

MAYDAZE!

a thesis on the celebration of alienation

For Ourselves

1972

This is supposed to be a celebration, but there is a stale scent about it — the scent of failure held up as success, of moldy platitudes held up as useful, critical ideas — the scent of an old, dying world, not the fresh air of a new one. Once again people come together because, deep down, all of them are fed up with their present existence; all of them want a life of unstifled tenderness, free creativity, limitless adventure. And once again, the Left, like the constipated rhinoceros it is, has managed after immense grunting and straining to produce the same dry, evil-smelling little pellets of slogans:

- Jobs or Income Now!
- No Wage Cuts
- No Cuts in Social Services
- Fight Police Repression

Never mind that a movement which could enforce the granting of even one of the first three demands would be easily strong enough to overthrow capitalism... let's just keep on pestering Mommy and Daddy.

With what swollen pride the organizers of this demonstration point to the great days of the 1930's, when "millions of workers, led by communists", marched and struck and achieved — WHAT? Their own integration, via the industrial unions of the CIO, into a militarized, state-regulated capitalism. From there they marched right off into World War II, with the "communists" urging them on to the slaughter and helping to break their strikes, all in the name of anti-fascism. It was above all, World War II, with the changes it made possible in the economies of the Western powers, and the huge destruction of workers, and of means of production it entailed, that gave world capitalism the chance to reconstruct — very profitably — the same world it had devastated.

After 30 years capitalism is again in difficulties, more than likely as the prelude to its final crisis.

Certainly it has pretty well used up all the checks and balances — including wage and-price controls, nationalizations, money-manipulation, expanded welfare and military spending, and massive looting of nature everywhere (and of the human and natural resources of the Third World, in particular). The Left breathes a sigh of relief — now it can begin protesting all the same things it protested in 1935; it can "organize" workers who are once again desperate enough to listen to it. It can find new fuel for its delusions, ranting about "the bosses" and their "profit system". Gimme that ole time religion!

But capitalism is not just a "system" run by an evil force called "bosses"; it is a mode of social reproduction in which workers necessarily and actively reproduce — via wage-labor — their own everyday lives. As long as human beings sell their labor-power, they sell with it the power to shape their own world; they make alien their powers to create a world built in the image of their needs, desires and pleasures. Instead, an alien world — a world and daily life are produced, consumed and reproduced in the image of capital (an accumulated surplus of alienated-labor). Capital, in its forms of (1) money — its medium of exchange-value, (2) commodity — its economic product, and (3) the spectacle — its social product, is protected by the State apparatus and ensured by continued self-alienation. With capital in the "East" as the property of the State-Party and in the "West" as the property of private and corporately-monopolized interests — directors of capital's world architecture — "bosses" and "bureaucrats" alike, must push and pursue the market-values of capital or cease to be capitalists.

Capitalism creates a global system of production, a material community via the world market, but only by destroying all the old partial communities — tribe, village, region, etc. It unites the world, paradoxically, as separate, as divided into nation-states, enterprises, nuclear families and so forth. It has developed in us productive forces — desires, creativity, knowledge, skills — that it is less and less able to put to human use. Instead, it must either channel them into producing garbage and death-machines, or else repress and destroy them by the subtle violence of conditioning — or, the gross violence of war and starvation. Through capitalism we have developed the power to end scarcity and the competition it engenders, to create the first full human community, a global association where "the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all", a world without States, classes, forced tranquility or the blackmail called "work". Thus, what we face is not just the crisis of capitalism, but the culmination of all previous history.

The Leftists who organized this demonstration want to revive the grand old institution of International Workers' Day. As usual they are 100 years too late. May Day belongs to the workers' movement of the 19th century, to the period when the working class could and did force general and lasting reforms from the capitalist class, while looking forward to a time when it would be *strong enough* to overthrow capitalism. But the very success of its reform struggles integrated it into the "system"; they merely improved themselves as human spectacles and human commodities. With the outbreak of World War I, this old workers' movement split into warring national fragments. Its revolutionary and internationalist minority organized, by 1918, into armed workers' councils and such short-lived political formations as the K.A.P.D. and fought as well as they knew for a communist society AND LOST — while the majority looked on and did nothing. Submission to hierarchical mass parties and trade unions along with disciplined demonstrations and ritualistic strikes did well in FAILING the first time: around; the ends spoke directly to what the

