On the Content of Socialism

From the Critique of Bureaucracy to the Idea of the Proletariat's Autonomy

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Contents

Part One

[Introduction]

The ideas set forth in this discussion perhaps will be understood more readily if we retrace the route that has led us to them. Indeed, we started off from positions in which a militant worker or a Marxist inevitably places himself at a certain stage in his development and therefore positions everyone we are addressing has shared at one time or another. And if the conceptions set forth here have any value at all, their development cannot be the result of chance or personal traits but ought to embody an objective logic at work. Providing a description of this development, therefore, can only increase the reader's understanding of the end result and make it easier for him to check it against his experience.[1]

Like a host of other militants in the vanguard, we began with the discovery that the traditional large "working-class" organizations no longer have a revolutionary Marxist politics nor do they represent any longer the interests of the proletariat. The Marxist arrives at this conclusion by comparing the activity of these "socialist" (reformist) or "communist" (Stalinist) organizations with his own theory. He sees the so-called Socialist parties participating in bourgeois governments, actively repressing strikes or movements of colonial peoples, and championing the defense of the capitalist fatherland while neglecting even to make reference to a socialist system of rule. He sees the Stalinist "Communist" parties sometimes carrying out this same opportunistic policy of collaborating with the bourgeoisie and sometimes an "extremist" policy, a violent adventurism unrelated to a consistent revolutionary strategy. The class-conscious worker makes the same discoveries on the level of his working-class experience. He sees the socialists squandering their energies trying to moderate his class's economic demands, to make any effective action aimed at satisfying these demands impossible, and to substitute interminable discussions with the boss or the State for the strike. He sees the Stalinists at certain times strictly forbidding strikes (as was the case from 1945 to 1947) and even trying to curtail them through violence[2] or frustrating them underhandedly[3] and at other times trying to horsewhip workers into a strike they do not want because they perceive that it is alien to their interests (as in 1951–52, with the "anti-American" strikes). Outside the factory, he also sees the Socialists and the Communists participate in capitalist governments without it changing his lot one bit, and he sees them join forces, in 1936 as well as in 1945, when his class is ready to act and the regime has its back against the wall, in order to stop the movement and save this regime, proclaiming that one must "know to end a strike" and that one must "produce first and make economic demands later."

Once they have established this radical opposition between the attitude of the traditional organizations and a revolutionary Marxist politics expressing the immediate and historical interests of the proletariat, both the Marxist and the class-conscious worker might then think that these organizations "err" [*se trompent*] or that they "are betraying us." But to the extent that they reflect on the situation, and discover for themselves that socialists and Stalinists behave the same

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way day after day, that they always and everywhere have behaved in this way, in the past, today, here, and everywhere else, they begin to see that to speak of "betrayal" or "mistakes" does not make any sense. It could be a question of "mistakes" only if these parties pursued the goals of the proletarian revolution with inadequate means, but these means, applied in a coherent and systematic fashion for several dozen years, show simply that the goals of these organizations are not our goals, that they express interests other than those of the proletariat. Once this is understood, saying that they "are betraying us" makes no sense. If, in order to sell his junk, a merchant tells me some load of crap and tries to persuade me that it is in my interest to buy it, I can say that he is trying to deceive me [*il me trompe*] but not that he is betraying me. Likewise, the Socialist or Stalinist party, in trying to persuade the proletariat that it represents its interests, is trying to deceive it but is not betraying it; they betrayed it once and for all a long time ago, and since then they are not traitors to the working class but faithful and consistent servers of other interests. What we need to do is determine whose interests they serve.

Indeed, this policy does not merely appear consistent in its means or in its results. It is embodied in the leadership stratum of these organizations or trade unions. The militant quickly learns the hard way that this stratum is irremovable, that it survives all defeats, and that it perpetuates itself through co-optation. Whether the internal organization of these groups is "democratic" (as is the case with the reformists) or dictatorial (as is the case with the Stalinists), the mass of militants have absolutely no influence over its orientation, which is determined without further appeal by a bureaucracy whose stability is never put into question; for even when the leadership core should happen to be replaced, it is replaced for the benefit of another, no less bureaucratic group.

At this point, the Marxist and the class-conscious worker are almost bound to collide with Trotskyism.[4] Indeed, Trotskyism has offered a permanent, step-by-step critique of socialist and Stalinist politics for the past quarter century, showing that the defeats of the workers' movement – Germany, 1923; China, 1925–27; England 1926; Germany, 1933; Austria, 1934; Frances 1936; Spain, 1936–38; France and Italy, 1945–47; etc. – are due to the policies of the traditional organizations, and that these policies have constantly been in breach of Marxism. At the same times Trotskyism[5] offers an explanation of the policies of these parties, starting from a sociological analysis of their makeup. For reformism, it takes up again the interpretation provided by Lenin: The reforming of the socialists expresses the interests of a labor aristocracy (since imperialist surplus profits allow the latter to be "corrupted" by higher wages) and of a trade union and political bureaucracy. As for Stalinism, its policy serves the Russian bureaucracy, this parasitic and privileged stratum that has usurped power in the first workers' State, thanks to the backward character of the country and the setback suffered by the world revolution after 1923.

We began our critical work, even back when we were within the Trotskyist movement, with this problem of Stalinist bureaucracy. Why we began with that problem in particular needs no long involved explanations. Whereas the problem of reforming seemed to be settled by history, at least on the theoretical level, as it became more and more an overt defender of the capitalist system,[6] on the most crucial problem of all, that of Stalinism – which is *the* contemporary problem par excellence and which in practice weighs on us more heavily than the first – the history of our

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times has disproved again and again both the Trotskyist viewpoint and the forecasts that have been derived from it. For Trotsky, Stalinist policy is to be explained by the interests of the Russian bureaucracy, a product of the degeneration of the October Revolution. This bureaucracy has no "reality of its own" historically speaking; it is only an "accident" the product of the constantly upset balance between the two fundamental forces of modern society, capitalism and the proletariat. Even in Russia it is based upon the "conquests of October," which had provided socialist bases for the country's economy (nationalization, planning, monopoly over foreign trade, etc.) and upon the perpetuation of capitalism in the rest of the world; for the restoration of private property in Russia would signify the overthrow of the bureaucracy and help bring about the return of the capitalists, whereas the spread of the revolution worldwide would destroy Russia's isolation – the economic and political result of which was the bureaucracy and would give rise to a new revolutionary explosion of the Russian proletariat, who would chase off these usurpers. Hence the necessarily empirical character of Stalinist politics, which is obliged to waver between two adversaries and makes its objective the utopian maintenance of the status quo; it even is obliged thereby to sabotage every proletarian movement any time the latter endangers the capitalist system and to overcompensate as well for the results of these acts of sabotage with extreme violence every time reactionaries, encouraged by the demoralization of the proletariat, try to set up a dictatorship and prepare a capitalist crusade against "the remnants of the October conquests." Thus, Stalinist parties are condemned to fluctuate between "extremist" adventuress and opportunism.

But neither can these parties nor the Russian bureaucracy remain hanging indefinitely in midair like this. In the absence of a revolution, Trotsky said, the Stalinist parties would become more and more like the reforming parties and more and more attached to the bourgeois order, while the Russian bureaucracy would be overthrown with or without foreign intervention so as to bring about a restoration of capitalism.

Trotsky had tied this prognostication to the outcome of the Second World War. As is well known, this war disproved it in the most glaring terms. The Trotskyist leadership made itself look ridiculous by stating that it was just a matter of time. But it had become apparent to us, even before the war ended, that it was not and could not have been a question of some kind of time lag, but rather of the *direction* of history, and that Trotsky's entire edifice was, down to its very foundations, mythological.

The Russian bureaucracy underwent the critical test of the war and showed it had as much cohesiveness as any other dominant class. If the Russian regime admitted of some contradictions, it also exhibited a degree of stability no less than that of the American or German regime. The Stalinist parties did not go over to the side of the bourgeois order. They have continued to follow Russian policy faithfully (apart, of course, from individual defections, as take place in all parties): They are partisans of national defense in countries allied to the USSR, and adversaries of this kind of defense in countries that are enemies of the USSR (we include here the French CP's series of turnabouts in 1939, 1941, and 1947). Finally, the most important and extraordinary thing was that the Stalinist bureaucracy extended its power into other countries; whether it imposed its power on behalf of the Russian army, as in most of the satellite countries of Central Europe and the Balkans, or had complete domination over a confused mass movement, as in Yugoslavia (or later on in China and in Vietnam), it inaugurated in these countries regimes that were in every respect

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similar to the Russian regime (taking into account, of course, local conditions). It obviously was ridiculous to describe these regimes as degenerated workers' States.[7]

From then on, therefore, we were obliged to look into what gave such stability and opportunities for expansion to the Stalinist bureaucracy, both in Russia and elsewhere. To do this, we had to resume the analysis of Russia's economic and social system of rule. Once rid of the Trotskyist outlook, it was easy to see using the basic categories of Marxism, that Russian society is divided into classes, among which the two fundamental ones are the bureaucracy and the proletariat. The bureaucracy there plays the role of the dominant, exploiting class in the full sense of the term. It is not merely that it is a privileged class and that its unproductive consumption absorbs a part of the social product comparable to (and probably greater than) that absorbed by the unproductive consumption of the bourgeoisie in private capitalist countries. It also has sovereign control over how the total social product will be used. It does this first of all by determining how the total social product will be distributed among wages and surplus value (at the same time that it tries to dictate to the workers the lowest wages possible and to extract from them the greatest amount of labor possible): next by determining how this surplus value will be distributed between its own unproductive consumption and new investments, and finally by determining how these investments will be distributed among the various sectors of production.

But the bureaucracy can control how the social product will be utilized only because it controls production. Because it manages production at the factory level, it always can make the workers produce more for the same wage; because it *manages* production on the societal level, it can decide to manufacture cannons and silk rather than housing and cotton. We discover, therefore, that the essence, the foundation, of its bureaucratic domination over Russian society comes from the fact that it has dominance within the relations of production; at the same time, we discover that this same function always has been the basis for the domination of one class over society, in other words, at every instant the actual essence of class relations in production is the antagonistic division of those who participate in the production process into two fixed and stable categories, directors and executants. Everything else is concerned with the sociological and juridical mechanisms that guarantee the stability of the managerial stratum; that is how it is with feudal ownership of the land, capitalist private property, or this strange form of private, non-personal property ownership that characterizes present-day capitalism; that is how it is in Russia with the "Communist Party" the totalitarian dictatorship by the organ that expresses the bureaucracy's general interests and that ensures that the members of the ruling class are recruited through co-optation on the scale of society as a whole.[8]

It follows that planning and the nationalization of the means of production in no way resolve the problem of the class character of the economy, nor do they signify the abolition of exploitation; of course, they entail the abolition of the former dominant classes, but they do not answer the fundamental problem of who now will direct production and how. If a new stratum of individuals takes over this function of direction, "all the old rubbish" Marx spoke about will quickly reappear, for this stratum will use its managerial position to create privileges for itself, it will reinforce its monopoly over managerial functions, in this way tending to make its domination more complete and more difficult to put into question; it will tend to assure the transmission of these privileges to its successors, etc.

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For Trotsky, the bureaucracy is not a ruling class since bureaucratic privileges cannot be transmitted by inheritance. But in dealing with this argument, we need only recall (1) that hereditary transmission is in no way an element necessary to establish the category of "ruling class," and (2) that, moreover, it is obvious how, in Russia, membership in the bureaucracy (not, of course, in some particular bureaucratic post) can be passed down; a measure such as the abolition of free secondary education (laid down in 1936) suffices to set up an inexorable sociological mechanism assuring that only the children of bureaucrats will be able to enter into the career of being a bureaucrat. That, in addition, the bureaucracy might want to try (using educational grants or aptitude tests "based upon merits alone") to bring in talented people from the proletariat or the peasantry not only does not contradict but even confirms its character as an exploiting class: Similar mechanisms have always existed in capitalist countries, and their social function is to reinvigorate the ruling stratum with new blood, to mitigate in part the irrationalities resulting from the hereditary character of managerial functions, and to emasculate the exploited classes by corrupting their most gifted members.

It is easy to see that it is not a question here of a problem particular to Russia or to the 1920s. For the same problem is posed in every modern society, even apart from the proletarian revolution; it is just another expression of the process of concentration of the forces of production. What, indeed, creates the *objective* possibility for a bureaucratic degeneration of the revolution? It is the inexorable movement of the modern economy, under the pressure of technique, toward the more and more intense concentration of capital and power, the incompatibility of the actual degree of development of the forces of production with private property and the market as the way in which business enterprises are integrated. This movement is expressed in a host of structural transformations in Western capitalist countries, though we cannot dwell upon that right now. We need only recall that they are socially incarnated in a new bureaucracy, an economic bureaucracy as well as a work-place bureaucracy. Now, by making a *tabula rasa* of private property, of the market, etc., revolution *can* – if it stops at that point – make the route of total bureaucratic concentration easier. We see, therefore, that far from being deprived of its own reality, bureaucracy personifies the final stage of capitalist development.

Since then it has become obvious that the program of the socialist revolution and the proletariat's objective no longer could be merely the suppression of private property, the nationalization of the means of production and planning, but rather *workers' management* of the economy and of power. Returning to the degeneration the Russian revolution, we established that on the economic level the Bolshevik party had as its program not *workers' management* but *workers' control*. This was because the Party, which did not think the revolution could immediately be a socialist revolution, did not even pose for itself the task of expropriating the capitalists, and therefore thought that this latter class would remain as managers in the workplace. Under such conditions, the function of workers' control would be to prevent the capitalists from organizing to sabotage production, to get control over their profits and over the disposition of the product, and to set up a "school" of management for the workers. But this sociological monstrosity of a country where the proletariat exercises its dictatorship through the instrument of the soviets and of the Bolshevik party, and where the capitalists keep their property and continue to direct their enterprises, could not last; where the capitalists had not fled, they were expelled by the workers, who then took over the management of these enterprises.

This first experience of workers' management only lasted a short time; we cannot go into an analysis here of this period of the Russian Revolution (which is quite obscure and about which

few sources exist),[*] or of the factors that determined the rapid changeover of power in the factories into the hands of a new managerial stratum. Among these factors are the backward state of the country, the proletariat's numerical and cultural weakness, the dilapidated condition of the productive apparatus, the long civil war with its unprecedented violence, and the international isolation of the revolution. There is one factor whose effect during this period we wish to emphasize: In its actions, the Bolshevik party's policy was systematically opposed to workers' management and tended from the start to set up its own apparatus for directing production, solely responsible to the central power, i.e., in the last analysis, to the Party. This was done in the in name of efficiency and the overriding necessities brought on by the civil war. Whether this policy was the most effective one even in the short term is open to question; in any case, in the long run it laid the foundations for bureaucracy.

If the management [*direction*] of the economy thus eluded the proletariat, Lenin thought the essential thing was for the power of the soviets to preserve for the workers at least the leadership [*direction*] of the State. On the other hand, he thought that by participating in the management of the economy through workers' control, trade unions, and so on, the working class would gradually "learn" to manage. Nevertheless, a series of events that cannot be retraced here, but that were inevitable quickly made the Bolshevik party's domination over the soviets irreversible. From this point onward, the proletarian character of the whole system hinged on the proletarian character of the Bolshevik party. We could easily show that under such conditions the Party, a highly centralized minority with monopoly control over the exercise of power, no longer would be able to preserve even its proletarian character (in the strong sense of this term), and that it was bound to separate itself from the class from which it had arisen. But there is no need to go as far as that. In 1923, "the Party numbered 50,000 workers and 300,000 functionaries in its total of 350,000 members. It no longer was a workers' party but a party of workers-turned-functionaries."[9] Bringing together the "elite" of the proletariat, the Party had been led to install this elite in the command posts of the economy and the State; hence this elite had to be accountable only to the Party itself. The working class's "apprenticeship" in management merely signified that a certain number of workers, who were learning managerial techniques, left the rank and file and passed over to the side of the new bureaucracy. As people's social existence determines their consciousness, the Party members were going to act from then on, not according to the Bolshevik program, but in terms of their concrete situation as privileged managers of the economy and the state. The trick has been played, the revolution has died, and if there is something to be surprised about, it is rather how long it took for the bureaucracy to consolidate its power.[10]

The conclusions that follow from this brief analysis are clear: The program of the socialist revolution can be nothing other than *workers' management*. Workers' management of power, i.e., the power of the masses' autonomous organizations (soviets or councils); workers' management of the economy, i.e., the producers' direction of production, also organized in soviet-style organs. The proletariat's objective cannot be nationalization and planning without anything more, because that would signify that the domination of society would be handed over to a new stratum of rulers and exploiters; it cannot be achieved by handing over power to a party, however revolutionary and however proletarian this party might be at the outset, because this party inevitably will tend to exercise this power on its own behalf and will be used as the nucleus for the crystal-

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lization of a new ruling stratum. Indeed, in our time the problem of the division of society into classes appears more and more in its most direct and naked form, and stripped of all juridical cover, as the problem of the division of society into directors and executants. The proletarian revolution carries out its historical program only insofar as it tends from the very beginning to abolish this division by reabsorbing every particular managerial stratum and by *collectivizing*, or more exactly by *completely socializing*, the functions of direction. The problem of the proletariat's historical capacity to achieve a classless society is not the problem of its capacity to physically overthrow the exploiters who are in power (of this there is no doubt); it is rather the problem of how to positively organize a collective, socialized management of production and power. From then on it becomes obvious that the realization of socialism on the proletariat's behalf by any party or bureaucracy whatsoever is an absurdity, a contradiction in terms, a square circle, an underwater bird; socialism is nothing but the masses conscious and perpetual self-managerial activity. It becomes equally obvious that socialism cannot be objectively inscribed, not even halfway, in any law or constitution, in the nationalization of the means of production, or in planning, nor even in a "law" instaurating workers' management: If the working class cannot manage, no law can give it the power to do so, and if it does manage, such a "law" would merely ratify this existing state of affairs.

Thus, beginning with a critique of the bureaucracy, we have succeeded in formulating a positive conception of the content of socialism; briefly speaking, "socialism in all its aspects does not signify anything other than worker's management of society," and "the working class can free itself only by achieving power for itself." The proletariat can carry out the socialist revolution only if it acts autonomously, i.e., if it finds in itself both the will and the consciousness for the necessary transformation of society. Socialism can be neither the fated result of historical development, a violation of history by a party of supermen, nor still the application of a program derived from a theory that is true in itself. Rather, it is the unleashing of the free creative activity of the oppressed masses. Such an unleashing of free creative activity is made *possible* by historical development, and the action of a party based on *this* theory can *facilitate* it to a tremendous degree.

Henceforth it is indispensable to develop on every level the consequences of this idea.

Marxism and the Idea of the Proletariat's Autonomy

We must say right off that there is nothing essentially new about this conception. Its meaning is the same as Marx's celebrated formulation "The emancipation of the workers must be conquered by the workers themselves."[1] It was expressed likewise by Trotsky: "socialism, as opposed to capitalism, consciously builds itself up." It would be only too easy to pile up quotations of this kind.

What is new is the will and ability to take this idea in total seriousness while drawing out the theoretical as well as the practical implications. This could not be done till now, either by us or by the great founders of Marxism. For, on the one hand, the necessary historical experience was lacking; the preceding analysis shows the tremendous importance the degeneration of the Russian Revolution possesses for the clarification of the problem of workers' power. And on the other hand, and at a deeper level, revolutionary theory and practice in an exploiting society are subjected to a crucial contradiction that results from the fact that they belong to this society they are trying to abolish. This contradiction is expressed in an infinite number of ways.

Only one of these ways is of interest to us here. To be revolutionary signifies both to think that only the masses in struggle can resolve the problem of socialism and not to fold one's arms for all that; it means to think that the essential content of the revolution will be given by the masses' creative, original, and unforeseeable activity, and to act oneself, beginning with a rational analysis of the present with a perspective that anticipates the future.[2] In the last analysis, it means to postulate that the revolution will signify an overthrow and a tremendous enlargement of our present form of rationality and to utilize this same rationality in order to anticipate the content of the revolution.

How this contradiction is relatively resolved and relatively posed anew at each stage of the workers' movement up to the ultimate victory of the revolution, cannot detain us here; this is the whole problem of the concrete dialectic of the historical development of the proletariat's revolutionary action and of revolutionary theory. At this time we need only establish that there is an intrinsic difficulty in developing a revolutionary theory and practice in an exploiting society, and that, insofar as he wants to overcome this difficulty, the theoretician – and, likewise indeed, the militant – risks falling back unconsciously on the terrain of bourgeois thought, and more generally on the terrain of the type of thought that issues from an alienated society and that has dominated humanity for millennia. Thus, in the face of the problems posed by the new historical situations the theoretician often will be led to "reduce the unknown to the known," for that is what theoretical activity today consists of. He thereby either cannot see that it is a question of a new type of problem or, even if he does see that, he can only apply to it solutions inherited from the past. Nevertheless, the factors whose revolutionary importance he has just recognized

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or even discovered – modern technique and the activity of the proletariat – tend not only to create new kinds of solutions but to destroy the very terms in which problems previously had been posed. From then on, solutions of the traditional type provided by the theoretician will not simply be inadequate; insofar as they are adopted (which implies that the proletariat too remains under the hold of received ideas) they objectively will be the instrument for maintaining the proletariat within the framework of exploitation, although perhaps under a different form.

Marx was aware of this problem. His refusal of "utopian" socialism and his statement that "every step of real movement is more important than a dozen Programs," express precisely his distrust of bookish solutions, since they are always separate from the living development of history. Nevertheless, there remains in Marxism a significant share (which has kept on growing in succeeding generations of Marxists) of a bourgeois or "traditional" ideological legacy. To this extent, there is an ambiguity in theoretical Marxism, an ambiguity that has played an important historical role; the exploiting society thereby has been able to exert its influence on the proletariat movement from within. The case analyzed earlier, where the Bolshevik party in Russia applied traditionally effective solutions to the problem of how to direct production, offers a dramatic illustration of this process; traditional solutions have been effective in the sense that they effectively have brought back the traditional state of affairs, or have led to the restoration of exploitation under new forms. Later we will come upon other important instances of bourgeois ideas surviving within Marxism. It is useful nevertheless to discuss now an example that will bring to light what we are trying to say.

How will labor be remunerated in a socialist economy? It is well known that in the "Critique of the Gotha Programme," where he distinguishes the organizational form of this post-revolutionary society (the "lower stage of communism") from communism itself (where the principle "from each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs" would reign), Marx spoke of the "bourgeois right" that would prevail during this phase. He understood by that equal pay for an equal quantity and quality of labor – which can mean unequal pay for different individuals.[3]

How can this principle be justified? One begins with the basic characteristics of the socialist economy, namely that, on the one hands this economy is still an economy of scarcity where, consequently, it is essential that the production efforts of society's members be pushed to the maximum; and on the other hand, that people still are dominated by the "egoistic" mentality inherited from the preceding society and maintained by this state of scarcity. The greatest amount of effort in production therefore is required at the same time that this society needs to struggle against the "natural" tendency to shirk work that still exists at this stage. It will be said, therefore, that it is necessary, if one wants to avoid disorder and famine, to make the remuneration of labor proportional to the quality and quantity of the labor provided, measured, for example, by the number of pieces manufactured, the number of hours in attendance, etc., which naturally leads to zero remuneration for zero work and in the same stroke settles the problem of one's obligation to work. In short, one ends up with some sort of "output-based wage."[4] Depending on how clever one is, one will reconcile this conclusion, with greater or lesser ease, with the harsh criticism to which this form of wage payment has been subjected when it is applied within the capitalist system.

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Doing this, one will have purely and simply forgotten that the problem no longer can be posed in these terms: Both modern technique and the forms of association among workers that socialism implies render it null and void. Whether it is a matter of working on an assembly line or of piecework on "individual" machines, the individual laborer's work pace is dictated by the work pace of the unit to which he belongs – automatically and "physically" in the case of assembly work, indirectly and "socially" in piecework on a machine, but always in a manner that is imposed upon him. Consequently, it longer is a problem of individual output.[5] It is a problem of the work pace of a given unit of workers (which in the final analysis is the factory unit), and this pace can be determined only by this unit of workers itself. The problem of *remuneration* therefore comes down to a *management* problem, for once a general wage is established, the concrete rate of remuneration (the wage-output ratio) will be determined by determining the pace of work; the latter in its turn leads us to the heart of the problem of management as the problem that concretely concerns the producers as a whole (who, in one form or another, will have to determine that such and such a production pace on one line of a given type is equivalent as an expenditure of labor to another production pace on another line of another type, and this will have to done between various shops in the same factory as well as between a variety of factories, etc.).

Let us recall, if need be, that in no way does this signify that the problem necessarily becomes any easier to solve. Maybe even the contrary is the case. But finally it has been posed in correct terms. Mistakes made while trying to solve this problem might be fruitful for the development of socialism, and the successive elimination of such mistakes would allow us to arrive at *the* solution. As long as it is posited in the form of an "output-based wage" or "bourgeois right," however, we remain situated directly on the terrain of an exploiting society.

Certainly, the problem in its traditional form still can exist in "backward sectors" – though this does not necessarily mean that one should provide a "backward" solution. But whatever the solution might be in such a case, what we are trying to say is that historical developments tend to change both the form and the content of the problem.

But what is essential is to analyze both the mechanism and the mistake. Faced with a problem bequeathed by the bourgeois era one reasons like a bourgeois. One reasons like a bourgeois first of all in that one sets up an abstract and universal rule – this being the only form in which problems can be solved in an alienated society – forgetting that "law is like an ignorant and crude man" who always repeats the same thing[6] and that a socialist solution can only be socialist if it is a concrete solution that involves the permanent participation of the organized units of workers in determining this solution. One also reasons like a bourgeois in that an alienated society is obliged to resort to abstract universal rules, because otherwise it could not be *stable* and because it is incapable of taking concrete cases into consideration on their own. It has neither the institutions nor the point of view necessary for this, whereas a socialist society, which creates precisely the organs that can take every concrete case into consideration, can have as its law only the perpetual determining activity of these organs.

One is reasoning like the bourgeois in that one accepts the bourgeois idea (and here one is correctly reflecting the real situation in bourgeois society) that individual interest is the supreme motive of human activity. Thus, for the bourgeois mentality of English "neo-socialists," man in socialist society continues to be, before all else, an *economic man*, and society therefore ought to

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be regulated starting out from this idea. Thus transposing at once both the problems of capitalism and bourgeois behavior onto the new society, they are in essence preoccupied by the problem of incentives (earnings that stimulate the worker)[7] and forget that already in capitalist society what makes the worker work are not incentives but the control of his work by other people and by the machines themselves. The idea of *economic man* has been created by bourgeois society in its image; to be quite exact, in the image of the bourgeois and certainly not in the image of the worker. The workers act like "economic men" only when they are obliged to do so, i.e., vis-à-vis the bourgeois (who thus makes money off of their piecework), but certainly not among themselves (as can be seen during strikes, and also in their attitudes toward their families; otherwise, workers would have ceased to exist a long time ago). That it may be said that they act in this way toward what "belongs" to them (family, class, etc.) is fine, for we are saying precisely that they will act in this way toward everything when everything "belongs" to them. And to claim that the family is visible and here whereas "everything" is an abstraction again would be a misunderstandings for the everything we are talking about is concrete, it begins with the other workers in the shop, the factory, etc.

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Workers' Management of Production

A society without exploitation is conceivable, we have seen, if the management of production no longer is localized in a social category, in other words, if the *structural* division of society into directors and executants is abolished. Likewise we have seen that the solution to the problem thus posed can be given only by the proletariat itself. It is not only that no solution would be of any value, and simply could not even be carried out if it were not reinvented by the masses in an autonomous manner, nor is it that the problem posed exists on a scale that renders the active cooperation of millions of individuals indispensable to its solution. It is that by its very nature the solution to the problem of workers' management cannot be fitted into a formula, or, as we have said already, it is that the only genuine law socialist society acknowledges is the perpetual determining activity of the masses' organs of management.

The reflections that follow, therefore, aim not at "resolving" the problem of workers' management theoretically – which once again would be a contradiction in terms – but rather at clarifying the givens of the problem. We aim only at dispelling misunderstandings and widely held prejudices by showing how the problem of management is *not* posed and how it *is* posed.

If one thinks the basic task of the revolution is a negative task, the abolition of private property (which actually can be achieved by decree), one may think of the revolution as centered on the "taking of power" and therefore as a *moment* (which may last a few days and, if need be, can be followed by a few months or years of civil war) when the workers seize power and expropriate de facto and de jure the factory owners. And in this case, one actually will be led to grant a prime importance to "the taking of power" and to an organ constructed exclusively with this end in view.

That in fact is how things happen during a bourgeois revolution. The new society is prepared for completely within the old one; manufacturing concentrates employers and workers, the rent peasants pay to landed property owners is stripped of every economic function as these proprietors are stripped of every social function. Only a feudal shell remains around this society that is in fact bourgeois. A Bastille is demolished, a few heads cut off, a night falls in August, some elected officials (many of whom are lawyers) draft some constitutional some laws, and some decrees – and the trick is played. The revolution is over, a historical period is closed, another is opened. True, a civil war may follow: The drafting of new codes will take a few years, the structure of the administration as well as that of the army will undergo significant changes. But the essence of the revolution is over before the revolution begins.

Indeed, the bourgeois revolution is only pure negation as concerns the area of economics. It is based upon what already is there, it limits itself to erecting into law a state of fact by abolishing a superstructure that in itself already is unreal. Its limited constructions affect only this superstructure; the economic base takes care of itself. Whether this occurs before or after the bourgeois revolution, once established in the economic sector, capitalism spreads by the force of its own laws over the terrain of simple commercial production that it discovers lying stretched out before it.

There is no relationship between this process and that of the socialist revolution. The latter is not a simple negation of certain aspects of the order that preceded it; it is essentially *positive*. It has to construct its regime – constructing not factories but new relations of production for which the development of capitalism furnishes merely the presuppositions. We will be able to see this better by rereading the passage where Marx describes the "Historical Tendency of Capitalist Accumulation." Please excuse us for citing a long passage.

> "As soon as the capitalist mode of production stands on its own feet, then the further socialization of labor and further transformation of the land and other means of production into socially exploited and, therefore, common means of production, as well as the further expropriation of private proprietors, takes a new form. That which is now to be expropriated is no longer the laborer working for himself, but the capitalist exploiting many laborers. This expropriation is accomplished by the action of the immanent laws of capitalistic production itself, by the centralization of capital. One capitalist always kills many. Hand in hand with this centralization, or this expropriation of many capitalists by few develop, on an ever-extending scale, the cooperative form of the labor-process, the conscious technical application of science, the methodical cultivation of the soil, the transformation of the instruments of labor into instruments of labor only usable in common, the economizing of all means of production by their use as the means of production of combined, socialized labor, the entanglement of all peoples in the net of the world-market, and with this the international character of the capitalistic regime. Along with the constantly diminishing number of the magnates of capital, who usurp and monopolize all advantages of this process of transformation, grows the mass of miserly oppression, slavery, degradation, exploitation; but with this too grows the revolt of the working-class, a class always increasing in numbers, and disciplined, united, organized by the very mechanism of the process of capitalist production itself. The monopoly of capital becomes a fetter upon the mode of production, which has sprung up and flourished along with, and under it. Centralization of the means of production and socialization of labor at last reach a point where they become incompatible with their capitalist integument. This integument is burst asunder. The knell of capitalist private property sounds. The expropriaters are expropriated."[1]

What in fact exists of the new society at the moment when the "capitalist integument is burst asunder"? All its premises: a society composed almost entirely of proletarians, the "rational application of science in industry," and also, given the degree of concentration of business enterprises this passage presupposes, the separation of property ownership from the actual functions of directing production. But where can we find already realized in this society socialist relations of productions as bourgeois relations of production were in "feudal" society?

Now, it is obvious that these new relations of production cannot be *merely* those realized in the "socialization of the labor process," the cooperation of thousands of individuals within the great industrial units of production. For these are the relations of production *typical* of a highly developed form of *capitalism*.

[1] Footnote missing.

The "socialization of the labor process" as it takes place in the capitalist economy is the premise of socialism in that it abolishes anarchy, isolation, dispersion, etc. But it is in no way socialism's "prefiguration" or "embryo," in that it is an *antagonistic* form of socialization; i.e., it reproduces and deepens the division between the mass of executants and a stratum of directors. At the same time the producers are subjected to a collective form of discipline, the conditions of production are standardized among various sectors and localities, and production tasks become interchangeable, we notice at the other pole not only a decreasing number of capitalists in a more and more parasitic role but also the constitution of a separate apparatus for directing production. Now, socialist relations of production are those types of relations that preclude the separate existence of a fixed and stable we stratum of directors production. We see, therefore, that the point of departure for realizing such relations can be only the destruction of the power of the bourgeoisie or the bureaucracy. The capitalist transformation of society *ends* with the bourgeois revolution; the socialist transformation of society *begins* with the proletarian revolution.

Modern developments themselves have abolished the aspects of the problem of management that once were considered decisive. On the one hand, managerial labor itself has become a form of wage labor, as Engels already pointed out; on the other hand, it has become itself a *collective labor of execution.*[2] The "tasks" involved in the organization of labor, which formerly fell to the boss, assisted by a few technicians, now are performed by offices bringing together hundreds or thousands of persons, who themselves work as salaried, compartmentalized executants. The other group of traditional managerial tasks, which basically involve integrating the enterprise into the economy as a whole (in particular, those involving market "analysis" or having a "flair" for the market – which pertain to the nature, quality, and price of manufactured goods in demand, modifications in the scale of production, etc.), already has been transformed in its very nature with the advent of monopolies. The way this group of tasks is accomplished has been transformed too, since its basics are now carried out by a collective apparatus that canvasses the market, surveys consumer tastes, sells the product, etc. All this already has happened under monopoly capitalism. When private property gives way to State-run property, as in [total] bureaucratic capitalism, a central apparatus for coordinating the functioning of enterprises takes the place both of the market as "regulator" and of the apparatuses belonging to each enterprise; this is the central planning bureaucracy, the economic "necessity" for which should issue, according to its defenders, directly from these functions of coordination.

There is no point in discussing this sophism. Let us simply note in passing that the advocates of the bureaucracy demonstrate, in a first move, that one can do without bosses since one can make the economy function according to a plan and, in a second move, that for the plan to function, it has need of bosses of a different kind. For – and here is what interests us – the problem of how to coordinate the activity of enterprises and sectors of productions after the market has been abolished, in other words, the problem of planning, already has been virtually abolished by advancements in modern techniques. Leontief 's method,[3] even in its present form,[4] removes all "apolitical" or "economic" meaning from the problem of how to coordinate various sectors or various enterprises, for it allows us to determine the consequences for a entire set of sectors, regions, and enterprises once we have settled upon the desired volume of production of end-

[2] Footnote missing.

[3] Footnote missing.

[4] Footnote missing.

use articles. At the same time, it allows us a large degree of flexibility, for this method makes it possible, if we want to modify the plan while work is in progress, to draw out immediately the practical implications of such a change. Combined with other modern methods,[5] it allows us both to choose the optimal methods for achieving our overall objectives, once they are settled upon, and to define these methods in detail for the entire economy. Briefly speaking, all of the "planning activity" of the Russian bureaucracy, for example, could be transferred at this point to an electronic calculator.

The problem, therefore, appears only at the two extremes of economic activity: at the most specific level (how to translate the production goal of a particular factory into the production goals to be carried out by each group of workers in the shops of this factory) and at the universal level (how to determine the production goals for end-use goods of the entire economy).

In both cases, the problem exists only because technique (in the broad sense of this term) develops – and it will develop even more in a socialist society. Indeed, it is clear that with an unchanging set of techniques the type of solution (if not the solutions themselves, whose exact terms will vary if, for example, there is accumulation) would be given once and for all, and that it would be merely a matter of allocating tasks within a shop (perfectly compatible with the possibility of interchangeable producers being able to switch between different jobs) or of determining the end-use products. The incessant modification of the different possible ways of carrying out production along with the incessant modification of final objectives will create the terrain on which collective management will work itself out.

