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"Préliminaires sur les conseils et l'organisation conseilliste"
originally appeared in *Internationale Situationniste* #12 (Paris,
September 1969). This translation by Ken Knabb is from the
Situationist International Anthology (Revised and Expanded
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Preliminaries on Councils and Councilist Organization

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"The Workers and Peasants Government has decreed that Kronstadt and the rebelling ships must immediately submit to the authority of the Soviet Republic. I therefore order all who have revolted against the socialist fatherland to lay down their arms at once. Recalcitrants should be disarmed and turned over to the Soviet authorities. The commissars and other members of the government who have been arrested must be liberated at once. Only those who surrender unconditionally can expect mercy from the Soviet Republic. I am simultaneously giving orders to prepare for the suppression of the rebellion and the subjugation of the sailors by armed force. All responsibility for the harm that may be suffered by the peaceful population will rest entirely on the heads of the White Guard mutineers. This warning is final."

—Trotsky, Kamenev, *Ultimatum to Kronstadt*

"We have only one answer to all that: All power to the soviets! Take your hands off them — your hands that are red with the blood of the martyrs of freedom who fought the White Guards, the landowners and the bourgeoisie!"

—*Kronstadt Izvestia* #6[1]

During the fifty years since the Leninists reduced communism to electrification, since the Bolshevik counterrevolution erected the *Soviet State* over the dead body of the power of the soviets, and since "soviet" ceased to mean *council,* revolutions have continued to fling the Kronstadt demand in the face of the rulers of the Kremlin: *"All power to the soviets and not to the parties."* The remarkable persistence of the *real tendency* toward *workers councils* throughout this half-century of efforts and repeated suppressions of the modern proletarian movement now imposes the councils on the new revolutionary current as the sole form of antistate dictatorship of the proletariat, as the sole tribunal that will be able to pass judgment on the old world and carry out the sentence itself.

The essence of the councils must be more precisely delineated, not only by refuting the gross falsifications propagated

[1] *Kronstadt:* In March 1921 the sailors of Kronstadt, who had been among the most ardent participants in the 1917 revolution, revolted against the Bolshevik government, calling for a genuine power of the soviets (democratic popular councils) as opposed to the rule of the "Soviet" state. Denounced as reactionaries, they were crushed by the Red Army under the leadership of Trotsky. See Ida Mett's *The Kronstadt Commune,* Paul Avrich's *Kronstadt, 1921,* or Israel Getzler's *Kronstadt 1917–1921: The Fate of a Soviet Democracy*.

On the 1917 Russian revolution in general, Trotsky's *The History of the Russian Revolution* is well worth reading, but it should be supplemented with Voline's *The Unknown Revolution* and Maurice Brinton's *The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control: 1917–1921* (included in the recent collection of Brinton's works, *For Workers' Power*). For a more personal first-hand account of the same period, see Emma Goldman's *My Disillusionment in Russia*.

a concession, let us add that it seems to us indispensable to correct it with this rider: in all delegations to central conferences at which decisions may be taken that have not previously been provided for by imperative mandates, workers must make up 3/4 of the participants. In sum, the inverse proportion of the first congresses of the "Russian Social-Democratic Workers Party."

It is known that we have no inclination toward workerism of any form whatsoever. The above considerations refer to workers who have "become dialecticians," as they will have to become *en masse* in the exercise of the power of the councils. But on the one hand, the workers continue to be the *central* force capable of bringing the existing functioning of society to a halt and the *indispensable* force for reinventing all its bases. On the other hand, although a councilist organization obviously must not separate other categories of wage-earners, notably intellectuals, from itself, it is in any case important that the dubious importance the latter may assume should be severely restricted: not only by verifying, by considering all aspects of their lives, that such intellectuals are really councilist revolutionaries, but also by seeing to it that there are as few of them in the organization as possible.