workers' movement, in general, and the Left in particular, theoretically and practically sought (and still do seek!) to strangle revolution in its cradle. It's no surprise that the workers' council movement died under the guns of "Socialist"-led troops in Germany and of "Communist"-led troops in Russia and Spain. Despite a few brilliant achievements like the Kronstadt Soviet (a Russian word translated as "workers' council") and the workers' collectives of Catalonia of 1936-7, it failed. Its greatest "success", the Russian revolution, was isolated under appallingly backward and hostile conditions, and finally crushed by "its representatives" — the Bolshevik Party. The resulting state-capitalism, a novel monstrosity, was marketed to the workers of the world as the "Socialist Fatherland" by Communist Parties whose main activity was to suppress the real communist movement wherever they found (and find) it.

Why does the Left try so hard to resurrect this corpse? The basic reason is good old neurosis — an incapacity to face reality. Specifically, its program, despite the modernist chrome-plating of "workers' control" and so forth, is essentially the program of the old workers' movement, which was to centralize capital in the hands of the State so as to develop the productive forces to the socialist level. But capitalism has already accomplished the essentials of this task, whether in its old private form or else by means of bureaucratic peasant-based parties such as the one that took power in China in 1948 or that are about to take power in S.E. Asia. Such "National Liberation Movements" and "Socialist States" can only be seen as progressive in the absence of a class-wide revolutionary movement in the rest of the world. They are capitalist revolutions that serve no useful function from the genuinely communist point-of-view except that of creating a modern working class where none existed before. In the advanced countries, this program — with all the "good will" of its supporters to the contrary — is nothing less than a counter-revolutionary diversion. It's but one more way of persuading the working class to help rationalize and to update its own alienation and exploitation.

Extreme? Hardly. Capital has now colonized almost every aspect of daily life; one can hardly breathe without having to pay (in Tokyo they already sell air from vending machines). All human relations become money-exchange, commodity-exchange, and spectacle-exchange relations; play, pleasure and the participation we seek in our daily lives all face the extinction as exemplified by ticket and check stubs. From the time we crawl out of bed to the time we crawl out again — at home, at work, and in the streets — we (re-)produce an alien and hostile world. We set the process into motion by selling our labor-power, by paying for goods and services, by using our "free" time to forget the misery so that we'll be able to go back for more another day — and another... We, the working class, (which includes all those whom the State pays not to work — to stay out of a labor market which cannot absorb them) reproduce our own misery. The slavery of all enforces the slavery of each.

The Left, though it wants a few changes in ideology, defends the working class it is, including its traditional institutions such as the labor unions and the family. But it is through these institutions that the working class reproduces itself as a class for capital — repressed, privatized, full of divisive local and sectorial prejudices (ethnic, racial, sexual, regionalist, nationalist) and above all, SLAVISH, crippled and incapable of running the world in its own interest. We are not suggesting that individual workers should abandon the unions (until the movement which makes them unnecessary is widespread, and — in a world of closed shops, how could they?) any more

than we are telling members of families that still care for each other to split up. Many unions still provide a certain minimal defense from the employers, just as many families still provide the last remaining source of tenderness and community for their members. Nevertheless, in a time when something far better is really possible — when workers are openly rebelling against the unions and men, women and children are openly rebelling against the family — to defend these institutions is purely reactionary, no matter how confused, limited and often pointlessly destructive the rebellion against them may be at first. In a communist society, where people create wealth according to their abilities and pleasures, and use wealth according to their needs and desires, where there is a real, universal community, unions and families alike would cease to exist (although the unions, in particular, will have to be smashed on the way to creating such a society) simply because people will not seek protection from their own wealth.