[5] Footnote missing.

Alienation in Capitalist Society

By alienation – a characteristic moment of every class society, but one that appears to an incomparably greater extent and depth in capitalist society – we mean to say that the products of man's activity (whether we are talking about objects or institutions) take on an independent social existence opposite him. Instead of being dominated by him, these products dominate him. Alienation is that which is opposed to man's free creativity in the world created by man; it is not an independent historical principle having its own source. It is the objectification of human activity insofar as it escapes its author without its author being able to escape it. Every form of alienation is a form of human objectification; i.e., it has its source in human activity (there are no "secret forces" in history, any there is a cunning of reason in natural economic laws). But not every form of objectification is necessarily a form of alienation insofar as it can be consciously taken up again, reaffirmed or destroyed. As soon as it is posited, every product of human activity (even a purely internal attitude) "escapes its author" and even leads an existence independent of that author. We cannot act as if we have not uttered some particular word, but we can cease to be determined by it. The past life of every individual is its objectification till today; but he is not necessarily and exhaustively alienated from it, his future is not permanently dominated by his past. Socialism will be the abolition of alienation in that it will permit the perpetuate conscious recovery without violent conflict of the socially givens in that it will restore people's domination over the products of their activity. Capitalist society is an alienated society in that its transformations take place independently of people's will and consciousness (including those of the dominant class), according to quasi-"laws" that express objective structures independent of their control.

What interests us here is not to describe how alienation is produced in the form of alienation in capitalist society (which would involve an analysis of the birth of capitalism as well as of its functioning) but to show the concrete manifestations of this alienation in various spheres of social activity as well as their intimate unity.

Only to the extent that we grasp the content of socialism as the proletariat's autonomy, as free creative activity determining itself, as workers' management in all domains, can we grasp the essence of man's alienation in capitalist society. Indeed, it is not by accident that "enlightened" members of the bourgeoisie as well as reformist and Stalinist bureaucrats want to reduce the evils of capitalism to essentially economic evils, and, on the economic level, to exploitation in the form of an unequal distribution of national income. To the extent that their critique of capitalism is extended to other domains it again will take for its point of departure this unequal distribution of income, and it will consist basically of variations on the theme of the corrupting influence of money. If they look at the family or the sexual question, they will talk about how poverty makes prostitutes, about the young girl sold to the rich old man, about domestic problems that are the result of economic misery. If they look at culture, they will talk about venality, about obstacles put in the way of talented but underprivileged people, and about illiteracy. Certainly, all that is true, and important. But it only touches the surface of the problem, and those who talk only in

this way regard man solely as a consumer and, by pretending to satisfy him on this levels they tend to reduce him to his (direct or sublimated) physical functions of digestion. But for man, what is at stake is not "ingestion"[1] pure and simple; rather it is a matter of self-expression and self-creation, and not only in the economic domain, but in all domains.

In class society, conflict is not expressed simply in the area of distribution, in the form of exploitation and limitations on consumption. This is only one aspect of the conflict and not the most important one. Its fundamental feature is to be found in the limitations placed on man's human role in the domain of production; eventually, these limitations go so far as an attempt to abolish this role completely. It is to be found in the fact that man is expropriated, both individually and collectively, from having command over his own activity. By his enslavement to the machine, and through the machine, to an abstract, foreign, and hostile will, man is deprived of the true content of his human activity, the conscious transformation of the natural world. It constantly inhibits his deep-seated tendency to realize himself in the object. The true signification of this situation is not only that the producers live it as an absolute misfortune, as a permanent mutilation; it is that this situation creates at the profoundest level of production a perpetual conflict, which explodes at least on occasion; it also is that it makes for huge wastefulness – in comparison to which the wastefulness involved in crises of overproduction is probably negligible – both through the producers' positive opposition to a system they reject and through the lost opportunities that result from neutralizing the inventiveness and creativity of millions of individuals. Beyond these features, we must ask ourselves to what extent the further development of capitalist production is possible, even "technically," if the direct producer continues to be kept in the compartmentalized state in which he currently resides.

But alienation in capitalist society is not simply economic. It not only manifests itself in connection with material life. It also affects in a fundamental way both man's sexual and his cultural functions.

Indeed, society exists only insofar as there exists an organization of production and reproduction of the life of individuals and of the species – therefore an organization of economic and sexual relations – and only insofar as this organization ceases to be simply instinctual and becomes conscious – therefore only insofar as it includes the moment of culture.

As Marx said, "A bee puts to shame many an architect in the construction of her cells. But what distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees is this, that the architect raises his structure in imagination before he erects it in reality."[2] Technique and consciousness obviously go hand in hand: An instrument is a materialized and operative signification, or better yet a mediation between a deliberate intention and a still-ideal goal.

What is said in this quotation from Marx about the fabrication of bees' honeycombs can be said as well about their "social" organization. As technique represents a rationalization of relations with the natural world, social organization represents a rationalization of the relations between individuals of a group. Bee-hive organization is a non-conscious form of rationalization, but tribal organization is a conscious one; the primitive can describe it and he can deny it (by transgressing it). Rationalization in this context obviously does not mean "our" rationalization. At one stage and in a given context, both magic and cannibalism represent rationalizations (without quotation marks).

[1] Footnote missing.

[2] Footnote missing.

If, therefore, a social organization is antagonistic, it will tend to be so both on the level of production and on the sexual and cultural planes as well. It is wrong to think that conflict in the domain of production "creates" or "determines" a secondary or derivative conflict on other planes; the structures of class domination impose themselves right away on all three levels at once and are impossible and inconceivable outside of this simultaneity, of this equivalence. Exploitation, for example, can be guaranteed only if the producers are expropriated from the management of production, but this expropriation both presupposes that the producers tend to be separated from the *ability* to manage – and therefore from culture – and reproduces this separation on an larger scale. Likewise, a society in which the fundamental inter-human relations are relations of domination presupposes and at the same time engenders an alienating organization of sexual relations, namely an organization that creates in individuals deep-seated inhibitions that tend to make them accept authority, etc.[3]

Indeed, there obviously is a dialectical equivalence between social structures and the "psychological" structures of individuals. From his first steps in life the individual is subjected to a constant set of pressures aimed at imposing on him a given attitude toward work, sex, ideas, at cheating him out of [*frustrer*] the natural objects of his activity and at inhibiting him by making him interiorize and value this process of frustration. Class society can exist only insofar as it succeeds to a large extent in enforcing this acceptance. This is why the conflict is not a purely external conflict, but is transposed into the hearts of individuals themselves. This antagonistic social structure corresponds to an antagonistic structure within individuals, each perpetually reproducing itself by means of the other. The point of these considerations is not only to emphasize the moment of identity in the essence of the relations of domination as they take place in the capitalist factory, in the patriarchal family, or in authoritarian teaching and "aristocratic" culture. It is to point out that the socialist revolution necessarily will have to embrace all domains in their entirety, and this must be done not it some unforeseeable future and "by increments," but rather from the outset. Certainly it has to begin in a certain fashion, which can be nothing other than the destruction of the power of the exploiters by the power of the armed masses and the installation of workers' management in production. But it will have to grapple immediately with the reconstruction of other social activities, under penalty of death. We will try to show this by looking at what kind of relations the proletariat, once in power, will entertain with culture.

The antagonistic structure of cultural relations in present-day society is expressed also (but in no way exclusively) by the radical division between manual and intellectual labor. The result is that the immense majority of humanity is totally separated from culture as *activity* and shares [*participe*] in only an infinitesimal fraction of the fruits of culture. On the other hand, the division of society into directors and executants becomes more and more homologous to the division between manual labor and intellectual labor (all management jobs being some form of intellectual labor and all manual jobs being some form of labor that consists of the execution of tasks).[4] Workers' management is possible, therefore, only if from the outset it starts moving in the direction of overcoming this division, in particular with respect to intellectual labor as it relates to the production process. This implies in turn that the proletariat will begin to appropriate culture for itself. Certainly not as ready-made culture, as the assimilation of the "results" of historically extant culture. Beyond a certain point, such an assimilation is both impossible in the immediate

[3] Footnote missing.

[4] Footnote missing.

future and superfluous (as concerns what is of interest to us here). Rather as appropriation of activity, as recovery of the cultural function itself and as a radical change in the producing masses' relation to intellectual work. Only as this change takes hold will workers' management become irreversible.

Part Two

[Introduction]

The development of modern society and what has happened to the working-class movement over the last 100 years (and in particular since 1917) have compelled us to make a radical revision of the ideas on which that movement has been based.

Forty years have elapsed since the proletarian revolution seized power in Russia. From that revolution it is not socialism that ultimately emerged but a new and monstrous form of exploiting society and totalitarian oppression that differed from the worst forms of capitalism only in that the bureaucracy replaced the private owners of capital and "the plan" took the place of the "free market." Ten years ago, only a few people like us defended these ideas. Since then, the Hungarian workers have brought them to the world's attention.

Among the raw materials for such a revision are the vast experience of the Russian Revolution and of its degeneration, the Hungarian workers' councils, their actions, and their program. But these are far from being the only elements useful for making such a revision. A look at modern capitalism and at the type of conflict it breeds shows that throughout the world working people are faced with the same fundamental problems, often posed in surprisingly similar terms. These problems call everywhere for the same response. This answer is socialism, a social system that is the very opposite of the bureaucratic capitalism now installed in Russia, China, and elsewhere.

The experience of bureaucratic capitalism allows us clearly to perceive what socialism is not and cannot be. A close look both at past proletarian uprisings and at the everyday life and struggles of the proletariat enables us to say what socialism could and should be. Basing ourselves on a century of experience we can and must now define the positive content of socialism in a much fuller and more accurate way than was possible for previous revolutionaries. In today's vast ideological morass, people who call themselves socialists may be heard to say that they "are no longer quite sure what the word means." We hope to show that the very opposite is the case. Today, for the first time, one can begin to spell out in concrete and specific terms what socialism really could be like.

The task we are about to undertake not only leads us to challenge many widely held ideas about socialism, many of which go back to Lenin and some to Marx. It also leads us to question widely held ideas about capitalism, about the way it works and about the real nature of its crises, many of which have reached us (with or without distortion) from Marx himself. The two analyses are complementary and in fact the one necessitates the other.

The revision we propose did not of course start today. Various strands of the revolutionary movement — and a number of individual revolutionaries — have contributed to it over time. From the very first issue of Socialisme ou Barbarie we endeavored to resume this effort in a systematic fashion. There we claimed that the fundamental division in contemporary societies was the division into directors and executants. We attempted to show how the working class's own development would lead it to a socialist consciousness. We stated that socialism could only be the product of the autonomous action of the working class. We stressed that a socialist society

implied the abolition of any separate stratum of directors and that it therefore implied the power of mass organs and workers' management of production.

But in a sense, we ourselves have failed to develop the content of our own ideas to the full. It would hardly be worth mentioning this fact were it not that it expressed, at its own level, the influence of factors that have dominated the evolution of Marxism itself for a century, namely, the enormous dead weight of the ideology of exploiting society, the paralyzing legacy of traditional concepts, and the difficulty of freeing oneself from inherited modes of thought.

In one sense, our revision consists of making more explicit and precise what was the genuine, initial intention of Marxism and what has always been the deepest content of working-class struggles — whether at their dramatic and culminating moments or in the anonymity of working-class life in the factory. In another sense, our revision consists of a freeing of revolutionary thought from the accumulated dross of a century. We want to break the distorting prisms through which so many revolutionaries have become accustomed to looking at the life and action of the proletariat.

Socialism aims at giving a meaning to people's life and work; at enabling then freedom, their creativity, and the most positive aspects of their personality to flourish; at creating organic links between the individual and those around him, and between the group and society; at reconciling people with themselves and with nature. It thereby rejoins the most basic goals of the working class in its daily struggles against capitalist alienation. These are not aspirations about some hazy and distant future, but rather the content of tendencies existing and manifesting themselves today, both in revolutionary struggles and in everyday life. To understand this is to understand that, for the worker, the ultimate problem of history is an everyday problem. To grasp this is also to perceive that socialism is not "nationalization" or "planning" or even an "increase in the standard of living." It is to understand that the real crisis of capitalism is not due to "the anarchy of the market" or to "overproduction" or to "the falling rate of profit." Indeed, it is to see the tasks of revolutionary theory and the function of the revolutionary organization in an entirely new way.

Pushed to their ultimate consequences, grasped in their full strength, these ideas transform our vision of society and the world. They modify our conception of theory as well as of revolutionary practice.

The first part of this text is devoted to the positive definition of socialism. The following part[1] concerns the analysis of capitalism and the crisis it is undergoing. This order, which might not appear very logical, may be justified by the fact that the Polish and Hungarian revolutions have made the question of the positive definition of the socialist organization of society an immediate practical question.

This order of presentation also stems from another consideration. The very content of our ideas leads us to maintain that, ultimately, one cannot understand anything about the profound meaning of capitalism and the crisis it is undergoing unless one begins with the most total idea of socialism. For all that we have to say can be reduced, in the last analysis, to this: Socialism is autonomy, people's conscious direction of their own lives. Capitalism — whether private or bureaucratic — is the ultimate negation of this autonomy, and its crisis stems from the fact that the system necessarily creates this drive toward autonomy, while simultaneously being compelled to suppress it.

[1] This following part will be published in the next issue of S. ou B.

The Root of the Crisis of Capitalism

The capitalist organization of social life (we are speaking about private capitalism in the West and bureaucratic capitalism in the East) creates a perpetually renewed crisis in every sphere of human activity. This crisis appears most intensely in the realm of production — "production" meaning here the shop floor, not "the economy" or "the market." In its essence, however, the situation is the same in all other fields, whether one is dealing with the family, education, international relations, politics, or culture. Everywhere, the capitalist structure of society consists of organizing people's lives from the outside, in the absence of those directly concerned and against their aspirations and interests. This is but another way of saying that capitalism divides society into a narrow stratum of directors (whose function is to decide and organize everything) and the vast majority of the population, who are reduced to carrying out (executing) the decisions made by these directors. As a result of this very fact, most people experience their own lives as something alien to them. This pattern of organization is profoundly irrational and full of contradictions. Under it, repeated crises of one kind or another are absolutely inevitable.

Its is nonsensical to seek to organize people, either in production or in politics, as if they were mere objects, systematically ignoring what they themselves wish or how they themselves think things should be done. In real life, capitalism is obliged to base itself on people's capacity for self-organization, on the individual and collective creativity of the producers. Without making use of these abilities the system could not survive for a day. But the whole "official" organization of modern society both ignores and seeks to suppress these abilities to the utmost.

The result is not only an enormous waste due to untapped capacity. The system does more: It necessarily engenders opposition, a struggle against it by those upon whom it seeks to impose itself. Long before one can speak of revolution or political consciousness, people refuse in their everyday working lives to be treated like objects. The capitalist organization of society is thereby compelled lot only to structure itself in the absence of those most directly concerned but also to take shape against them. The net result is not only waste but perpetual Conflict.

If a thousand individuals have among them a given capacity for self-organization, capitalism consists in more or less arbitrarily choosing fifty of these individuals, vesting them with managerial authority and deciding that the others should just be cogs. Metaphorically speaking, this is already a 95 percent loss of social initiative and drive. But there is more to it. As the 950 ignored individuals are not cogs, and as capitalism is obliged up to a point to base itself on their human capacities and in fact to develop them, these individuals will react and struggle against what the system imposes upon them. The creative faculties they are not allowed to exercise on behalf of a social order that rejects them (and which they reject) are now utilized against that social order. A permanent struggle develops at the very heart of social life. It soon becomes the source of further waste. The narrow stratum of directors has henceforth to divide its time between organizing the work of those "below" and seeking to counteract, neutralize, deflect, or manipulate their resistance. The function of the managerial apparatus ceases to be merely organizational and soon assumes all sorts of coercive aspects. Those in authority in a large modern factory in fact spend

less of their time organizing production than coping, directly or indirectly, with the resistance of the exploited — whether it be a question of supervision, of quality control, of determining piece rates, of "human relations," of discussions with shop stewards or union representatives. On top of all this there is of course the permanent preoccupation of those in power with making sure that everything is measurable, quantifiable, verifiable, and supervisable so as to deal in advance with any inventive counter-reaction the workers might launch against new methods of exploitation. The same applies, with all due corrections, to the total overall organization of social life and to all the essential activities of any modern state.

The irrationality and contradictions of capitalism do not show up only in the way social life is organized. They appear even more clearly when one looks at the real content of the life this system proposes. More than any other social order, capitalism has put work at the center of human activity — and more than any other social order capitalism makes of work something that is absurd (absurd not from the viewpoint of the philosopher or of the moralist, but from the point of view of those who have to perform it). What is challenged today is not only the "human organization" of work but its nature, its content, its methods, the very instruments and purpose of capitalist production. The two aspects are of course inseparable, but it is the second that needs to be stressed.

As a result of the nature of work in a capitalist enterprise, and however it may be organized, the activity of the worker, instead of being the organic expression of his human faculties, turns into an alien and hostile process that dominates the subject of this process. In theory, the proletarian is tied to this activity only by a thin (but unbreakable) thread: the need to earn a living. But this ensures that one's work, even the day that is about to begin, dawns as something hostile. Work under capitalism therefore implies a permanent mutilation, a perpetual waste of creative capacity, and a constant struggle between the worker and his own activity, between what he would like to do and what he has to do.

From this angle, too, capitalism can survive only to the extent that reality does not yield to its methods and conform to its spirit. The system functions only to the extent that the "official" organization of production and of society is constantly resisted, thwarted, corrected, and completed by the effective self-organization of people. Work processes can be effective under capitalism only to the extent that the real attitudes of workers toward their work differ from what is prescribed. Working people succeed in learning the general principles pertaining to their work — to which, according to the spirit of the system, they should have no access and concerning which the system seeks to keep them in the dark. They then apply these principles to the specific conditions in which they find themselves, whereas in theory this practical application can be spelled out only by the managerial apparatus.

Exploiting societies persist because those whom they exploit help them to survive. Slave-owning and feudal societies perpetuated themselves because ancient slaves and medieval serfs worked according to the norms set by the masters and lords of those societies. The proletariat enables capitalism to continue by acting against the system. Here we find the origin of the historical crisis of capitalism. And it is in this respect that capitalism is a society pregnant with revolutionary prospects. Slavery or serf society functioned as far as the exploited did not struggle against the system. But capitalism can function only insofar as those whom it exploits actively oppose everything the system seeks to impose upon them. The final outcome of this struggle is socialism, namely, the elimination of all externally imposed norms, methods, and patterns of organization and the total liberation of the creative and self-organizing capacities of the masses.

The Principles of Socialist Society

Socialist society implies people's self-organization of every aspect of their social activities. The instauration of socialism therefore entails the immediate abolition of the fundamental division of society into a class of directors and a class of executants.

The content of the socialist reorganization of society is first of all workers' management of production. The working class has repeatedly staked its claim to such management and struggled to achieve it at the high points of its historical actions: in Russia in 1917–18, in Spain in 1936, in Hungary in 1956.

Workers' councils, based on one's place of work, are the form of workers' management and the institution capable of fostering its growth. Workers' management means the power of the local workers' councils and ultimately, at the level of society as a whole, the power of the central assembly of workers' councils and the government of the councils. Factory councils (or councils based on any other place of work such as a plant, building site, mine, railway yard, office, etc.) will be composed of delegates who are elected by the workers, responsible for reporting to them at regular intervals, and revocable by them at any time, and will unite the functions of deliberation, decision, and execution. Such councils are historic creations of the working class. They have come to the forefront every time the question of power has been posed in modern society. The Russian factory committees of 1917, the German workers' councils of 1919, the Hungarian councils of 1956 all sought to express (whatever their name) the same original, organic, and characteristic working-class pattern of self-organization.

To define the socialist organization of society in concrete terms is to draw all the possible conclusions from two basic ideas: workers' management of production and the rule of the councils, which are themselves the organic creations of proletarian struggles. But such a definition can come to life and be given flesh and blood only if combined with an account of how the institutions of this society might function in practice.

There is no question for us here of trying to draw up "statutes," "rules," or an "ideal constitution" for socialist society. Statutes as such mean nothing. The best of statutes can only have meaning to the extent that people are permanently prepared to defend what is best in them, to make up what they lack, and to change whatever they may contain that has become inadequate or outdated. From this point of view, we obviously should condemn any fetishism for the "soviet" or "council" type of organization. The "constant eligibility and revocability of representatives" are of themselves quite insufficient to "guarantee" that a council will remain the expression of working-class interests. The council will remain such an expression for as long as people are prepared to do whatever may be necessary for it to remain so. The realization of socialism is not a question of better legislation. It depends on the autonomous action of the working class, on this class's capacity to find within itself the necessary awareness of ends and means, the necessary solidarity and determination.

But this autonomous mass action cannot remain amorphous, fragmented, and dispersed. It will find expression in patterns of action and forms of organization: in methods of operation and in

institutions that adequately embody and express its purpose. Just as we must avoid the fetishism of "statutes" we should also condemn any sort of "anarchist" or "spontaneist" fetishism that, in the Belief that working-class consciousness ultimately will determine everything, takes little or no interest in the forms such consciousness should take if it wants to be effective in changing society. The council is not a miraculous institution. It cannot be a means for the workers to express themselves if the workers have not decided that they will express themselves through this medium. But the council is an adequate form of organization: Its whole structure is set up to enable this will to self-expression to come to the fore, when it exists. Parliamentary institutions, on the other hand, whether called the "National Assembly," the "U.S. Congress," or the "Supreme Soviet of the USSR,"[1] are by definition types of institutions that cannot be socialist. They are founded on a radical separation between the people, "consulted" from time to time, and those who are supposed to "represent" them, but who are in fact uncontrollable and irremovable. A workers' council is designed so as to represent the masses, but may cease to fulfil this function. Parliament is designed so that it never fulfils this function.

The question of adequate and meaningful institutions is basic to socialist society. It is particularly important as socialism can only be instaurated through a revolution, that is to say, as the result of a social crisis in the course of which the consciousness and activity of the masses reach a state of extreme tension. Under these conditions, the masses become capable of breaking the power of the ruling class and of its armed forces, of bypassing the political and economic institutions of established society, and of overcoming within themselves the heavy legacy of centuries of servitude. This state of affairs should be thought of not as some kind of paroxysm but, on the contrary, as the prefiguration of the level of both activity and awareness demanded of people in a free society.

The "ebbing" of revolutionary activity has nothing inevitable about it. It will always remain a threat, however, given the sheer enormity of the tasks to be accomplished. Everything that adds to the innumerable problems facing popular mass action will enhance the tendency to such a reflux. It is therefore essential that revolutionary society, from its very beginning, furnish itself with a network of institutions and methods of operation that both allow and favor the unfolding of the activity of the masses and that it abolish along the way everything that inhibits or thwarts this activity. It is essential too that revolutionary society should create for itself, at each step, those stable forms of organization that can most readily become effective normal mechanisms for the expression of popular will, both in "important matters" and in everyday life (which is, in truth, the first and foremost of all "important matters").

The definition of socialist society that we are attempting therefore requires of us some description of how we visualize its institutions and of the way they will function. This endeavor is not "utopian," for it is but the elaboration and extrapolation of the historical creations of the working class, and in particular of the concept of workers' management. (At the risk of reinforcing the "utopian" features of this text, we have always used the future tense when speaking of socialist society. The use of the conditional throughout the text would have been tedious and tiresome. It goes without saying that this manner of speaking does not affect in any way our examination of the problems raised here; the reader may easily replace "The socialist society will be …" with "The author thinks that the socialist society will be.

[1] The present "Supreme Soviet," of course.

As for the substance of the text, we have deliberately reduced historical and literary references to a minimum. The ideas we propose to develop, however, are only the theoretical formulation of the experience of a century of working-class struggles. They embody real experiences (both positive and negative), conclusions (both direct and indirect) that have already been drawn, answers given to problems actually posed or answers that would have had to be given if such and such a revolution had developed a little further. Thus every sentence in this text is linked to questions that have already been met implicitly or explicitly in the course of working-class struggles. This should put a stop once and for all to allegations of "utopianism."

In the first chapter of his book The Workers' Councils (Melbourne, 1950), Anton Pannekoek develops a similar analysis of the problems confronting socialist society. On fundamental issues, our points of view are very close.)

The guiding principle of our effort to elaborate the content of socialism is as follows: Workers' management will be possible only if people's attitudes to social organization alter radically. This in turn will take place only if the institutions embodying this organization become a meaningful part of their real daily lives. Just as work will have a meaning only when people understand and dominate it, so will the institutions of socialist society have to become understandable and controllable. (Bakunin once described the problem of socialism as being one of "integrating individuals into structures that they can understand and control.")

Modern society is a dark and hidden jungle, a confusion of apparatuses, structures, and institutions whose workings no one, or almost no one, understands, and no one really dominates or takes any interest in. Socialist society will be possible only if it brings about a radical change in this state of affairs and massively simplifies social organization. Socialism implies that the organization of a society will have become transparent to its members.

To say that the workings and institutions of socialist society must be easy to understand implies that people must have a maximum of information. This "maximum of information" is something quite different from an enormous mass of data. The problem is not to equip everybody with a portable version of the Bibliotheque nationale or the Library of Congress. On the contrary, the maximum of information depends first and foremost on a reduction of data to their essentials so that they can readily be handled by everyone. This will be possible because socialism will result in an immediate and enormous simplification of problems and the disappearance, pure and simple, of most current rules and regulations, which will have become quite meaningless. It will be facilitated by a systematic effort to gather and disseminate information [connaissance] about social reality, and to present facts both adequately and simply. Further on, when discussing the functioning of socialist economy, we will give examples of the enormous possibilities that already exist in this field.

Under socialism, people will dominate the workings and institutions of society, instead of being dominated by them. Socialism will therefore have to realize democracy for the first time in human history. Etymologically, the word "democracy" means domination by the masses. We are not concerned here with the formal aspects of the word "domination." Real domination must not be confused with voting. A vote, even a free vote, may only be — and often only is — a parody of democracy. Democracy is not the right to vote on secondary issues. It is not the right to appoint rulers who will then decide, without control from below, on all the essential questions. Nor does democracy lie in calling upon people to voice their opinions upon incomprehensible questions or upon questions that have no meaning for them. Real domination lies in one's being able to decide for oneself on all essential questions in full knowledge of the relevant facts.

"In full knowledge of the relevant facts": In these few words lies the whole problem of democracy.[2] It is meaningless to ask people to voice their opinions if they are not aware of the relevant facts. This has long been stressed by the reactionary or fascist critics of bourgeois "democracy," and even by the most cynical Stalinist.[3] It is obvious that bourgeois democracy is a farce, if only because literally nobody in capitalist society can express an opinion in knowledge of the relevant facts, least of all the mass of the people from whom political and economic realities and the real meaning of the questions asked are systematically hidden. But the answer is not to vest power in the hands of a few incompetent and uncontrollable bureaucrats. The answer is to transform social reality in such a way that essential data and fundamental problems are understood by everyone, enabling everyone to express opinions in full knowledge of the relevant facts.

To decide means to decide for oneself. To decide who is to decide already is not quite deciding for oneself. The only total form of democracy is therefore direct democracy. And the factory council exercises authority and replaces the factory's general assembly only when the latter is not in session.[4]

To achieve the widest, the most meaningful direct democracy will require that all the economic, political, and other structures of society be based on local groups that are concrete collectivities, organic social units. Direct democracy certainly requires the physical presence of citizens in a given place, when decisions have to be made. But this is not enough. It also requires that these citizens form an organic community, that they live if possible in the same milieu, that they be familiar through their daily experience with the subject to be discussed and with the problems to be tackled. It is only in such units that the political participation of individuals can become total, that people can know and feel that their involvement will have an effect, and that the real life of the community is, in large part, determined by its own members and not by unknown or external authorities who decide for them. There must therefore be the maximum amount of autonomy and self-administration for the local units.

Modern social life has already created these collectivities and continues to create them. They are based on medium-sized or large enterprises and are to be found in industry, transportation, commerce, banking, insurance, public administration, where people by the hundreds, thousands, or tens of thousands spend the main part of their life harnessed to a common task, where they encounter society in its most concrete form. A place of work is not only a unit of production: It has Income the primary unit of social life for the vast majority of people.[5] Instead of basing itself on geographical units, which economic developments have rendered completely artificial, the political structure of socialism will be largely based on collectivities involved in common work.

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[2] The expression is to be found in part 3 of Engels's Anti-Dühring. [T/E: The French phrase is "en connaissance de cause." Castoriadis refers to a passage in section 2 of this third part, pp. 309–10, of the edition we are using (trans. Emile Burns, ed. C. P. Dutt [New York: International Publishers, 1939]). This edition translates the phrase in question merely as "with complete understanding."]

[3] A few years ago a certain "philosopher" could seriously ask how one could even discuss Stalin's decisions, since one did not know the real facts upon which he alone could base them. (J.-P. Sartre, "Les Communistes et la Paix," in Les Temps Modernes, 81, 84–85, and 101 [July and October-November 1952, April 1954]; trans. Martha H. Fletcher, The Communists and the Peace [New York: George Braziller, 1968].)

[4] Lenin took the opportunity, in State and Revolution, to defend the idea of direct democracy against the reformists of his day who contemptuously called it "primitive democracy."

[5] On this feature of working life, see Paul Romano, "L'Ouvrier amerieain," in S. ou B., 5–6 (March 1950), pp. 129–32 [T/E: "Life in the Factory," in The American Worker (1947; reprinted, Detroit: Bewick Editions, 1972), pp. 37–39], and R. Berthier, "Une Experience d'organisation ouvriere," in 5. ou B., 20 (December 1956), pp. 29–31.

Such collectivities will be the fertile soil on which direct democracy can flourish, as the ancient city or the democratic communities of free farmers in the United States of the nineteenth century were in their times, and for similar reasons.

Direct democracy gives an idea of the amount of decentralization that socialist society will be able to achieve. But this democratic society will have to find a means of democratically integrating these basic units into the social fabric as a whole as well as of achieving the necessary degree of centralization, without which the life of a modern nation would collapse.

It is not centralization as such that has brought about political alienation in modern societies or that has led to the expropriation of the power of the many for the benefit of the few. It comes rather from the constitution of separate, uncontrollable bodies, exclusively and specifically concerned with the function of centralization. As long as centralization is conceived of as the independent function of an independent apparatus, bureaucracy and bureaucratic rule will indeed be inseparable from centralization. But in a socialist society there will be no conflict between centralization and the autonomy of grass-roots organs, insofar as both functions will be exercised by the same institutions. There will be no separate apparatus whose function it will be to reunite what it has itself fragmented; this absurd task (need we recall it) is precisely the "function" of a modern bureaucracy.

Bureaucratic centralization is a feature of all modern exploiting societies. The intimate links between centralization and totalitarian bureaucratic rule in such class societies provoke a healthy and understandable aversion to centralization among many people. But this response is often confused, and at times it reinforces the very things it seeks to correct. "Centralization, there's the root of all evil" proclaim many honest militants as they break with Stalinism or Leninism in France as well as in Poland or Hungary. But this formulation, at best ambiguous, becomes positively harmful when it leads — as it often does — either to formal demands for the "fragmentation of power" or to demands for a limitless extension of the power of grass-roots or factory organs, neglecting what is happening at the center.

When Polish militants, for instance, imagine they have found the way to abolish bureaucracy when they advocate a social life organized and directed by "several centers" (the State administration, a parliamentary assembly, the trade unions, workers' councils, and political parties), they are arguing beside the point. They fail to see that this "polycentrism" is equivalent to the absence of any real and identifiable center, controlled from below. And as modern society has to make certain central decisions, the "constitution" they propose will exist only on paper. It will only serve to hide the re-emergence of a real, but this time masked (and therefore uncontrollable), "center" from amid the ranks of the State and political bureaucracy.

The reason is obvious: If one fragments any institution accomplishing a significant or vital function, one only creates ten times over an enhanced need for some other institution to reassemble the fragments. Similarly, if, in principle or in fact, one merely advocates extending the power of local councils to the level of the individual enterprise, one is thereby handing them over to domination by a central bureaucracy that alone would "know" or "understand" how to make the economy function as a whole (and modern economies, whether one likes it or not, do function as a whole). To refuse to face up to the question of central power is tantamount to leaving the solution of these problems to some bureaucracy or other.

Socialist society therefore will have to provide a socialist solution to the problem of centralization. This answer can only be the assumption of power by a federation of workers' councils and the institution of a central assembly of councils and of a council government. We will see

further on that such an assembly and such a government do not signify a delegation of popular power but are, on the contrary, an expression of that power. At this stage we only want to discuss the principles that will govern the relationship of such bodies to the local councils and other grass-roots groups. These principles are important, for they will affect the functioning of all institutions in a socialist society.

In a society where the people have been robbed of political power and where this power is in the hands of a centralizing authority, the essential relationship between this authority and its subordinate organs (and ultimately, the people) can be summed up as follows: Channels of communication from the base to the summit only transmit information, whereas channels from the summit to the base transmit decisions (plus, perhaps, that minimum of information deemed necessary for the understanding and execution of the decisions made at the summit). The whole setup expresses not only a monopoly of power by the summit — a monopoly of decision-making authority — but also a monopoly of the conditions necessary for the exercise of power. The summit alone has the "sum total" of information needed to evaluate and decide. In modern society it can only be by accident that any individual or body gains access to information other than that relating to his immediate milieu. The system seeks to avoid, or at any rate it does not encourage, such "accidents."

When we say that in a socialist society the central bodies will not constitute a delegation of power but will be the expression of the power of the people, we are implying a radical change in this way of doing things. Two-way communications will be instaurated between the "base" and the "summit." One of the essential tasks of central bodies, including the council government, will be to collect, transmit, and disseminate information conveyed to them by local groups. In all essential fields decisions will be made at the grass-roots and will be sent back up to the "summit," whose responsibility it will be to ensure their execution or to carry them out itself. A two-way flow of information and decisions thus will be instaurated and this will not only apply to relations between the government and the councils but will be a model for relations between all institutions and those who participate in them.

We must stress once again that we are not trying to draw up perfect blueprints. It is obvious, for instance, that to collect and disseminate information is not a socially neutral function. Not all information can be disseminated — that would be the surest way of smothering what is relevant and rendering it incomprehensible and therefore uncontrollable. The role of the government is therefore political, even in this respect. This is why we call it "government" and not the "central press service." But more important is its explicit function of informing people, which shall be its responsibility. The explicit function of government today is to hide what's going on from the people.

Socialism Is the Transformation of Work

Socialism can be instaurated only by the autonomous action of the working class; it is nothing other than this autonomous action. Socialist society is nothing other than the self-organization of this autonomy. Socialism both presupposes this autonomy and helps to develop it.

But if this autonomy is people's conscious domination over what they do and what they produce, clearly it cannot merely be apolitical autonomy. Political autonomy is but a derivative aspect of the inherent content and the basic problem of socialism: the instauration of people's domination over their primary activity, the work process. We deliberately say "instauration" and not "restoration," for never in history has this kind of domination existed. All comparisons with historical antecedents (for instance, with the situation of the artisan or of the free peasant), however fruitful they may be in some respects, have only a limited scope and risk leading one into a backward-looking type of Utopian thinking.

A purely political autonomy would be meaningless. One cannot imagine a society where people would be slaves in production every day of the week and then enjoy Sundays of political freedom. (Yet this is what Lenin's definition of socialism as "soviets plus electrification" boiled down to.) The idea that socialist production or a socialist economy could be run, at any political level, by "technicians" supervised by councils, or by Soviets or by any other body "incarnating the political power of the working class" is pure nonsense. Real power in any such society would rapidly fall into the hands of those who managed production. The councils or Soviets sooner or later would wither away amid the general indifference of the population. People would stop devoting time, interest, or activity to institutions that no longer really determined the pattern of their lives. Autonomy is therefore meaningless unless it implies workers' management, that is, unless it involves organized workers determining the production process themselves at the level of the shop, the plant, entire industries, and the economy as a whole. But workers' management is not just a new administrative technique. It cannot remain external to the structure of work itself. It does not mean keeping work as it is and just replacing the bureaucratic apparatus that currently manages production with a workers' council — however democratic or revocable such a council might be. It means that for the mass of workers new relations will have to be instaurated with their work and about their work. The very content of work will immediately have to be altered.