A councilist organization will not consent to speak on equal terms with other organizations unless they are consistent partisans of proletarian autonomy; just as the councils will not only have to free themselves from the grip of parties and unions, but must also reject any tendency aiming to pigeonhole them in some limited position and to negotiate with them as one power to another. The councils are the only power or they are nothing. The means of their victory are already their victory. With the lever of the councils *plus* the fulcrum of the total negation of the spectacle-commodity society, the Earth can be raised.

The victory of the councils is not the end of the revolution, but the beginning of it.

by social democracy, the Russian bureaucracy, Titoism and even Ben-Bellaism, but above all by recognizing the insufficiencies in the fledgling practical experiences of the power of the councils that have briefly appeared so far; as well, of course, as the insufficiencies in councilist revolutionaries' very conceptions. The council's *ultimate tendency* appears negatively in the limits and illusions which have marked its first manifestations and which have caused its defeat quite as much as has the immediate and uncompromising struggle that is naturally waged against it by the ruling class. The purpose of the council form is the *practical unification* of proletarians in the process of appropriating the material and intellectual means of changing all existing conditions and making themselves the masters of their own history. It can and must be the organization in acts of historical consciousness. But in fact it has nowhere yet succeeded in overcoming the separation embodied in *specialized* political organizations and in the forms of ideological false consciousness that they produce and defend. Moreover, although it is quite natural that the councils that have been major agents of revolutionary situations have generally been *councils of delegates,* since it is such councils which coordinate and federate the decisions of local councils, it nevertheless appears that the general assemblies of the rank and file have almost always been considered as mere assemblies of electors, so that the first level of the "council" is situated above them. Here already lies an element of separation, which can only be surmounted by treating local general assemblies of all the proletarians in revolution as the *ultimate, fundamental councils,* from which any delegation must derive its power.

Leaving aside the precouncilist features of the Paris Commune which so enthused Marx ("the finally discovered political form through which the economic emancipation of labor can be realized") — features which, moreover, can be seen more in the organization of the Central Committee of the National Guard, which was composed of delegates of the Parisian pro-

letariat in arms, than in the elected Commune — the famous St. Petersburg "Council of Workers' Deputies" was the first fledgling manifestation of an organization of the proletariat in a revolutionary situation. According to the figures given by Trotsky in his book *1905,* 200,000 workers sent their delegates to the St. Petersburg Soviet; but its influence extended far beyond its immediate area, with many other councils in Russia drawing inspiration from its deliberations and decisions. It directly grouped the workers from more than 150 enterprises, besides welcoming representatives from 16 unions that had rallied to it. Its first nucleus was formed on October 13; by the 17th the soviet had established an Executive Committee over itself which Trotsky says "served it as a ministry." Out of a total of 562 delegates, the Executive Committee comprised only 31 members, of which 22 were actually workers delegated by the entirety of the workers in their enterprises and 9 represented three revolutionary parties (Mensheviks, Bolsheviks and Social Revolutionaries); however, "the representatives of the parties had only consultative status and were not entitled to vote." Although the rank-and-file assemblies were presumably faithfully represented by their revocable delegates, it is clear that those delegates had abdicated a large part of their power, in a very *parliamentary* way, into the hands of an Executive Committee in which the "technical advisors" from the political parties had an enormous influence.

How did this soviet originate? It seems that this form of organization was discovered by certain politically aware elements among the ordinary workers, who for the most part themselves belonged to one or another socialist fraction. Trotsky seems to be quite unjustified in writing that "one of the two social-democratic organizations in St. Petersburg took the initiative of creating an autonomous revolutionary workers' administration" (moreover, the "one of the two" organizations that did at least immediately recognize the significance of this workers' initiative was the Mensheviks, not the Bolsheviks).

cils first appear, as Pannekoek[8] wished. The councilists should speak as councilists within the council, rather than staging an exemplary dissolution of their organizations only to regroup them on the side and play pressure-group politics in the general assembly. In this way it will be easier and more legitimate for them to combat and denounce the inevitable presence of bureaucrats, spies and ex-scabs who will infiltrate here and there. They will also have to struggle against fake councils or fundamentally reactionary ones (e.g. police councils) which will not fail to appear. They will act in such a way that the unified power of the councils does not recognize such bodies or their delegates. Because the infiltration of other organizations is exactly the contrary of the ends they are pursuing, and because they refuse any incoherence within themselves, councilist organizations will prohibit any dual membership. As we have said, all the workers of a factory must take part in the council, or at least all those who accept the rules of its game. The solution to the problem of whether to accept participation in the council by "those who yesterday had to be thrown out of the factory at gunpoint" (Barth)[9] will be found only in practice.

