

The Libertarian Communist Platform of 1971

Organisation Communiste Libertaire

November 1971

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A Note

This platform was discussed and adopted during a meeting held in Marseille on July 11, 1971. It had been called by the Mouvement Communiste Libertaire [MCL, Libertarian Communist Movement], founded by groups and individuals most of whom had come out of the former Federation Communiste Libertaire [FCL, Libertarian Communist Federation], the Jeunesse Anarchiste Communiste [JAC, Communist Anarchist Youth], and the Union des Groupes Anarchistes-Communistes [UGAC, Union of Communist-Anarchist Groups] in the wake of May 1968 and within the framework of the fusion of several local groups of the Organisation révolutionnaire Anarchiste [ORA, Anarchist Revolutionary Organization]. I actively participated in the discussion concerning its final version on the basis of a draft proposed by Georges Fontenis. It was published in November 1971 in *Guerre de Classes* [Class War], newspaper of the Organisation Communiste Libertaire [OCL, Libertarian Communist Organization].

Daniel Guérin

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I

Individual and collective revolts punctuate the history of humanity, which is a succession of exploitative societies. In every era thinkers have arrived at an idea that calls their society into question. But it was with the advent of modern capitalist society that the division of society into two fundamental, antagonistic classes clearly appeared, and it is through class struggle, the motor of the evolution of capitalist society, that the road was constructed that leads from revolt to the achieving of revolutionary consciousness.

Today, because it has changed form, class struggle is sometimes denied by those who insist on either the bourgeoisification and integration of the working class, or the birth of a new working class that will supposedly insert itself naturally, as it were, into the decision-making centers of capitalist society. In fact, the old social strata are disappearing, the polarization into two fundamental classes is growing more acute, and there is always some spot in the world where the class war is being reignited.

Whatever the ideological forms it assumes, the capitalist mode of production is, globally, a unity. Whether it be in the form which, based originally on "liberalism," is headed towards state monopoly capitalism, or that of state bureaucratic capitalism, capitalism cannot but increase the exploitation of labor in order to attempt to escape the mortal crisis threatening it. Massacres, the general collapse of living conditions, as well as the exploitation and alienation peculiar to this or that human group (women, the young, racial or sexual minorities, etc.) are manifestations that cannot be separated from the division of society into two classes: that which disposes of wealth and the lives of workers, and creates and perpetuates the superstructures (customs, moral values, law, culture in general), and that which produces wealth.

The proletariat can today be defined broadly as follows: those who, at one level or another, create surplus value or contribute to its realization. Added to the proletariat are those who, belonging to non-proletarian strata, rally to proletarian objectives (such as intellectuals and students).

II

Class struggle and revolution are not purely objective processes, are not the results of mechanical necessities independent of the activities of the exploited. The class struggle is not simply a phenomenon to be observed: it is the driver that constantly modifies the situation and the facts of capitalist society. Revolution is its conclusion. It is the exploited taking into its hands the instruments of production and exchange, of weapons, and the destruction of the centers and means of state power.

To be sure, the class struggle is punctuated with difficulties, failures, and bloody defeats, but proletarian action periodically reemerges, more powerful and more extensive.

1. In the first instance it manifests itself at the level of direct confrontation in the workplace. It also manifests itself at the level of problems of daily life, in struggles against the oppression of women, the young, and minorities; in the questioning of education, culture, art, and values. But these struggles must never be separated from the class struggle. Attacking the state and the superstructures also means attacking capitalist domination. Fighting for better working conditions or wage increases means carrying on the same struggle. But it is clear that posing the problem of lifestyle, rather than just that of wage levels, gives the struggle a more radical aspect when this means the development of a mass movement demanding a whole new conception of life rather than merely quantitative improvements.
2. Historical analysis makes clear a profound tendency, expressed by the workers through their direct struggles against capital and the state, towards self-organization, and the structures of classless society appear embryonically in the forms assumed by revolutionary action. The tendency towards autonomous action can be seen in the course of the most everyday struggles: wildcat strikes, expropriations, various forms of direct action opposed to bureaucratic leadership, action committees, rank-and-file committees, etc. With the demand for power at workers' general assemblies and the insistence on the revocability of delegates, it is true self-management that is on the agenda.

For us there is no historic and formal break between the proletariat rising to power and its struggles to achieve this, rather a continuous and dialectical development of self-management techniques, starting from the class struggle and ending with the victory of the proletariat and the establishment of a classless society.

A specifically proletarian mode of organization, "council power," arose during revolutionary periods like the Paris Commune (1871), Makhnovist Ukraine (1918–1921), the Italian workers' councils (1918–1922), the Bavarian council republic (1918–1919), the Budapest Commune (1919), the Kronstadt Commune (1921), the Spanish Revolution (1936–1937), the Hungarian revolt (1956), the Czech revolt (1968), and May '68.

The power of the councils, achieving generalized self-management in all realms of human activity, can only be defined through historical practice itself, and any attempt at a definition of the new world can only be an approximation, a proposal, an investigation.