Today the purpose, means, methods, and rhythms of work are determined from the outside by a bureaucratic managerial apparatus. This apparatus can only manage through resort to abstract, universal rules determined "once and for all." Inevitably, though, they are revised periodically with each new "crisis" in the organization of the production process. These rules cover such matters as production norms, technical specifications, rates of pay, bonuses, and the organization of production areas. Once the bureaucratic managerial apparatus has been eliminated, this way of regulating production will be unable to continue, either in its form or its substance.

In accordance with the deepest aspirations of the working class, production "norms" (in their present meaning) will be abolished, and complete equality in wages will be instituted. Taken to-

gether, these measures mean the abolition of economic coercion and constraint in production — except in the most general form of "those who do not work do not eat" — as a form of discipline externally imposed by a specific coercive apparatus. Labor discipline will be the discipline imposed by each group of workers upon its own members, by each shop on the groups that make it up, by each factory assembly upon its shops and departments. The integration of particular individual activities into a whole will be accomplished basically by the cooperation of various groups of workers or shops. It will be the object of the workers' permanent and ongoing coordinating activity. The essential universality of modern production will be freed from the concrete experience of particular jobs and will be formulated by meetings of workers.

Workers' management is therefore not the "supervision" of a bureaucratic managerial apparatus by representatives of the workers. Nor is it the replacement of this apparatus by another, similar one made up of individuals of working-class origin. It is the abolition of any separate managerial apparatus and the restitution of the functions of such an apparatus to the community of workers. The factory council is not a new managerial apparatus. It is but one of the places in which coordination takes place, a "local meeting area [permanence]" from which contacts between the factory and the outside world are regulated.

If this is achieved it will imply that the nature and content of work are already beginning to be transformed. Today work consists essentially in obeying instructions initiated elsewhere, the direction of this activity having been removed form the executant's control. Workers' management will mean the reunification of the functions of direction and execution.

But even this is insufficient — or rather it does and will immediately lead beyond mere reunification. By restituting to the workers the functions of direction, they necessarily will be led to tackle what is today at the core of alienation, namely, the technological structure of work, its objects, its tools and methods, which ensure that work dominates the workers instead of being dominated by them. This problem will not be solved by the workers overnight, but its solution will be the task of that historical period we call socialism. Socialism is first and foremost the solution to this problem.

Between capitalism and communism there are not thirty-six different types of "transitional society," as some have sought to make us believe. There is but one: socialist society. And the main characteristic of this society is not "the development of the productive forces" or "the increasing satisfaction of consumer needs" or "an increase in political freedom." The hallmark of socialism is the transformation it will bring about in the nature and content of work, through the conscious and deliberate transformation of an inherited technology. For the first time in history, technology will be subordinated to human needs (not only to the people's needs as consumers but also to their needs as producers).

The socialist revolution will allow this process to begin. Its realization will mark the entry of humanity into the communist era. All other things — politics, consumption, etc. — are consequences, conditions, implications, and presuppositions that certainly must be looked at in their organic unity, but which can only acquire such a unity or meaning through their relation to this central problem: the transformation of work itself. Human freedom will remain an illusion and a mystification if it doesn't mean freedom in people's fundamental activity: their productive activity. And this freedom will not be a gift bestowed by nature. It will not arise automatically, by increments or out of other developments. People will have to create it consciously. In the last analysis, this is the content of socialism.

Important practical consequences pertaining to the immediate tasks of a socialist revolution follow from these considerations. Changing the nature of work will be tackled from both ends. On the one hand, the development of people's human capacities and faculties will have to become the revolution's highest priority. This will imply the systematic dismantling, stone by stone, of the entire edifice of the division of labor. On the other hand, people will have to give a whole new orientation to technical developments and to how such developments should be applied in the production process. These are but two aspects of the same thing: man's relationship to technique.

Let us start by looking at the second, more tangible point: technical development as such. As a first approximation, one could say that capitalist technology (the current application of technique to production) is rotten to the core, not only because it does not help people dominate their work, but also because its aim is exactly the opposite. Socialists often say that what is basically wrong with capitalist technology is that it seeks to develop production for purposes of profit, or that it develops production for production's sake, independently of human needs (people being conceived of, in these arguments, only as potential consumers of products). The same socialists then tell us that the purpose of socialism is to adapt production to the real consumer needs of society, in relation both to the volume and to the nature of the goods produced.

Of course, all this is true. But the fundamental problem lies elsewhere. Capitalism does not utilize a socially neutral technology for capitalist ends. Capitalism has created capitalist technology, which is by no means neutral. The real intention of capitalist technology is not to develop production for production's sake: It is to subordinate and dominate the producers. Capitalist technology is characterized essentially by its drive to eliminate the human element in productive labor and, in the long run, to eliminate man altogether from the productive process. That here, as everywhere else, capitalism fails to fulfill its deepest tendency — and that it would fall to pieces if it achieved its purpose — does not affect the argument. On the contrary, it only highlights another aspect of the crisis of this contradictory system.

Capitalism cannot count on the voluntary cooperation of the producers. On the contrary, it constantly runs up against their hostility (or at best indifference) to the production process. This is why it is essential for the machine to impose its rhythm on the work process. Where this is not possible capitalism seeks at least to measure the work performed. In every productive process, work must therefore be definable, quantifiable, supervisable from the outside — otherwise this process has no meaning for capitalism. As long as capitalism cannot dispense with the producers altogether, it has to make them as interchangeable as possible and reduce their work to its simplest expression, that of unskilled labor. There is no conspiracy or conscious plot behind all this. There is only a process of "natural selection," affecting technical inventions as they are applied to industry. Some are preferred to others and are, on the whole, more widely utilized. These are the ones that fit in with capitalism's basic need to deal with labor power as a measurable, supervisable, and interchangeable commodity.

There is no capitalist chemistry or capitalist physics as such. There is not even a specifically capitalist "technique," in the general sense of the word. There certainly is, however, a capitalist technology, if by this one means that of the "spectrum" of techniques available at a given point in time (as determined by the development of science) a given group (or "band") of processes actually will be selected. From the moment the development of science permits a choice of several possible procedures, a society will regularly choose those methods that have a meaning for it, that are "rational" within the framework of its own class rationality. But the "rationality" of an exploiting society is not the rationality of socialism. The conscious transformation of technology

will therefore be a central task of a society of free workers. Correspondingly, the analysis of alienation and crisis in capitalist society ought to begin with this central core of all social relationships, which are found in the concrete relationships of production, people's relationships in work, as seen in its three indissociable aspects: the relationship of the workers with the means and objects of production, the relationships of the workers among themselves, and the relationship of the workers with the managerial apparatus of the production process.

(Academic economists have analyzed the fact that of several technically feasible possibilities certain ones are chosen, and that these choices lead to a particular pattern of technology applied in real life, giving concrete expression to the technique [understood in the general sense of "know-how"] of a given period. See, for instance, Joan Robinson's The Accumulation of Capital, 3rd ed. [New York: St. Martin's Press, 1969], pp. 101–78. But in these analyses the choice is always presented as flowing from considerations of "profitability" and in particular from the "relative costs of capital and labor." This abstract viewpoint has little grasp of the reality of industrial evolution. Marx, on the other hand, underlines the social content of machine-dominated industry, its enslaving function.)

Marx, as is well known, was the first to go beyond the surface of the economic phenomena of capitalism (such as the market, competition, distribution, etc.) and to tackle the analysis of the central area of capitalist social relations: the concrete relations of production in the capitalist factory. But volume 1 of Capital is still awaiting its sequel. The most striking feature of the degeneration of the Marxist movement is that this particular concern of Marx's, the most fundamental of all, was soon abandoned, even by the best of Marxists, in favor of an analysis of "important" phenomena. Through this very fact, these analyses were either totally distorted, or ended up dealing with very partial aspects of reality, thereby leading to judgments that proved catastrophically wrong.[1]

Thus it is striking to see Rosa Luxemburg entitle two large volumes The Accumulation of Capital, in which she totally ignores what this process of accumulation really signifies in the concrete relations of production. Her concern in these volumes was solely with the possibility of an overall equilibrium between production and consumption, and she finally came to believe that she had discovered in capitalism a process of automatic collapse (an idea, needless to say, that is concretely false and a priori absurd).

It is just as striking to see Lenin, in his Imperialism, start from the correct and fundamental observation that the concentration of capital has reached the stage of domination by monopolies — and yet neglect the transformation in the capitalist factory's relations of production that results precisely from such concentration. At the same time, he ignored the crucial phenomenon of the constitution of an enormous apparatus managing production, which was henceforth to incarnate exploitation. He preferred to see the main consequences of the concentration of capital in the transformation of capitalists into "coupon-clipping" rentiers. The working-class movement is still paying the consequences of this way of looking at things. Insofar as ideas play a role in

[1] The great contribution of the American group that publishes Correspondence has been to resume the analysis of the crisis of society from the standpoint of production and to apply it to the conditions of our age. See their texts, translated and published in S. ou B.: Paul Romano's "L'Ouvrier americain" (nos. 1 to 5–6 [March 1949 to March 1950]) and "La Reconstruction de la société" (nos. 7–8 [August 1951 and January 1952]) [T/E: see "Life in the Factory" and "The Reconstruction of Society," in The American Worker). In France, it is Philippe Guillaume who has revived this way of looking at things (see his article, "Machinisme et proletariat," in no. 7 [August 1951] of this review). I am indebted to him, directly or indirectly, for several ideas used in the present text.

history, Khrushchev is in power in Russia as a by-product of the conception that exploitation can only take the form of coupon clipping.

But we must go back even further. We must go back to Marx himself. Marx shed a great deal of light on the alienation the producer experiences in the course of the capitalist production process and on the enslavement of man by the mechanical universe he has created. But Marx's analysis is at times incomplete in that he sees only alienation in all this. In Capital — as opposed to Marx's early writings — it is hardly brought out at all that the worker is (and can only be) the positive vehicle of capitalist production, which is obliged to base itself on him as such, and to develop him as such, while simultaneously seeking to reduce him to an automaton and, at the limit, to drive him out of production altogether. Because of this, the analysis fails to perceive that the primary crisis of capitalism is the crisis at the point of production, due to the simultaneous existence of two contradictory tendencies, neither of which could disappear without the whole system collapsing. Marx shows in capitalism "despotism in the workshop and anarchy in society" — instead of seeing it as both despotism and anarchy in both workshop and society. This leads him to look for the crisis of capitalism not in production itself (except insofar as capitalist production develops "oppression, misery, degradation, but also revolt," and the numerical strength and discipline of the proletariat), but in such factors as overproduction and the falling rate of profit. Marx therefore fails to see that as long as this type of work persists, this crisis will persist with all it entails, and this not only whatever the system of property but also whatever the nature of the State, and finally whatever even the system of management of production.

In certain passages of Capital, Marx is thus led to see in modern production only the fact that the producer is mutilated and reduced to a "fragment of a man" — which is true, as much as the contrary — and, what is more serious, to link this aspect to modern production and finally to production as such, instead of linking it to capitalist technology. Marx implies that the basis of this state of affairs is modern production as such, a stage in the development of technique about which nothing can be done, the famous "realm of necessity." Thus the takeover of society by the producers — socialism — at times comes to mean for Marx only an external change in political and economic management, a change that would leave intact the structure of work and simply reform its more "inhuman" aspects. This idea is clearly expressed in the famous passage of volume 3 of Capital, where Marx, speaking of socialist society, says, "In fact, the realm of freedom actually begins only where labor which is determined by necessity and mundane considerations ceases; thus in the very nature of things it lies beyond the sphere of actual material production… Freedom in this field can only consist in socialized man, the associated producers, rationally regulating their interchange with Nature, bringing it under their common control, instead of being ruled by it … and achieving this with the least expenditure of energy and under conditions most favorable to, and worthy of their human nature. But it nonetheless still remains a realm of necessity. Beyond it begins … the true realm of freedom, which, however, can blossom forth only with this realm of necessity as its basis. The shortening of the working day is its basic prerequisite."[2]

If it is true that "the realm of freedom actually begins only where labor which is determined by necessity and mundane considerations ceases," it is strange to read from the pen of the man who wrote that "industry is the open book of human faculties" that freedom "thus" could only be found outside of labor. The proper conclusion, which Marx himself draws in certain other places, is that the Realm of freedom begins when labor becomes free activity, both in what motivates it

[2] K. Marx, Capital (New York: International Publishers, 1967), vol. 3, p. 820.

and in its content. In the current way of looking at things, however, freedom is what is not work, it is what surrounds work, it is either "free time" (reduction of the working day) or "rational regulation" and "common control" of exchanges with Nature, which minimize human effort and preserve human dignity. In this perspective the shortening of the working day certainly becomes a "basic prerequisite," as mankind would only be free in its leisure.

The reduction of the working day is in fact important, not for this reason however, but because it will allow people to achieve a balance between their various types of activity. And, at the limit, the "ideal" (communism) is not the reduction of the working day to zero, but the free determination by each of the nature and extent of his work. Socialist society will be able to reduce the length of the working day, and will have to do so, but this will not be its fundamental preoccupation. Its first task will be to tackle "the realm of necessity" as such, to transform the very nature of work. The problem is not to leave more and more "free" time to individuals — which might well only be empty time — so that they may fill it at will with "poetry" or the carving of wood. The problem is to make all time a time of liberty and to allow concrete freedom to embody itself in creative activity. The problem is to put poetry into work. (Strictly speaking, poetry means creation.) Production is not something negative that has to be limited as much as possible for mankind to fulfil itself in its leisure. The instauration of autonomy is also — and in the first place — the instauration of autonomy in work.

Underlying the idea that freedom is to be found "outside the sphere of actual material production" there lies a double error: first, that the very nature of technique and of modern production renders inevitable the domination of the productive process over the producer, in the course of his work; second, that technique and in particular modern technique follows an autonomous development, before which one can only bow down. Modern technique would moreover possess the double attribute of, on the one hand, constantly reducing the human role in production and, on the other hand, of constantly increasing the productivity of labor. From these two inexplicably combined attributes would result a miraculous dialectic of technical progress: More and more a slave in the course of work, man would be in a position to reduce enormously the length of work, if only he could succeed in organizing society rationally.

We have already shown, however, that there is not an autonomous development of technique in its application to the production process, i.e., of technology. Of the sum total of technologies that scientific and technical development makes possible at any given point in time, capitalist society brings to fulfilment those ones that correspond most closely to its class structure and that best permit capital to struggle against labor. It is generally believed that the application of this or that invention to production depends on its economic profitability. But there is no such thing as a neutral "profitability": The class struggle in the factory is the main factor determining "profitability." A given invention will be preferred to another by a factory management if, other things being equal, it enhances the "independent" progress of production, freeing it from interference by the producers. The increasing enslavement of people in production flows essentially from this process, and not from some mysterious curse, inherent in a given phase of technological development. There is, moreover, no magic dialectic of slavery and productivity: Productivity increases as a function of the enormous scientific and technical advancements that are at the basis of modern production — and it increases despite the slavery, and not because of it. Slavery implies an enormous amount of waste, due to the fact that people only contribute to production an infinitesimal fraction of their potential abilities. (We are passing no a priori judgment on what these faculties might be. However low they may estimate these faculties, Mr. Dreyfus" and Mr.

Khrushchev would have to admit that their own particular ways of organizing production only tap an infinitesimal fraction of their potential.)

Socialist society, therefore, will not be afflicted with any kind of technical curse. Having abolished bureaucratic-capitalist relationships, it will tackle at the same time the technological structure of production, which is both the basis of these relationships and their ever-renewed product.

Workers' Management: The Factory

It is well known that workers can organize their own work at the level of a workshop or of part of a factory. Bourgeois industrial sociologists not only recognize this fact but point out that "primary groups" of workers often get on with their job better if management leaves them alone and doesn't constantly try to "direct" them.[1]

How can the work of these various "primary groups" — or of various shops and sections — be coordinated? Bourgeois theoreticians stress that the present managerial apparatus, whose formal job it is to ensure such coordination, is not really up to the task: It has no real grip on the workers and is itself torn by internal conflicts.

But, having "demolished" the present setup by their criticisms, these modern industrial sociologists have nothing to put in its place. And as beyond the "primary" organization of production there has to be a "secondary" organization, they finally fall back on the existing bureaucratic apparatus, exhorting it "to understand," "to improve itself," "to trust people more," etc.[2] The same can be said, at another level, of "democratically reformed" or "de-Stalinized" Russian leaders.[3]

What no one seems prepared to recognize (or even to admit) is the capacity of working people to manage their own affairs outside a very narrow radius. The bureaucratic mind cannot see in the mass of workers employed in a factory or an office an active subject, capable of managing and organizing. In the eyes of those in authority, both East and West, as soon as one gets beyond a group often, fifteen, or twenty individuals the crowd begins — the mob, the thousand-headed Hydra that cannot act collectively, or that could only act collectively in the display of collective delirium or hysteria. They believe that only a managerial apparatus specifically designed for this purpose, and endowed of course with coercive functions, can master and "organize" this mass. The inconsistencies and shortcomings of the present managerial apparatus are such that even today individual workers or "primary groups" are obliged to take on quite a number of coordinating tasks.[4] Moreover, historical experience shows that the working class is quite capable of managing whole enterprises. In Spain, in 1936 and 1937, workers ran the factories. In Budapest, in 1956, according to the accounts of Hungarian refugees, big bakeries employing hundreds of

[1] Daniel Mothe's text, "L'Usine et la gestion ouvrière," also in this issue [S. ou B., 22 (July 1957), pp. 75 ff.] already is one de facto response — coming from the factory itself — to the concrete problem of shop-floor workers' management and that of how to organize work. In referring to this text, we are considering here only the problems of the factory as a whole.

[2] In J. A. C. Brown's The Social Psychology of Industry (London: Penguin, 1954), there is a striking contrast between the devastating analysis the author makes of present capitalist production and the only "conclusions" he can draw, which are pious exhortations to management that it should "do better," "democratize itself," etc. Let it not be said, however, that an "industrial sociologist" takes no position, that he merely describes facts and does not suggest norms. Advising the managerial apparatus to "do better" is itself a taking of a position, one that has been shown here to be completely Utopian.

[3] See the Twentieth Congress texts analyzed by Claude Lefort in "Le Totalitarisme sans Staline," S. ou B., 19 (July 1956), in particular, pp. 59–62 [now in Elements, pp. 166 ff.; T/E: 1979 ed., pp. 203 ff.].

[4] See Mothe, "L'Usine et la gestion ouvrière."

workers carried on during and immediately after the insurrection. They worked better than ever before, under workers' self-management. Many such examples could be cited.

The most useful way of discussing this problem is not to weigh up, in the abstract, the "self-managerial capacities" of the working class. It is to examine the specific functions of the present managerial apparatus and to see which of them; retain meaning in a socialist enterprise and how they can be carried out there.

Present managerial functions are of four main types and we will discuss them in turn.

1. These functions, and the jobs that go along with them (supervisors, foremen, part of the "personnel" department) will be done away with, purely and simply. Each group of workers is quite capable of disciplining itself. It also is capable of granting authority to people drawn from its own ranks should it feel this to be needed for the carrying out of a particular job.

2. These relate to jobs that, in themselves, are in no way managerial in character, but involve rather the execution of tasks necessary to the functioning of the company without being directly connected with the manufacturing process. Most of these jobs are now carried out in "offices [bureaux]."

Among them are accountancy and the "commercial" and "general" services of the company. The development of modern production has divided up, compartmentalized, and socialized this work, just as it has done to production itself. Nine-tenths of people working in offices attached to factories carry out compartmentalized tasks of execution. Throughout their life they will do little else — important changes will have to be brought about here.

The capitalist structure of the factory generally results in considerable over-staffing of these areas,[5] and a socialist reorganization probably will result in a substantial savings of labor in these fields. Some of these departments will not only diminish in size, but will witness a radical transformation of their functions. In the last few years, "commercial services" have everywhere grown enormously. In a planned socialist economy, they will be concerned mainly with the book-keeping aspects of obtaining supplies and making deliveries. They will be in contact with similar departments in supply factories and with stores that sell to consumers. Once the necessary transformations have been brought about, offices will be considered "workshops" like all others, organizing their own work and keeping in contact with other shops for purposes of coordination. They will enjoy no particular rights by virtue of the nature of their work. They have, in fact, no such rights today, and it is as a result of other factors (the division between manual and "intellectual" labor, the more pronounced hierarchy found in offices) that individuals heading up these departments sometimes can rise to the summit of the genuine "management" of the company.

3.These are at present carried out by people ranging from consultant engineers to draftsmen. Here too, modern industry has created a "collective" apparatus in which work is divided up and socialized, and which is made up nine-tenths of executants working in compartmentalized jobs. Bin while pointing this out in relation to what goes on within these particular departments, we must recognize too that these departments carry out managerial functions in relation to the rest of the factory — areas directly related to production. I Once production targets have been set, it is this collective technical apparatus that selects — or is charged with selecting — the appropriate ways and means, looks into the necessary changes in tooling, determines the sequence and the

[5] On the extreme overstaffing of "nonproductive" departments in today's factories, see G. Vivier, "La Vie en usine," 6." ou B., 12 (August 1953), pp. 39–41. Vivier estimates that in the business he describes, "without a rational reorganization of these departments, 30% of the employees already arc redundant" (emphasis in the original).

details of various operations, etc. In theory, the production areas merely carry out the instructions issued from the technical departments. Supposedly, a complete separation exists between those who draw up the plans and those who are charged with carrying them out under the concrete conditions of mass production.

Up to a point, all this is based on something real. Today, both specialization and technical and scientific competence are the privilege of a minority. But it does not follow at all that the best way to use this expertise is to leave it to the "experts" to decide everything about the production process. Competence is, by definition, restricted in its scope. Outside his particular sector, or outside the particular processes he is familiar with, the technician is no better equipped to make a responsible decision than anyone else. Even within his own field, his viewpoint is inevitably limited. He will often know little about other sectors and may tend to minimize their importance although these sectors have a definite bearing on his own. Moreover — and this is more important — the technician is separated from the real process of production.

This separation is a source of waste and conflict in capitalist factories. It will be abolished only when "technical" and "productive" staff begin to cooperate thoroughly. This cooperation will be based on joint decisions made by technicians and by those who will be working on a given task. Together they will decide on the methods and means to be used.

Will such cooperation work smoothly? There is no intrinsic reason why insurmountable obstacles should arise. The workers will have no interest in challenging an answer that the technician, in his capacity as a technician, may give to purely technical problems. And if there are disagreements, these will rapidly be resolved in practice. The field of production allows for almost immediate verification of what this or that person proposes. That for this or that part or tool, a certain type of metallic compound would be preferable (given a certain state of knowledge and certain conditions of production) cannot and will not be a matter of controversy.

But the answers provided by technique establish only a general framework. They suggest only some of the elements that will, in practice, influence the concrete production process. Within this given framework there will be a multitude of ways to organize this process. The choice will have to take into account, on the one hand, certain general considerations of "economy" (economy of labor, of energy, of raw materials, of plant) and, on the other hand — and this is much more important — considerations relating to the fate of man in production. And on these questions, by definition, the only people who can decide are those directly involved. In this area the specific competence of the technician, as a technician, is nil.

In other words, what we are challenging deep down is the whole concept of a technique capable of organizing people from the outside. Such an idea is as absurd as the idea of a psychoanalytic session in which the patient would not appear, thus making psychoanalysis into just a "technique" in the hands of the analyst. Such techniques are all just techniques of oppression and coercion offering "personal incentives," which, ultimately, always remain ineffective.

Accordingly, the actual organization of the production process can be vested only in those who perform it. The producers obviously will take into account various technical points suggested by competent technicians. In fact, there obviously will be a permanent process of give-and-take, if only because the producers themselves will see new ways of organizing the manufacturing process, hereby posing new technical problems concerning which the technicians will in turn have to put forward their comments and evaluations before a joint decision can be made "in full knowledge of the relevant facts." But the decision, in this case as in others, will be in the hands

of the producers (including the technicians) of a given shop (if it only affects a shop) — or of the factory as a whole (if it affects the whole factory).

The roots of possible conflict between workers and technicians therefore are not at all of a technical nature. If such a conflict emerged it would be a social and political conflict, arising from a possible tendency of the technicians to assume a dominating role, thereby constituting anew a bureaucratic managerial apparatus.

What would be the strength and probable evolution of such a tendency? We cannot discuss this problem in any depth. We can only reemphasize that technicians do not constitute a majority — or even an essential part — of the upper strata of modern economic or political management. Incidentally, to become aware of this obvious fact helps one see through the mystificatory character of all those arguments that seek to prove that ordinary people cannot manage production because they lack the "necessary technical capacity." The vast majority of technicians only occupy subordinate positions. They only carry out compartmentalized work, on instructions from above. Those technicians who have "reached the top" are not there as technicians, but as "managers" or "organizers."

Modern capitalism is bureaucratic capitalism. It is not — and never will be — a technocratic capitalism. The concept of a technocracy is an empty generalization of superficial sociologists, or a daydream of technicians confronted with their own impotence and with the absurdity of the present system. Technicians do not constitute a separate class. From the formal point of view they are just a category of salaried workers. The evolution of modern capitalism, by increasing their numbers and by transforming them into people who carry out compartmentalized and interchangeable labor, tends to drive them closer to the working class. Counteracting these tendencies, it is true, is their position in the wage and status hierarchies — and also the scanty chances for "moving up" still open to them. But these channels are gradually being closed as the numbers of technicians increases and as bureaucratization spreads within its own ranks. In parallel with all this, a kind of revolt is developing among these compartmentalized and bureaucratized [fonctionnarise] technicians as they confront the irrationalities of the system of bureaucratic capitalism and increasingly experience difficulties in giving free rein to their capacities for creative or meaningful work.

Some technicians already at the top, or on their way there, will side squarely with exploiting society. They will be opposed, however, by a growing minority of disaffected colleagues, ready to work with others in overthrowing the system. In the middle, of course, there will be the great majority of technicians, today apathetically accepting their status as slightly privileged employees. Their present conservativism suggests that they would not risk a conflict with real power, whatever its nature. The evolution of events can only radicalize them.

It is therefore extremely likely that workers' power in the factory, after having swept aside a small number of technical bureaucrats, will find support among a substantial number of other technicians. It should succeed, without major conflict, in integrating the remainder into the cooperative network of the factory.

4. The people "consulted" by a company chairman or managing director before he makes an important decision usually number less than a dozen, even in the largest of firms. This very narrow stratum of management has two main tasks. On the one hand, it has to make decisions concerning investment, stocks, output, etc., in relation to market fluctuations and long-term prospects. On the other hand, it has to "coordinate" the various differences between various segments of the bureaucratic apparatus.

Some of these functions will disappear altogether in a planned economy, in particular those related to the fluctuations of the market (scale of production, levels of investment, etc.). Others would be considerably reduced: Coordinating the different shops of a factory would be much easier if the producers organized their own work and if different groups, shops, or departments could contact each other directly. Still other functions might be enhanced, such as genuine discussions of what might be possible in the future, or of how to do things, or about the present or future role of the enterprise in the overall development of the economy.

Under socialism, "managerial" tasks at factory level could be carried out by two bodies: a) The factory council, composed of delegates from the various shops and offices, all of them elected and instantly revocable. In an enterprise of, say, 5,000 to 10,000 workers, such a council might number 30–50 people. The delegates will remain at their jobs. They will meet in full session as often as experience proves it necessary (probably on one or two half-days a week). They will report back each time to their workmates in shop or office — and anyway they already will have discussed with them the agenda. Rotating groups of delegates will ensure continuity. One of the main tasks of a factory council will be to ensure liaison and to act as a continuous regulating locus between the factory and the outside world." b) The general assembly of all those who work in the plant, whether manual workers, office workers, or technicians. This will be the highest decision-making body for all problems concerning the factory as a whole. Differences or conflicts between various sectors of the factory will be thrashed out at this level.

This general assembly will embody the restoration of direct democracy into what should, in modern society, be its basic unit: the place of work. The assembly will have to ratify all but routine decisions of the factory council. It will be empowered to question, challenge, amend, reject, or endorse any decision made by the council. The general assembly itself will decide on all sorts of questions to be submitted to the council. The assembly will meet regularly, say, one or two days each month. There will, in addition, exist procedures for calling such general assemblies, if this is wanted by a given number of workers, shops, or delegates.

What will be the actual content of workers' management at the factory level, the permanent tasks it will have to accomplish? It will help us to discuss this problem if we differentiate schematically between the static and the dynamic aspects of workers' management.

Looked at in a static way, the overall plan might allocate to a given enterprise a target to be achieved within a given period of time (we will examine further on how such targets are to be determined). The general means to be allocated to the enterprise (to achieve its target) also will be broadly outlined by the plan. For example, the plan will decide that the annual production of a given automobile factory should be so many cars and that for this purpose such and such a quantity of raw materials, power, machinery, etc., should be made available. At the same time, it will set how many work hours (in other words, the number of workers, since the length of the workday is fixed) will be allocated to achieve this goal.

Seen from this angle, workers' management implies that the workers' collective itself will bear the final responsibility for deciding how a proposed target could best be achieved, given the general means available. The task corresponds to the "positive" functions of the present narrowly based managerial apparatus, which itself will have been superseded. The workers themselves will determine the organization of their work in each shop or department. They will ensure coordination between shops. This will take place through direct contacts whenever it is a question of routine problems or of shops engaged in closely related aspects of the production process. If more important matters arose, they would be discussed and solved by meetings of delegates (or

by joint gatherings of workers) of two or more shops or sections. The overall coordination of the work would be undertaken by the factory council and by the general assembly of the factory. Relations with the rest of the economy, as already stated, would be in the hands of the factory council.

Under such conditions, autonomy in the production process means the ability to decide how to achieve designated targets with the aid of means that have been defined in general terms. A certain "give-and-take" undoubtedly will occur between the "targets set" and "means to be used." The plan must in general prescribe these "targets" and "means," for they are the product of other factories. But only the workers of the particular factory can carry out this process of concrete elaboration. By themselves, "targets set" and "means of production available for achieving them" do not automatically or exhaustively define all the possible methods that could be used, all the more so since the plan's definition of the means remains highly general and it cannot specify even all the important "details." Spelling these methods out in detail and deciding exactly how an objective will be achieved with the means provided will be the first area in which workers will exercise their autonomy. It is an important field but a limited one, and it is essential to be fully aware of its limitations. These limitations stem from (and define) the inevitable framework within which this new type of production will have to begin. It will be the task of socialist production to constantly expand this framework and to constantly push back these limitations on autonomy.

Autonomy, envisaged in this static way, is limited first of all in relation to the fixing of targets. True, the workers of a given enterprise will participate in determining the targets of their factory insofar as they participate in the elaboration of the overall plan. But they are not in total or sole control of these targets or objectives. In a modern economy, where the production of each enterprise both conditions and is conditioned by that of all the others, the determination of coherent targets cannot be vested in individual enterprises, acting in isolation. It must be undertaken by and for all enterprises together, with general viewpoints prevailing over particular ones.

Autonomy also is limited in relation to available material means. The workers of a given enterprise cannot in full autonomy determine the means of production they would prefer to use, for these are but the products of other enterprises or factories. Total autonomy for every factory, in relation to means, would imply that each factory could determine the output of all the others. These various autonomies would immediately cancel each other out. This limitation is, however, less rigid than the first (the limitation in relation to targets). Alterations of its own equipment, as proposed by the user factory, could easily be accommodated by the producer factory without the latter saddling itself with a heavy extra load.

On a small scale, this happens even today in integrated engineering factories (car factories, for instance), where a substantial part of the tooling utilized in one shop may be made in another shop of the same factory. Close cooperation between plants making machine tools and plants using them could quickly lead to considerable changes in the means of production currently used.[6]

Let us now take a look at workers' management at the factory level in its dynamic aspect, i.e., the function of workers' management in developing and transforming socialist production. More precisely, let us look at how the development and transformation of socialist production will become the primary objective of workers' management. Everything we have suggested so

[6] See Mothe, "L'Usine et la gestion ouvrière."

far will now have to be re-examined. In this way we shall see how the limits to autonomy will gradually be pushed back.

The change will be most obvious in relation to the means of production. As we have said, socialist society will attack the problem of how to consciously transform the technology it has inherited from capitalism. Under capitalism, production equipment — and more generally, the means of production — are planned and manufactured independently of the user and of his preferences (manufacturers, of course, pretend to take the user's viewpoint into account, but this has little to do with the real user: the worker on the shop floor). But equipment is made to be used productively. The viewpoint of the "productive consumers" (i.e., those who will use the equipment to produce the goods) is of primary importance. As the views of those who make the equipment are also important, the problem of the structure of the means of production will only be solved by the vital cooperation of these two categories of workers. In an integrated factory, this involves permanent contacts between the corresponding shops. At the level of the economy as a whole, it will have to take place through the instauration of normal, permanent contacts between factories and between sectors of production. (This problem is distinct from that of overall planning. General planning is concerned with determining a quantitative framework — so much steel and so many hours of labor at one end, so many consumer goods at the other. It does not have to intervene in the form or the type of intermediate products.)

Cooperation necessarily will take two forms. The choice and popularization of the best methods, and the standardization and rationalization of their use, will be achieved through the horizontal cooperation of councils, organized according to branch or sector of industry (for instance, textiles, the chemical industry, engineering, electrical supply, etc.). On the other hand, the integration of the viewpoints of those who make and of those who utilize equipment (or, more generally, of those who make and those who utilize intermediate products) will require the vertical cooperation of councils representing the successive stages of a productive process (the steel industry, and the machine-tool and engineering industries, for instance). In both cases, cooperation will have to be organized on a permanent basis through committees of factory council representatives (or wider conferences of producers) organized both horizontally and vertically.

Considering the problem from this dynamic angle — which ultimately is the only important one — we see at once that the terrain for exercising autonomy has expanded considerably. Already at the level of individual factories (but more significantly at the level of cooperation between factories), the producers are beginning to influence the structure of the means of production. They are, thereby, reaching a position where they are beginning to dominate the work process: They are not only determining its methods but are now also modifying its technological structure.

This fact now begins to alter what we have just said about targets. Three-quarters of gross modern production consists of intermediate products, o "means of production" in the broadest sense. When producers and users of intermediate products decide together about the means of production, they are participating in a very direct and immediate way in decisions about the objectives of production. The remaining limitation, and it is an important one, flows from the fact that these means of production (whatever their exact nature) are destined, in the last analysis, to produce consumer goods. And the overall volume of these can only be determined, in general terms, by the plan.

But here, too, looking at things dynamically radically alters one's vision. Modern consumption is characterized by the constant appearance of new products. Factories producing consumer goods will conceive of, receive suggestions about, study, and finally produce such products.

This raises the broader problem of contact between producers and consumers. Capitalist society rests on a complete separation of these two aspects o human activity and on the exploitation of the consumer qua consumer. There isn't just monetary exploitation (through overcharging) and limitations on one's income. Capitalism claims that it can satisfy people's needs better than any other system in history. But in fact capitalism, if it does not determine these needs themselves, decides upon the method of satisfying them. Consumer preference is only one of numerous variables that can be manipulated by modern sales techniques.

The division between producers and consumers appears most glaringly in relation to the quality of goods. This problem is insoluble in any exploiting society as Daniel Mothe's dialogue between the human-worker and the robot-worker shows: "Do you think this part's important? — What's it to you? You can always jam it in somehow."[7] Those who look only at the surface of things see only a commodity as a commodity. They don't see in it a crystallized moment of the class struggle. They see faults or defects, instead of seeing in them the resultant of the worker's constant struggle with himself. Faults or defects embody the worker's struggles against exploitation. They also embody squabbles between different sections of the bureaucracy managing the plant.