Ultimately, a councilist organization will stand or fall solely by the coherence of its theory and action and by its struggle for the complete elimination of all power remaining external to the councils or trying to make itself independent of them. But in order to simplify the discussion right off by refusing even to take into consideration a mass of councilist pseudo-organizations that may be simulated by students or obsessive professional militants, let us say that it does not seem to us that an organization can be recognized as councilist if it is not comprised of at least 2/3 workers. As this proportion might pass for

[8] *Anton Pannekoek*, author of *Workers Councils,* the classic work on this subject. See also *The Society of the Spectacle* #116–119.

[9] *Barth*: Probably Emil Barth, a German independent socialist who was briefly a member of the 1918 "Socialist" government before resigning in protest at its counterrevolutionary actions.

example, that a worker will invariably write better than a student). But because in its aggregate the organization will have all the talents it needs, no hierarchy of individual talents will come to undermine its democracy. It is neither membership in a councilist organization nor the proclamation of an ideal equality that will enable all its members to be beautiful and intelligent and to live well; but only their real aptitudes for becoming more beautiful and more intelligent and for living better, freely developing in the only game that's worth the pleasure: the destruction of the old world.

In the social movements that are going to spread, the councilists will refuse to let themselves be elected to strike committees. On the contrary, their task will be to act in such a way as to encourage the rank-and-file self-organization of the workers into general assemblies that decide how the struggle is carried out. It will be necessary to begin to understand that the absurd call for a "central strike committee" proposed by some naďve individuals during the May 1968 occupations movement would, had it succeeded, have sabotaged the movement toward the autonomy of the masses even more quickly than actually happened, since almost all the strike committees were controlled by the Stalinists.

Given that it is not for us to forge a plan for all time, and that one step forward by the real movement of the councils will be worth more than a dozen councilist programs, it is difficult to state precise hypotheses regarding the relation of councilist organizations with councils during a revolutionary situation. A councilist organization — which knows itself to be *separated* from the proletariat — must cease to exist as a separate organization in the moment that abolishes separations; and it will have to do this even if the complete freedom of association guaranteed by the power of the councils allows various parties and organizations that are enemies of this power to survive. It may be doubted, however, that it is feasible to immediately dissolve all councilist organizations the very instant the coun-

But the general strike of October 1905 in fact originated first of all in Moscow on September 19, when the typographers of the Sytine printing works went on strike, notably because they wanted punctuation marks to be counted among the 1000 characters that constituted their unit of payment. Fifty printing works followed them out, and on September 25 the Moscow printers formed a council. On *October 3* "the assembly of workers' deputies from the printers, mechanics, carpenters, tobacco workers and other guilds adopted the resolution to set up a general council (soviet) of Moscow workers" (Trotsky, *op. cit.*). It can thus be seen that this form appeared spontaneously at the beginning of the strike movement. And this movement, which began to fall back in the next few days, was to surge forward again up to the great historic crisis when on October 7 the railroad workers, beginning in Moscow, spontaneously began to stop the railway traffic.