The Left, of course, does not even begin to understand any of this. These hacks who call only for "a decent life", who think the goal of revolution, as well as its means, is higher and equalized wages for self-alienation, better conditions to do it in, and social welfare as a safety-valve for discontent... they have forgotten what life is, and themselves, bear the scent of something already dead. The desperation that transforms children into alcoholics, arsonists, ideologists and murderers before they reach puberty makes one thing painfully clear: communism, free human association, is no longer "a program" to be realized in the distant future, but an immediate, basic, biological and emotional NEED — one which grows more urgent every day. From now on, as the workers of Watts and Detroit demonstrated in the 1960's, and as those of Paris, Milan, Barcelona, Warsaw, Liverpool, Tel Aviv and Cairo continued to demonstrate, the revolution BEGINS with the refusal of wage-labor and the market — the refusal of sacrifice and submission, and never ceases to refuse all constraints. Here, the old saying that we "do not live by bread alone" acquires a new and marvelous meaning. The community and festivity, the erotic and creative life that we so passionately desire, can only be successfully achieved through a violent break with the past... through the conscious rejection of all the old habits and makeshifts which have helped us to (merely) survive up to now. It is these habits and makeshifts — these defensive adaptations and camouflages — which make us both capable of tolerating this world and incapable of creating a new one. Only we ourselves, acting without any authority but that of our needs and desires, can use the wealth of creative potential stored up under capitalism to transform our lives and our planet.

To be sure, all of this will require global planning and coordination, before, during and after the final battle. But, if we are really going to re-own our lives, the coordinating bodies at the local, regional and global levels must be strictly mandated and subject to immediate recall. This is not for the sake of "democracy", for the revolution is not essentially a democratic process — rather, it is simply to ensure that we all get what we want, and that where compromise has to be made among conflicting interests it is we who work it out... not some representative, bureaucrat or mediator. "Bookkeeping" and administering the flow of our world production will still be necessary, but they can and must become activities just like any other, without power of privilege. The full application of modern communications and computer technology, impossible under capitalism, will make possible worldwide planning whose "center" is everywhere — based upon a continual balancing out of our abilities and pleasures as producers (creators) and our needs and desires as consumers (self-oriented hedonists and adventurers). The tangled, strangled cobweb of capital-

ist organization, with its separation into enterprises, corporations, committees and nation-states, will be brushed away by the revolution itself, and the new organization of life will grow up organically as production is resumed and transformed by ex-workers, ex-students, ex-housewives, et al, who are now simply — human beings — unconfined to any particular social role... moving freely throughout the world as they experience new activities and taste new pleasures.

To return to the present situations the re-owning of our lives begins on a small scale with the re-owning of our intelligence, senses, associations and passions. Everything can (and greedily must) be called upon for use. Every aspect of the old world can be examined to see if we find a want to preserve, convert or destroy it. The serums of false consciousness and the empty phrases we exchange every day ("Have a nice day", "That's life", "What's happening?", and "Did you come?" to excerpt but a few) can be played with in such a way as to make clear what is not really going on. In limited struggles like work-strikes and rent-strikes the point is not to militantly push abstract "demands", but to selfishly place the struggle within the context of the world-situation, and, hence, to be realistic (concrete) about what can be accomplished. Besides this, we need to begin finding out how our own immediate areas fit into world production as a whole, what the important facilities are that will need to be captured, occupied and held against the State forces during the insurrection, how long a given city or region can hold out in spells of isolation, and so on. In other words, we need to think tactically and strategically. In this way the consciously communist minority can help prepare themselves and the rest of their class — for, make no mistake about it, it is a social war we are starting, a war whose stake is the freedom to shape the whole world.

To many people, what we say here will come as no particular shock, for our ideas and our practice are already in everyone's minds and daily life activities at some level; we are only expressing the real movement that has been emerging for a long time, which we call communism. Among more conservative and repressed people, like the organizers of this demonstration, we will no doubt continue to be very unpopular. But, unlike the Left, which wants to recruit the "masses" into its "revolutionary organizations" — and so, panders to their meanest prejudices and most stupid anxieties, we have no interest in being popular as such. Of course we want people to agree with us: but because we have no interest outside the movement as a whole, because we do not try to represent the interests of the working class but speak for our own as a part of it, we feel that our own ends are best served by telling the whole truth as we see it, however painful that truth may be at times. As a class we will go on failing until we succeed; our failures can be superseded — turned into success, if we selfishly critique them as fiercely as we extend our more successful encounters with the old world.

The old May Day ritual is part of our failure. In Moscow, it is the occasion for a sacred parade of nuclear missiles; in Peking, for hymns to the glory of Nation, Sacrifice, Family and Work. If we are going to re-own our past, let it be as a part of re-owning our present. Let it be as the workers of Szczecin, Poland made the Internationale their own again in 1970 — by singing it as they looted State-owned stores, fought off the Red Army and burned down the headquarters of the Communist Party. May Day began when workers were fighting for the 8-hour day: let's celebrate it once again — only when we have made our days and nights our own once and for all.

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