The elimination of exploitation will of itself bring about a change in all this. At work, people will begin to assert their claims as future consumers of what they have to instaurate — regular forms of contact (other than "the market") between producers and consumers.

We have assumed, as a starting point for all this, the division of labor inherited from present-day capitalism. But we have also pointed out that, from the very beginning, socialist society cannot survive unless it demolishes this division. This is an enormous subject with which we cannot even begin to deal in this text. Nevertheless, the first benchmarks of a solution can be seen even today. Modern production has destroyed many traditional professional qualifications. It has created universal automatic or semiautomatic machines. It has thereby itself demolished on its own the traditional framework for the industrial division of labor. It has given birth to a universal worker who is capable, after a relatively short apprenticeship, of using most existing machines. Once one gets beyond its class aspects, the "posting" of workers to particular jobs in a big modern factory corresponds less and less to a genuine division of labor and more and more to a simple division of tasks. Workers are not allocated to given areas of the productive process and then riveted to them because their "occupational skills" invariably correspond to the "skills required" by management. They are placed here rather than there because putting a particular worker in a particular place at a particular time happens to suit the personnel officer — or the foreman — or, more prosaically, just because a particular vacancy happened to exist.

Under socialism, factories would have no reason to accept the artificially rigid division of labor now prevailing. There will be every reason to encourage a rotation of workers between shops and departments — and between production and office areas. Such a rotation will greatly help workers to manage production in full knowledge of the relevant facts as more and more workers develop firsthand familiarity with what goes on where they work. The same applies to rotation of workers (between various enterprises, and in particular between "producing" and "utilizing" units).

[7] Ibid.

The residues of capitalism's division of labor gradually will have to be eliminated. This overlaps with the general problem of education not only of generations to come but of those adults who were brought up under the previous sys tem. We cannot go into this problem here.

Simplification and Rationalization of General Economic Problems

The functioning of the socialist economy implies that the producers themselves will consciously manage all economic activity. This management will be exercised at all levels, and in particular at the overall or central level. It is completely illusory to believe that either a central bureaucracy left to itself or even a bureaucracy "controlled" by the workers could guide the economy toward socialism, Such a bureaucracy could only lead society toward new forms of exploitation, not direct the economy in the desired direction. It is just as impossible for an "enlightened" bureaucracy, the mechanisms of a "true market" (supposedly restored to its pristine and original, precapitalist, purity), or the regulatory control afforded by some electronic supercomputer to achieve such an ideal end. Any plan presupposes a fundamental decision on the rate of growth of the economy, and this in turn depends essentially on decisions concerning the distribution of the social product between investment and consumption.

(One might add that the rate of economic growth also depends: (1) on technical progress [but such technical progress is itself critically dependent on the amounts of investment put, directly or indirectly, into research]; and (2) on the evolution of the labor productivity [but this hinges on the amount of capital invested per worker and on the level of technique — and these two factors again bring us back to the larger question of investment. More significantly, the productivity of labor depends on the producers' attitude toward the economy. This, in turn, would center on people's attitude toward the plan, on how its targets were established, on their own involvement and sense of identification with the decisions reached, and in general on factors discussed in this text].)

Now, there is no "objective" rational basis for determining how to distribute the social product. A decision to invest zero percent of the social product is neither more nor less objectively rational than a decision to invest 90 percent of it. The only rationality in the matter is the choice people make about their own fate, in full knowledge of the relevant facts. The fixing of plan targets by those who will have to fulfil them is, in the last analysis, the only guarantee of their willing and spontaneous participation and hence of an effective mobilization of individuals around both the management and the expansion of the economy.

But this does not mean that the plan and the management of the economy are "just political matters." Socialist planning will base itself on certain rational technical factors. It is in fact the only type of planning that could integrate such factors into a conscious management of the economy. These factors consist of a number of extremely useful and effective "labor-saving" and "thought-saving" devices that can be used to simplify the representation of the economy and its laws, thereby allowing the problems of central economic management to be made accessible to all. Workers' management of production (this time at the level of the economy as a whole and not just at the level of a particular factory) will be possible only if management tasks have been enormously simplified, so that the producers and their collective organs are in a position to judge

the key issues in an informed way. What is needed, in other words, is for the vast chaos of today's economic facts and relations to be boiled down to certain propositions that adequately sum up the real problems and choices. These propositions should be few in number. They should be easy to grasp. They should summarize reality without distortion or mystification. If they can do this, they will form an adequate basis for meaningful judgments.

A condensation of this type is possible, first, because there is at least a rational outline to the economy; second, because there already exist today certain techniques allowing one to grasp the complexities of economic reality; and finally, because it is now possible to mechanize and to automate all that does not pertain In human decisions in the strict sense.

A discussion of the relevant devices, techniques, and possibilities is therefore indispensable, starting right now. They enable us to carry out a vast clearing of ground. Without them, workers' management would collapse under the weight of the very subject matter it ought to be getting a handle on. The content of such it discussion is in no sense a "purely technical" one, and at each stage we will be bided by the general principles already outlined here.

A production plan, whether it deals with one factory or the economy as a whole, is a type of reasoning (made up of a great number of secondary arguments). It can be boiled down to two premises and one conclusion. The two premises are the material means initially at one's disposal (equipment, stocks, labor, etc.) and the target one is aiming at (production of so many specified objects and services, within a given period of time). We will refer to these premises as the "initial conditions" and the "ultimate target." The "conclusion" is the path to be followed from initial conditions to ultimate target. In practice this means a certain number of intermediate products to be made within a given period. We will call these conclusions the "intermediate targets."

When passing from simple initial conditions to a simple ultimate target, the intermediate targets can be determined right away. As the initial conditions or the ultimate targets (or both) become more complex, or are more spread out in time, the establishment of intermediate targets becomes more difficult. In the case of the economy as a whole (where there are thousands of different products, many of which can be made by several different processes, and where the manufacture of any given category of products directly or indirectly involves most of the others), one might imagine that the level of complexity makes rational planning (in the sense of an a priori determination of the intermediate targets, given the initial conditions and ultimate target) impossible. The apologists for "free enterprise" have been proclaiming this doctrine for ages. But it is false.[1] The problem can be solved and available mathematical techniques in fact allow it to be solved remarkably simply. Once the initial conditions (the economic situation at the start of the planning process) are known and the ultimate target or targets have been consciously set, all planning work (the determination of the intermediate targets) can be reduced to a purely technical task of execution, capable of being mechanized and automated to a very high degree.

The basis of the new methods is the concept of the total interdependence of all sectors of the economy (the fact that everything that one sector utilizes in production is itself the product of one or more other sectors; and the converse fact that every product of a given sector will ultimately be utilized or consumed by one or more other sectors). The idea, which goes back to Quesnay and which formed the basis of Marx's theory of accumulation, has been vastly developed in the past

[1] Bureaucratic "planning" as carried out in Russia and the Eastern European countries proves nothing, one way or the other. It is just as irrational and just as anarchic and wasteful as the capitalist "market" — though in different ways. The waste is both "external" (the wrong decisions being Blade) and "internal" (brought about by the resistance of the workers) to the production process. Lor further details, see PRAB.

twenty years by a group of American economists around W Leontief that has succeeded in giving it a statistical formulation that can be applied to a real economy in a state of constant expansion.[2] This interdependence is such that at any given moment (for a given level of technique and a given structure of available equipment) the production of each sector is related, in a relatively stable manner, to the products of other sectors that the first sector utilizes (or: "consumes productively").

It is easy to grasp that a given quantity of coal is needed to produce a ton of steel of a given type. Moreover, one will need so much scrap metal or iron ore, so many hours of labor, such and such an expenditure on upkeep and repairs. The ratio "coal used/steel produced," expressed in terms of value, is known as the "current technical coefficient" determining the productive consumption of coal per unit of steel turned out. If one wants to increase steel production beyond a certain point, it will not help just to go on delivering more coal or more scrap metal to the existing steel mills. New mills will have to be built. Or one will have to increase the productive capacity of existing mills. To increase steel output by a given amount one will have to produce a given amount of specified equipment. The ratio "given amount of specified equipment/steel-producing capacity per given period," again expressed in terms of value, is known as the "technical coefficient of capital." It determines the quantity of capital utilized per unit of steel produced in a given period.

One could stop at this point if one were only dealing with a single enterprise. Every firm bases itself on calculations of this sort (in fact, on much more detailed ones) whenever, in making decisions about how much to produce or how much to increase production, it buys raw materials, orders machinery or recruits labor. But when one looks at the economy as a whole, things change. The interdependence of the various sectors has definite consequences. The increase of production in a given sector has repercussions (of varying intensity) on all other sectors and finally on the initial sector itself. For example, an increase in the production of steel immediately requires an increase in the production of coal. But this requires both an increase in certain types of mining equipment and the recruitment of more labor into mining. The increased demand for mining equipment in turn requires more steel, and more labor in the steel mills. This in turn leads to a demand for still more coal, etc., etc. For their part, newly hired workers get increased wages, and therefore they buy more consumer goods of various kinds. The production of these new goods will require such and such an amount of raw materials, new equipment, etc. (and, again, more coal and steel). The question of how much the demand for nylon stockings will rise in West Virginia or the Basses-Pyrenees if a new blast furnace were to be built in Pennsylvania or the Lorraine is not a joke but one of the central problems to which planners should — and can — respond.

The use of Leontief s matrices, combined with other modern methods such as Koopman's "activity analysis"[3] (of which "operational research" is a specific instance) would, in the case of a socialist economy, allow theoretically exact answers to be given to questions of this type. A matrix is a table on which the technical coefficients (both "current technical coefficients" and "technical coefficients of capital") expressing the dependence of each sector upon each of the others are laid out systematically. Every ultimate target that might be chosen is presented as a

[2] The field is in constant expansion. The starting points remain, however, Leontief's The Structure of American Economy, 1919–1939: An Empirical Application of Equilibrium Analysis (1951; reprinted, Armonk, N.Y.: Sharpe, 1976), and the essays by Leontief et al., Studies in the Structure of the American Economy: Theoretical and Empirical Explorations in Input-Output Analysis (1953; reprinted, Armonk, N.Y.: Sharpe, 1976).

[3] Tjalling Koopmans, Activity Analysis of Production and Allocation (1951; reprinted, New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1972).

list of material means to be utilized (and therefore manufactured) in specific amounts, within the period in question. As soon as the ultimate target is chosen, the solution of a system of simultaneous equations enables one to define immediately all the intermediate targets and therefore the tasks to be fulfiled by each sector of the economy.

Solving these problems will be the task of a highly mechanized and automated specific enterprise, whose main work will consist of a veritable "mass production" of various plans (targets) and of their various components (implications).

This enterprise is the plan factory. Its central workshop will, to start with, probably consist of a computer whose "memory" will store the technical coefficients and the initial productive capacity of each sector. If "fed" a number of hypothetical targets, the computer will "produce" the productive implication of each target for each sector (including the amount of work to be provided, in each instance, by the "manpower" sector).

(The division of the economy into some 100 sectors, which roughly corresponds to present [1957] computer capacity, is about "halfway" between its division [by Marx] into two sectors [consumer goods and means of production] and the few thousand sectors that would be required to ensure a perfectly exact representation. Present computer capabilities would probably be sufficient in practice, and could be made more precise, even now, by tackling the problem in several stages.)

Around this central workshop there would be others whose tasks would be to study the distribution and variations of regional production and investment and possible technical optima (given the general interdependence of the various sectors). They would also determine the unit values (equivalences) of different categories of products.

Two departments of the plan factory warrant special mention: the one dealing with stock taking and the one dealing with the technical coefficients.

The quality of the planning work, when conceived in this way, depends on how much people know about the real state of the economy, since such knowledge forms the basis of all planning work. An accurate solution, in other words, depends on adequate information both about the "initial conditions" and the "technical coefficients." Industrial and agricultural censuses are carried out at regular intervals, even today, by a number of advanced capitalist countries, but they offer only a very crude basis because they are extremely inaccurate, fragmented, and based on insufficient data. The taking of an up-to-date and complete inventory will be the first task, once the workers take power, and it will require a great deal of serious preparation. It cannot be achieved "by decree," from one day to the next. Nor, once taken, could such an inventory be considered final. Perfecting it and keeping it up-to-date will be an ongoing task of the plan factory, working in close cooperation with the departments responsible for industrial stock taking in their own enterprises. The results of this cooperation will constantly modify and "enrich" the "memory" of the central computer (which indeed will itself take on a large part of the job).

Establishing the "technical coefficients" will pose similar problems. To start with, it could be done very roughly, using certain generally available statistical information ("on average, the textile industry uses so much cotton to produce so much cloth"). But such knowledge soon will have to be made far more precise through information provided by the responsible technical workers in each industry. The data "stores" in the computer will have to be periodically revised as more accurate knowledge about the technical coefficients — and in particular about the real changes in these coefficients brought about by new technological developments — is brought to light.

Such in-depth knowledge of the real state of affairs of the economy, combined with the constant revision of basic physical and technical data and with the possibility of drawing instantaneous conclusions from them, will result in very considerable, probably enormous gains, though it is difficult at this time to form a precise idea of the extent of these changes. The potentialities of these new computer-assisted techniques have been exploited in particular instances to make considerable improvements upon past practices, thus leading to greater rationality and economic savings. But these potentialities remain untapped in the very area where they could be most usefully applied: that of the economy taken as a whole. Any technical modification, in any sector, could in principle affect the conditions for profitability and the rational choice of production methods in all other sectors. A socialist economy will be able totally and instantaneously to take advantage of such facts. Capitalist economies take them into account only belatedly and in a very partial way.

It will be immediately possible to actually set up such a plan factory in any moderately industrialized country. The necessary equipment already exists. So do the people capable of operating it. Banks and insurance companies (which will be unnecessary under socialism) already use some of these methods in work of this general type. Linking up with mathematicians, statisticians, and econometricians, those who work in such offices could provide the initial personnel of the plan factory. Workers' management of production and the requirements of a rational economy will provide a tremendous impetus to the simultaneously "spontaneous/automatic" and "conscious" development of the logical and mechanical aspects of rational planning techniques.

Let us not be misunderstood; the role of the "plan factory" will not be to decide on the plan. The targets of the plan will be determined by society as a whole, in a manner soon to be described. Before any proposals are voted upon, however, the plan factory will work out and present to society as a whole the implications and consequences of the plan (or plans) suggested. After a plan has been adopted, the task of the plan factory will be to constantly bring up to date the facts on which the current plan is based, and to draw conclusions from these modifications, informing both the central assembly of councils and the relevant sectors of any alterations in the intermediate targets (and therefore in production tasks) that might be worth considering.

In none of these instances would those actually working in the plan factory decide anything — except, like in every other factory, the organization of their own work.

The Market for Consumer Goods

With a fixed set of techniques, the determination of intermediate targets is, as we have just seen, a purely mechanical matter. With constantly and permanently evolving techniques, other problems arise that we will treat later. But what about consumption? In a socialist society, how could people determine what and how much is to be produced?

It is obvious that this cannot be based on direct democracy. The plan cannot propose, as an ultimate target, a complete list of consumer goods or suggest in what proportions they should be produced. Such a proposal would not be democratic, for two reasons. First, it could never be based on "full knowledge of the relevant facts," namely, on a full knowledge of everybody's preferences. Second, it would be tantamount to a pointless tyranny of the majority over the minority. If 40 percent of the population wish to consume a certain article, there is no reason why they should be deprived of it under the pretext that the other 60 percent prefer something else. No preference or taste is more logical than any other. Moreover, there is no reason at all to cut short the problem in this way, since consumer wishes are seldom incompatible with one another. Majority votes in this matter would amount to rationing, an irrational and absurd way of settling this kind of problem anywhere but on the raft of Medusa or in a besieged fortress.

Planning decisions therefore will relate not to particular items but to the general standard of living (the overall volume of consumption), expressed in terms of the disposable income of each person in a socialist society. They will not delve into the detailed composition of this consumption.

Once the overall volume of consumption is defined, one might be tempted to treat its constituent articles of consumption as "intermediate targets." One might say, "When consumers dispose of x amount of income, they will buy y amount of some particular article." But this would be an artificial and ultimately erroneous response.

In relation to human consumption, deciding on living standards does not involve the same kind of considerations that go into determining how many tons of coal are needed to produce so many tons of steel. There are no "technical coefficients of the consumer." In actual, material production, such coefficients have an intrinsic meaning, but in the realm of consumption they would represent merely a bookkeeping contrivance. Under capitalism, there is of course some statistical correlation between income and the structure of demand (without such a correlation private capitalism could not function). But this is only a very relative affair. It would be turned upside down under socialism. A massive redistribution of incomes will have taken place; many profound changes will have occurred in every realm of life; the permanent rape of consumers through advertising and capitalist sales techniques will have been abolished; and new tastes will have emerged as the result of an increase in free time.

Finally, the statistical regularity of consumer demand cannot solve the problem of gaps that might appear within a given period between real demand and that envisaged in the plan. Genuine planning does not mean saying, "Living standards will go up by 5 percent next year, and experience tells us that this will result in a 20 percent increase in the demand for cars, so let's make

20 percent more cars," and stopping at that. One will have to start this way, where other criteria are missing, but there will have to be powerful correcting mechanisms capable of responding to disparities between anticipated and real demand.

Socialist society will have to regulate the pattern of its consumption according to the principle of consumer sovereignty, which implies the existence of a real market for consumer goods. The "general decision" embodied in the plan will define: (1) what proportion of its overall product society wishes to devote to the satisfaction of individual consumer needs, (2) what proportion it would like to allocate to collective needs ("public consumption"), and (3) what proportion it wants to apply to the development of the productive forces (i.e., investment). But the structure of consumption will have to be determined by the demand of consumers themselves.

How would this market operate? How could a mutual adaptation of supply and demand come about?

First, there would have to be an overall equilibrium. The sum total of income distributed in any given period ("wages," retirement funds, and other benefits) will have to be equal to the value of consumer goods (quantities x prices) made available in that period. An "empirical" initial decision will then have to be made in order to provide at least a skeleton for the structure of consumption. This initial decision will be based on traditionally "known" statistical data, but in full knowledge of the fact that these will have to be extensively modified by taking into account a whole series of new factors (such as the equalization of wages, for instance). Stocks of various commodities in excess of what might be expected to be consumed in a given period will, initially, have to be scheduled for.

Three "corrective" processes will then come into play, the net result of which will be to show immediately any gap between anticipated and real demand, and then to bridge it:

1. Available stocks will either rise or fall.

2. According to whether the reserve stocks decreased or increased (i.e., according to whether demand had been initially underestimated or overestimated), there will be an initial rise or fall in the price of the various commodities. The reason for these temporary price fluctuations will have to be fully explained to the public.

3. Meanwhile, there will be an immediate readjustment in the structure for producing consumer goods to the level where (the stocks having been replenished) the production of goods equals the demand. At that moment, the sale demand and the amount of production scheduled will have to be corrected by a modification in the structure of production and not by resorting to the instauration of permanent differences between selling prices and normal prices. If such differences were to appear, they would imply ipso facto that the original planning decision was wrong, in this particular field.

Money, Prices, Wages, and Value

Many absurdities have been spoken about money and its immediate abolition in a socialist society. It should be clear, however, that the role of money is radically transformed from the moment it no longer can be used as a means of accumulation (the means of production being owned in common) or as a means of exerting social pressure (wages being equal).

People will receive a token [revenu] in return for what they put into society. These "tokens" will take the form of units [signes], allowing people to organize what they take out of society, spreading it out (1) in time, and (2) between different objects and services, exactly as they wish. As we are seeking here to come to grips with realities and are not fighting against words, we see no objection to calling these tokens "wages" and these units "money," just as a little earlier we used the words "normal prices" to describe the monetary expression of labor value.

(Labor value includes, of course, the actual social cost of the equipment utilized in the period considered. [For the working out of labor values by the matrix method, see the article DC in S. ou B., 12 (August 1953), pp. 7–22.] The adoption of labor value as a yardstick is equivalent to what academic economists call "normal long-term costs." The viewpoint expressed in this text corresponds to Marx's, which is, in general, attacked by academic economists, even "socialist" ones. For them, "marginal costs" should determine prices; see, for instance, Joan Robinson's An Essay on Marxian Economics, 2nd ed. [New York: St. Martin's Press, 1966], pp. 23–28. We cannot go into this discussion here. All we can say is that the application of the principle of marginal costs would mean that the price of a plane ticket between Paris and New York would at times be zero and at other times equivalent to that of the whole aircraft.)

Under socialism, labor value will be the only rational basis for any kind of social accountancy and the only yardstick having any real meaning for people. As such, it necessarily will serve as the foundation for calculating profitability in the sphere of socialist production. The main objective of making such calculations will be to reduce both the direct and indirect costs of human labor power. Setting the prices of consumer goods on the basis of their labor value would mean that for each person the cost of consumer objects will clearly appear as the equivalent of the labor he himself would have had to expend to produce them (assuming he had both access to the average prevailing equipment and an average social capacity also would be helpful if the hourly wage, equal for all, were a given fraction of this unit, expressing the ratio private consumption total net production If these steps were taken and thoroughly explained, they would enable the fundamental planning decision (namely, the distribution of the social product between consumption and investment) to be immediately obvious to everyone, and repeatedly drawn to people's attention, every time anyone bought anything. Equally obvious would be the social cost of every object acquired.

Absolute Wage Equality

Whenever they succeed in expressing themselves independently of the trade-union bureaucracy, working-class aspirations and demands increasingly are directed against hierarchy and wage differentials.[1] Basing itself on this fact, socialist society will introduce absolute equality in the area of wages.

There is no justification, other than naked exploitation, for wage differentials,[2] whether these reflect differing professional qualifications or differences in productivity. If an individual himself advanced the costs of his professional training and if society considered him "an enterprise," the recuperation of those costs, spread out over a working lifetime would at most "justify," at the extremes of the wage spectrum, a differential of 2:1 (between sweeper and neurosurgeon). Under socialism, training costs will be advanced by society (they often are, even today), and the question of their "recovery" will not arise. As for productivity, it depends (already today) much less on bonuses and incentives and much more on the coercions exercised, on the one hand, by machines and supervisors and, on the other hand, by the discipline of production, imposed by primary working groups in the workshop. Socialist society could not increase productivity by economic constraints without resorting again to all the capitalist paraphernalia of norms, supervision, etc. Labor discipline will How (as it already does, in part, today) from the self-organization of primary groups in each workshop, from the mutual cooperation and supervision among the factories' different shops, from gatherings of producers in different factories or different sectors of the economy. As a general rule, the primary group in a workshop ensures the discipline of any particular individual. Anyone who proves incorrigible can be made to leave that particular shop. It would then be up to this recalcitrant individual to seek entry into another primary group of workers and to get accepted by them or else to remain jobless.

Wage equality will give a real meaning to the market in consumer goods, every individual being assured for the first time of an equal vote. It will abolish countless conflicts, both in everyday life and in production, and will enable there to develop an extraordinary cohesion among working people. It will destroy at its very roots the whole mercantile monstrosity of capitalism (both private and bureaucratic), the commercialization of individuals, that whole universe where one does not earn what one is worth, but where one is worth what one earns. A few years of wage equality and little will be left of the present-day mentality of individuals.

[1] The 1955 Nantes strikes took place around an anti-hierarchical demand for a uniform increase for everyone. The Hungarian workers' councils demanded the abolition of norms and severe limitations on hierarchy. What inadvertently is said in official Russian proclamations indicates that a permanent struggle against hierarchy is taking place in the factories of that country. See PRAB.

[2] For a detailed discussion of the problem of hierarchy, see RPR, section 5, and DC, in S. ou B., 13 (January 1954), pp. 67–69.

The Fundamental Decision

The fundamental decision, in a socialist economy, is the one whereby society as a whole determines what it wants (i.e., the ultimate targets of its plan). This decision concerns two basic propositions. Given the "initial conditions" of the economy, how much time does society want to devote to production? And how much of the total product does it want to see devoted respectively to private consumption, public consumption, and investment?

In both private and bureaucratic capitalist societies, the amount of time one has to work is determined by the ruling class by means of direct physical constraints (as was the case until quite recently in Russian factories) or economic ones. No one is consulted about the matter. Socialist society, taken as a whole, will not escape the impact of certain economic constraints (in the sense that any decision to modify labor time will — other things being equal — have a bearing on production). But it will differ from all previous societies in that for the first time in history people will be able to decide about work in full knowledge of the relevant facts, with the basic elements of the problem clearly presented to them.

Socialist society will also be the first society capable of rationally deciding how society's product should be divided between consumption and investment. (We leave aside for now the problem of public consumption.) Under private capitalism, this distribution takes place in an absolutely blind fashion and one would seek in vain any "rationality" underlying what determines investment. (In his major work, which is devoted to this theme — and after a moderate use of differential equations — Keynes comes up with the conclusion that the main determinants of investment are the "animal spirits" of entrepreneurs. The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money [1936], pp. 161–62.) The idea that the volume of investment is primarily determined by the rate of interest (and that the latter results from the interplay of the "real forces of productivity and thrift") was long ago demolished by academic economists themselves. (See, for example, Joan Robinson's The Rate of Interest and Other Essays [1952; reprinted, London: Hyperion, 1981].) In bureaucratic capitalist societies, the volume of investment is also decided quite arbitrarily, and the central bureaucracy in these societies has never been able to justify its choices except through monotonous recitations of litanies about the "priority of heavy industry." (One would seek in vain through the voluminous writings of Mr. Charles Bettelheim for any attempt to justify the rate of accumulation "chosen" by the Russian bureaucracy. The "socialism" of such "theoreticians" not only implies that Stalin [or Khrushchev] alone can know. It also implies that such knowledge, by its very nature, cannot be communicated to the rest of humanity. In another country, and in other times, this was known as the Führerprinzip.) Even if there were a rational, "objective" basis for making a central decision on this matter, the decision arrived at would be ipso facto irrational if it was reached in the absence of those primarily concerned, namely, the members of society. Any decision made in this way would reproduce the basic contradiction of all exploiting regimes. It would treat people in the plan as just one variable of predictable behaviour among others and as theoretical "objects." It would soon lead to treating them as objects in real life, too. Such a policy would contain the seeds of its own failure: Instead of encouraging the participation of the

producers in the carrying out of the plan, it would irrevocably alienate them from a plan that was not of their choosing. There is no "objective" rationality allowing one to decide, by means of mathematical formulas, about the future of society, work, consumption, and accumulation. The only rationality in these realms is the living reason of mankind, the decisions of ordinary people concerning their own fate.

But these decisions will not come from a toss of the dice. They will be based upon a complete clarification of the problem and they will be made in full knowledge of the relevant facts. This will be possible because there exists, for any given level of technique, a definite relation between a given amount of investment and the resulting increase in production. This relation is nothing other than the application to the economy as a whole of the "technical coefficients of capital" we spoke of earlier. A given investment in steelworks will result in such and such increase in what steelworks turn out — and a given overall investment in production will result in such and such a net increase in the overall social product. Therefore, a certain rate of accumulation will allow a certain rate of increase of the social product (and therefore of the standard of living or of the amount of leisure). Finally, a particular fraction of the product devoted to accumulation will also result in a particular rate of increase of living standards.

The overall problem can therefore be posed in the following terms. A large immediate increase in consumption is possible — but it would imply a significant cutback on further increases in the years to come. On the other hand, people might prefer to choose a more limited immediate increase in living standards, which would allow the social product (and hence living standards) to increase at the rate of x percent per annum in the years to come. And so on. "The antinomy between the present and the future," to which the apologists of private capitalism and of the bureaucracy are constantly referring, would still be with us. But it would be laid out clearly. And society itself would settle the matter, fully aware of the setting and of the implications of its decision.

(This net increase in the social product of which we have spoken obviously is not just the sum of the increases in each sector. Several elements must be added up or be subtracted before one can pass from one to the other. For instance, there would be the "intermediate utilizations" of the products of each sector and the "external economies" [investment in a given sector, by abolishing a bottleneck, could allow the better use of the productive capacities of other sectors that, although already established, were being wasted hitherto]. Working out these net increases presents no particular difficulties. They are calculated automatically, at the same time as one works out the "intermediate objectives" [mathematically, the solution to one problem immediately provides the solution to the other].

We have discussed the problem of how to determine the overall volume of investments. We can only touch on the problem of the choice of particular investments. Allocation of investment by sectors is automatic once the final investment is determined [a given level of final consumption directly or indirectly implies such and such an amount of productive capacity in each sector]. The choice of a given type of investment from among several producing the same result could only depend on such considerations as the effect that a given type of equipment would have on those who would have to use it — and here, from all we have said, their own viewpoint would be decisive.

From this point of view, when two comparable types of machinery are examined [thermal and hydroelectric power stations, for example], the criterion of profitability still applies. Here, where an "accounting-book" interest rate is used to make one's calculations, socialist society will still

be superior to a capitalist economy: For this "rate of interest," the former will use the rate of expansion of its own economy; it can be shown — Von Neumann did it in 1937 — that these two rates ought necessarily to be identical in a rational economy.)

In conclusion, and to sum up, one could say that any overall plan submitted to the people for discussion would have to specify:

1. The productive implications for each sector of industry, and as far as possible the tasks to be completed by each enterprise;
2. The amount of work involved for everybody;
3. The level of consumption during the initial period;
4. The amount of resources to be devoted to public consumption and to investment; and
5. The rate of increase of future consumption.

To simplify things, we have at times presented the decisions about ultimate and intermediate targets (i.e., the implications of the plan concerning specific areas of production) as two separate and consecutive acts. In practice there would be a continuous give-and-take between these two phases, and a plurality of proposals. The producers will be in no position to decide on ultimate targets unless they know what the implications of particular targets are for themselves, not only as consumers but as producers, working in a specific factory. Moreover, there is no such thing as a decision made in full knowledge of the relevant facts if that decision is not founded on a spectrum of choices, each with its particular implications.

The fundamental process of decision therefore will take the following form. Starting from below, there would be discussions in the general assemblies. Initial proposals would emanate from the workers' councils of various enterprises and would deal with their own productive possibilities in the period to come. The plan factory would then regroup these various proposals, pointing out which ones were mutually incompatible or entailed undesirable effects on other sectors. It would elaborate a series of achievable targets, grouping them as far as possible in terms of their concrete implications. (Proposal A implies that factory X will increase production by r percent next year with the help of additional equipment Y. Proposal B, on the other hand, implies …) There would then be a full discussion of the various overall proposals, throughout the general assemblies and by all the workers' councils, possibly with counterproposals and a repetition of the procedure described. A final discussion would then lead to a simple majority vote in the general assemblies of each enterprise.

The Management of the Economy

We have spelled out the implications of workers' management at the level of a particular factory. These consist in the abolition of any separate managerial apparatus and of the performance of managerial jobs by the workers themselves, organized in workers' councils and in general assemblies of one or more shops or offices, or of a whole enterprise.

Workers' management of the economy as a whole also implied that the management of the economy is not vested in the hands of a specific managerial stratum, but belongs instead to organized collectivities of producers.

What we have outlined in the previous sections shows that democratic management is perfectly feasible. Its basic assumption is the clarification of data and people's utilization of what modern techniques have now made possible. It implies the conscious use of a series of devices and mechanisms (such as a genuine consumer "market," wage equality, the connections established between price and value — and, of course, the plan factory) combined with real knowledge concerning economic reality. Together, these will help clear the ground. The major part of planning is just made up of tasks of execution and could safely be left to highly mechanized or automated offices, which would have no political or decisional role whatsoever and would confine themselves to placing before society a variety of feasible plans and their full respective implications for everyone, both from the standpoint of production and from that of consumption.

This general clearing of the ground having been achieved, and coherent possibilities having been presented to the people, the final choice will lie in their hands. Everyone will participate in deciding the ultimate targets "in full knowledge of the relevant facts," i.e., knowing the implications of his choice for himself (both as producer and as consumer). The elements of the plan will begin as proposals emanating from various enterprises. They will be elaborated by the plan factory as a series of possible compatible plans. Finally, this spectrum of plans will be brought back before the general assemblies of each enterprise where they will be discussed and voted on.

Once adopted, a given plan provides the framework of economic activities for a given period of time. It establishes a starting point for economic life. But in a socialist society, the plan will not dominate economic life. It is only a starting point, to be constantly re-examined and modified as necessary. Neither the economic life of society — nor its life overall — can be based on a dead technical rationality, given once and for all. Society cannot alienate itself from its own decisions. It is not only that real life will almost of necessity diverge, in many aspects, from the "most perfect" plan in the world. It is also that the workers' self-managerial activity will constantly tend to alter, both directly and indirectly, the basic data and targets of the plan. New products, new means of production, new methods, new problems, new difficulties, and new solutions will constantly be emerging. Working times will be reduced. Prices will fall, entailing consumer reactions and displacements of demand. Some of these modifications will affect only a single factory, others several factories, and yet others, no doubt, the economy as a whole. (From this angle — and if they weren't false in the first place — Russian figures that show that year after year the targets of the plan have been fulfilled to 101 percent would provide the severest possible indictment of

the Russian economy and of Russian society. They would signify, in effect, that during a given five-year period nothing happened in the country, that not a single new idea arose in anyone's mind — or else that Stalin, in his wisdom, had foreseen all such ideas and incorporated them in advance in the plan, allowing — in his kindness — inventors to savor the pleasures of illusory discovery.) The "plan factory" therefore will not just operate once every five years; it will daily have to tackle some problem or another.

All this deals mainly with the form of workers' management of the economy and with the mechanisms and institutions that will ensure that it functions in a democratic manner. These forms will allow society to give to the management of the economy the content it chooses. In a narrower sense, they will enable society to orient economic development freely.

The Content of the Management of the Economy

Everything we have said indicates that the direction chosen will be radically different from that proposed by the best intentioned ideologists or philanthropists of modern society. All such ideologists (whether "Marxist" or bourgeois) accept as self-evident that the ideal economy is one that allows the most rapid possible expansion of the productive forces and, as a corollary, the greatest possible reduction of the working day. This idea, considered in absolute terms, is absolutely absurd. It epitomizes the whole mentality, psychology, logic, and metaphysics of capitalism, its reality as well as its schizophrenia. "Work is hell. It must be reduced." Mr. Harold Wilson and Mr. Nikita Krushchev have nothing to offer people besides cars and butter. The population must therefore be made to feel that it can only be happy if the roads are choked with cars or if it can "catch up with American butter production within the next three years." And when people acquire the said cars and the said butter, all that will be left for them to do will be to commit suicide, which is just what they do in the "ideal" country called Sweden. This "acquisitive" mentality that capitalism engenders, which engenders capitalism, without which capitalism could not operate, and which capitalism pushes to the point of paroxysm might just conceivably have been a useful aberration during a certain phase of human development. But this way of thinking will die along with capitalism. Socialist society will not be this absurd race after percentage increments in production. This will not be its basic concern.

In its initial phase, to be sure, socialist society will concern itself with satisfying consumer needs and with a more balanced allocation of people's time between production and other activities. But the development of people and of social communities will be socialism's central preoccupation. A very significant part of social investment will therefore be geared toward transforming machinery, toward a universal education, and toward abolishing divisions between town and country. The growth of freedom within work, the development of the creative faculties of the producers, the creation of integrated and complete human communities will be the paths along which socialist humanity will seek the meaning of its existence. These will, in addition, enable socialism to secure the material basis it requires.

The Management of Society

We have already discussed the type of change that will be brought about by the "vertical" and "horizontal" cooperation of workers' councils, a cooperation secured through industrial councils composed of delegates from various places of work. A similar regional cooperation will have to be instaurated through councils representing all the units of a region. Cooperation, finally, will be necessary on a national level for all the activities of society, whether they are economic or not.