The council movement in Turin of March-April 1920 originated among the highly concentrated proletariat of the Fiat factories. During August and September 1919 new elections for an "internal commission" (a sort of collaborationist factory committee set up by a collective convention in 1906 for the purpose of better integrating the workers) suddenly provided the opportunity, amid the social crisis that was then sweeping Italy, for a complete transformation of the role of these "commissioners." They began to federate among themselves as direct representatives of the workers. By October 30,000 workers were represented at an assembly of "executive committees of factory councils," which resembled more an assembly of shop stewards (with one commissioner elected by each workshop) than an organization of councils in the strict sense. But the example nevertheless acted as a catalyst and the movement radicalized, supported by a fraction of the Socialist Party (including Gramsci) that was in the majority in Turin and by the Piedmont anarchists (see Pier Carlo Masini's pamphlet, *Anarchici e comunisti nel movimento dei Consigli a Torino*). The move-

ment was resisted by the majority of the Socialist Party and by the unions. On 15 March 1920 the councils began a strike *combined with occupation of the factories* and *resumed production* under their own control. By April 14 the strike was general in Piedmont; in the following days it spread through much of northern Italy, particularly among the dockers and railroad workers. The government had to use warships to land troops at Genoa to march on Turin. While the councilist program was later to be approved by the Congress of the Italian Anarchist Union when it met at Bologna on July 1, the Socialist Party and the unions succeeded in sabotaging the strike by keeping it isolated: when Turin was besieged by 20,000 soldiers and police, the party newspaper *Avanti* refused to print the appeal of the Turin socialist section (see Masini, *op. cit.*). The strike, which would clearly have made possible a victorious insurrection in the whole country, was vanquished on April 24. What happened next is well known.[2]

In spite of certain remarkably advanced features of this rarely mentioned experience (numerous leftists are under the mistaken impression that factory occupations took place for the first time in France in 1936), it should be noted that it contains serious ambiguities, even among its partisans and theorists. Gramsci wrote in *Ordine Nuovo* (second year, #4): "We see the factory council as the historic beginning of a process that must ultimately lead to the foundation of the workers' state." For their part, the councilist anarchists were sparing in their criticism of labor unionism and claimed that the councils would give it a renewed impetus.

However, the manifesto circulated by the Turin councilists on 27 March 1920, "To the Workers and Peasants of All Italy,"

[2] *What happened next:* i.e. Mussolini's fascist coup (1922).

On the Italian movement, see Paolo Spriano's *The Occupation of the Factories: Italy 1920.* For more detailed background, see Gwyn A. Williams's *Proletarian Order: Antonio Gramsci, Factory Councils and the Origins of Communism in Italy, 1911–1921.*

pations movement, and the proliferation of encouraging situations here and there, from Italy to the USSR, it is quite likely that genuine councilist organizations will still take a long time to form and that other important revolutionary situations will occur before such organizations are in a position to intervene in them at a significant level. One must not play with councilist organization by setting up or supporting premature parodies of it. But the councils will certainly have greater chances of maintaining themselves as sole power if they contain conscious councilists and if there is a real appropriation of councilist theory.

In contrast to the council as permanent *basic unit* (ceaselessly setting up and modifying councils of delegates emanating from itself), as the assembly in which all the workers of an enterprise (workshop and factory councils) and all the inhabitants of an urban district who have rallied to the revolution (street councils, neighborhood councils) must participate, a councilist organization, in order to guarantee its coherence and the authentic working of its internal democracy, must *choose its members* in accordance with what they explicitly want and what they actually can do. As for the councils, their coherence is guaranteed by the single fact that they are *the sole power;* that they eliminate all other power and decide everything. This practical experience is the terrain where people learn how to become conscious of their own action, where they "realize philosophy." It goes without saying that their majorities also run the risk of making lots of momentary mistakes and not having the time or the means to rectify them. But they know that their fate is the product of their own decisions, and that they will be destroyed by the repercussions of any mistakes they don't correct.