The appearance and generalization of direct forms of workers' power implies that the revolutionary process is already quite advanced. Nevertheless, it should be presumed that at this stage bourgeois power is still far from being totally liquidated. And so a provisional dual power is es-

established between the revolutionary and socialist structures put in place by the working classes and, on the other hand, the counter-revolutionary forces.

During this period the class struggle, far from being attenuated, reaches its climax, and it is here that the words class war take on all their sharpness: the future of the revolution depends on the outcome of this war. Nevertheless, it would be dangerous to view the process in accordance with well-defined norms. Indeed, the nature of state power (i.e., counter-revolutionary power) in its fight against the councils can take on different forms. What is fundamental is that council power is antagonistic to all state power, since it expresses itself within society itself through general assemblies, whose delegates in the various organizations that have been established are nothing but its expression and can be recalled at any time.

At this point authority and society are no longer separate, the maximal conditions having been realized for the satisfaction of the needs, tendencies, and aspirations of individuals and social groups, humanity escaping from its condition as object to become the creative subject of its own life.

And so it is obvious that the revolution cannot be made through intermediaries: it is the product of the spontaneous movement of the masses and not of a general staff of specialists or a so-called vanguard that is alone conscious and charged with the leadership and direction of struggles. When the word “spontaneous” is used here its use should not at all be interpreted as adherence to a so-called spontaneist idea privileging mass spontaneity at the expense of revolutionary consciousness, which is its indispensable complement and which surpasses it. In other words, an incorrect use of the notion of spontaneity would consist in likening it to a “disordered,” “instinctive” activity that would be incapable of engendering revolutionary consciousness, as was claimed by Kautsky and later by Lenin in his *What Is to Be Done?*

It is no less obvious that the revolution cannot be a simple political and economic restructuring of the old society. Instead, by all at once overturning all realms through the smashing of capitalist production relations and the state, it is not only political and economic, but also at every moment cultural, and it is in this sense that we can utilize the idea of total revolution.

III

The real vanguard is not this or that group that proclaims itself the historic consciousness of the proletariat. It is, in fact, those militant workers who are at the forefront of offensive combat, and those who maintain a certain degree of consciousness even in periods of retreat.

The revolutionary organization is a place for meetings, exchanges, information, and reflection which enable the development of revolutionary theory and practice, which are nothing but two aspects of one movement. It brings together militants who recognize each other at the same level of reflection, activity, and cohesion. It can on no account substitute itself for the proletarian movement itself or impose a leadership on it or claim to be its fully achieved consciousness.

On the other hand, it must strive to synthesize the experiences of struggle, helping to acquire the greatest possible degree of revolutionary consciousness and the greatest possible coherence in that consciousness, which is to be seen not as a goal or as existing in the abstract, but as a process.

In summary, the revolutionary organization’s role is to support the proletarian vanguard and to assist in the self-organization of the proletariat by playing—either collectively or through the

intervention of militants—the role of propagator, catalyst, and revealer, and by allowing the revolutionaries that compose it coordinated and convergent interventions in the areas of information, propaganda, and support for exemplary actions.

A consequence of this conception of the revolutionary organization is its mission to disappear not through a mechanical decision, but when it no longer corresponds to the functions that justify it. It will then dissolve in the classless society.

Revolutionary praxis is carried out within the masses, and theoretical elaboration only has meaning if it is always connected to the struggles of the proletariat. In this way revolutionary theory is the opposite of ideological verbiage papering over the absence of any truly proletarian praxis.

What this means is that the purpose of the revolutionary organization is to bring together militants in agreement with the above and independently of any Marxist, anarchist, councilist, or libertarian communist label, the label serving to cover in fact the top-down and elitist understanding of the vanguard that is of course found among Leninists, but also among so-called anarchists.

The revolutionary organization does not exclusively invoke any particular theoretician or any preexisting organization, though recognizing the positive contributions of those who systematized, refined, and spread the ideas drawn from the mass movement. Rather it positions itself as heir of the various manifestations of the anti-authoritarian workers current of the First International, a current which is historically known under the name of communist anarchism or libertarian communism, a current which the so-called anarchist currents have, unfortunately, often grossly caricatured.

The revolutionary organization is self-managed. In its structures and functioning it must prefigure the non-bureaucratic society that will see the distinction between order-givers and order-followers disappear and that will establish delegation solely for technical tasks and with the corrective of permanent recall.

Technical knowledge and competencies of all kinds must be as widespread as possible to ensure an effective rotation of tasks. Discussion and the elaboration of ideas must thus be the task of all militants and, even more than the indispensable organizational norms, which can always be revised, it is the level of coherence and the consciousness of responsibilities reached by all concerned that is the best antidote to any bureaucratic deviation.

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Appendix of *À la recherche d'un communisme libertaire* and republished in *For a Libertarian Communism*, both by Daniel Guérin.

In 1969, Daniel Guérin had helped launch the Mouvement Communiste Libertaire (Libertarian Communist Movement), and two years later the MCL merged with a number of other groups to create the Organisation Communiste Libertaire (Libertarian Communist Organization). This was the OCL's manifesto.

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