A central organ that will be the expression of the workers themselves will be needed in order to ensure the general tasks of economic coordination, inasmuch as they were not dealt with by the plan itself — or more precisely, inasmuch as the plan will have to be frequently or constantly amended (the very decision to suggest that it should be amended would have to be initiated by someone). Such a body will also coordinate activities in other areas of social life that have little or nothing to do with general economic planning. This central body will be the direct emanation of the workers' councils and the local general assemblies themselves. It will consist of a central assembly of delegates. The assembly itself will elect, from within its own ranks, a central council, called "the government."

This network of general assemblies and councils is all that is left of the State or of power in a socialist society. It is the whole state and the only embodiment of power. There are no other institutions that could manage, direct, or make binding decisions about people's lives.

To convince people that there would be no other "State" lurking in the background we must show:

1. That such a pattern of organization can embrace the entire population of the nation, not just in industry; and

2. That institutions of the type described can organize, direct, and coordinate all those social activities that the population felt needed to be organized, directed, and coordinated (in particular non-economic activities), in other words, that they could fulfil all the functions needed of a socialist "State" (which should not be confused with those of a modern State).

We will then have to discuss what the significations of the "State," "parties," and "politics" would be in such a society.

The Councils: Exclusive and Exhaustive Form of Organization for the Whole Population

The setting-up of workers' councils will create no particular problems in relation to industry (taking the term in its widest sense to include manufacture, transport, communications, building, mining, energy production, public services and public works, etc.). The revolutionary transformation of society will in fact be based on the establishment of such councils and would be impossible without it.

In the post revolutionary period, however, when the new social relations become the norm, a problem will arise from the need to regroup people working in smaller enterprises. This regrouping will be necessary if only to ensure them their full democratic and representational rights. Initially, it will be based on some compromise between considerations of geographical proximity and considerations of industrial integration. This particular problem is not very important, or even if there are many such small enterprises, the number of those working in them represents only a small proportion of the total industrial work force.

Paradoxical as it may seem, the self-organization of the population into councils could proceed as naturally in agriculture as in industry. It is traditional on the Left to see the peasantry as a source of constant problems for a working-class power because of its dispersion, its attachment to private property, and its political and ideological backwardness. These factors certainly exist, but it is doubtful that the peasantry would actively oppose a working-class power that has formulated an intelligent (i.e., socialist) farming policy. The "peasant nightmare" currently obsessing so many revolutionaries results from the telescoping of two quite different problems: on the one hand, the relations of the peasantry with a socialist economy, in the context of a modern society; and on the other hand, the relations between the peasantry and State in the Russia of 1921 (or of 1932) or in the satellite countries between 1945 and today.

The situation that led Russia to the New Economic Policy of 1921 is of no exemplary value to an even moderately industrialized country. There is no chance of its repeating itself in a modern setting. In 1921, it was a question of an agricultural system that did not depend on the rest of the national economy for its essential means of production; seven years of war and civil war had compelled it to fall back upon itself entirely. The Party was asking of this system of agriculture to supply its produce to the towns without offering it anything in exchange. In 1932 in Russia (and after 1945 in the satellite countries), what happened was an absolutely healthy resistance of the peasantry to the monstrous exploitation imposed on it by a bureaucratic State through forced collectivization.

In a country such as France — classically considered "backward" as far as the numerical importance of its peasantry is concerned — the workers' power will not have to fear a "wheat strike." It will not have to organize punitive expeditions into the countryside. Precisely because the peasant is concerned with his own interests, he will have no cause to quarrel with a State that supplies him with gas, electricity, fertilizers, insecticides, and spare parts. Peasants would actively oppose

such an administration only if pushed to the limit, either by exploitation or by an absurd policy of forced collectivization. The socialist organization of the economy would mean an immediate improvement in the economic status of most peasants, if only through the abolition of that specific kind of exploitation they are subjected to through middlemen. As for forced collectivization, it is the very antithesis of socialist policy in the realm of agriculture. The collectivization of agriculture could only come about as the result of an organic development within the peasantry itself, helped along by technical developments. Under no circumstances could it be imposed through direct or indirect (economic) coercion.

A socialist society will start by recognizing the rights of the peasants to the widest autonomy in the management of their own affairs. It will invite them to organize themselves into rural communes, based on geographical or cultural units and comprising approximately equal populations. Each such commune will have, both in relation to the rest of society and in relation to its own organizational structure, the status of an enterprise. Its sovereign organ therefore will be the general assembly of peasants and its representational unit, the peasant council. Rural communes and their councils will be in charge of local self-administration. They alone will decide when and how they want to form producers' cooperatives and under what conditions. In relation to the overall plan, it will be the rural communes and their councils that will be responsible to the government, and not individual peasants. Communes will undertake to deliver a certain percentage of their produce (or a given amount of a specific product) in exchange for given amounts of money or means of production. The rural communes themselves will decide how these obligations and payments ought to be allocated among their own members.

(Complex but by no means insoluble economic problems will probably arise in this respect. They boil down to the question of how agricultural prices will be determined in a socialist economy. The application of uniform prices would maintain significant income inequalities ["differential rents"] between different rural communes or even between different farmers in a given commune. The ultimate solution to the problem would require, of course, the complete socialization of agriculture. In the meantime, compromises will be necessary. There might perhaps be some form of taxation on the wealthier communes combined with subsidies for the poorer ones until the gap between them had been substantially narrowed [to suppress inequalities completely by this means would amount, however, to forcible socialization]. One should note in passing that differential yields today stem in part from the artificial maintenance of farming on poor-yield soils through subsidies paid by the capitalist State for basically political purposes. Socialist society could rapidly lessen these gaps by refusing to subsidize non-profitable farming activities — while at the same time massively helping to equip poor but potentially viable communes.)

What about groups of workers involved in services of various kinds (from. commercial, banking, and insurance company staff to workers in entertainment to all the ex-State administrators)?[1] There is no reason why the pattern of their self-organization should not resemble that pertain-

[1] On the structure of a large insurance company undergoing rapid "industrialization," both technically as well as socially and politically, see the articles by Henri Collet ("La Greve aux A.G.-Vie," in S. ou B., 7 [August 1951], pp. 103–10) and R. Berthier ("Une Experience d'organisation ouvriere: Le Conseil du personnel des A.G.-Vie," in S. ou B., 20 [December 1957], pp. 1–64). On the same process taking place within the United States, where "tertiary" sectors are being merged, see C. Wright Mills, White Collar (New York: Oxford University Press, 1951, esp. pp. 192–98). In order to take stock of the significance of the changes that are expected to occur in these areas, we must remember that the industrialization of office and "service" work (and, ultimately, the industrialization of "intellectual" work) is still in its infancy. Cf. N. Wiener, Cybernetics (New York: Wiley, 1948), pp. 37–38. In an entirely different sector, that of theater and film, it is interesting to compare the ideas expounded in this article with the multiple (economic, political, work-

ing to industry as a whole. And what about the thousand-and-one petty trades existing in towns (shopkeepers, "personal services," artisans, some of the "liberal professions," etc.)? Here the pattern of organization could resemble what we have outlined for an "atomized" occupation such as agriculture. A working-class power will never seek to socialize these occupations by force. It will only require that these categories group themselves into associations or cooperatives, which will at one and the same time constitute their representative political organs and their responsible units in relation to the management of the economy as a whole. There will be no question, for instance, of socialized industry individually supplying each particular shop or artisan. Instead, it will supply the cooperatives that these shopkeepers or artisans will be members of, and will entrust to these collectives the job of organizing within their own ranks. At the political level, people in these occupations will seek representation through councils or they won't be represented at all, for there won't be any elections of either the Western or Russian types.

These solutions present serious shortcomings when compared with industrially based workers' councils — or even when compared with rural communes. Workers' councils or rural communes are not primarily based on an occupation (when they are still so based, this would reflect their weakness rather than their strength). They are based on a working unity and on a shared life. In other words, workers' councils and rural communes represent organic social units. A cooperative of artisans or of petty traders, geographically scattered and living and working separately from one another, will only be based on a rather narrow community of interests. This fragmentation is a legacy of capitalism that socialist society ought to eliminate as soon as possible. These occupations are overcrowded today. Under socialism, some of the members of these strata will be absorbed into other occupations. Society will grant funds to the remainder to enable them to organize into larger, self-managed units.

When discussing people in these various occupations we must repeat what we said about farmers, namely, that we have no experience of what their attitudes might be toward a socialist power. To start with, and up to a point, they will doubtless remain "attached to property." But up to what point? All that we know is how they reacted when Stalinism sought forcibly to drive them into a concentration camp instead of into a socialist society. A society that will grant them a great deal of autonomy in their own affairs, that will peacefully and rationally seek to integrate them into the overall pattern of social life, that will furnish them a living example of democratic self-management, and that will give them positive help if they wanted to proceed toward socialization will certainly enjoy a different prestige in their eyes (and will have a different kind of influence on their development) than did an exploiting and totalitarian bureaucracy that, by every one of its acts, reinforced their "attachment to property" and drove them centuries backward.

management) role the Revolutionary Workers' Committee of this sector played during the Hungarian Revolution. See "Les Artistes du theatre et du cinema pendant la revolution hongroise," in S. ou B., 20 (December 1957), pp. 96–104.

The Councils: Universal Form of Organization for Social Activities

The basic units of social organization, as we have envisaged them so far, will not merely manage production. They will, at the same time and primarily, be organs for popular self-management in all its aspects. On the one hand, they will be organs of local self-administration, and on the other hand, they will be the only bases of the central power, which will exist only as a federation or regrouping of all the councils.

To say that a workers' council will be an organ of popular self-administration (and not just an organ of workers' management of production) is to recognize that a factory or office is not just a productive unit, but is also a social cell, and that it will become the primary locus of individual "socialization." Although this varies from country to country and from workplace to workplace, myriad activities other than just earning a living take place around it (canteens, cooperatives, vacation retreats, sports clubs, libraries, rest homes, collective outings, dances) — activities that allow the most important human ties (both private and "public") to become established. To the extent that the average person is today active in "public" affairs, it is more likely to be through some trade-union or political activity related to work than in a capacity as an abstract "citizen," putting a ballot into a box once every few years. Under socialism, the transformation of the relations of production and of the very nature of work will enormously reinforce, for each worker, the positive significance of the working collective to which he belongs.

Workers' councils and rural communes will absorb all of today's "municipal" functions. They also will take over many others, which the monstrous centralization of the modern capitalist state has removed from the hands of local groups with the sole aim of consolidating the control of the ruling class and of its central bureaucracy over the whole population. Local councils, for instance, will take over such city and county services and departments as the direct application of "policing" powers (by detachments of armed workers assigned in rotation), the administration of local justice, and the local control of primary education.

The two forms of regroupment — productive and geographical — seldom coincide today. Peoples' homes are at variable distances from where they work. Where the scatter is small, as in a number of industrial towns or industrial suburbs (or in many rural communes), the management of production and local self-administration will be undertaken by the same general assemblies and by the same councils. Where home and workplace do not overlap, geographically based local councils (soviets) will have to be instituted, directly representing both the inhabitants of a given area and the enterprises in the area. Initially, such geographically based local councils will be necessary in many places. One might envisage them as "collateral" institutions in charge of local affairs. They will collaborate at the local and national levels with the councils of producers, which alone represent the seat of power.

(Although the Russian word "soviet" means "council," one should not confuse the workers' councils we have been describing in this text with even the earliest Russian Soviets. The work-

ers' councils are based on one's place of work. They can play both a political role and a role in the industrial management of production. In its essence, a workers' council is a universal organ. The 1905 Petrograd Soviet (Council) of Workers' Deputies, although the product of a general strike and, although exclusively proletarian in composition, remained a purely political organ. The Soviets of 1917 were as a rule geographically based. They too were purely political institutions, in which all social layers opposed to the old regime formed a united front [see Trotsky's 1905 and his History of the Russian Revolution]. Their role corresponded to the "backwardness" of the Russian economy and of Russian society at the time as well as to the "bourgeois-democratic" aspects of the 1917 revolution. In this sense, they belonged to the past. The normal form of working-class representation in the present age undoubtedly is the workers' council.)

The problems created by the gaps between these two types of councils could soon be overcome if one were to organize changes in workers' living places. This is but a small aspect of an important problem that will hang over the general orientation of socialist society for decades to come. Underlying these questions are all the economic, social, and human problems of urban planning in the deepest sense of the term and, ultimately, the very problem of the division between town and country. It is not for us here to venture into these fields. All we can say is that, from the very start, a socialist society will have to tackle these problems as total problems, for they have an effect on every aspect of peoples' lives and on society's own economic, political, and cultural purpose.

What we have said about local self-administration also applies to regional self-administration. Regional federations of workers' councils or rural communes will be in charge of coordinating these bodies at a regional level and of organizing activities best tackled at such a level.

The Industrial Organization of the "State"

We have seen that a large number of functions of the modern State (and not merely "territorial" functions) will be taken over by local or regional organs of popular self-administration. But what about the truly "central" functions, those whose content affects indivisibly the totality of the population?

In class societies, and in particular under classical nineteenth-century "liberal" capitalism, the ultimate function of the State was to guarantee the maintenance of existing social relations through the exercise of a legal monopoly on violence. In this sense, Lenin was right, against the reformists of his day, to adopt Engels's description of the State as nothing more than "special bodies of armed men, and prisons."[1] In the course of a socialist revolution, there was no doubt as to the fate of this State: Its apparatus was to be smashed, the "special detachments of armed men" dissolved and replaced by the arming of the people, and the permanent bureaucracy abolished and replaced by elected and revocable officials.

Under today's crisis-ridden capitalism, increasing economic concentration and the increasing concentration of all aspects of social life (with the corresponding need for the ruling class to submit everything to its control and supervision) have led since Lenin's time to an enormous growth of the State apparatus, its functions, and its bureaucracy. The State is no longer just a coercive apparatus that has elevated itself "above" society. It is the hub of a whole series of mechanisms whereby society functions from day to day. At the limit, the present-day State underlies all social activity, as in the fully developed bureaucratic-capitalist regimes of Russia and the satellite countries. Even in the West, the State goes beyond the mere exercise of "power" in the narrow sense and takes on an ever-increasing role in the management and control not only of the economy but of a host of social activities. Parallel with all this, the State takes on a large number of functions that in themselves could perfectly well be carried out by other bodies, but which either have become useful instruments of control or imply the mobilization of considerable resources that the State alone possesses.

In many people's minds the myth of the "State" as the "incarnation of the Absolute Idea" (which Engels mocked a century ago) has been replaced by another myth, the myth of the State as the inevitable incarnation of centralization and of the "technical rationalization" required by modern social life. This has had two main effects. It has led some people to consider outmoded, Utopian, or inapplicable the conclusions Marx, Engels, and Lenin have drawn from their theoretical analysis of the State and from the experience of the revolutionary events of 1848, 1871, or 1905. It has led others to swallow the reality of the modern Russian State, which simultaneously epitomizes (not in what it hides — police terror and the concentration camps — but in what it officially proclaims, in its Constitution) the complete and total negation of previous Marxist conceptions of what the socialist "State" might be like and exhibits a monstrous increase in those very features of capitalist society that were criticized by Marx or Lenin (the total separation of rulers and ruled,

[1] See section 2 of Chapter 1 of State and Revolution.

permanent officialdom, greater privileges for the few than ever were allowed to the elite in any bourgeois State, etc.).

But this very evolution of the modern State contains the seed of a solution. The modern State has become a gigantic enterprise — by far the most important enterprise in modern society. It can exercise its managerial functions only to the extent that it has created a whole network of organs of execution, within which work has become collective, subject to a division of labor, and specialized. What has happened here is the same as what has happened to the management of production in particular enterprises. But it has happened on a much vaster scale. In their overwhelming majority, today's governmental departments only carry out specific and limited tasks. They are "enterprises," specializing in certain types of work. Some are socially necessary. Others are purely parasitic or are only necessary in order to maintain the class structure of society. The "powers that be" have no more intrinsic connection with the work of "their" departments than they have, say, with the production of automobiles. The notion of "power" or "administrative rights" that remains appended to what are in fact a series of "public services" is a juridical legacy, without real content. Its only purpose is to shield from criticism the arbitrary and irresponsible behavior of those at the top of various bureaucratic pyramids.[2]

Given these conditions, the solution does not lie in the "election and revocability of all civil servants." This is neither necessary (these officials exercise no real power) nor possible (they are specialized workers, whom one could no more elect" than one would elect electricians or doctors).

The solution will lie in the industrial organization, pure and simple, of most of today's governmental departments. In many cases this would only be giving formal recognition to an existing state of affairs. Concretely, such industrial organization would mean:

1. The explicit transformation of these "administrative" departments into enterprises having the same status as any other enterprise. In many of these new enterprises the mechanization and automation of work could be systematically developed to a considerable degree.

2. The management of these enterprises will be through workers' councils, representing those who work there. These office workers, like all others, will determine autonomously the organization of their own work. (The formation of workers' councils of State employees was one of the demands of the Hungarian workers' councils.)

3. The function of these enterprises will be confined to the execution of the tasks assigned to them by the representative institutions of society.

We have seen that the "plan factory" will be organized in this way. The same will apply to whatever remains or could be used of any current structures relating to the economy (foreign trade, agriculture, finance, industry, etc.). Current State functions that already are industrialized (public works, public transport, communications, public health, and social security) will be similarly organized. And the same goes for education.

[2] See Chapter 4 ("Technique and the State") of Jacques Ellul's The Technological Society, trans. J. Wilkinson, intro. Robert K. Merton (New York: Knopf, 1964). In spite of his fundamentally incorrect outlook, Ellul has the merit of analyzing some of these key aspects of the reality of the modern State, aspects that are blithely ignored by most sociologists and political writers — whether "Marxist" or not.

The Central Power: The Assembly and the Governmental Council

What remains of the functions of a modern state will be discussed under three headings:

1. The material basis of authority and coercion, "the specialized bands of armed men and prisons" (in other words, the army and the law);

2. Foreign and domestic "politics," in the narrow sense (in other words, the problems that might arise for a working-class power if it was confronted with internal opposition or with the persistence of hostile exploiting regimes in other countries);

3. Real politics: the overall vision, coordination, and general purpose and direction of social life.

Concerning the army, it is obvious that "the specialized bands of armed men" will be dissolved and then replaced by the armed populace. Workers in factories, offices, and rural communes will constitute the units of a non-permanent, territorially based militia, each council being in charge of policing its own area. Regional regroupings will enable local units to become integrated and will allow the rational use of heavier armaments.

The extent to which "strategic" types of weapons (which can be used only on a centralized basis) will remain necessary cannot be decided a priori. If it proved necessary, each council would probably contribute a contingent to the formation of certain central units, which would be under the control of the central assembly of councils.

Neither the means nor the overall conception of war can be copied from those of an imperialist country. What we have said about capitalist technology is valid for military technique: There is no neutral military technique, there is no "A-bomb for socialism." Philippe Guillaume has clearly shown (in "La Guerre et notre époque," Socialisme ou Barbarie, 3 and 5–6 [July 1949 and March 1950]) that a proletarian revolution of necessity will have to draw up its own strategy and methods suitable to its social and human objectives. The need for so-called strategic weapons does not go without saying for a revolutionary power.

As for the administration of justice, it will be in the hands of rank-and-file bodies. Each council will act as a "lower court" in relation to "offenses" committed in its jurisdiction. Individual rights will be guaranteed by procedural rules established by the central assembly, and could also include the right of appeal to the regional councils or to the central assembly itself. There would be no question of a "penal code" or of prisons, the very notion of "punishment" being absurd from a socialist point of view. Judgments could only aim at re-educating the social delinquent and at reintegrating him into his social surroundings. Deprivation of freedom has a meaning only if it is judged that a particular individual constitutes a permanent threat to others (and in that case what is needed is not a penitentiary but "pedagogical" and "medical" — "psychiatric" — institutions).

Political problems — in the narrow as well as in the broader sense — concern the whole population, and therefore only the population as a whole is in a position to solve them. But people can solve them only if they are organized to this end. (At the present time, everything is devised so as to prevent people from dealing with such problems. People are conned into believing that the sole possessors of solutions to political problems are the politicians, those specialists of the universal, whose most universal attribute is precisely their ignorance of any particular reality.)

This organization will be made up first of all of the workers' councils and the general assemblies of each particular enterprise, the vital collective setting within which there can be a confrontation of views and an elaboration of informed political opinions. They will be the ultimate sovereign authorities for all political decisions. But there will also be a central institution, directly emanating from these grass-roots organizations, namely, the central assembly of councils. The existence of such a body is necessary, not only because some problems require an immediate decision (even if such a decision may subsequently be reversed by the population), but more particularly because preliminary checking, clarification, and elaboration of the facts are almost always necessary before any meaningful decision can be made. To ask the people as a whole to voice their opinions without such preparation would often be a mystification and a negation of democracy (because it would eliminate the possibility of people deciding in full knowledge of the relevant facts). There must be a framework for discussing problems and for submitting them to popular decision — or even for suggesting that they should be discussed. These are not just "technical" functions. They are deeply political, and the body that would initiate them would be a central power — although very different in its structure and role from any contemporary central body — that socialist society could not do without.

The real problem is not whether such a body should exist. It is how to organize It in such a manner that it no longer incarnates the alienation of political power in society and the vesting of authority in the hands of specialized institutions, separate from the population as a whole. The problem is to make any central body into the expression and instrument of the central power. We think this is perfectly possible under modern conditions.

The central assembly of councils will be composed of delegates elected directly by the general assemblies of the grass-roots organs (or by larger geographical or federated groups of these organs, enterprises, rural communes, etc.). These people will be revocable at all times by the bodies that elected them. They will remain at work, as will delegates to the local workers' councils. Delegates to the central assembly will meet in plenary session as often as necessary. In meeting twice a week, or during one week each month, they will almost certainly get through more work than any present legislature (which hardly gets through any). At frequent intervals (perhaps once a month) they will have to give an account of their mandate to those who had elected them. (In a country like France, such an assembly could consist of 1,000 or 2,000 delegates [one delegate per 20,000 or 10,000 workers]. A compromise would have to be reached between two requirements: As a working body, the central assembly of councils should not be too large, but on the other hand, it must afford the most direct and most broadly based representation of the people, areas, and organs of which it is the outcome.)

Those elected to the central assembly will elect from within their own ranks — or will appoint to act in rotation — a central governmental council, composed perhaps of a few dozen members. The tasks of this body will be restricted to preparing the work of the central assembly of councils, acting in its stead when it is not in session, and convening the assembly for emergency sessions if necessary.

If this governmental council exceeded its jurisdiction and made a decision that could or should have been submitted to the central assembly, or if it made any unacceptable decisions, these could immediately be rescinded by the next meeting of the central assembly, which could also take any other necessary measures, up to and including the "dissolution" of its own council. Likewise, if the central assembly made any decision that exceeded its jurisdiction, or that went against the will of the local workers' councils or the local general assemblies, it will be up to these bodies to take any steps necessary, beginning with the revocation of their delegates to the central assembly. Neither the central council nor the central assembly could persevere in unacceptable practices (they have no power of their own, they are revocable, and in the last analysis, the population is armed). But if the central assembly allowed its council to exceed its rights — or if members of local assemblies allowed their delegates to the central assembly to exceed their authority — nothing could be done. The population can exercise political power only if it wants to. The organization proposed merely ensures that the population could exercise such power, if it wanted to.

But this very will to take affairs into one's own hands is not some occult force, appearing and disappearing in some mysterious way. Political alienation in capitalist society does not just stem from the fact that existing institutions, by their very structure, make it "technically" impossible for the political will of the people to express or exercise itself. Contemporary political alienation stems from the destruction of this will at its roots, the thwarting of its very growth, and, finally, the suppression of all interest in public affairs. There is nothing more sinister than the utterances of sundry liberals, bemoaning the "political apathy of the people," an apathy that the political and social system they subscribe to would recreate daily, if it did not already exist. This suppression of political will in modern societies stems as much from the content of modern "politics" as from the means available for political expression. It is based on the unbridgeable gulf that today separates "politics" from people's real lives. The content of modern politics is the "better" organization of exploiting society. The better to exploit society itself. Its methods of expression are necessarily mystifying: They resort either to direct lies or to meaningless abstractions. The world in which all this takes place is a world of "specialists," underhanded deals, and a spurious "technicism."

All this will be radically changed in a socialist society. Exploitation having been eliminated, the content of politics will be the better organization of our common life. An immediate result will be a different attitude on the part of ordinary people toward public affairs. Political problems will be everyone's problems, whether they relate to where one works or deal with national issues. People will begin to feel that their concerns have a real impact, and perceptible results should soon be obvious to everyone. The method of expression of the new politics will be geared toward making real problems accessible to everyone. The gulf separating "political affairs" from people's everyday lives will be completely eliminated.

All this warrants some comment. Modern sociologists often claim that the content of modern politics and its modes of expression are inevitable. They believe that the separation of politics from life is due to irreversible technical changes that make any real democracy impossible.[1] It is alleged that the content of politics — namely, the direction and management of society — has become highly complex, embracing an extraordinary mass of data and problems, each of which can be mastered only through advanced specialization. All this allegedly being so, it is proclaimed

[1] This is Ellul's point of view, as expressed in The Technological Society. Ellul concludes that "it is futile to try to put a halt to this process or to grasp a hold of it and guide it." For him, technique is only the self-developing process of enslavement taking place independently of any social context. [T/E: I have translated Castoriadis's quotation of Ellul.]

as self-evident that these problems could never be put to the public in any intelligible way — or only by simplifying them to a degree that would distort them altogether. Why be surprised then that ordinary people take no more interest in politics than they do in differential calculus?

If these "arguments" — presented as the very latest in political sociology but in fact as old as the world (Plato discusses them at length, and his Protagoras is in part devoted to them) — prove anything, it is not that democracy is a Utopian illusion but that the very management of society, by whatever means, has become impossible. The politician, according to these premises, would have to be the Incarnation of Absolute and Total Knowledge. No technical specialization, however advanced, entitles its possessor to master areas other than his own. An assembly of technicians, each the highest authority in his particular field, would have no competence (as an assembly of technicians) to solve anything. Only one individual could comment on any specific point, and no one would be in a position to comment on any general problem.

Indeed, modern society is not managed by technicians as such (and never could be). Those who manage it do not incarnate Absolute Knowledge — but rather generalized incompetence. In fact, modern society is hardly managed at all — it merely drifts. Just like the top management of the bureaucratic apparatus heading up some big factory, a modern political "leadership" only renders verdicts — and thoroughly arbitrary ones at that. It decides between the opinions of the various technical departments that are designed to "assist" it, but over which it has very little control. In this, our rulers feel the repercussions in their own social system and experience the same political alienation they impose on the rest of society. The chaos of their own social organization and the narrow development of each branch for its own exclusive ends render impossible a rational exercise of their own power — even in their own terms.[2]

We discuss this sophism because it puts us on the road to an important truth. In the case of politics as in the case of production, people tend to blame modern technique and modern "technicization" in general instead of seeing that the problems stem from a specifically capitalist technology. In politics as in production, capitalism does not only mean the use of technically "neutral" means for capitalist ends. It also means the creation and development of specific techniques, aimed at ensuring the exploitation of the producers — or the oppression, mystification, and political alienation and manipulation of citizens in general. At the level of production, socialism will mean the conscious transformation of technology. Technique will be put in the service of the people. On the political level, socialism will imply a similar transformation: Technique will be put in the service of democracy.

Political technique is based essentially on the techniques of information and of communication. We are here using the term "technique" in the widest sense (the material means of information and communication comprise only a part of the corresponding techniques). To place the technique of information at the service of democracy does not only mean to put material means of expression in the hands of the people (essential as this may be). Nor does it mean the dissemination of all information, or of any information whatsoever. It means first and foremost to put at the disposal of mankind the elements necessary to enable people to decide in full knowledge of the relevant facts. This means that each person will receive a faithful translation of essential data relating to the problems that will have to be decided upon. This information will be expressed

[2] See C. Wright Mills White Collar, pp. 347–48, and The Power Elite [New York: Oxford University Press, 1956], pp. 134 ff., 145 ff., etc.) for an illustration of the total lack of any relationship between "technical" capacities of any kind, on the one hand, and current industrial management or political leadership groups, on the other.

in the form of a finite number of succinctly stated and meaningful details. With respect to the plan factory, we have given a specific example of how information could be used so as vastly to increase people's areas of freedom. In this case, genuine information would not end up burying everyone under whole libraries of textbooks on economics, technology, and statistics: The information that would result from this would be strictly nil. The information provided by the plan factory would be compact, significant, sufficient, and true. Everyone will know what he will have to contribute and the level of consumption he will enjoy if this or that variant of the plan is adopted. This is how technique (in this instance, economic analysis, statistics, and computers) can be put in the service of democracy in a key area. There is no "cybernetic politics" that could tell us how to make a decision; only people can determine the elements required to make decisions.

The same applies to the technique of communication. It is claimed that the very size of modern societies precludes the exercise of any genuine democracy. Distances and numbers allegedly render direct democracy impossible. The only feasible democracy, it is claimed, is representative democracy, which "inevitably" contains a kernel of political alienation, namely, the separation of representatives from those they represent.

In fact, there are several ways of envisaging and achieving representative democracy. A legislature is one form. Councils are another, and it is difficult to see how political alienation could arise in a council system operating according to its own rules. If modern techniques of communication were put in the service of democracy, the areas where representative democracy would remain necessary would narrow considerably. Material distances are smaller in the modern world than they were in Attica, in the fifth century B.C. At that time, the voice range of the orator — and hence the number of people he could reach — was limited by the functional capacity of his vocal cords. Today it is unlimited.[3] In the realm of communicating ideas, distances have not only narrowed — they have disappeared. If society felt it were necessary, tomorrow it could establish a general assembly of the whole population in any modern country. Closed-circuit radio and television hookups easily could link a vast number of general assemblies, in various factories, offices, or rural communes. Similar, but more limited, hookups could be established in a vast number of cases. In any case, the sessions of the central assembly or of its council easily could be televised. This, combined with the revocability of all delegates, would readily ensure that any central institution remained under the permanent control of the population. It would profoundly alter the very notion of "representation." (It certainly would be amusing to televise today's parliamentary sessions; this would be an excellent way of lowering TV set sales.)

It might be claimed that the problem of numbers remains and that people never would be able to express themselves in a reasonable amount of time. This is not a valid argument. There would rarely be an assembly of over twenty people where everyone would want to speak, for the very good reason that when there is something to be decided upon there are not an infinite number of options or an infinite number of arguments. In unhampered rank-and-file workers' gatherings (convened, for instance, to decide on a strike) there have never been "too many" speeches. The two or three fundamental opinions having been voiced, and various arguments having been exchanged, a decision is soon reached. The length of speeches, moreover, often varies inversely

[3] "Plato defined the limits of the size of the city as the number of people who could hear the voice of a single orator: today those limits do not define a city but a civilization. Wherever neo-technic instruments exist and a common language is used there are now the elements of almost as close a political unity as that which once was possible in the tiniest cities of Attica. The possibilitie for good and evil here are immense" (Lewis Mumford, Technics and Civilization [New York-Hil court, Brace, 1934], p. 241).

with the weight of their content. Russian leaders sometimes talk on for four hours at Party Congresses without saying anything. The speech of the Ephor that persuaded the Spartans to launch the Peloponnesian War occupies twenty-one lines of Thucydides (I, 86). For an account of the laconicism of revolutionary assemblies, see Trotsky's accounts of the Petrograd soviet of 1905[4] — or accounts of the meetings of factory representatives in Budapest in 1956 (S. ou B.,2 [March 1957], pp. 91–92.)

People bemoan the fact that the size of the modern "city" compared with l hose of yesterday (tens of millions rather than tens of thousands) renders direct democracy impossible. They are doubly blind. They do not see, first, that modern society has recreated the very milieu (the workplace) where such democracy could be reinstaurated. Nor do they see that modern society has created and will continue to create for an indefinite period of time the technical means for a genuine democracy on a massive scale. They envisage the only solution to the problems of the supersonic age in the horse-and-buggy terms of parliamentary political machinery. And they then conclude that democracy has become "impossible." They claim to have made a "new" analysis — and they have ignored what is really new in our epoch: the material possibilities of at last freely transforming the world through technique, and through the proletariat, which is its living vehicle.

[4] 7905, trans. Anya Bostock (New York: Vintage, 1971), p. 109.

The "State," "Parties," and "Politics"

What will the "State," "politics," and "parties" consist of in such a society? We have seen that the remnants of a "State" will still exist in those instances where there will not immediately be a pure and simple "administration of things," where there still will be the possibility of coercion and constraints against individuals or groups, where the majority will still prevail over the minority, and where, therefore, limitations on individual freedom persist. There no longer will be a "State" to the extent that the bodies exercising power will be none other than the productive units or local organizations of the whole population, that the institutions organizing social life will be but one aspect of that life itself, and that what remained of central bodies will be under the direct and permanent control of the grassroots organizations. This will be the starting point. Social development cannot but bring about a rapid reduction ("withering away") of the "statist" features of social organization: The reasons for exercising constraints gradually will disappear, and the field of individual freedom will enlarge. (Needless to say, we are not talking here about formal "democratic freedoms," which a socialist society will immediately and vastly expand, but about substantive freedoms: not only the right to live, but the right to do what one wants with one's life.)

Freed from all the rubbish and mystifications currently surrounding it, politics in such a society will be nothing but the collective search for, debate about, and adoption of solutions to the general problems concerning the future of society — whether these be economic or educational, whether they dealt with the rest of the world or with domestic relations between various social strata or classes. All these decisions concern the whole of the population and they will III theirs to make.

It is probable, even certain, that there will be different views about, such problems. Each approach will seek to be as coherent and systematic as possible. People will subscribe to particular viewpoints, though they will be dispersed geographically or occupationally, These people will come together to defend their views — in other words, they will form political groups. On the national level, the councils will have to decide whether they consider the general orientation of this or that party compatible with the make-up of the new society, and therefore whether such arties will be allowed to function on a legal basis.

There would be no point in pretending that a contradiction would not exist between the existence of such groups and the role of the councils. The two could not develop simultaneously. If the councils fulfil their function, they will provide the principal and vital setting not only for political confrontations but also for the formation of political opinions. Political groups, on the other hand, are exclusive environments for the schooling of their members, as well as being exclusive poles for their loyalty. The parallel existence of both councils and political groups will imply that a part of real political life will be taking place outside, the councils. People will then tend to act in the councils according to decision already made elsewhere. Should this tendency predominate, it would bring about the rapid atrophy and finally the disappearance of the councils. Conversely, real socialist development would be characterized by the progressive atrophy of established political groups.

This contradiction could not be abolished by a stroke of the pen or by a "statutory" decree. The persistence of political groups would reflect the continuation of characteristics inherited from capitalist society, in particular, the persistence of divergent interests (and their corresponding ideologies) even after these capitalistic traits have disappeared. People will not form parties for or against quantum theory, or over simple differences of opinion about some particular point. The flowering or final atrophy of political groups will depend of the ability of workers' power to unite society.

The basis of parties is not a difference of opinion as such, but rather differences on fundamentals and the more or less systematic unity of each "set of views." In other words, parties express a set orientation corresponding to a more or less clear ideology, in its turn flowing from the existence of social positions leading to conflicting aspirations. As long as such positions exist and lead to a political "projection" of expectations, one cannot abolish political groups — but as they begin to disappear it is unlikely that groups will be formed about "divergences" of opinion in general.

If political organizations expressing the survival of different interests and ideologies persist, a working-class socialist party, a partisan defender of proletarian socialist organization also will exist. It will be open to all those who favor total power for the councils and will differ from all others, both in its program and in its practice, precisely on this point: Its fundamental activity will be directed toward the concentration of power in the councils and to their becoming the only centres of political life. This implies that it will struggle against power being held by any particular party, whichever one it may be.