Within councilist organizations real equality of everyone in making decisions and carrying them out will not be an empty slogan or an abstract demand. Of course, not all the members of an organization will have the same talents (it is obvious, for

ers councils reveals a councilist ideology such as can be seen in diverse forms in certain unions, in the PSU, or among the situationists. The very concept of council excludes any ideology." These individuals clearly know nothing about ideology — their own ideology is distinguished from more fully developed ones only by its spineless eclecticism. But they have heard (perhaps from Marx, perhaps only from the SI) that ideology has become a bad thing. They take advantage of this to try to have it believed that any theoretical work — which they avoid as if it were a sin — is an ideology, among the situationists exactly as in the PSU. But their gallant recourse to the "dialectic" and the "concept" which they have now added to their vocabulary in no way saves them from an imbecilic ideology of which the above quotation alone is evidence enough. If one idealistically relies on the council "concept" or, what is even more euphoric, on the practical inactivity of ICO, to "exclude all ideology" in the real councils, one must expect the worst — we have seen that historical experience justifies no such optimism in this regard. The supersession of the primitive council form can only come from struggles becoming more conscious, and from struggles for *more consciousness.* ICO's mechanistic image of the strike committee's perfect automatic response to "necessities," which presents the council as automatically coming into existence at the appropriate time *provided that one makes sure not to talk about it,* completely ignores the experience of the revolutions of our century, which shows that "the situation itself" is just as ready to crush the councils, or to enable them to be manipulated and coopted, as it is to give rise to them.

Let us leave this contemplative ideology, this pathetic caricature of the natural sciences which would have us observe the emergence of a proletarian revolution almost as if it were a solar eruption. Councilist organizations will be formed, though they must be quite the contrary of general staffs that would cause the councils to rise up on order. In spite of the new period of open social crisis we have entered since the occu-

calling for a general congress of the councils (which never took place), formulates some essential points of the council program: "The struggle for conquest must be fought with arms of conquest, and no longer only with those of defense (*SI note: this is aimed at the unions, which the manifesto describes elsewhere as "organisms of resistance … crystallized into a bureaucratic form"*). A new organization must be developed as a direct antagonist of the organs of the bosses' government; for that task it must spring up spontaneously in the workplace and unite all the workers, because all of them, as producers, are subjected to an authority that is alien (*estranea*) to them, and must liberate themselves from it… This is the beginning of freedom for you: the beginning of a social formation that by rapidly and universally extending itself will put you in a position to eliminate the exploiter and the middleman from the economic field and to become yourselves the masters — the masters of your machines, of your work, and of your life …"

The majority of the Workers and Soldiers Councils in the Germany of 1918–1919 were more crudely dominated by the Social-Democratic bureaucracy or were victims of its maneuvers. They tolerated Ebert's "socialist" government, whose main support came from the General Staff and the Freikorps. The "Hamburg seven points" (calling for the immediate dissolution of the old Army), presented by Dorrenbach and passed with a large majority by the Congress of Soldiers Councils that opened December 16 in Berlin, were not implemented by the "People's Commissars." The councils tolerated this defiance, and the legislative elections that had been quickly set for January 19; then they tolerated the attack launched against Dorrenbach's sailors; finally, they tolerated the crushing of the Spartakist insurrection on the very eve of those elections.[3]

In 1956 the Central Workers Council of Greater Budapest, constituted on November 14 and declaring itself determined

[3] *Freikorps:* right-wing paramilitary units used to repress radical movements in the aftermath of World War I.

to defend socialism, demanded "the withdrawal of all political parties from the factories" while at the same time pronouncing itself in favor of Nagy's return to power and free elections within a short time. It is true that this was during the time it was continuing the general strike despite the Russian troops' having already crushed the armed resistance. But even before the second Russian intervention the Hungarian councils had called for parliamentary elections: that is to say, they themselves were seeking to return to a dual-power situation at a time when they were in fact, in the face of the Russians, the only actual power in Hungary.[4]

Consciousness of what the power of the councils is and *must be* arises from the very practice of that power. But at an *impeded* stage of that power it may be very different from what one or another isolated member of a council, or even an entire council, thinks. *Ideology* opposes the truth in acts whose field is the system of the councils; and such ideology manifests itself not only in the form of hostile ideologies, or in the form of ideologies *about the councils* devised by political forces that want to subjugate them, but also in the form of an ideology *in favor of* the power of the councils that restrains and reifies their total theory and practice. A pure *councilism* will inevitably prove to be an enemy of the reality of the councils. There is a risk that such an ideology, more or less consistently formulated, will be borne by revolutionary organizations that are in principle in favor of the power of the councils. This power, which is itself *the organization of revolutionary society* and whose coherence is objectively determined by the practical necessities of this historical task grasped as a whole, can in no case escape the practical problem posed by *specialist organizations* which, whether enemies of the councils or more or less genuinely in fa-

On the German revolution, see Richard M. Watt's *The Kings Depart: Versailles and the German Revolution* or A.J. Ryder's *The German Revolution: 1918–1919*.

