage-dependency that occurs parallel to the dissolution of the old proletarian milieu, which pushes peasants to the margins of the historical stage and which proletarianizes first the salaried workforce, and then the intellectual laborers, ultimately brings about in the centers of capitalist development not two clearly defined class camps, but rather a vast multiplicity of circumstances. Such a situation offers a field day to social researchers, who are joyous about not having to see the forest for the trees. Class here and today does not describe a collective actor with possibly revolutionary intentions, but rather simply the largely generalized compulsion of selling one's own labor-power (a compulsion that managers, albeit formally wage- laborers, are scarcely subject to after spending at most two years on the board of directors). Just as value and surplus-value do not need to be embodied in any specific commodities, the concept of class is not necessarily bound to physical labor, a material product, or factory production. One doesn't need to have a high opinion of the blithe immaterially-producing Multitude of Professor Negri, one must not be a friend of the left-academic schema of Fordism (every man in the factory) and Post-Fordism (everybody at home alone in front of the computer) in order to recognize in the discourse of the "centrality of the factory" precisely the narrow conception of class which is as dead as a duck, and which certainly will not serve to win the final conflict. By international standards, the industrial working-class has not disappeared, nor is it synonymous with the concept of the proletariat.

the intention of precipitating that very crisis. In this rejection of the old determinism, the critique of the Situationists and proponents of Operaismo converge, even if they otherwise go their separate ways. The prompt confirmation of this conception granted by the course of events — nowhere are the heavy class struggles of 1968 preceded by mass layoffs, wage reductions, or other consequences of a capitalist crisis — catches the trustees of the old world completely by surprise, and correspondingly hard. Even in places where bourgeois society appears to realize its conception of general happiness, exhibiting democracy, full employment, and prosperity, the general consent of the exploited is not secure.

Even the half-heartedness with which the traditional radical left conceived of the self-abolition of the proletariat is transcended — not only the cult of the party and the conquest of state power advanced by the Left Communists around Amadeo Bordiga; also the self-management of commodity production advocated by the German-Dutch proponents of Council Communism. With the best anti-authoritarian intentions, the Council Communists countered the dictatorship of the party with the rule of councils and the central planning of workers self-management, in which every producer would receive a share of the total social product according to his individual labor performance, and in which a labor-time currency would replace money. Against the contemporary adherents of such conceptions, the Situationist International asserted in 1967: "it is not enough to be for the power of workers councils in the abstract; it is necessary to demonstrate what it means concretely: the suppression of commodity production and therefore of the proletariat." (On The Poverty of Student Life). That the Situationists were in no way alone in this, but rather that all advanced subversive elements around 1968 were characterized by this insight, points to the fact that this insight simply owes its existence to the higher level of capitalist socialization, which can directly turn over into communism. "The theft of alien labour time, on which the present wealth is based, appears a miserable foundation in face of

ing we walk," the dogmatic skeptics no longer want to know where they're going and overlook first of all the fact that the goal of communism is determined in the critique of the existing relations; and second, that this goal, because it will not be achieved politically or overnight, is only possible as a movement of communisation, in which atomized wage-workers transform themselves into social individuals and begin to organise their lives without exchange relations. "So long as the mass movements are still small and still remain a surface affair, the tendency toward the mastery of all social forces does not come so clearly to light. But if these movements become large, then more and more functions are drawn into the province of the struggling masses, — their sphere of action becomes extended. And in this struggling mass there then comes about a completely new grouping of the relations between human beings and the productive process. A new "order" develops. Those are the essential distinguishing marks of the independent class movements, which are accordingly the horror of the bourgeoisie." The Dutch Council Communist Henk Canne Meijer thus wrote in 1935 the script for the Parisian May of 1968.

16.

The Parisian May and the "creeping May" in Italy are high points of a new wave of class struggles shaking the developed regions of the world since 1968, and whose radical minorities, as if mocking leftist cultural pessimism, grasp the self-abolition of the proletariat more exactly than their predecessors in the revolutionary cycle around 1917. The theoretical and practical critique takes aim not only at the old workers movement that had mutated into an outpost of the state, but also at the traditional radical left.

Firstly, the proletariat is no longer assigned the dishonorable role of an appendage of capitalist development, in the manner that traditional theory conceived of its grand entrance upon the stage. The patient act of waiting for the death crisis of capital yields to

II. The Self-Abolition of the Proletariat

13.