It is obvious that the democratic power structure of a socialist society excludes the possibility of a Party "holding power" The very words would be meaningless within the framework we have described. Insofar as major trends of opinion might arise or diverge on important issues, the holders of majority viewpoints might be elected as delegates to the councils, assemblies, communes, etc more often than others. (This does not necessarily follow, however, for delegates will be elected mainly on the basis of overall confidence, and not always according to their opinion on this or that issue.) Parties will not be organizations seeking power, and the central assembly of councils will not be a "workers' parliament"; people will not be elected to it as members of a party. The same goes for any government chosen by this assembly.[1]

The role of a working-class socialist party initially will be quite important. It will have to defend these conceptions systematically and coherently. It will have to conduct an extensive struggle to unmask and denounce bureaucratic tendencies, not in general, but where they concretely show themselves; also, and perhaps above all, initially it will be the only group capable of showing the ways and means whereby technique and technicians could be organized and directed so as to allow working-class democracy to both stabilize itself and blossom forth. The work of the party could, for instance, hasten considerably the setting-up of the democratic planning mechanisms we analyzed earlier. The party is in fact the only form in which a coalescence of workers and intellectuals can now take place in our society of exploitation. And this fusion could also allow the working-class power to make rapid use of techniques that would advance its goals, But if, some years after the revolution, the party continued to grow, it would be the surest sign that it was dead — as a working-class socialist party.

[1] The events in Poland have furnished yet another confirmation of the idea that the Party can not be a governmental organ (see "La Révolution prolétarienne contre la bureaucratic" in S. on B

Freedom and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat

The problem of political freedom arises in two forms: freedom for political organizations and the rights of various social strata of the population. Nationally, the councils alone will be in a position to judge to what extent the activities of any given political organization could be tolerated. The basic criterion that ought to guide their judgment will be whether the organization in question was seeking to re-establish an exploiting regime, In other words, was it trying to abolish the power of the councils? If they judged this to be the case, the councils will have the right and the duty to defend themselves, at the ultimate limit of curtailing such activities. But this yardstick will not provide an automatic answer in every specific instance for the very good reason that such an automatic answer never could exist. In each case, the councils will have to bear the political responsibility for their answer, steering a course between two equal and very serious dangers: either to allow freedom of action to enemies of socialism who seek to destroy it — or to kill self-management by themselves through extreme restrictions on political freedom. There is no absolute or abstract answer to this dilemma. Nor is it any use trying to minimize the extent of the problem by saying that any important political tendency would be represented inside the councils: It is perfectly possible and even quite probable that there will exist within the councils tendencies opposed to their total power.

The "legality of soviet parties" — a formula through which Trotsky believed, in 1936, that he could answer this problem — in fact answers nothing. If the only dangers confronting socialist society were those due to bourgeois "restorationist" parties, there would be little to fear, for such parties would not find much support in the workers' assemblies. They would automatically exclude themselves from meaningful political life. But the main danger threatening the socialist revolution after the liquidation of private capitalism does not arise from restorationist tendencies. It stems rather from bureaucratic tendencies. Such tendencies may find support in some sections of the working class, the more so as their programs do not and would not aim at restoring traditional and known forms of exploitation, but would be presented as "variants" of socialism. In the beginning, when it is most dangerous, bureaucratism is neither a social system nor a definite program: It is only an attitude in practice. The councils will be able to fight bureaucracy only as a result of their own concrete experience. But the revolutionary tendency inside the councils will always denounce "one-man management" — as practiced in Russia — or the centralized management of the whole economy by a separate apparatus — as practiced in Russia, Poland, or Yugoslavia. It will denounce them as variants not of socialism but of exploitation, and it will struggle to outlaw organizations propagating such aims.

It is hardly necessary to add that although it might prove necessary to limit the political activity of this or that organization, no limitation is conceivable in the domains of ideology or of culture. A genuine socialist society can only entail a much greater variety of tendencies, "schools," and so on, than exists today.

Another problem, independent of the question of political organizations, arises: Should all sections of the population have the same rights from the start? Are they equally able to participate in the political management of society? What does the dictatorship of the proletariat mean in such circumstances?

The dictatorship of the proletariat means the incontrovertible fact that the initiative for and the direction of the socialist revolution and subsequent transformation of society can only belong to the proletariat in the factories. Therefore it means that the point of departure and the center of socialist power will quite literally be the workers' councils. But the proletariat does not aim at instituting a dictatorship over society and over the other strata of the population. Its aim is the instauration of socialism, a society in which differences between strata or classes must diminish rapidly and soon disappear. The proletariat will be able to take society in the direction of socialism only to the extent that it associates other sections of the population with its aims. Or to the extent that it grants them the fullest autonomy compatible with the general orientation of society. Or that it raises them to the rank of active subjects of political management an does not see them as objects of its own control — which would be in conflict with its whole outlook. All this is expressed in the general organization of the population into councils, in the extensive autonomy of the councils in their own domain, and in the participation of all these councils in the central power, as we have described it

What happens if the working class does not vastly outnumber the rest of the population? Or if the revolution is from the start in a particularly difficult position, other strata being actively hostile to the power of the workers' councils? The dictatorship of the proletariat will then find concrete expression in an unequal participation of the various strata of society in the central power. In the beginning, for example, the proletariat might have to grant a smaller voice to the peasants' councils than to other councils, even if it allows this voice to grow as class tensions diminish.

But the real implications of these questions are limited. The working class could keep power only if it gained the support of the majority of those who work for a living, even if they are not industrial workers. In modern societies, wage and salary earners constitute the overwhelming majority of the population, and each day their numerical importance increases. If the majority of industrial workers and other wage earners and salaried personnel supported a revolutionary power, the regime could not be endangered by the political opposition of the peasants, who are not, indeed, one homogeneous bloc. If the aforementioned sections did not support revolutionary power, it is difficult to see how the revolution could triumph [s'instaurer], and even more how it could last for any length of time.

Problems of the "Transition"

The society we are talking about is not communism, which supposes total freedom, people's complete control over all their own activities, the absence of any constraint, total abundance — and human beings of a totally different kind.

The society we are talking about is socialism, and socialism is the only transitional society between a regime of exploitation and communism. What is not socialism (as here defined) is not a transitional society but an exploiting society. We might say that any exploiting society is a "society in transition," but it is "in transition to another form of exploitation." The transition to communism is only possible ii exploitation is immediately abolished, for otherwise exploitation continues and feeds on itself. The abolition of exploitation is only possible when every separate stratum of directors ceases to exist, for in modern societies it is the division between directors and executants that is at the root of exploitation. The abolition of a separate managerial apparatus means workers' management in all sectors of social activity. Workers' management is only possible within the framework of new organizational forms embodying the direct democracy of the producers (as represented by the councils). Workers' management can be consolidated and enlarged only insofar as it attacks the deepest roots of alienation in all fields and primarily in the realm of work.

In their essence these views closely coincide with Marx's and Lenin's ideas on the subject. Marx envisaged only one kind of transitional society between capitalism and communism, which he called indifferently "dictatorship of the proletariat" or "lower stage of communism." For him there was no doubt this society would signify from day one an end to exploitation and to a separate stair apparatus.[1] Lenin's positions on this question, as elaborated in State and Revolution, merely explain and defend Marx's theses against the reformists of his day.

These elementary truths have been systematically hidden and distorted since the Russian Revolution degenerated. Let us leave aside the Stalinists, whose historic job it has been to present concentration camps, the absolute power of factory managers, piece rates, and Stakhanovism as the finished products of socialism. In a more subtle, but just as dangerous, form, the same mystification has been propagated by the Trotskyists and by Trotsky himself. They have managed to invent an increasing number of transitional societies, fitting more or less comfortably next to each other. Between communism and capitalism there was socialism. But between socialism and capitalism there was the workers' State. And between the workers' State and capitalism there was the "degenerated workers' State" (degeneration being a process, there were gradations: degenerated, very degenerated, monstrously degenerated, etc.). After the war, according to the Trotskyists, we witnessed the birth of a whole series of "degenerated workers' States" (the satellite countries of Eastern Europe), which were degenerated without ever having been workers' States. All these gymnastics were performed so as to avoid having to admit that Russia had become again an exploiting society without a shred of socialism about it, and so as to avoid drawing

[1] See "Critique of the Gotha Programme."

the conclusion that the fate of the Russian Revolution made it imperative to re-examine all the problems relating to the program and content of socialism, to the role of the proletariat, to the role of the party, etc.

The idea of a "transitional society" other than the socialist society we have spoken about is a mystification. This is not to say — far from it — that problems of transition do not exist. In a sense, the whole of socialist society is determined by the existence of these problems and by people's attempt to solve them. But problems of transition will also exist in a narrower sense. They will flow from the concrete conditions that will confront any socialist revolution at the start. These initial conditions will make it more or less easy to bring about socialism; they will guide socialist society toward particular ways of giving concrete form to what are the basic principles of socialism.

For instance, the revolution can only begin in one country, or in one group of countries. As a result, it will have to endure pressures of extremely varying kinds and durations. On the other hand, however swiftly the revolution spreads internationally, a country's level of internal development will play an important role in how the principles of socialism will be concretely applied. For example, agriculture might create important problems in France — but not in the United States — or Great Britain (where, inversely, the main problem would be that of the country's extreme dependence on food imports). In the course of our analysis, we have considered several problems of this kind and hope to have shown that solutions tending in a socialist direction existed in each case.

We have not been able to consider the special problems that would arise if the revolution remained isolated in one country for a long time — and we can hardly do it here. But we hope to have shown that it is wrong to think that the problems arising from such isolation are insoluble, that an isolated workers' power must lie heroically or degenerate, or that at the most it can "hold on" while waiting. The only way to "hold on" is to start building socialism; otherwise, degeneration us already set in, and there is nothing to hold on for. For workers' power, the building of socialism from the very first day is not only possible, it is imperative. If it does not take place the power held has already ceased to be workers' power.

All the discussion about "socialism in one country" between the Stalinists Hid the Left Opposition (1924–27) shows to a frightening degree how men make history thinking they know what they are doing, yet understand nothing about it. Stalin insisted it was possible to build socialism in Russia alone, meaning by socialism industrialization plus the power of the bureaucracy. Trotsky vowed that this was impossible, meaning by socialism a classless society. Both were right in what they said, and wrong in denying the truth of the other's allegation. But neither was in fact talking about socialism. And no one, during the whole discussion, mentioned the system of rule inside Russian factories, the relation of the proletariat to the management of production, or the relation of the Bolshevik party, where the discussion was taking place, to the proletariat, who were in the long run the main interested party in the whole business.

The program we have outlined is a program for the present, capable of being realized in any reasonably industrial country. It describes the steps — or the spirit guiding the steps — that the councils will have to take and the general orientation They will have to adopt, starting from the very first weeks of their power, whether this power has spread to several countries or is confined to one. Perhaps, if we were talking about Albania, there would be little we could do. But if Tomorrow in France, or even in Poland (as yesterday in Hungary), workers' councils emerged without having to face a foreign military invasion, they could only:

- Federate into a central and declare themselves the only power in the land;
- Proceed to arm the proletariat and order the dissolution of the police and of the standing army;
- Proclaim the expropriation of the capitalists, the dismissal of all managers, and the takeover of the management of all factories by the workers, themselves organized into workers' councils;
- Proclaim the abolition of work norms and instaurate full equality of wages and salaries;
- Encourage other categories of wage earners to form councils and to take into their own hands the management of their respective enterprises;
- Ask workers in governmental departments, in particular, to form councils and proclaim the transformation of these administrative bodies into enterprises managed by those who work in them;
- Encourage the peasants and other self-employed sections of the population to group themselves into councils and to send their representatives to a central assembly;
- Proceed to organize a "plan factory" and promptly submit a provisional economic plan for discussion by the local councils;
- Call on the workers of other countries and explain to them the content and meaning of these measures.

All this would be immediately necessary. And it would contain all that is essential to the process of building socialism.

Part Three

[Introduction]

We have tried to show[1] that socialism is nothing other than people's conscious self-organization of their own lives in all domains; that it signifies, therefore, the management of production by the producers themselves on the scale of the workplace as well as on that of the economy as a whole; that it implies the abolition of every ruling apparatus separated from society; that it has to bring about a profound modification of technology and of the very meaning of work as people's primordial activity and, conjointly, an overthrow of all the values toward which capitalist society implicitly or explicitly is oriented.

This elaboration allows us in the first place to unmask the mystifications that have been built up for many long years around the notion of socialism. It allows us to understand first of all what socialism is not. Cast in this light, Russia, China, and the "popular democracies" show their true face as exploitative class societies. With respect to the present discussion at least, the fact that bureaucrats have taken the place of private employers appears to be of absolutely no consequence.

But it allows us to say much more. Only by beginning with this notion of socialism can we comprehend and analyse the crisis of contemporary society. Going beyond the superficial spheres of the market, consumption, and "politics," we can see now that this crisis is directly tied to the most deep-seated trait of capitalism: the alienation of man in his fundamental activity, productive activity. Insofar as this alienation creates a permanent conflict at every stage and in all sectors of social life, there is a crisis of exploitative society. This conflict is expressed in two forms: both as the workers' struggle against alienation and against its conditions, and as people's absence from society, their passivity, discouragement, retreat, and isolation. In both cases, beyond a certain point this conflict leads to the overt crisis of the established society: when people's struggle against alienation reaches a certain intensity it becomes revolution. But when their abstention from society goes beyond a certain limit, the system collapses, as the evolution of Poland's economy and society in 1955 and 1956 clearly shows.[2] Oscillating between these two limits, there unfolds daily life in modern societies. These societies succeed in functioning only in spite of their own norms, inasmuch as there is struggle against alienation and inasmuch as this struggle does not go beyond a certain level. Such societies therefore are based on a fundamentally irrational premise.

In resuming our analysis of the crisis of capitalism, we start therefore with an explicit notion of the content of socialism. This notion is the privileged centre, the focal point that permits us to organize all perspectives and to see everything again with new eyes. Without it, everything becomes chaos, fragmentary statements, naive relativism, mere empirical sociology.

But this is not an a priori notion. The proletariat's struggle against alienation and its conditions can take place and develop only by setting forth — be it in the shape of real relations between

[1] In CS II.

[2] See RPB, in SB 1, pp. 286–310 [T/E: see "The Proletarian Revolution against the Bureaucracy," this volume, starting with the section entitled "Working-Class Resistance: Ultimate Cause of the Failure of the 'Plan,'" and ending with the first half of "The Political Evolution of De-Stalinization"].

people, be it in the shape of demands, aspirations, and programs — forms and contents of a socialist nature. Consequently, the positive notion of socialism is only the historical product of preceding developments, and in the very first place, of the activity, the struggles, and the mode of living of the proletariat in modern society. It is the provisional systematisation of the points of view that the history of the proletariat offers, of its most everyday gestures as well as its most ambitious actions.

In a shop, the workers set things up among themselves in order to make the maximum amount in bonuses as well as to produce less than the norms. In Budapest, they battle against Russian tanks, organize themselves into councils, and lay claim to the management of the factories. In the United States, they insist on stopping the assembly line twice a day so they can have a cup of coffee. At the Breguet factories in Paris last spring, they went on strike and called for the abolition of most of the categories into which they are divided by management. For more than a century they have gotten killed crying, "To live working or to die fighting." In the "socialist" factories of the Russian bureaucracy, they force wages to be levelled out, despite the bitter complaints Khrushchev and his clique make in their speeches. With different degrees of development and various levels of clarification, all of these manifestations and, figuratively speaking, half of all the everyday actions of hundreds of millions of workers in all the enterprises of the world express this struggle for the instauration of new relations among people and with their work. And these manifestations and actions are comprehensible only in terms of a socialist perspective.

We must understand fully the dialectical unity the following diverse moments constitute: the analysis as well as the critique of capitalism, and the positive definition of the content of socialism as well as the interpretation of the proletariat's history. No critique, not even an analysis of the crisis of capitalism, is possible outside of a socialist perspective. Indeed, such a critique could not be based

Upon nothing at all — unless it be upon an ethics, which twenty-five centuries of philosophy have succeeded neither in founding nor even in defining. Every critique presupposes that something other than what it criticizes is possible and preferable. Every critique of capitalism therefore presupposes socialism.

Inversely, this notion of socialism cannot be merely the positive, flip side of this critique; the circle would then run the risk of becoming completely Utopian.

The positive content of socialism can be derived only from the real history, from the real life of the class that is tending toward its realization. Here we have its ultimate source.

But neither does it mean that the conception of socialism is the passive and complete reflection of the history of the proletariat. It is based just as much upon a choice, which is merely the expression of a revolutionary political attitude. This choice is not arbitrary, for there is here no rational alternative. The alternative would be simply/the conclusion that history is only a "tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing," and that it can only remain so. It is only in terms of a revolutionary politics that the history of the proletariat can be the source of this politics.

For someone with a different attitude, this history is merely the source of statistics and monographs of anything at all and ultimately of nothing at all. Indeed, neither the critique of capitalism nor the positive definition of socialism, neither the interpretation of the history of the proletariat nor a revolutionary politics is possible outside of a theory. The socialist elements that the proletariat continually produces have to be extrapolated and generalized into the total project that is socialism, otherwise they are meaningless. The analysis and critique of class society have to be

systematized, otherwise they have no portent of truth. Both are impossible without a theoretical labour in the proper sense, without an effort to rationalize that which is simply given.

This rationalization involves its own risks and contradictions. As theory it is obliged to begin with the logical and epistemological structures of present-day culture — which are in no way neutral forms, independent of their content, but which express rather, in an antagonistic and contradictory fashion, the attitudes, behaviours, and visions of its subject and object, which have their dialectical equivalents in the social relations of capitalism. Revolutionary theory therefore constantly runs the risk of falling under the influence of the dominant ideology in forms that are much more subtle and deep-seated, much more hidden and dangerous than the "direct" ideological influence traditionally denounced in opportunism, for example. Marxism has not escaped this fate, as we already have shown,[3] and we will provide still more such examples.

It is only by returning each time to the source, by confronting the results of theory with the real meaning of the proletariat's life and history, that we can revolutionize our very methods of thought, which are inherited from class society, and can construct through successive upheavals a socialist theory. Only by assimilating all these points of view and their profound unity can we advance.

We begin our analysis of the crisis of capitalism with an analysis of the contradictions of the capitalist enterprise. The concepts and methods thus acquired in this primordial domain, the domain of production, will allow us then to generalize our investigation and subject the various social spheres and finally all of the social as such to this examination.

[3] Concerning the problem of remunerating labour in a socialist society: CS I, pp. 12–15 [T/E: reprinted in CS, pp. 83–87, and included in PSW 1 as the second section of CS I, "Marxism and the Idea of the Autonomy of the Proletariat"]; apropos of the very nature of work and of the "reduction of the workday" as a solution to the problem of alienation: CS II, pp. 14–22 [T/E: reprinted in CS, pp. 123–37, and included in this volume as section 4 of CS II, "Socialism Is the Transformation of Work"].

The Contradictions in the Capitalist Organization of the Enterprise

For the traditional view, which is still quite widespread today, the contradictions and irrationality of capitalism exist and actively manifest themselves on the overall level of the economy, but affect the capitalist enterprise only by ricochet. Leaving aside the conditions imposed upon it by its integration into an irrational and anarchic market, the enterprise is the place where efficiency and capitalist rationalization reign supreme. Under penalty of death, competition obliges capitalism to pursue the maximum result with the minimum of means.

For is this not the very goal of economics, the definition of its rationality? In order to arrive at this goal, it puts "science in the service of production" to an ever-increasing extent, and it rationalizes the labour process through the intermediary of engineers and technicians, those embodiments of operant rationality. It is absurd that these enterprises manufacture armaments, absurd that periodic crises make them work below capacity — but there is nothing to criticize in their organization. The rationality of this organization is the basis on which socialist society will be built once the anarchy of the market is eliminated and other goals — the satisfaction of needs rather than the maximization of profits — are assigned to production.

Lenin subscribed to this view absolutely. As for Marx himself, there was no basic difference. For him, the enterprise certainly is not pure rationalization. Or, more precisely, this type of rationalization contains a profound contradiction. It develops by enslaving living labour to dead labour, it signifies that the products of man's activity dominate man, and therefore it gives rise to a kind of oppression, a kind of mutilation that increases without ever stopping.

But it is a contradiction that is, if we can call it that, "philosophical," abstract, and this is so in two senses. First of all, it affects man's fate in production, and not production itself. The permanent mutilation of the producer, his transformation into a "fragment of a man" does not impede capitalist rationalization. It is merely its subjective side. Rationalization is exactly symmetrical to dehumanisation. The same step carries both of them forward. To rationalize production means to ignore and even to deliberately crush people's habits, desires, needs, and tendencies insofar as these are opposed to the logic of productive efficiency, while ruthlessly subjecting all aspects of labour to the imperatives of achieving the maximum result with the minimum of means. Necessarily, therefore, man becomes the means of this end that is production.

As a result, this contradiction remains "philosophical" and abstract also in a second sense: Without mincing words, it is because we cannot do anything about it. This situation is the inexorable result of a phase of technical development and ultimately even of the very nature of economics, "the reign of necessity." This is alienation in the Hegelian sense: Man has to lose himself first in order to find himself again — and to find himself again on another plane, after having gone through purgatory. It is the reduction of the workday that will allow there to be a socialist

[1] See the critique of this conception in CS II, pp. 14–22 [T/E: see preceding note].

organization of society, and it is the abolition of the waste-fullness of the capitalist market that will make man free — outside of production.[1]

In fact, as we shall see, this philosophical conception is the real contradiction of capitalism, and the source of the crisis in the most down-to-earth and material sense of this term. In its most microscopic as well as its most large-scale aspects, the crisis of capitalism directly expresses the following fact: that man's situation and status qua producer under capitalism are contradictory and ultimately absurd. The capitalist rationalization of the relations of production is only rationalization in appearance. This huge pyramid of means ought to acquire its meaning from its ultimate end. But having become a goal in itself and detached from everything else, the ultimate end of increasing production for its own sake is absolutely irrational. Production is one of man's means, man is not one of the means of production. The irrationality of this ultimate end determines from one end to the other the entire capitalist production process; whatever rationality it might contain in the domain of means, when it is put in the service of an irrational end, it becomes irrational itself. But the principal one of these means is man himself. To make man completely a means of production signifies the transformation of the subject into an object, it signifies treating him as a thing in the domain of production. Whence we have a second irrational aspect, another concrete contradiction, insofar as this transformation of people into things, this reification, is in conflict with the very development of production, which is indeed the essence of capitalism and which cannot take place without also developing people.

But what thus appears as an objective and impersonal contradiction acquires its historical meaning only through its transformation into human and social conflict. It is the producers' permanent struggle against their reification that transforms what otherwise would remain a mere opposition between concepts into a crisis rending the entire organization of society. There is no crisis of capitalism resulting from the operation of "objective laws" or dialectical contradictions. Such a crisis exists only insofar as people revolt against the established rules. This revolt, inversely, begins as a revolt against the concrete conditions of production; it is therefore at this level that we must seek both the origin of and the model for the general crisis of the system.

The Hour of Work

The contradiction of capitalism appears from the outset in the simple question of how capital and the worker relate to each other: What is an hour of work?

Through the labour contract the worker sells his labour power to the enterprise. But what is this labour power? Does the worker sell his "time"? But what is this "time"? The worker, of course, does not sell his mere presence. During a period when the workers were struggling to reduce the workday from twelve or fourteen hours, Marx asked, what is a workday? This meant: How many hours are there in a workday? But there is an even profounder question: What is an hour of work? In other words, how much work is there in an hour? The labour contract can define the daily duration of work and the hourly wage — and therefore what the capitalist owes to the worker for an hour of work. But how much work does the worker owe to the capitalist for an hour? It is impossible to say. It is upon this sand that capitalist relations of production are built.

In the past, the mode and pace of work were set in an almost immutable fashion by natural conditions and inherited techniques, habit, and custom. Today, natural conditions and techniques are in a constant state of upheaval so as to accelerate production. The worker, however, has lost all interest in working except as it helps him to win his bread. Inevitably, therefore, he resists this attempt to accelerate his work pace. The content of an hour of work, the actual labour the worker has to furnish in an hour, thus becomes the object of a permanent conflict.

Now, in the capitalist universe there exists no rational criterion that would allow this conflict to be resolved. Whether the worker "loafs" or dies of exhaustion over his machine is neither "logical" nor "illogical." The relation of forces between workers and capital alone can determine the pace of work under given conditions. Every real solution therefore represents a compromise, a truce based on the relation of forces existing at that moment. By its very essence such a truce is temporary. The relation of forces changes. Even if it does not change, the technical situation will be modified. The compromise that was arrived at so arduously starting from a given configuration of machinery, a particular type of manufacturing process, etc., collapses; in the new situation the previous set of norms no longer makes any sense. And thus conflict begins anew.

Nevertheless, in order to overcome this conflict as well as to be able to plan production in the enterprise, capitalism is obliged to search for an "objective," "rational" basis for setting production norms. The essential element of this planning process is to be found in the labour time devoted to each operation. Insofar as production has not been completely automated, each unit of time always boils down in the last analysis to "human time," in other words, to the output actually obtained where living labour continues to make itself felt. This truth remains concealed from the production engineers insofar as "depreciation on equipment," for example, can appear (when the factory is not completely integrated) as an autonomous and irreducible element in cost computations. This, however, is only an optical illusion that is due to the fact that under the present structural setup, the engineer is obliged to take the part for the whole. The cost of equipment depreciation is nothing but the labour of workers who manufacture it or repair it

(machinists). Hence, one cannot calculate, for example, a machine's "optimal running speed" — which balances the labour cost of the worker utilizing it against the cost of "depreciation on equipment" — unless the actual efficiency of these machinists also is taken into account.

We will return later to this question, which is decisive for the "rationality" of capitalist production. It suffices to point out here two things. First, the inability to consider the entire production process beyond the accidental boundaries of the particular enterprise destroys at its base all pretension to "rationality" on the part of the capitalist organization; one is obliged to consider as irreducible givens what are in reality a part of the problem to be resolved. Second, even on the scale of the individual enterprise, the capitalist management inevitably remains, as will be seen, at least partially in the dark about the real output and efficiency of different types of labour. This state of ignorance therefore also makes it impossible for this type of management to plan production in a rational manner.

Taylorism and all the methods of "scientific management" that flow from it claim either directly or indirectly to furnish such an "objective" basis. Postulating that there is only "one best way" to accomplish each operation, they try to establish this "one best way"[1] and to make it the criterion for how much output the worker should furnish. This "one best way" is to be discovered by breaking down each operation into a series of movements, the duration of which is to be measured, and by choosing, among the various types of movements carried out by various workers, the most "economic" ones. By adding together these "elementary times,"[2] one is supposed to be able to determine the normal amount of time required for the total operation. For each type of operation, we then would be able to tell the actual amount of labour an hour of clock time contains and thereby overcome the conflict over output. Ideally, this method ought to allow us even to eliminate supervisors, insofar as the latter are used to make sure that the workers furnish the maximum amount of labour possible: Paid according to the ratio between their output and the norm, workers would supervise themselves. One part of the conflicts over wages finally could be eliminated, since the actual wage would depend henceforth on the worker himself.

In fact, this method runs aground. Taylorism and the "scientific management" movement have resolved certain problems;[3] they have created many others and on the whole they have not permitted capitalism to get beyond its daily crisis in the area of production. Because of the bankruptcy of "scientific" rationalization, capitalism is constantly obliged to return to the empiricism of coercion pure and simple, and thereby to aggravate the conflict inherent in its mode of production, to heighten its anarchy, and to multiply its wastefulness. First of all there is an insurmountable gap between the postulates of the theoretical conception and the essential characteristics of the real situation in which this conception tries to assert itself. The "one best way" has no relation to the concrete reality of production. Its definition presupposes the existence of ideal conditions, conditions that are extremely far removed from the actual conditions the worker faces, such as problems relating to the quality of equipment and raw materials, the need to estab-

[1] T/E: Castoriadis uses the phrase "une seule bonne méthode" followed by the English phrase "the one best way" within quotation marks and in parentheses.

[2] With the addition of various other factors, like the percentages allotted for "taking account of unforeseen possibilities" — which in fact can be assessed only empirically and arbitrarily and which thereby ruin the alleged "rationality" of the rest.

[3] We are talking about scientific management insofar as it applies to the problems of output by human beings. As production engineers, the Taylorists were able to play a positive role in a host of domains concerning the material rationalization of production — and sometimes also the rationalization of human motion by making known to others the most economical methods, as picked up from individual workers.

lish an uninterrupted flow of supplies, etc. — in short, it presupposes the complete elimination of all the "accidents" that often interrupt the course of production or give rise to unforeseen problems.[4]

But in particular, there are flaws immanent in the theoretical conception itself. From the physiological point of view, work is an expenditure of effort multiplied by a duration of time. This duration is measurable, but the expenditure of effort is not (it involves a muscular component a component of attentiveness, an intellectual component, etc.). "Time studies" can take into account only the duration of time. As for the rest, they confine themselves to "the subjective judgments or interpretations of the engineer responsible for the measurement of the practical calculations and this deprives the results of any scientific value."[5] But work is not only a physiological function; it is a total activity of the person who accomplishes it. The idea that there is "one best way" for each operation ignores the basic fact that each working individual can have and does have his manner of adapting himself to the job and of adapting it to himself. What appears to the scientific manager as an absurd, time-wasting movement has its own logic in the personal psychosomatic makeup of the worker in question which leads him to follow his own "best way" to complete a given operation.

The worker tends to resolve the problems his work poses for him in a manner that corresponds to his overall way of being. His gestures are not like a set of toy blocks where one could pull out one cube and replace it with a "better" one while leaving everything else in place. A gesture that is apparently "more rational" and "more economical" can be much more difficult for some particular worker than the way of doing things that he has invented for himself and that thereby expresses his organic adaptation to this hands-on struggle with machinery and materials that constitutes the work process. Such a gesture is carried out more rapidly because another one is carried out more slowly; merely adding together the minimum amounts of time used by different workers is a glaring absurdity, but applying a standard "normal performance rate" to all the successive phases of an operation carried out by the same worker is an even greater one. The worker's entire set of gestures is not a garment that might be replaced with another. A human being cannot spend two-thirds of his waking life carrying out movements that are foreign to him and that correspond to nothing within him. Tacking "rational" gestures onto the worker in this way is not simply inhuman' in actuality, it is impossible, it never can be fully realized. Indeed, even for the gestures that workers make up themselves, and even for each worker taken individually, there is no "one best way"; experience shows that the same worker alternatively uses several methods of carrying out the same job, if only to relieve the monotony of his work.[6]

[4] Thus a strike breaks out in an enterprise following an average 20 percent reduction in time allowances in the assembly shop. Among other issues, the shop stewards brought up the fact that "components were now supplied in bulk, whereas previously they had been sorted and laid out in a carrier; moreover, frequent stoppages were caused by bad supply arrangements at assembly points, which penalized workers paid on an output basis" (R. J. Jouffret, "Description of Two Cases in Which Human Relations in Industry Were Impaired by the Efficient Use of Time Study in Determining Production Bonuses," in Human Relations in Industry [Paris: European Productivity Agency, 1956], p. 202). Such situations exist everywhere.

[5] Jouffret, ibid., p. 201. The times noted are adjusted to the "normal (performance) rates" and "rest coefficients," which can be based only upon the time-study engineers' estimations.

[6] Here we have one of the "findings" of the famous Hawthorne factory experiments conducted in the United States from 1924 to 1927 under the direction of Elton Mayo: "It was found that the more intelligent the girl, the greater was the number of variations (in her movements)." J. A. C. Brown, The Social Psychology of Industry (London: Penguin, 1956), p. 72.

Critique of the Theoretical Critique

The idea that labor is only a succession of elementary movements of a measurable duration, that this duration of time is their sole significant feature, makes sense only if we accept the following postulate: The worker in the capitalist factory should be completely transformed into an appendage of the machinery. As with a machine, one determines the movements that are "rational" and those that are not; one retains the former and eliminates the latter. As with a machine, the total time to complete an operation is merely the sum of the "elementary times" of the movements into which one can, mechanically, resolve this operation. Like the machine, the worker does not have and should not have any personal traits; more precisely, as with the machine, the worker's "personal traits" are considered and treated as irrational accidents to be eliminated.[1]

The theoretical critique of Taylorism, in particular as it is conducted by modern industrial sociologists[2] lies essentially in showing that this view is absurd, that man is not a machine, that Taylor was mechanistic, etc. But this is only a half truth. The whole truth is that the reality of modern production, where hundreds of millions of individuals spend their lives in enterprises dispersed all over the world, is precisely this very "absurdity." Taylor, from this point of view, did not invent anything at all; he merely systematized and brought to its logical conclusion what has always been the logic of capitalist organisation that is to say, the capitalist logic of organisation. What is astonishing is not. that mechanistic" and absurd ideas were able to germinate in the heads of the Ideologues and organizational managers of industry. These ideas merely give expression to the peculiar reality of capitalism. The astonishing thing is that the sphere of production, capitalism almost has succeeded in transforming man into an appendage of the machinery, that the reality of modern production is only this very endeavour renewed each day, each instant. This endeavour fails only to the exact extent that in the sphere of production people refuse to be treated as machines. Every critique of the inhuman character of capitalist production that does

[1] The "objective-scientific" measurability of labor-time aimed at by Taylorism "extends right into the workers' 'soul': even his psychological attributes are separated from his total personality and placed in opposition to it so as to facilitate their integration into specialized rational systems and their reduction to statistically viable concepts... In consequence of the rationalization of the work-processes, the human qualities and idiosyncrasies appear increasingly as mere sources of errors (G. Lukács, History and Class Consciousness [Cambridge: MIT Press, 1971], p. 88.)

[2] See the summary of this critique in J. A. C. Brown, The Social Psychology of Industry, chapters 1 and 3. Speaking of Taylorism, Alain Touraine writes (L'Evolution du travail ouvrier aux usines Renault [Paris: CNRS, 1955], p. 115): "Since Taylor, personnel administrators have striven to stop (the workers) from 'loafing,' but Taylor's pseudoscientific and purely coercive methods today are condemned; the importance of human relations, of communications, of informal organization, i.e., of social adjustment [T/E: Touraine places the English phrase 'social adjustment' in parentheses and in italics, following the phrase 'integration sociale'] of the worker into the enterprise, has become the principal theme of American Personnel Management." [T/E: "Personnel Management" appears in English.] But what value is there in condemning Taylor when it is well known that the great majority of French businesses pay workers on an output basis, using time-motion studies (R. J- Jouffret, "Description," p. 200)? In fact, as we shall see, management has responded to the bankruptcy of Taylorism with more and not with less coercion. As for "human relations," we will come to it later.

not take as its point of departure the practical critique of this inhumanity that the workers themselves bring to bear in the sphere of production through their daily struggle against capitalist methods ultimately is merely literary moralizing.

The Workers' Practical Critique

The root of the failure of "scientific management'; methods is the bitter opposition that the workers have shown from the very outset. And of course, the first manifestation of this resistance is the permanent struggle that sets workers against the time-study men. It is on the terrain of this struggle that in every factory the workers immediately realize a spontaneous association. For obvious reasons, the actions that are the expression of this spontaneous association are little known, but their import and universality become clear once we listen to an author who is familiar with what goes on inside a factory.[1]

The first outcome of this resistance obviously is that all semblance of "objective" justification for such "elementary times" is destroyed. The conflict between workers and management is transposed onto the plane of determining these time periods. This process of determination presupposes a certain degree of collaboration on the workers' part. The latter refuse to do so. Management might have been able to dispense with this collaboration if its techniques were unchanging; in that case, little by little it would have been able to set down for good norms representing the maximum amount of output that can be extorted from the worker under a given set of conditions. These techniques, however, are constantly changing; norms have to be reset, and conflict begins anew.

Speaking of an enterprise in which there is a methods department that brings up to date" the times allotted to workers, a right-thinking author writes:

Surveys are constantly being brought up to date to take account of:

a. rapid technical development: improvements in processes and in the machinery manufactured.

b. the large number of operations.