[4] On the Hungarian revolution, see Andy Anderson's *Hungary '56*.

absolutism: government anarchists.[7] In the *last* historical battle it was to wage, anarchism was to see all the ideological sauce that comprised its being fall back into its face: State, Freedom, Individual, and other musty ingredients with capital letters; while the libertarian militians, workers and peasants were saving its honor, making *the greatest practical contribution ever* to the international proletarian movement, burning churches, fighting on all fronts against the bourgeoisie, fascism and Stalinism, and beginning to *create a truly communist society*.

Some present-day organizations cunningly pretend not to exist. This enables them to avoid bothering with the slightest clarification of the bases on which they assemble any assortment of people (while magically labeling them all "workers"); to avoid giving their semi-members any account of the *informal leadership* that holds the controls; and to thoughtlessly denounce any theoretical expression and any other form of organization as automatically evil and harmful. Thus the *Informations, Correspondance Ouvričres* group writes in a recent bulletin (*ICO* #84, August 1969): "Councils are the transformation of strike committees under the influence of the situation itself and in response to the very necessities of the struggle, within the very dialectic of that struggle. Any other attempt, at any moment in a struggle, to declare the necessity of creating work-

[7] *Olivier, Blanco, Montseny:* anarchist leaders who became ministers in the Popular Front government during the Spanish civil war. *Anarcho-trenchists:* Kropotkin and other anarchists who supported World War I.

The best general histories of the Spanish revolution are Burnett Bolloten's *The Spanish Civil War* and Pierre Broué and Emile Témime's *Revolution and the War in Spain*. Some good first-hand accounts are George Orwell's *Homage to Catalonia,* Franz Borkenau's *The Spanish Cockpit,* and Mary Low and Juan Breá's *Red Spanish Notebook*. Other books worth reading include Vernon Richards's *Lessons of the Spanish Revolution,* Murray Bookchin's *To Remember Spain,* Noam Chomsky's *Objectivity and Liberal Scholarship,* Gerald Brenan's *The Spanish Labyrinth,* Sam Dolgoff's *The Anarchist Collectives,* Abel Paz's *Durruti: The People Armed,* and Victor Alba and Stephen Schwartz's *Spanish Marxism versus Soviet Communism: A History of the P.O.U.M.*

1931 the revolutionary movement had been dead for nearly ten years.

If only to make them cry, let us remind the retarded devotees of the anarchist-Marxist feud[6] that the CNT-FAI — with its dead weight of anarchist ideology, but also with its greater practice of liberatory imagination — was akin to the Marxist KAPD-AAUD in its organizational arrangements. In the same way as the German Communist Workers Party, the Iberian Anarchist Federation saw itself as the *political* organization of the conscious Spanish workers, while its AAUD, the CNT, was supposed to take charge of the management of the future society. The FAI militants, the elite of the proletariat, propagated the anarchist idea among the masses; the CNT did the practical work of organizing the workers in its unions. There were two essential differences, however, the ideological one of which was to bear the fruit one could have expected of it. The first was that the FAI did not strive to take power, but contented itself with influencing the overall policies of the CNT. The second was that the CNT *really* represented the Spanish working class. Adopted on 1 May 1936 at the CNT congress at Saragossa, two months before the revolutionary explosion, one of the most beautiful programs ever proclaimed by a revolutionary organization was partially put into practice by the anarchosyndicalist masses, while their leaders foundered in ministerialism and class-collaboration. With the pimps of the masses, García Oliver, Secundo Blanco, etc., and the brothel-madam Montseny, the antistate libertarian movement, which had already tolerated the anarcho-trenchist Prince Kropotkin, finally attained the historical consummation of its ideological