Class antagonism is inscribed into society, without necessarily blowing it apart. The individualized sellers of labor-power constantly experience the fact that they must band together and struggle in order to avoid going completely to rack and ruin; the conditions of exploitation must be constantly re-negotiated, and it is only by association that a few workers can selectively transcend their mutual competition. But the legendary transition from "class in itself" to "class for itself" cannot emerge through immediate interests, not by the generalization of any demands, since these remain necessarily bound to capital and therefore to that which imposes fragmentation upon the proletariat as its natural condition. Class consciousness does not consist in the recognition of being a class, but rather in the knowledge of no longer having to be one. Revolution does not consist in the victory of the proletariat over the bourgeoisie, but rather in the self-abolition of the proletariat. "Wage-laborers can only unite at all into a class "for itself," in order to abolish themselves as a class, through the complete negation of fragmenting private property, through the interest of not only appropriating the operational means of production, but also the social process of reproduction in its entirety (and that necessarily means: on an international scale)." (Werner Imhof)

Socialization through capital remains contradictory, since that which connects people also separates them. The value-form of the products of labor is nothing other than an expression and mediation of the most fundamental contradiction of bourgeois society: labor is social, namely production for others, and at the same time unsocial, namely as labor conducted in workplaces separate from one another and producing in competition with one another, only obtaining social validity with the act of exchange. If the proletari-

ans would merely take over their respective workplaces, while still maintaining exchange relations between these workplaces, then production would not really be social, and the workers would continue to foist all of the contradictions of commodity society upon themselves, in a "self-determined" way, as it were. Emancipation would be nothing less than the world commune, in which private property has yielded to the collective organisation of life.

However, one should not burden revolution with the false promise of dissolving the realm of necessity into nothing but play and pleasure; just as little will this realm of necessity persist in its current abstract opposition to a realm of freedom emptied of any possibility for shaping the world. The decisive step forward would be a form of production whose purpose we can recognise as ours. With the establishment of a rational universality, the basis for the state would also no longer apply, since the state enforces only a false, repressive universality on the basis of competing private interests, or in the words of a far-sighted friend of the classless society: "Only when the real, individual man re-absorbs in himself the abstract citizen, and as an individual human being has become a species-being in his everyday life, in his particular work, and in his particular situation, only when man has recognized and organized his "own powers" as social powers, and, consequently, no longer separates social power from himself in the shape of political power, only then will human emancipation have been accomplished." (Marx, On the Jewish Question)

14.

The self-abolition of the proletariat is consequently irreconcilable with its dictatorship. Every new attempt at liberation must undoubtedly reckon with armed opponents who, if past experience is any indication, tend to be unimpressed by a discourse free of domination. But the watchword of the dictatorship of the proletariat cannot be reduced to this banality. Rather, it aims for

a socialist transitional society. It was Marx of all people who, against Bakunin, committed the First International to the slogan of the "conquest of political power" by the proletariat and programmatically applied a transitional phase prior to communism in which "a given amount of labor in one form is exchanged for an equal amount of labor in another form" (Critique of the Gotha Programme), which merely illustrates the mandatory connection between commodity production and the state. That's all history now. It was the tragedy of the 20th century that revolution broke out in those places where the conditions for communism were the worst imaginable, and that the "socialist transitional societies" born out of the failure of the revolutionary attempts in Western Europe ultimately proved to be, after 70 years, transitional towards the free market. The socialist revolutions up to now were without exception bourgeois, in zones where the bourgeoisie was too weak to fulfill this historical task and so-called primitive accumulation was declared in all seriousness to be a socialist concern. But in the 21st century, there aren't any more agrarian revolutions to accomplish, no productive forces to develop; the issue isn't the generalization of wage-labor, but the abolition thereof. Revolutions aiming to accomplish the establishment of the preconditions for communism are only imaginable as isolated occurrences in the most backward corners of the world.

15.

Today, however, the conquest of state power is usually discarded in favor of an aimless and consequently everlasting war of position within the power structure. The anti-authoritarian spirit, which insisted that the forms of the movement must anticipate its goals and that the Leninist vanguard party is suitable for a putsch but not for the self-emancipation of the exploited, has degenerated into the dispiritedness [Ungeist] of post-modernism, which rejoices over the indeterminateness and indeterminableness of revolution. "Ask-