[1] The first person to experience this struggle obviously was Taylor himself. Speaking of the first years of his career, when he himself applied his method in factories, he wrote, "I was a great deal older than I am now, what with the worry, meanness, and contemptibleness of the whole damn thing. It's a horrid life for any man to live not being able to look any workman in the face without seeing hostility there, and a feeling that every man around you is your virtual enemy" (cited by J. A. C. Brown, 'The Social Psychology of Industry, p. 14). See a description of the workers' attitude toward time-study men in Georges Vivier, "La Vie en usine," Socialisme ou Barbarie, 12 (August 1953), pp. 38 and 40, Daniel Mothe, "L'Usine et la gestion ouvière," ibid., 22 (July 1957), pp. 90–92 [partially reproduced in Journal d'un ouvrier (Paris: Minuit, 1959]; Paul Romano, "L'Ouvrier americain," ibid., 2 (May 1949), pp. 84–85 [T/E: "Life in the Factory," in Romano and Stone, The American Worker (1947; reprinted, Detroit, Bewick Editions, 1972), p. 9]: "When the time-study men are about, the worker will find a multitude of reasons for shutting the machine down." The systematic slowdown of work performed in front of the time-study men is a universal rule. When time studies are done, the workers switch to lower speeds and slower "feeds" than the ones they will use later on; "operators deemed it necessary to embellish the timing performance with movements … that could be dropped instanter with the departure of the time-study man" (Donald Roy, "Efficiency and 'The Fix,"' American Journal of Sociology, 60 [November 1954], pp. 255–66).

The allotted time is frequently revised and should normally be agreed upon by the workers. Experience shows that this is not the case and that these revisions are the cause of frequent disputes capable of leading to local strike action.[2]

As the norms cannot be put into effect or even established without at least a certain degree of grudging acceptance on the part of the workers, and as the latter do not cooperate, the exploiters' first counter response is to establish them with the collaboration of a minority that they buy off. Here is the ultimate meaning of Stakhanovism: It is to establish monstrously exaggerated norms based on the output of certain individuals who are given a privileged position and who are placed under conditions that bear no relation to the current conditions of the actual production process.[3] A twofold result thus is aimed at: (1) to create within the proletariat a privileged stratum that is a direct support for the exploiters and that is helpful in dissolving working-class solidarity precisely on the terrain of their resistance to increases in output; and (2) to utilize the norms thus established, if not as such, at least in order to shorten the times allotted for the mass of production workers. But Stakhanovism is not the invention of Stalin; its true father is Taylor. In his first "experiment," at Bethlehem Steel Company, after a "scientific" motion study was conducted, Taylor set a norm four times higher than the average output theretofore achieved, and he "proved" three years later with a specially chosen Dutch worker that this norm "could have been realized." Nevertheless, when one tried to extend this system to seventy-five other workers on the gang after having taught them the "rational" method of working, it was discovered that only one worker in eight could keep up with the norm.

Consequently, the problem was posed anew, for norms established based upon the output of a few "rate-busters" or a few Stakhanovites cannot be extended to the rest of the workers. The Russian bureaucracy's ultimate abandonment of Stakhanovism is the glaring admission of the bankruptcy of this method.

In fact, management's real counter response — which at the same time wipes out all of Taylorism's scientific pretensions and closes the discussion from this standpoint — is that it itself sabotages every "rational" employment of scientific management methods and reverts to arbitrarily imposing norms, backed up with coercion. Each year, hundreds and thousands of books and articles appear on the topic of "scientific management," "time studies," etc.; hundreds and thousands of individuals are "trained" to apply these methods. Simplifying the issue but remaining faithful to the essence of the actual situation, we can state that all this is an enormous masquerade that has nothing to do with the setting of norms as it is practiced in a real industrial setting. The objective basis for establishing these norms essentially comes from fraud, spying, and assorted types of pressure.

Workers who think of the time-study men as policemen refer not only to the content but to the methods of their "work" as well. In the Renault factories, the setting of norms often occurs in the following fashion: Unknown to the workers, a new time-study man is sent to walk around the

[2] R. J. Jouffret, "Description," p. 201. The idea that the workers "should normally" accept revisions in the hotted times is all the more astonishing since the author himself shows that the revision that provoked the conflict ended up stealing from the workers at least 10 percent of their time and since he concludes his study by saying that in this firm "the lack of confidence felt by the workers in the procedure of the Methods Department proved to be largely justified as a result of the joint survey subsequent to the dispute."

[3] See "Stakhanovisme et mouchardage dans les usines tchécoslovaques," by V. W. in Socialisme ou Barbarie, 3 (July 1949), pp. 82–87, and Guillaume's short report, "La Destakhanovisation en Pologne," ibid., 19 (July 1956), pp. 144–45.

shops and to note while passing by unnoticed the amounts of time required for various operations (one can easily imagine the true value of the "times" noted in this way). With the aid of these "times," the time-study man mixes up a concoction — the new "norm" — which he then will haggle over with the supervisor of the shop in question. The final norm is the outcome of this process of haggling. One or two weeks later, a ritual performance is enacted in the shop: The time-study man comes to time the workers, starts his stopwatch, bustles about, pronounces some cabalistic words, and then disappears. Finally, the result is proclaimed — which had been decided upon in advance.[4]

In another factory, in September, 1954, the Methods Department timed all the operations carried out in the assembly shop; the time-study engineer, questioned by the head of the workshop and a delegate, stated that he was carrying out a revision of the operating methods shown on the chart… On December 29, 1954, new times, representing an average reduction of about 20% in allotted time, were notified to the shop delegates… The workers concerned stopped work; the arguments put forward by their delegates were as follows:

1. The delegates and the workers had been misinformed about the purpose of the time-study operations…[5]

If management's agents are forced to hide like thieves in management's own shops, we can definitely say that all discussion about "rationalizing" efficiency and norms is nothing but mystificatory drivel. In fact, in such a situation, norms express merely management's Diktat — the enforcement of which depends on the workers' capacity for resistance.

Almost nothing is changed in this situation when the trade unions intervene. In theory, the trade unions' line is that they are "opposed to all modifications of the norms and speed of production, unless these modifications are justified by improvements in the equipment or changes in the manufacturing processes." In reality, management constantly modifies its equipment and its manufacturing processes precisely in order to accelerate the work pace. Hence we see that the trade unions end up being opposed to modifications of norms in all cases … except, it turns out, when it is really important. How indeed can it be judged whether or not some particular equipment change or alteration of the manufacturing process "justifies" a change in the norms? Management constantly relies upon this inability to make a judgment in order to cut down on any "slack in time," and it does so under the pretext of "technical modifications" that are in fact fictional. An American worker put it this way: "They'll tear a machine to pieces to change something to cut a price."[6]

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[4] Testimony gathered by us from factory workers.

[5] R. J. Jouffret, "Description," p. 201–2.

[6] Donald Roy, "Quota Restriction and Goldbricking in a Machine Shop," American Journal of Sociology, 57 (March 1952), pp. 427–42. It should be noted that the entire analysis of the "Hawthorne experiment" made by the Elton Mayo school is based on the assumption that workers in the shops studied had no "rational reason" for restricting their output and that it therefore was necessary to find "nonlogical" motives for their behaviour. Roy remarks in this regard: "John Mills, onetime research engineer in telephony and for five years engaged in personnel work for Bell Telephone Company, has recently indicated the possibility that there were factors in the bank-wiring room situation which the Mayo group failed to detect: 'Reward is supposed to be in direct proportion to production. Well, I remember the first time I ever got behind that fiction. I was visiting the Western Electric Company, which had a reputation of never cutting a piece rate. It never did; if some manufacturing process was found to pay more than seemed right for the class of labour employed on it — if, in other words, the rate-setters had misjudged — that particular part was referred to the engineers for redesign, and then a new rate was set on the new part. Workers, in other words, were paid as a class, they were supposed to make about so much a week with their best efforts and, of course, less for less competent efforts' (The Engineer in Society [New York: Van Nosirand, 1946], p. 93)." (Quoted by Roy, "Quota Restric-

Once the norm is set, one's problems are far from being over. Management is assured of the quantity of the workers' output but not its quality. Except for the simplest of jobs, this is a decisive question. Rushed by norms that are difficult to adhere to, the worker naturally will have a tendency to make up for it on the quality of his work. Quality control over manufactured parts becomes a new source of conflicts.[7] On the other hand, products cannot be manufactured without greater or lesser depreciation on the equipment — and generally, it is easier to increase output by depreciating one's equipment to an abnormally high degree. Management's only response lies in setting up additional supervisory controls — whence there arise additional conflicts.[8]

Indeed, the problem of effective output remains completely open. We will see how workers succeed in emptying a set of norms of its content and even in turning it against management.

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tion," p. 431.) Let us add that the Mayo research group literally lived in the shop in question for five years and that it claimed to be studying reality without any pre-established theoretical schema, without any "preconceived ideas." This is what allowed them to rediscover in reality their unconscious ideas (for example, that management is always logical, and that, if the workers oppose management, it can only be for "nonlogical" reasons) and to ignore facts as massive as those mentioned by Mills.

[7] On conflicts over quality control, see Mothe's article, "L'Usine et la gestion ouvrière," in 5. ou B., 22 (July 1957), particularly p. 103. "To succeed in 'earning a living' (i.e., in not exceeding your time allotments), one has to cut corners on quality, eliminate an operation here and there. In the factory, this currently is called 'sabotage'" (G. Vivier, Socialisme ou Barbarie, 14 [April 1954], p. 57). This cutting of corners is the "streamlining" [T/E: the word appears italicized and in English in the original] of American factory parlance; cf. Roy, "Efficiency and the 'Fix,'" p. 257. On the contradictions, the resort to empirical methods, and the proliferation of piecework-related supervisory services, see Touraine, L'Evolution, pp. 169–70. Touraine concludes that ultimately "the unwieldiness of supervisory controls poses the question of returning to self-control," i.e., quality control over pieces by the semiskilled workers who manufacture them. It is not difficult to see that such an apparently minuscule change is impossible without a total overthrow of the structure of the factory, of wages, of the relations between the worker and his work.

[8] Roy, "Efficiency and the 'Fix.'"

The Collective Reality of Production and the Individualized Organization of the Capitalist Enterprise

In an abstract form, the contradiction of capitalism appears at the outset in production's molecular element: the individual worker's work hour. The content of the work hour has directly opposite meanings for capital and for the worker. For the former, its meaning is that of maximum output; for the latter, it is the output corresponding to the amount of effort he thinks is fair.

But in modern production the individual worker is an abstraction. To a degree which was unknown under other historical forms of production, capitalist production is a collective form of production. Not only in society, but in the factory and in each shop, the jobs performed by one person are dependent upon the jobs performed by everyone else. This dependence takes on more and more direct forms as its scope continually widens and as it comes to cover all aspects of the operations of production. No longer is it merely the case that a worker cannot carry out some operation on some components if unfinished components are not provided at the required speed; the worker must also be provided with tools, power, "services" (tool setups, stock management, etc.). Furthermore, every aspect of an operation is directly interdependent with every aspect of all the operations preceding it as well as with those that will follow. Indeed, on a production line and, still more, on an assembly line, individual rhythms and gestures are only the materialization of a total rhythm that pre-exists them, controls them, and gives them a meaning. The true subject of modern production is not the individual; it is, to various degrees, a collectivity of workers.

Now, capitalism simultaneously develops this collective reality of modern production to the extreme and, in its mode of organization, fiercely repudiates it. At the same time that it absorbs individuals into ever-larger enterprises, assigning them jobs whose interdependence increases every day, capitalism claims to be Concerned only with, and wants to be concerned only with, the individual worker. This is not just some contradiction on the level of ideas — although that too exists and manifests itself in a thousand ways. It is a real contradiction. Capitalism is perpetually trying to retransform the producers into a cloud of individual dust particles lacking any organic tie among themselves, yet management clusters this cloud of dust together at convenient spots on the mechanical Moloch, according to the "logic" of this total machine. Capitalist "rationalisation" begins by being, and remains to the end, a meticulous regulation of the relationship between the individual worker and the machine or the segment of the total machine on which he works. This, as we have seen, is in keeping with the very essence of capitalist production. Work is reduced here to a series of meaningless gestures going on at a frantic pace, during the course of which the worker's exploitation and alienation unremittingly tend to increase. For the workers, this work is a kind of forced labour to which they put up both individual and collective resistance. As a counter response to this resistance, capitalism has at its disposal only economic and mechanical forms of coercion. Payment in terms of achieved output is supposed to furnish the worker with

motivations capable of making him accept this inhuman situation. But this payment has meaning only in relation to the individual worker, whose gestures have been taken apart and timed, whose work has been defined, measured, monitored, etc.

Thus, this method comes into violent conflict with the reality of collectivised and socialized production. Dissolving the organic ties between the individual and his group and transforming the producers into an anonymous mass of proletarians, capitalism is destroying the social groups that preceded it, the corporation or the village. Grouped into enterprises, these proletarians cannot live and coexist without resocializing themselves, at a different level; they are resocialized under the new conditions created by the situation in which they are placed within the capitalist world and which, by becoming resocialized, they transform. In the factory, capitalism is constantly trying to reduce them to mechanical and economic molecules, to isolate them, to make them gravitate around the total machine under the hypothesis that they obey only the dictates of economic motivation, this Newtonian law of the capitalist universe. And each time, these attempts are shattered when confronted with the perpetually renewed process through which individuals are socialized in the world of production — a process upon which capitalism itself is constantly obliged to rely.

The spontaneous constitution of elementary collective units within the framework imposed by capitalism is the first aspect this process of socializing the workers takes on. These elementary groups[1] constitute a firm's basic social units. Capitalism clusters individuals together within a team or a shop, pretending to keep them isolated from each other and linking them solely through the intermediary of production processes. In fact, as soon as workers are brought together to do a job, social relations are established among them, a collective attitude toward the job, supervisors, management, and other workers develops. The first facet of this socialization process on the level of the elementary group is to be found in the fact that the workers who make it up spontaneously lend to organize themselves, to cooperate with each other, and to deal with the problems raised by the work they have in common and with their relationships to the rest of the factory and to management. Just as an individual, when confronted with a job, organizes himself — half-consciously, half-unconsciously — in order to carry it out, so, on a different level, a number of workers, when confronted with a job, will tend to organize themselves — half-consciously, half-unconsciously — in order to carry it through, to give some order to the relations among the individual jobs of its members, and to make it into a whole corresponding to the goal in question. It is to this type of organization that elementary groups correspond. Elementary groups of workers include a varying, but generally small, number of persons. These groups are based on the direct and permanent contacts established among their members and on the interdependent character of the jobs these people perform. Workers in a workshop may form one or many elementary groups, depending upon the size of the shop, the nature and degree of unity of the jobs they carry out, but also as a function of other factors related to personal, ideological, and other kinds of attraction and repulsion. Often, but not necessarily, elementary groups coincide with the "crews" designated in the official organization of the shop.[2] They are the living nuclei of

[1] These are what Anglo-Saxon sociologists call "informal groups" or "primary groups." [T/E: In the original, Castoriadis gives the French translation of these two phrases. We have retained throughout his phrase, "elementary groups," to distinguish his analysis from that of these "Anglo-Saxon sociologists."]

[2] We shall see later that the divergence between the workers' spontaneous organization and the factory's official organization is, from a certain point of view, the condensed expression of all the conflicts and of all the contradictions of the capitalist enterprise.

productive activity — as elementary groups of another type are the living nuclei of all social activities at different levels. Within them we find already manifested the workers' self-managerial attitude, their tendency to organize themselves in order to resolve the problems raised by their work and by their relations with the rest of society.

Elementary Groups and Industrial Sociology

Bourgeois academic sociology has brought to light the fact that in reality modern production relies for the most part on this spontaneous association of workers into elementary groups, or more exactly on the self-transformation of fortuitous assemblages of individuals into organic collectivities.[1] Undoubtedly, modern industrial sociology has made a decisive contribution to the recognition of the fundamental importance of this phenomenon, and concurrently, to the critique of the capitalist organization of human relations in production, starting out from this point of view. This contribution is totally undermined, however, by the general outlook of its authors just as the critique of the capitalist enterprise that follows therefrom only results in a Utopian and impotent reformism.

The perspective through which industrial sociologists most of the time view elementary groups is "psychologistic." Like all human beings, workers tend to become socialized, to enter into reciprocal relationships, to form "bands." Their motivation to work is constituted starting from their belonging to a "band" and not starting from economic considerations. The "work ethic" depends on this feeling of belonging, on the ties that unite the individual and his group. The fundamental flaw of the capitalist organization of production is that it ignores these phenomena. From its own point of view management is wrong to arbitrarily transfer workers, to assign a new trainee to a given crew without worrying about the relationships that might arise between him and others, and more generally, to be unaware of the reality belonging to the elementary group. This regrettable lack of awareness is to be attributed to the erroneous theoretical conceptions (those that Mayo[2]) encapsulates under the name of the "rabble hypothesis" and that we prefer to designate henceforth in this text by the term "molecular hypothesis"[3] that have predominated for some time now. The critique of this conception ought to lead production managers to change their attitude toward the problem of human relations in the enterprise, thus allowing actual conflicts and wastefulness to be eliminated.

The paternalistic and idealistic character of these solutions, their thoroughly Utopian content, and their laborious naiveté are obvious. Management's theoretical conceptions do not determine the relations between management and the workers in the capitalist firm. These conceptions merely give abstract expression to the inescapable necessities management faces qua external management and qua exploitative management. The molecular hypothesis is a necessary product of capitalism and will disappear only when it does. From the practical point of view, when faced with the anarchy that characterizes both the capitalist enterprise and its relations with the

[1] The study of elementary groups goes back to Charles H. Cooley (Human Nature and the Social Order [1902; reprinted, New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Books, 1983]). Its application to industrial sociology is tied to the works of Elton Mayo and his school. See, in particular, Elton Mayo, The Social Problems of an Industrial Civilization (1945; reprinted, Salem, N.H.: Ayer, 1977).

[2] Mayo, Social Problems, Chapter 2, "The Rabble Hypothesis and Its Corollary, the State Absolute."

[3] T/E: Castoriadis uses the English phrase "rabble hypothesis" in italics, followed by the French phrase "postulat de la horde." What we have translated as "the molecular hypothesis" is what he calls the "postulat moléculaire."

market (or with the "plan"), management has other, more pressing matters than to be bothered with its employees' personal feelings toward each other. At the very most, a new bureaucratic department responsible for "human relations" may be created within the managerial apparatus. If it takes its role seriously, this department will be in permanent conflict with the exigencies of the "production" managers, and it will be reduced thereby to a decorative role; otherwise, it will put its "sociological" and "psychoanalytical" techniques at the disposal of the factory's system of coercion.[4]

But the main point lies elsewhere. The workers' spontaneous association in elementary groups does not express the tendency of individuals to form groups in general. It is simultaneously a regrouping for the purposes of production and a regrouping for the purposes of struggle. It is because they have to resolve among themselves the problems involved in organizing their work (whose various aspects are mutually interrelated) that workers necessarily form elementary collectivities not mentioned on the organizational chart of any enterprise. It is because their situation in production creates among them a community of interests, attitudes, and objectives irremediably opposed to those of management that, at the most elementary level, workers spontaneously associate together to resist, to defend themselves, and to struggle.

To invite management to recognize these elementary groups means to invite it to commit suicide.[5] For these groups are constituted from the start against management, not only because they struggle to make their interests prevail in irremediable opposition to its interests, but also because the very foundation of their existence, their primary objective, is the management [gestion] of their own activity. The group tends to organize the activity of its members, to define the norms relating to how much they should exert themselves and how they should behave. All this signifies a radical challenge to the very existence of a separate management [direction]. The inability of "elementary group" sociologists to recognize clearly the consequences of this state of affairs constitutes the main stumbling block for this type of sociology.[6]

[4] Remark by Philippe Guillaume.

[5] Unless, once again, such "recognition" [reconnoitre] means inviting management to utilize its "acquaintances [connaissances]" in such groups in order to worm its way into them, the better to combat them. Contemporary American literature and cinema offer many examples of this type of utilization: Thus in the film Blackboard Jungle, an elementary group is broken up by discrediting the "ringleader" in the eyes of its members.

[6] We are thinking in particular of Mayo, but the same can be said of all of industrial sociology. Thus Brown, in his excellent synthesis of industrial sociology already cited, persistently recapitulates the criticisms developed by several writers in this regard against Mayo and emphasizes that elementary groups have their own logic, in no way "inferior" to management's logic, but he remains unable to get himself out of the contradiction as thus stated. And for good reason, for the only way out is workers' management — obviously an "unscientific" idea for a sociologist.

The Informal Organization of the Enterprise

This challenge indeed goes far beyond the bounds of the elementary group. On the one hand, these groups tend to put themselves in contact with each other; on the other hand and more generally, contacts and relationships are established between individuals and groups throughout the enterprise, alongside and in opposition to the official organization. Along with modern industrial sociology, we are learning that the enterprise has a double structure and leads, so to speak, a double life. There is, on the one hand, its formal organization, the one represented on organizational charts, the one whose ruling summits proceed along the lines of these charts in order to allocate and define the work of each person, to keep informed, to send orders, or to assign responsibilities. To this formal organization there is opposed in reality the informal organization, whose activities are carried out and supported by individuals and groups at all levels of the hierarchical pyramid according to the requirements of their work, the imperatives of productive efficiency, and the necessities of their struggle against exploitation.[1] Correlatively, there is what indeed might be called the formal production process and the real production process. The first includes what ought to happen in the enterprise according to the plans, diagrams, regulations, methods for transmitting information, etc., established by management. The second is the one that actually is enacted. It often bears little relation to the first.

The failure of the individualist type of capitalist organization therefore goes far beyond the elementary group. Cooperation tends to be carried out alongside and in opposition to this type of organization. But what is most important is that this opposition is not the opposition of "theory" and "practice," of "beautiful schemes on paper" and "reality." It has a social content, a content having to do with struggle. The formal organization of the factory coincides as a matter of fact with the bureaucratic managerial apparatus's system of organization. Its nodal points, its articulations are those of this apparatus. For in the official diagram of the enterprise, the whole enterprise is "contained" in its managerial apparatus; people exist only as provinces of power for those in charge. Beginning with the summit of what is properly called "management" (president-CEO in the firms of Western countries, the factory director in the Russian factory) and passing through the various offices, departments, and technical services of the enterprise, the bureaucratic managerial apparatus terminates with the shop foremen, supervisors, and team leaders. Formally, it even completely encompasses the executants — who in the official diagram are only clusters around each foreman or team leader.

The managerial apparatus pretends to be the only organization in the enterprise, the sole source of all order and of any kind of order. In fact, it creates as much disorder as order and more conflicts than it is capable of resolving. Facing it is the enterprise's informal organization, which includes the elementary groups of workers, various modes of lateral connections [liaison transversale] among these groups, similar associations among individuals in the managerial ap-

[1] See the extraordinarily vivid description of this informal organization in the Renault factories by Mothe, "L'Usine et la gestion ouvrière," in particular pp. 81–90, 101–2, and 106–10.

paratus, and lots of isolated individuals at various levels who in extreme cases only have among themselves the relationships that the official diagram assumes they have. These two organizations, however, are truncated. The formal organization is riddled with holes by the base, it never succeeds in actually encompassing the immense mass of executants. The informal organization is thwarted by the heights; beyond the elementary groups of executants, it actually includes the individuals formally belonging to the managerial apparatus only when this apparatus starts to grow to enormous proportions, when the division of labour is pushed even further and is accompanied by further collectivisation, and, finally, when the work of the lower echelons of the managerial apparatus is transformed into merely another form of executant work, thus creating even within this apparatus a category of executants that struggles against the summits.[2]

The formal organization, therefore, is not a facade; in its reality it coincides with the managerial stratum. The informal organization is not an excrescence appearing in the interstices of the formal organization; it tends to represent a different mode of operation of the enterprise, centred around the real situation of the executants. The direction, the dynamic, and the outlook of the two organizations are entirely opposite — and opposed on a social terrain that ultimately coincides with that of the struggle between directors and executants.

For a struggle takes place between these two modes of organization, which is in all respects permanent and which ends up becoming identical with the enterprise's two social poles. This is what industrial sociologists, who usually just criticize the formal schema as absurd, too often forget. This situation is analogous to the one we discussed apropos of Taylorism, and the shortcomings of a purely theoretical critique are the same here. The managerial apparatus is constantly struggling to impose its scheme of organization; the absurdity of this schema is not theoretical, it is the reality of capitalism. What is astonishing is not the theoretical absurdity of the schema but the fact that capitalism almost succeeds in transforming people into points on an organizational chart. It fails only to the exact extent that people struggle against this transformation.

This struggle begins at the level of the elementary group, but it extends throughout the entire enterprise through the very need to produce and to defend against management; ultimately, it embraces the entire mass of executants. Its extension is founded on several successive moments. The position of each elementary group is essentially identical to that of the others; each of these groups inevitably is led to cooperate with the rest of the enterprise;[3] and ultimately they all tend to merge in a class, the class of executants, defined by a community of situation, function, interests, attitude, mentality. Now, industrial sociology denies deep down this class perspective that verbally it accepts. It speaks of elementary groups as a universal phenomenon; but while it is willing to compare them with each other, it refuses to add them together. Nevertheless, it does more than just add them together since it recognizes in them the subject matter and a the same time the principle of the enterprise's informal organization. But it keeps these two moments — the identity of elementary groups throughout the enterprise and their cooperation — separate and does not venture to ask itself why there is a passage from one to the other. It therefore renders itself incapable of seeing the polarization of the enterprise between directors and executants and the struggle that sets them against each other, all the more so as it includes under the rubric of informal organization phenomena whose significations are radically different, such as when it

[2] An informal organization also exists, of course, at higher echelons in the management apparatus — but, as will be seen later, it obeys another type of logic than that of an informal organization of executants.

[3] See a description of this kind of cooperation in Mothe's "L'Usine," as well as the long quotations from Roy that we provide later.

compares the tendency of the executants to form their own type of organization to the formation of cliques and clans within the ruling bureaucracy. This actual refusal to place the firm's problems within a class perspective (and the process of class formation can be seen most vividly through an analysis of the enterprise) makes it sink into theoretical abstraction as well as get lost in "practical solutions," the Utopian character of which is based precisely on the imaginary suppression of the reality of classes.

We must add that Marxism admits of an abstraction that is almost symmetrical to the preceding one insofar as it has limited itself to immediately positing the concept of class and to directly opposing the proletariat and capitalism while neglecting the basic articulations within the enterprise and among the human groups within the enterprise. It thus has prevented itself from seeing the proletariat's vital process of class formation, of self-creation as the outcome of a permanent struggle that begins within production. It also has prevented itself from relating the proletariat's organizational problems in capitalist society to this process. And finally, insofar as the primary content of this struggle is the workers' tendency to manage their own work, it has prevented itself from posing workers' management as the central feature of the socialist program and from drawing from it all the possible implications. To the abstract concept of the proletariat corresponds the abstract concept of socialism as nationalization and planning, whose sole concrete content ultimately is revealed to be the totalitarian dictatorship of the representatives of this abstraction — of the bureaucratic party.

The Contradictions Proper to Management's Bureaucratic Apparatus

To achieve its own ends, the capitalist organization of production is obliged to pursue the fragmentation of production tasks and the atomisation of the producers ad infinitum. With respect to the end in view — the total subjugation of people — this process culminates in a double failure and leads to tremendous waste. At the same time, however, it gives rise very sharply to a second problem: that of how to recompose these operations of production into a whole. Individual jobs, supposedly defined, measured, monitored, etc., have to be integrated anew into a unified whole [ensemble], outside of which they are meaningless. Now, this reintegration can be accomplished in the capitalist factory only by the same authority following the same method of decomposition that "preceded" it, by a managerial apparatus separated from the producers that aims at subjecting them to capital's requirements and that treats them to this end as things, as fragments of the mechanical universe that are comparable to all others. Logically and technically, reintegration is only the flip side of decomposition; neither one can be carried out or have any meaning without the other. Economically and socially, the realization of the goals pursued during the phase of decomposition is impossible if these goals do not also predominate over the process of reintegration: The ground taken from the producers during the phase of decomposition could not be given back to them during the phase of reintegration without putting back into question the very structure of the relations of exploitation.[1]

As a consequence, the managerial apparatus will try to resolve the problem of reintegrating jobs itself, thereby denying deep down the collective character of production that it is obliged to grant on a formal level. For the managerial apparatus, the collectivity of workers is not a collectivity but a collection. Their labour is not a social process whose every part is in a constantly changing interdependence with all the others and with the whole, and whose every moment perpetually contains the seeds of something new; it is a sum of parts that someone from the outside can decompose and recompose at will, like a game of blocks, and that can change only insofar as something else is introduced into it. For it is only upon this condition that the command post of this collective activity could be transposed outside this activity with no repercussions. It is only upon this condition that exactly what one has put into its parts could be rediscovered in the whole, without losses or gains.

The managerial apparatus thus is obliged to take everything upon itself. In theory, all acts of production have to be doubled ideally and a priori within the bureaucratic apparatus; everything that involves a decision has to be worked out in advance — or after the fact — outside the operations of production themselves. Execution has to become pure execution, and symmetrically, management has to become absolute and perfect. Of course, such a situation never can be real-

[1] Of course, it is not a matter here of separate time periods, but of simultaneous facets, of logical moments in the process of organizing production.

ized; but the "organizational" activity of the managerial apparatus is dominated by the necessary pursuit of this chimera, which puts it up against insoluble contradictions.

First of all, the very concept of a perfect, separate management is contradictory. A perfect, separate management is possible only if its complementary pole, a perfect, separate execution, also is possible. Now, perfect, separate execution is nonsensical. As human activity — as activity that cannot be conferred upon automated machinery — execution necessarily involves the element of self-direction; it is not and never can be execution pure and simple. Man is not and cannot be a perfect, separate executant, and this singular attempt to make him one creates in him both a situation and reactions that produce the opposite effect. This contrary situation is established because the suppression of the faculties of and capacities for self-direction (which are indispensable for tasks of "execution") are precisely what make him a bad executant. And these contrary reactions are created because man always tends in one fashion or another to take on the direction of his own activity and he revolts against this expropriation of his self-directing activity to which he is subjected. During the historical stages that preceded capitalism, this contradiction remained abstract and merely potential, basically because the form and content of productive activities were fixed once and for all. But capitalist production, which is in constant upheaval is continually obliged to call upon the human faculties of its executants in order to function. In this way the contradiction becomes an active and actual one, since the way the system functions leads it to affirm two things at once: "The worker should confine himself to the pure and simple execution of the tasks prescribed to him"; and, "The worker should bring about the end in view whatever the real conditions and available means and no matter how far these depart from theoretical conditions and means."

This gap cannot be bridged. Perfect, separate management can be conceived of only as the organ promulgating the perfect plan, which obviously cannot exist. Such a perfect plan would imply that management has absolute foresight and exhaustive information, both of which are impossible in themselves, two times impossible for a separate management, and three times impossible for a management that exploits the producers. Of course, modern industry tends to "rationalize" the set of conditions, means, and objects of production, and this rationalization is presented as the elimination of chance, of the unforeseen, and as the creation of standardized conditions for the production process as a whole. Under such conditions, it ought to be possible, after a period of trial and error and through successive approximations, to reach a "point of rest," after which production finally could unfold according to plan. But this would imply that from this moment on the conditions, methods, instruments, and objects of production were unalterably fixed. Now, the very essence of modern industry is perpetual change. From a large-scale point of view, one stage of technical development hardly has arrived at a level of "consolidation" when a new stage comes crashing onto the scene. From a small-scale point of view — which is just as important in the everyday life of the factory — "consolidation" is never achieved; "small" changes continually are being made in the materials, the machinery, the objects manufactured, and the ways people and machines are arranged (and these changes are precisely the expression of this process of "rationalization"). Thus, the plan has to be perpetually modified, and there never is time perfectly to adapt it to the unfolding of the production process.

Indeed, "standardization" remains an ideal norm that is never realized, for both social and "natural" reasons. Everything used at any given stage of the production process already is the result of previous industrial labour. In theory, this result, this product — whether we are talking about raw materials or a machine or a detachable part — is supposed to conform to a rigorous defini-

tion, to precise specifications of size, shape, quality, and so on within set margins of tolerance. It suffices that any one of these material or ideal components not correspond in reality to its theoretical definition for the plan not to be able to be put into effect as is; this does not mean, of course, that production collapses or even that there is necessarily any significant damage — but it implies that only the vital intervention of real people can serve as a substitute for some now out-of-date directive and can adapt on the spot the available means — which are different from the theoretical ones — to the end in view.

That all the components of any job are the result of a previous job signifies that as soon as the actual results of this job deviate at a given stage from the "theoretical" results, this gap has repercussions in one fashion or another upon the subsequent stages of the manufacturing process. Now, gaps of this kind are absolutely unavoidable in capitalist production, not only because the exploited executant is not interested in the result of his work and therefore often turns in "made up" results (which go along with a whole gamut of means for struggling [against the factory's "inspectors"), but also because the compartmentalized executant does not know and by definition should not know what is important and what is not important in what he is doing. All specifications that are set for him by the production directives he receives seem to be of equal importance (with allowed margins of tolerance). In fact they are not, either in the absolute or from the point of view of possibly making up for some gap without difficulties arising at a subsequent stage in the production process. Inasmuch as the executant, pressed by time restrictions, cannot handle everything at once, he will take shortcuts at random. For its part, the planning department cannot establish which aspects are truly important and which ones are not: On the one hand, it does not itself know which ones are important, for the establishment of such a hierarchy results from actual practice within an industrial setting from which it is, by definition, separated; on the other hand, its role is to present all directives as equally and absolutely important. Thus, by rendering an intelligent execution of tasks impossible, the methods of a separate managerial stratum themselves lead toward their own defeat.[2]

Similarly, there is always an unforeseen "natural" element, even under the conditions of large-scale modern industry. Even materials manufactured under the best possible conditions present specific, unanticipated problems that must be compensated for in an equally unforeseen manner as they are worked upon. Even electronic computers, which are manufactured not under industrial conditions but under laboratory conditions, break down or go haywire for unknown reasons.[3] At each new stage, modern industry stretches to the limit its exploitation of the possibilities of knowledge and of matter; during each new period, it tends to work at the edge of the known and the feasible. This continuous displacement of its frontiers signifies that it can never comfortably remain within the regions it has already fully explored. A new territory has hardly been opened up when it must already be exploited under the conditions of mass production. Its means expand at a dizzying rate — but so do its objectives and manufacturing requirements. Instruments become finer and finer and more and more precise — but at the same time the limits of tolerance become narrower and narrower. In the past, the "unforeseen," the "irrational," and the "accidental" consisted of a cleft in the steel bar; today it can lie in infinitesimal irregularities in the chemical composition of molecules. It is not the degree of matter's resistance to man that is

[2] See in this regard Mothe's long exposition in "L'Usine"; likewise those of Vivier (Socialisme ou Barbarie, 12 [August 1953], pp. 46–47, 14 [April 1954], pp. 56–57) and of Paul Romano (ibid., 2 [May 1949], pp. 89–91 [T/E: 1972 American edition, pp. 12–14].)

[3] Cf. N. Wiener, Cybernetics (New York: Wiley, 1948), pp. 172–73.

diminishing, it is the line on which this resistance becomes effective that is being displaced — so that the gap between theory and reality can always be filled in only by practice, only by man's simultaneously rational and concrete intervention. But this practice itself is constantly being elevated to a higher level, and it presupposes that the individual's ever more highly developed capabilities — which are absolutely incompatible with the role of a pure and simple executant — will be put to work. These are the reasons why the reality of production always deviates in a more or less appreciable manner from the plan and from production directives — and why this gap can be filled only by means of the practice, the invention, the creativity of the mass of executants. Each time that a new manufacturing process is introduced or a new product model is to be manufactured, and after the factory's various departments and engineers have spent months or years developing and "perfecting" the process or product in question, weeks or months will pass before production begins to flow in a somewhat satisfactory manner. Car drivers know that when a factory "launches" a new model, the cars produced during the first few months generally have serious defects.[4] And yet, their "prototype" had been tested for years, they had driven it in the Sahara and in Greenland, etc. But the time that has elapsed between the debut of the new manufactured product and the rolling-out of nearly satisfactory copies is the time needed for the mass of the factory's executants as a whole to give concrete form to initial manufacturing directives under real work conditions, to fill in the holes in the production plan, to resolve unforeseen problems, to adapt the manufacturing process to their own needs in their defence against exploitation (for example, to "make do" with the blueprint "specs" they are given), etc. Equilibrium between the production plan, the real state of the factory from the viewpoint of what is possible within the manufacturing process and the workers' struggle against exploitation thus is attained — until a new modification is introduced.