[6] *Anarcho-Marxist feud:* See *The Society of the Spectacle* #91. In the same book Debord examines the merits and defects of anarchism (#92–94), of Marx's theories (#78–89), and of the various strands of "Marxism" (#95–113).

vor of them, will inevitably interfere in their functioning. The masses organized in councils must be aware of this problem and overcome it. This is where councilist theory and the existence of authentically councilist organizations have a great importance. In them already appear certain essential points that will be at stake in the councils and in their own interaction with the councils.

All revolutionary history shows the part played in the failure of the councils by the emergence of a councilist ideology. The ease with which the spontaneous organization of the proletariat in struggle wins its first victories is often the prelude to a second phase in which counterrevolution works from the inside, in which the movement lets go of its reality in order to pursue the illusion that amounts to its defeat. Councilism is the artificial respiration that revives the old world.

Social democrats and Bolsheviks are in agreement in wishing to see in the councils only an auxiliary body of the party and the state. In 1902 Kautsky, worried because the unions were becoming discredited in the eyes of the workers, wanted workers in certain branches of industry to elect "delegates who would form a sort of parliament designed to regulate their work and keep watch over the bureaucratic administration" (*The Social Revolution*). The idea of a hierarchized system of workers' representation culminating in a parliament was to be implemented most convincingly by Ebert, Noske and Scheidemann.[5] The way this type of councilism treats the councils was definitively demonstrated — for anyone who doesn't have shit for brains — as long ago as 9 November 1918, when the Social Democrats combatted the spontaneous organization of the councils on its own ground by founding in the *Vorwärts* offices a "Council of the Workers and Soldiers

[5] *Ebert, Noske, Scheidemann:* "Socialist" leaders who crushed the German revolution.

of Berlin" consisting of 12 loyal factory workers along with a few Social-Democratic leaders and functionaries.

Bolshevik councilism has neither Kautsky's naďveté nor Ebert's crudeness. It springs from the most radical base — "All power to the soviets" — and lands on the other side of Kronstadt. In *The Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government* (April 1918) Lenin adds enzymes to Kautsky's detergent: "Even in the most democratic capitalist republics in the world, the poor never regard the bourgeois parliament as 'their' institution… It is the closeness of the Soviets to the 'people,' to the working people, that creates the special forms of recall and other means of control from below which must now be most zealously developed. For example, the Councils of Public Education — periodic conferences of Soviet electors and their delegates convoked to discuss and control the activities of the Soviet authorities in this field — deserve our full sympathy and support. Nothing could be sillier than to transform the Soviets into something congealed and self-contained. The more resolutely we have to stand for a ruthlessly firm government, for the dictatorship of individuals *in certain processes of work* and in certain aspects of *purely executive* functions, the more varied must be the forms and methods of control from below in order to counteract the slightest hint of any potential distortion of the principles of Soviet government, in order tirelessly and repeatedly to weed out bureaucracy." For Lenin, then, the councils, like charitable institutions, should become pressure groups correcting the inevitable bureaucratization of the state's political and economic functions, respectively handled by the Party and the unions. The councils are a social component that, like Descartes's soul, has to be hooked on somewhere.

Gramsci himself merely cleanses Lenin in a bath of democratic niceties: "The factory commissioners are the only true social (economic and political) representatives of the working class because they are elected under universal suffrage by all

very working of its internal democracy the new unitary organization aimed to accomplish the educative work that had until then devolved on the KAPD, and it simultaneously assigned itself the task of coordinating struggles: the factory organizations that it federated were supposed to transform themselves into councils at the revolutionary moment and take over the management of the society. Here again the modern watchword of workers councils was still mixed with messianic memories of the old revolutionary syndicalism: the factory organizations would magically become councils when all the workers took part in them.