Management, of course, is "conscious" in general of these gaps between the production plan and what really goes on in the factory, and in principle it is supposed to fill them in itself. In practice, this obviously is not achievable: If each time something went wrong it was necessary to stop everything and ask for instructions back up the hierarchical chain of command, the factory would accomplish only a small portion of its production goals. Let it be said in passing that just because management is forced to tolerate the indispensable initiatives of the executants does not make the latter's role any easier. The managerial apparatus is both jealous of its prerogatives and completely fearful of its responsibilities; as much as it can, it will avoid tackling a question unless it is "covered," but it will harshly reproach its subordinates for having done so themselves. If the initiative succeeds, it will merely grumble, and then will try above all to grab the credit itself;

[4] "After each model change, the supervisors frenetically run through the factory trying to get the plans and machinery which have been studied for months in the offices to work normally. At this moment the foreman is boss; he puts the workers where he wants, he breaks up old groups, he asserts his authority. It is the moment of greatest disorganization in the factory. For precisely this reason few Detroit autoworkers will buy a new car immediately after the model changes. They leave this lemon to people who don't work in a factory and therefore don't know any better. It is only when the workers are able to reestablish a certain amount of order in production that things go smoothly. The foreman has been put in charge of a group of workers and he is told what he should make them do. The organization he brings about is always bad. The assembly line goes too quickly or else there is only a single man where there should be two. The workers explain that to him, but he has his orders and cannot make any changes based on what the workers say. The men therefore are obliged to take the situation in hand themselves. They screw up the work so that the assembly line has to be stopped. Finally, after this situation has gone on for some time, management wises up, production is adjusted, and the cars produced are worth the price of purchase" (The American Civilization, monotyped text produced by the American group from Detroit, Correspondence, p. 47; [T/E: despite a long search, no copy of this text has been found; we therefore have retranslated Castoriadis's French back into English.])

if the initiative fails, it will deal with them severely.[5] For the executant, the ideal attitude is for him to take initiatives that are really effective while making it seem like he is following all the official directives — though this is not always easy. The factory thus comes to constitute in places a double world — where people make it seem like they are doing one thing while doing another.

Both the foresight required for planning and the need for ongoing readjustment of the plan to a constantly evolving reality pose the problem of how to obtain information about what is going on in production. This problem quickly becomes insoluble for a bureaucratic managerial apparatus. The ultimate source of all information is the executants who are constantly engaged in the battle for production. Now, these people do not collaborate in the process; not only do they not necessarily inform management about the situation, but very often they are led into a tacit conspiracy to hide the real situation from management. The managerial apparatus can react to this only by creating special organs for obtaining information — which quickly run up against the same difficulty, since they too live to obtain original information from the outside. The conspiracy surrounding, the obtainment of information indeed is not limited to executants. The managerial apparatus itself participates in it. In fact, this is an essential aspect of the activity of its members. They make up the results of their own activity or the activity of the sector for which they are responsible. Their fate, the fate of their clan or their department depends upon it.[6]

Obtaining information, however, is not simply the gathering of "facts." It already is their choice, but it is also and much more their elaboration, the disentangling of the relationships and perspectives that tie facts together. This is impossible outside a conceptual framework, therefore outside a set of organized ideas, therefore outside a theory (even if it remains unconscious). Consequently, all information the managerial apparatus may have at its disposal is undermined by its theory of society — or of industrial reality. This is plainly apparent when we consider the bureaucratic apparatus that runs the entire society — the State or bureaucratic party. To run society presupposes that one knows it, and to know society signifies that one has an adequate theoretical conception of it. But today's leaders can try to grasp social reality only by subordinating it to absurd schemata. The same is true of their ideologists. Sometimes these ideologists plan out the operations of society, using the functioning of a mechanism as their model; at other times, when disheartened by the failure of this absurd attempt at comparison, they take refuge in irrationalism, the accidental and the arbitrary. We will encounter these problems again later.

The ruling apparatus of the enterprise is faced with the same questions and the same impossible options. The reality it needs to know is the reality of production. The latter is first and last a human reality. The most important facts are those that concern the situation, the activity, and the fate of people in the production process. Obviously, it is impossible to know these facts from the outside. Moreover, management does not bother itself very much about them. To the extent that it is obliged to worry about them, however, it can do so only by considering them as external facts, by transforming them into mechanical entities capable of being observed — in short, by destroying their very nature. In management's eyes, consequently, the worker either does not exist at all or else he exists only as a system of nerves and muscles capable of carrying out a certain quantity of gestures — gestures that can be increased in proportion to the amount of money he

[5] See Mothe, "L'Usine," p. 88.

[6] See RPB, in SB 1, pp. 279–81 [T/E: see "The Proletarian Revolution against the Bureaucracy," this volume, the third unnumbered subsection of the section entitled "Bureaucratic Planning"].

is promised. This entirely imaginary view of the worker is the basis for the "knowledge" of the reality of production that management possesses. In the manager's very gaze is incorporated, through a process of construction, the negation of the inherent [propre] reality of the object he claims to be looking at, for recognition of this inherent reality would imply, conversely, that the manager denies himself qua manager.

This situation hardly is modified at all when the crude old methods and the schema of "molecules irresistibly attracted by money" are abandoned in favour of more modern conceptions and the discoveries of industrial sociology. Only the nature of the "laws" supposed to rule people and their relations changes; the basic attitude remains the same. It no longer is assumed that the worker is capable of murdering his buddy and killing himself at his job for a few extra pennies — it now is assumed, quite to the contrary, that he is essentially determined by a "group solidarity." But in both cases, it is merely a matter of management's knowledge about the workers, and this knowledge is supposed to allow management to utilize them better for purposes of production. Group solidarity in its turn has become the new external motive determining the worker's acts; knowing the motive and acting upon it, one can bring the worker to do what is wanted of him. Management's situation still remains that of the engineer charged with laying out and ordering the assembly and operation of the parts of the human mechanism that make up the enterprise and of which he knows the laws. That the author of these laws is no longer Bentham, but Freud or Elton Mayo, changes nothing. And we need hardly add that it is still impossible to know industrial reality. Mired in this perspective and utilized toward these ends, psychology, psychoanalysis, and sociology are emptied of their content and transformed into their opposite.[7] That the group, for example, is not for its members an external motive, that it is the unity of self-determination creating and recreating itself, that thereby it sooner or later can only set itself against every kind of external management that tries to impose itself on this group — these truths can be of no service to management, for they challenge its very foundations. Management can possess only the theory of its own practice, i.e., of its social existence.

But contradictions that are just as insoluble tear apart the managerial apparatus, independently, so to speak, of its permanent struggle against the executants. A series of factors, all of which derive in the last analysis from the tendency to confine labourers to more and more limited tasks of execution, leads to an extraordinary proliferation within the managerial apparatus itself. Taking on itself a constantly increasing number of tasks, the managerial apparatus can exist only as an enormous collective organ. In a large enterprise, the individuals employed in offices and departments already constitute in themselves a sizable enterprise.[8] This collective organ itself undergoes a twofold division of labour within its own ranks. On the one hand, the managerial apparatus is subdivided into "specialized branches" — the various "services" in the enterprise's offices. On the other hand, within this apparatus as a whole and within each of these "services," the division between directors and executants inevitably is instaurated anew. By this very fact, all the aforementioned conflicts reappear within the managerial apparatus.

[7] For example, every form of psychoanalysis worthy of the name is based on the idea that the freedom of the subject is at one and the same time the end and the means of the therapeutic process — and every utilization of psychoanalysis by industrial sociology is based on the manipulation of the subject, both as means and as ultimate end.

[8] In the Renault factories, the percentage of "monthly salaried workers" went from 6.5 of the total in 1919 to 11.7 in 1930, 17.8 in 1937, and 20.2 in January 1954 (Touraine, L'Evolution, pp 164–65). On the development of offices in American industry, see C. Wright Mills, White Collar (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956), pp. 65–70.

The organization of work within the managerial apparatus obviously can occur only under the same forms of "rationalization" as were applied to production proper: subdivision and compartmentalization of tasks, transformation of individuals into a mass of anonymous and interchangeable executants, etc. It engenders the same consequences in both places. In order to tame the workers' struggle, management thus ends up introducing the class struggle into its own ranks. Condemned to a compartmentalized job, deprived of all meaningful skills, reduced to salaries comparable to those paid to workers, deprived (in statistical terms) of any real chance of advancement, the vast majority of employees in the managerial apparatus now have trouble distinguishing themselves from their fellow workers on the shop floor; at bottom, only illusions that are being increasingly undermined by their real situation are capable of keeping them separate from the workers.[9] Independent of this process that unifies the various strata of executants in the enterprise, the principal result of the appearance of this mass of executants within the managerial apparatus is that management no longer has even itself at its own disposal; even if they are not in solidarity with the workers, vis-à-vis their work the lower strata of nonproduction employees have the same attitude as production workers.

On the other hand, the unavoidable fragmentation of the managerial apparatus into a series of specialized services inevitably creates a problem of reuniting the activities, methods, and viewpoints of these services. Each of them tends to champion its own viewpoint at the expense of the others, for this is the sole means by which it can assert its importance and enlarge its position within the apparatus. Now, the summit of the managerial apparatus, which is charged with resolving these conflicts, does not in general have any rational criterion for doing so. To do this, indeed, it would have to be able to take on itself all opposing points of view; i.e., it would have to in fact "duplicate" all the costly services that have been set up so laboriously. This is in fact the solution to which a number of managers are led: They surround themselves with an exclusive personal team, a sort of private and clandestine general staff.[10] Management thus is obliged to instaurate its own informal organization in opposition to the formal one it has already set up. However, it is obvious not only that these two solutions refute each other (either the clandestine general staff is useless or else it proves how useless a good part of the official departments are) but also that their juxtaposition can only be the source of new conflicts. And ultimately, top management does not run anything at all; it is reduced to arbitrating between opposing viewpoints and it does this in a truly arbitrary fashion, for it knows hardly anything about the problems in question. Logically speaking, its sole foundation now is merely that whatever decision it makes, even an arbitrary or absurd one, is more valuable than the total absence of decision making.[11]

[9] In this regard, the analysis of the attitude of these strata, as furnished by C. Wright Mills in the final chapters of his White Collar, has the following shortcomings:[1] It mixes disparate categories of "white-collar proletarians" whose situations and outlooks differ fundamentally; and[2] it does not take into account the dynamic of their situation. In particular, illusions about "status" will not outlive for long the real conditions that once had nourished them. The phenomenon of the industrialization of office work obviously is of decisive importance in this regard. Cf. R. Berthier's excellent analysis, "Une Experience d'organisation ouvriere," in 5. ou B., 20 (December 1956), pp. 6 ff.

[10] At an entirely different level, this phenomenon of "duplicating" the bureaucratic structure that blankets all of society with a more exclusive managing organ, the Party (which unsuccessfully tries to be the authoritative seat of reunification and thereby also tends to render the State's entire bureaucratic apparatus useless) has been brought to light by Claude Lefort, starting off from the speeches of the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU. See, in 5. ou B., 19 (July 1956), his article "Le Totalitarisme sans Staline," in particular pp. 45 ff. [now in Elements, pp. 166 ff.; T/E: 1979 ed., pp. 203 ff.]. Let us add that in duplicating the structure of the State bureaucracy, the Party is obliged to reproduce it within its own ranks, creating specialized commissions, etc. That is to say, this is no solution to the problem, by near or by far.

[11] On the necessary incompetence of managers within the present system, see C. Wright Mills, The Power Elite

The absence of rational criteria capable of aiding in the resolution of conflicts between opposing points of view that arise unavoidably within management's bureaucratic apparatus is combined with another phenomenon of capital importance: the absence of rational criteria concerning the placement of individuals within this apparatus. These two factors are at the root of the traits that are characteristic of every modern bureaucratic apparatus: the struggle of all against all for "advancement," the formation of cliques and clans that dominate in a hidden [occulte] fashion the "official" life of the apparatus, and the transformation of objective options into stakes in the struggle between cliques and clans.

We must fully understand the meaning of this analysis of the contradictions of bureaucratic management. We are not comparing the latter to a perfect management in order to draw out the failings it exhibits in relation to such an imaginary standard. There is no perfect management, whatever the social structure (even if it be the organized collectivity of producers), and such a comparison would be completely meaningless. From every standpoint we have examined, a human management would encounter problems as well as difficulties as to how to solve such problems. The preceding discussion has no bearing on the possibility of eliminating these problems. It shows rather that the structure and the nature of the present form of management, which is a bureaucratic form of management external to the activities it is supposed to direct, make its problems insoluble, or at best, prevent its problems from being "resolved" except at the price of enormous wastefulness and perpetual crises.

Perfect foresight will never exist. And it need not exist for production to be organized rationally. The present structure, however, is implicitly based on the hypothesis that such foresight exists, and that management possesses it. Since in theory the producers are incapable of carrying out "on the job" the permanent readjustment of the plan to reality, this adjustment must be carried out a priori and once and for all by management. By virtue of this, the "production plan" — of the enterprise or of the entire economy — acquires an absolute value. Since the permanent process of making adjustments between foresight — without which there is no rational action — and reality is upset by the fact that managers are radically separated from executants, balance can be re-established in each instance only by fits and starts, and through specific, belated, spasmodic interventions.

The problem of obtaining adequate information will always exist. But the present structure renders the problem literally insoluble, for its very existence drives the whole of society to conspire to mask reality. The problem of making individuals adequate for the functions they fulfil will exist for a long time to come. But, by arranging these functions along a hierarchical pyramid, by tying not only the economic fate of the individual but also his total situation and ultimately his sense of self-worth to his success in a desperate and absurd struggle against everyone else, the present structure destroys all possibility of a rational solution. Human society will always be faced with options that are not geometrical problems admitting of a single, unique solution at the end of one rigorously defined path. But the present structure either fails to pose these problems explicitly or resolves them in terms of factors that are external to their content.

Now, unless there is a radical overthrow of the present structure, this separate type of management is inevitable. The activities of thousands of individuals and elementary groups have to be coordinated in one fashion or another. The "universal" point of view of the enterprise's opera-

(New York: Oxford University Press, 1956), especially pp. 138–46 as concerns managers of industry, pp. 205–24 as concerns military leaders, and the final chapter of the book.

tion has to prevail over the "particular" viewpoints of the workers or of their groups. Ultimately, then, a particular group of managers has to take it upon themselves to impose this "universal" viewpoint upon the totality of producers. From then on, conflict is inevitable.

First of all, for each group of workers, the imperatives arising out of this "universal" standpoint of the management take the form of an arbitrarily imposed external law. Its justification cannot even be known, and by this very fact it therefore appears to be completely irrational. But management's "universal" point of view is in fact another particular point of view; this viewpoint, which is partial in both senses of the word [partial et partiel], is the viewpoint of a particular stratum that has access to only a part of reality, that lives a life apart from actual production, and that has its own interests to put forward. Inversely, the "particular" point of view of groups of producers is in fact a universal point of view. The point of view of each elementary group is found again in all the others. The norms arising within them are identical. The interests they try to advance are the same. Management endeavours to think about the actual reality of production. The producers are this actual reality itself. Taken in their totality, they embrace the totality of aspects of the activity of the enterprise — in fact, they are this totality.

But are they really? Can they, across the many shops and offices of the enterprise, actually form an organic unity? Are they not all riveted to specific places on the total machine of the workplace? Is not each of them deprived of a view of everything else and incapable of connecting with the overall living totality of the enterprise? An analysis can show their mutual identity, and it can combine them. But can they themselves become united? Only the analysis of working-class struggles can furnish an answer to these questions.

The Working-Class Struggle against Alienation

The capitalist organization of production is profoundly contradictory. Capitalist management claims it deals only with the individual worker, whereas in fact production is carried out by the collectivity of workers. It claims to reduce the worker to a limited and determined set of tasks, but it is obliged at the same time to rely upon the universal capacities he develops both as a function of and in opposition to the situation in which he is placed. By exhaustively defining in advance the methods by which these tasks are to be executed, it claims to remove from them every element involving managerial duties. But as such, an exhaustive definition always is impossible. Production can be carried out only insofar as the worker himself organizes his work and goes beyond his theoretical role of pure and simple executant.

The conflicts that result from this situation culminate in a veritable anarchy of production in each enterprise. But they create at the same time a contradictory situation and a contradictory attitude in the workers themselves. The conditions in which they are placed impel them to organize their production work in the most effective manner, to upgrade the machinery, to invent new processes, etc. The way capitalism organizes production obliges them to do so, for when something goes wrong it is the workers who pay (and who cannot defend themselves merely by pointing out that the factory is badly organized). On the other hand, however, as soon as they manifest themselves, the workers' organization and creativity are combated by the managerial apparatus. In any case, these qualities are continually being disrupted and butchered by this apparatus. Indeed, under present conditions, improvements in the organization and methods of production initiated by workers essentially profit capital, which often then seizes hold of them and turns them against the workers. The workers know it and consequently they restrict their participation in production, both consciously as well as unconsciously. They restrict their output; they keep their ideas to themselves; they make use of improvements on their individual machines that they carefully hide from the foremen; they organize among themselves to carry out their work, all the while keeping up a facade of respect for the official way they are supposed to organize their work — and so on.[1]

This contradictory attitude on the part of the workers signifies that the insurmountable conflict that tears through capitalist society is transposed into the heart of the proletariat itself, into the behaviour of the individual worker as well as into the attitudes of the working class. It would be entirely wrong to represent the proletariat as a full positivity, like some kind of class that

[1] See the articles by Romano, Vivier, and Mothe already cited. Noting the relatively small number of "suggestions" from workers that are aimed at improving production, Touraine writes: "How is this relative failure to be explained? In the first place by remembrance of the past. The worker, used to seeing his suggestions and his initiatives turned back against him when the time-study men are called in, abandons his former mistrust only slowly" (L'Evolulion, p. 121). "To abandon slowly" is a euphemism: The figures cited by Touraine refer to the period 1945–47. What has happened since then has not prompted the workers to abandon their mistrust. Quite the contrary.

already bears within itself the solution to all problems and that an enemy class and a form of social organization that remains foreign alone prevent it from achieving such solutions. That would be both a demagogic mystification and a poor, superficial theory. Capitalism would not be able to continue to exist if the crisis it is undergoing did not have repercussions within the proletariat itself. The oppression, the exploitation, and the alienation created by capitalism express themselves in the working class through contradictions that till now it has not succeeded in overcoming. The positivity of the working class comes from the fact that it does not remain simply torn by these contradictions, but constantly struggles to overcome them and that, at the most diverse levels, the meaning [contenu] of this struggle is the autonomous organization of the working class, workers' management of production, and, ultimately, the reorganization of society.

Bureaucrats — and sometimes even revolutionary militants deformed by a narrow "Marxism" they have outgrown but have not been able to shed — do not want to see in the proletariat's struggles anything but a tendency toward improving its standard of living, or at best a struggle "against exploitation." But the proletariat's struggle is not and cannot be simply a struggle "against" exploitation; it necessarily tends to be a struggle for a new organization of the relations of production. These are only two aspects of the same thing, for the root of exploitation is the present organization of the relations of production. The worker can be exploited, i.e., the fruits of his labour can be expropriated from him, only insofar as the direction of his labour is expropriated from him. And the struggle against exploitation quickly places before him the problem of management. This always is true on the shop floor and periodically on the level of the factory and of society as a whole.

Usually one fixes one's eyes on the "historical" moments of proletarian action (revolutions and general strikes) or, at the very least, on what can be called its explicit organization and activity (trade unions, parties, big strikes). But these actions and organizations can be comprehended only as moments of a permanent process of action and organization that finds its origin in the depths of everyday life in the workplace and that can sustain itself and remain adequate to its intentions only on the condition that it continually returns to these depths. Under the title of implicit struggle we include this everyday activity and organization, the capital importance of which must henceforth be given full recognition. It is implicit in the proletariat's existence, in its very condition as being proletarian. The informal or elementary organization of workers is only one aspect of this struggle. Organization is only one logical moment of the process of struggle — and the same is true of action. Struggle includes action, organization, and the setting of objectives. Our purpose is much more general than the analysis of informal organization since it also includes both informal actions and informal objectives. This implicit struggle is only the flip side, one could say, of the proletariat's everyday work. Work in the capitalist enterprise does not occur without struggle. This situation follows directly from an organization of work based upon the opposition between directors and executants.

Thus, the capitalist organization of work tends to rely upon the definition of work norms. Workers struggle against these norms. In this struggle, only a "defence against exploitation" can be seen. But in fact, it contains infinitely more: Precisely because he is trying to defend himself against exploitation, the worker is obliged to demand the right to determine his own work pace and to refuse to be treated like a thing.

Once a norm is defined, problems are far from being settled. It is only the boundaries of a battlefield that have just been defined. In this battle, the battle over actual output, the workers

are led to organize themselves, to invent new means of acting, and to define objectives. Nothing is given to them in advance; everything has to be created and conquered in the midst of struggle.

The dynamic of the sequence of objectives, organization, and means of action, is plain to see. The workers aim for the maximum amount of pay for "an honest day's work." This maximum has meaning only as a collective maximum — in other words, every attempt to reach a maximum amount of pay for an individual quickly is revealed to be illusory and ultimately is turned against the individual who made the attempt. The achievement of this initial objective implies the pursuit of the greatest possible amount of freedom within the given framework of the capitalist enterprise. It equally implies the pursuit of the maximum amount of real efficiency in production — an indispensable condition for achieving labour savings. The workers thereby are led to struggle against the entire set of methods for organizing production along capitalist lines. They are led equally to organize themselves in an "elementary" or "informal" fashion under forms that capitalism constantly breaks up and that they continually recreate.

We are not saying that the workers always or even most of the time achieve these objectives. In the last analysis, they cannot achieve them without smashing the capitalist organization of the enterprise — which is impossible without at the same time smashing the capitalist organization of society. Setbacks and defeats are inevitable phases in this process. But as long as the capitalist organization is there, the struggle will always be reborn from its ashes and will be led both by its own dynamic and by the objective dynamic of capitalist society to widen and deepen. This is the meaning of this struggle that we have been trying to bring out.

Neither are we saying that this meaning is simple, a state of grace automatically investing the working-class condition, a socialist apriority innate to proletarians. The proletariat is not socialist — it becomes so, or more exactly, it makes itself socialist. And, long before it came to appear as socialist by organizing itself into trade unions and parties with this name, it makes appear the embryonic elements of a new form of social organization, of a new type of behaviour and of a new human way of thinking, in its everyday life and in its daily struggle within the capitalist enterprise. It is upon this terrain that we will now begin to analyse the dynamic and the signification of working-class struggles.

The Struggle over Output

The tendency of workers to regulate their own work pace to the greatest extent possible — by combating management's norms, and then by "bending" these norms with all the means at their disposal — appears to management as "restricting output" or "restricting production." Faced with such curtailment, the classical "rational" counter response is "output-based wages" or "piece-rate wages."[1] The worker thus will be driven, "in his own interest," to increase output to the maximum. In doing so, he also will, incidentally, provide indications of what levels of output can be attained — which will make it possible to revise the norms downward when the time comes.

Industrial sociologists (mainly the Elton Mayo school) have criticized this method as "mechanistic" because it postulates that the worker is an "economic man" whose sole motive is getting the maximum amount of earnings whereas in reality other motives play a much more important role. This critique starts from a correct idea in order to come up with a false conclusion. It gets at the capitalist system as a whole, but falls far short of the problem that concerns us. Workers certainly are not "economic men." They behave exactly like "economic men," however, toward management. They pay management back in its own coin.

First of all, workers generally do not go for the efficiency bait, for experience teaches them that after a short period of receiving bonus pay a draconian reduction in the norms will supervene.[2] Next, they discover ways to get an increase in wages without a real or apparent increase in output.

In small- or medium-scale production with individual bonuses, the means used by workers are practically unstoppable. Taking as an example the shop described by an American author,[3] these means can be set forth as follows.

1. To avoid having the norms revised after output increases, the workers never show (which does not mean that they never attain) results surpassing 145–150 percent of the norm.

2. On the "gravy jobs," which represent nearly half the jobs done in the shop and which are defined by the possibility of going far beyond normal output, when the workers cannot "fix" the actual output so as not to appear to exceed these set maximums, they "loaf," either literally or figuratively. The resulting wastefulness is estimated by the author with the help of some long and involved, but quite conservative, calculations at around 40 percent of the workers' time — and that, in his opinion, is an "underestimation."

3. On the "stinkers," which represent the other half of the shop's jobs and which are defined by the fact that it is impossible to get a substantial pay bonus no matter how much effort is made

[1] The types, formulas, and names for "wages based on output" are innumerable. But as far as we are concerned here, only the general meaning [contenu] of these formulas matters: The worker's wage is, within ample limits, a function of the quantity of production provided.

[2] One of the workers in the shop where Roy worked said to him, "Don't you know that if I turned in $1.50 an hour on these pump bodies tonight, the whole God-damned Methods Department would be down here tomorrow! And they'd retime this job so quick it would make your head swim! And when they'd retime it, they'd cut the price in half?"

[3] Roy, in his articles cited earlier.

(the cut-off point seems to be, in the case analysed by Roy, in the neighbourhood of 120 percent of the norm), the workers generally "goldbrick" and fall back on the base rate (the hourly rate determined in collective bargaining, whatever the output actually achieved). There is, nevertheless, an important exception: If the "stinker" in question comes in large lots or is a job that must be done often, there begins a relentless struggle with the time-study men to revise the norms.[4] The wastefulness brought about in such a case is, according to the author, comparable to that of the previous case.

4. The very existence of these two types of jobs (as well as other minor jobs paid by the hour: machinery setups, jobs for which norms have not yet been established, "reworking" defective pieces) gives the workers ample opportunities to increase their pay without their apparent output going beyond the "normal" rate. Thus, if a worker has a "gravy job" for four hours, during which he could work at 200 percent of the norm, and a "stinker" for four hours, during which he will not be able to work at the norm, he can choose between three options.

He can (a) follow management's formal rules, in which case he will make a twelve-hour wage (4 x 2 + 4 x 1) — with the certainty that a few days later the time allotted for the "gravy job" will be reduced. He can (b) hold back on the gravy job to 150 percent; he then will make a ten-hour wage (4 x 1.5 + 4 x 1). Last, he can (c) work at 200 percent of the norm on the "gravy job" and at 100 percent on the other one, but report that the first job was carried out in 5'/3 hours and the second in 2% hours. It then will appear that the worker had worked at 150 percent of the norm in both cases, he will make a twelve-hour wage, the maximum amount of production will be carried out — and there will be no danger of the time allotments being reduced.[5]

The worker can obtain a similar result by changing the apparent allocation of his time between the "gravy jobs" and jobs paid by the hour (with the difference that in this case he increases his pay without increasing production).

5. For the workers to be able to realize these possibilities, most of the work rules established by management have to be broken. In fact, the whole system of capitalist "rationalization" of labour is struck down by it; management loses the ability to determine the breakdown of the workers' hours between various jobs, and ultimately all its accounting procedures and calculations of profitability are utterly ruined. Therefore, management has to react and it can do so only by instaurating additional "controls." If these controls are "effective," they lead the workers toward solution (b) as described in 4 — namely, restriction of output, and hence wastefulness.

These controls, however, quickly become ineffective. If the inspectors remain in their offices, they basically can inspect nothing at all. This is the case with the time-study men, who are used in fact, according to Roy's phrase, as the true "hatchet men" of upper management: Though they are merciless against machine operators whom they find breaking the rules and get them dismissed immediately, these time-study men described by Roy appear only very rarely on the shop floor. If they are stationed in the shop, they cannot resist the continuous pressure of the

[4] Roy describes at length an epic struggle in such a case between the four best workers in the shop and the time-study men, a struggle that lasted nine months and only came to an end when the workers won. This outcome makes one think — just as Mothe's remarks ("L'Usine," pp. 91–92) do — that the great majority of jobs are "stinkers" at the outset and that it is the workers' struggle against the time allotments that progressively transforms them into "gravy jobs."

[5] This third option, very likely applied as soon as the conditions for it are given, corresponds exactly to the concept of "maximization of profits in the long run" recently discovered by bourgeois economists as the principle that ought to guide the decision making of capitalist entrepreneurs.

operators for long.[6] Such is the case with the "time checkers" who are supposed to record the time at the beginning and the end of each job specifically to prevent any "fixing" of real output. Quite soon these time checkers themselves ask the operators, "When do you want me to check you?" In fact, not only production workers but all "service" employees who are in direct and continuous contact with them ("time checkers," tool-crib attendants, stock-chasers, setup men, inspectors, and ultimately even foremen) continually cooperate to a greater or lesser degree to break management's rules (which in their eyes, and objectively, are absurd) and to allow the workers to "figure the angles." "Figuring the angles" would be impossible without this constant cooperation involving all the parts of the managerial apparatus that are in ongoing contact with the producers.

Not being able to trust its human representatives, management is obliged once again to fall back on impersonal and abstract regulations. It introduces new regulations aimed at making the transgression of its rules "objectively impossible." But the objective observance of these new regulations of necessity depends in turn upon human control: Their effectiveness presupposes that the problem they are called upon to resolve is already resolved. From this standpoint, additional regulations are made in vain, for workers in cooperation with the lower strata of the "auxiliary services" quickly succeed in circumventing them.

But there is more: Most of the time these regulations introduce an additional degree of wastefulness and anarchy. The operators and the service employees are obliged by this very fact to devote part of their efforts not only to circumventing the regulations but to compensating for its irrational effects.

Thus, in the factory described by Donald Roy, in order to keep the machine operators from "figuring the angles" (allocating the apparent distribution of their time between different jobs as it suits them), management appoints "time checkers." In fact, the latter become the operators' allies and are turned against management. At a certain point, management decides to react and to make a "ruling" aimed at making the operators' "make-out angles" "objectively impossible." The "ruling" in question forbids the operators from keeping their tools and other auxiliary means of production (the "setups") next to their machines after a given job is finished as well as from getting what they need from the tool-crib attendants "in advance" (these two practices obviously being necessary to do any other work than what they are supposed to be doing). Tool orders in triplicate are used to guarantee adequate monitoring. At the end of each shift, the work-order card and all tool setups have to be turned in to the tool-crib attendants, whether the job is finished or not. The setup work then has to be started all over again by the next shift.

The rule's effects — which indeed have been foreseen by experienced workers — are not long in coming: a considerable increase in the tool-crib attendants' workload resulting both from increased paperwork and from the need to reassemble and re-sort the requested tools after each shift (up until then, the machine operators and setup men served themselves from the tool crib); also, there is a considerable loss of time for the workers and long lines begin to form at the tool crib. But management's desired result is not achieved: The triplicate forms ire filled out and exchanged each time — but the tool-crib attendants continue to supply the operators in advance with their tools.

Faced with this situation, management, four months later, modifies its first rule with a second one. To avoid long lines forming in front of the crib the shifts no longer are obliged to turn in

[6] Let us recall that the stomach ulcer is the occupational illness of the foreman.

their work-order cards and tools at the end of their workday, but tools can be furnished from then on only upon an order in duplicate from the "time checkers." At the same time, the inspectors have to countersign the time a job ends before a new work order can be obtained (this is done to permit a cross-check of the times marked by the "time checkers" and the inspectors).

Nevertheless, the second rule also results merely in increased paperwork for the tool-crib attendants. The setup men, who are allowed to go into the tool crib, pick up setups ahead of time for the operators. The inspectors quickly fall in step and "countersign" the time cards as requested by the operators. The shop gets back into a routine again, under slightly different procedures — and with a notable increase in the production of pink, white, and blue paper.

Management does not let itself get discouraged. It publishes a third "ruling" officially forbidding anyone from going into the tool crib except the tool-crib employees and two superintendents. The order, signed by Faulkner, the director of the factory, is posted on the tool-crib door.

An old machine operator, Hank, predicts that the new order "won't last out the week," and a setup man explains why its effects will be tough on the grinders and crib attendants, because setup men and foremen have been doing much of the [tool] grinding and have made it easier for them by coming in to help themselves to tools, jigs, etc.

A new line forms in front of the crib as a result of the third rule. The foremen are furious, they yell at the crib attendants and warn them that they will make out allowance cards charging them for every minute of time the workers are delayed because they do not have their tools. The boys who are standing in line at the crib window growl or wisecrack about the crib attendants.

Then Jonesy, the most conscientious and most efficient of the crib attendants, declares that he has "had enough" and lets foremen and setup men back into the crib again. The notes taken the same evening by D. Roy are worth citing verbatim.

Just ten days after the new order was promulgated, the sun began to break through the dark clouds of managerial efficiency. Hank's prediction was off by four days… Johnny (setup man) and others seemed to be going in and out of the crib again, almost at will… When I asked Walt (crib attendant) for some jaws to fit the chuck I had found, he said: "We've got lots of jaws back here, but I wouldn't know what to look for. You'd better get the setup man to come back here and find you some." Walt said to me: "I break the rules here, but not too much — just within reason to keep the boys on production. Faulkner's order still hangs at eye level on the crib door…

"And so much for Faulkner's order!" The "fix" was "on" again, and operators and their service-group allies conducted business as usual for the remaining weeks of the writer's employment.

The dialectic of this situation can be summed up easily in a certain number of moments of universal import. The essential element in production costs is human labour (in any case, the sole element upon which management can or thinks it can continually act: the others depend on factors that for the most part are beyond its control). Management seeks to reduce its costs by trying to obtain maximum output with minimum pay. The workers want to get maximum pay by providing what they consider a fair amount of output. Whence the fundamental conflict over the content of the work hour.

Management tries to overcome this conflict through' 'rationalization," through a strict definition of the amount of effort to be provided by the workers, tying their pay to the amount of production attained. This "rationalization" only makes the initial conflict grow and blossom into a number of specific conflicts: over the setting of norms, the concrete application of such norms, the quality of tools and machinery and their depreciation, the application of regulations aimed at organizing work from management's viewpoint.

The initial conflict, far from being overcome, is broadened at the same time as it is deepened, for management's successive counter responses force the workers to put all aspects of the organization of labour into question. At the same time, the overhead costs of capitalist management are considerably increased: voluntary restriction of output on the part of the workers, time taken up merely struggling against norms and regulations, multiplication of auxiliary services and in particular "supervisory" services that in each instance have to be rechecked by others, etc.[1]

[1] This text — of which the first part, a sort of programmatic introduction, was published in July 1955 in *S. ou B.*, no. 17, and whose second part was devoted to a discussion of the problems of a socialist society, in issue no. 22 (July 1957) — continued with an analysis of the proletariat's political struggles, a critique of the overall organization of capitalist society, and an analysis of the crisis of contemporary culture. Events (May 1958, the scission within the S. ou B. group) interrupted its elaboration and publication. Parts of the first draft have been used in the writing of PO I, MRCM/MCR, and MTR/MRT. [T/E: The first two texts are included in this volume; the third is to be found in IIS.]

Cornelius Castoriadis
On the Content of Socialism
From the Critique of Bureaucracy to the Idea of the Proletariat's Autonomy
1955, 1957, 1958

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Part 1

Published: in *Socialisme ou Barbarie* July, 1955.
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HTML-markup: by Jonas Holmgren
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Part 2

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Philadelphia Solidarity, entitled “About Ourselves,” and a new introduction by Peter Dorman, “Workers Councils … 25 Years Later”). Brinton’s sub-headings are retained.

Translation: David Ames Curtis

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HTML-markup: Jonas Holmgren

Part 3

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