All that led where it would. After the crushing of the 1921 insurrection and the repression of the movement, large numbers of workers, discouraged by the waning prospect of revolution, abandoned factory struggle. The AAUD was only another name for the KAPD, and the AAUD-E saw revolution recede as fast as its membership declined. They were no longer anything but bearers of a *councilist ideology* more and more cut off from reality.

The KAPD's evolution into terrorism and the AAUD's increasing involvement in "bread and butter" issues led to the split between the factory organization and its party in 1929. In 1931 the corpses of the AAUD and the AAUD-E pathetically and without any sound or explicit bases merged in the face of the rise of Nazism. The revolutionary elements of the two organizations regrouped to form the KAUD (*Kommunistische Arbeiter Union Deutschlands* — German Communist Workers Union). A consciously minority organization, the KAUD was also the only one in the whole movement for councils in Germany that did not claim to take upon itself the future economic (or economico-political as in the case of the AAUD-E) organization of society. It called on the workers to form autonomous groups and to themselves handle the linkups between those groups. But in Germany the KAUD came much too late; by

with any other form of power, they will be aware that a merely *abstract* agreement with this definition condemns them to nonexistence; this is why their real agreement will be practically demonstrated in the nonhierarchical relations within their groups or sections; in the relations between these groups and with other autonomous groups or organizations; in the development of revolutionary theory and an integral critique of the ruling society; and in the ongoing critique of their own practice. Maintaining a unitary program and practice, they will refuse the old partitioning of the workers movement into separate organizations (i.e. parties and unions). Despite the beautiful history of the councils, all the councilist organizations of the past that have played a significant role in class struggles have accepted separation into political, economic and social sectors. One of the few old parties worth analysis, the *Kommunistische Arbeiter Partei Deutschlands* (KAPD, German Communist Workers Party), adopted a councilist program, but by assigning to itself as its only essential tasks propaganda and theoretical discussion — "the political education of the masses" — it left the role of federating the revolutionary factory organizations to the *Allgemeine Arbeiter Union Deutschlands* (AAUD, General Workers Union of Germany), a schema not far from traditional syndicalism. Even though the KAPD rejected the Leninist idea of the mass party, along with the parliamentarianism and syndicalism of the KPD (*Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands* — German Communist Party), and preferred to group together politically conscious workers, it nevertheless remained tied to the old hierarchical model of the vanguard party: professionals of Revolution and salaried propagandists. A rejection of this model (in particular, a rejection of the practice of separating the political organization from the revolutionary factory organizations) led in 1920 to the secession of some of the AAUD members, who then formed the AAUD-E (the 'E' for *Einheitsorganisation* — Unified Organization). By the

the workers in the workplace itself. At the different levels of their hierarchy, the commissioners represent the union of all the workers in various levels of production units (work gang, factory department, union of factories in an industry, union of enterprises in a city, union of production units of mechanical and agricultural industries in a district, a province, a region, the nation, the world), whose councils and system of councils represent the government and the management of society" (article in *Ordine Nuovo*). Since the councils have been reduced to economico-social fragments preparing the way for a "future Soviet republic," it goes without saying that the Party, that "Modern Prince," appears as the indispensable political mediation, as the preexisting *deus ex machina* taking care to ensure its future existence: "The Communist Party is the instrument and historical form of the process of internal liberation thanks to which the workers, from being executants become initiators, from being masses become *leaders* and *guides,* from being muscles are transformed into minds and wills" (*Ordine Nuovo,* 1919). The tune may change, but the song of councilism remains the same: Councils, Party, State. To treat the councils fragmentarily (economic power, social power, political power), as does the councilist cretinism of the *Révolution Internationale* group of Toulouse, is like thinking that by clenching your ass you'll only be buggered half way.

After 1918 Austro-Marxism also constructed a councilist ideology of its own, in accordance with the slow reformist evolution that it advocated. Max Adler, for example, in his book *Democracy and Workers Councils,* recognizes councils as instruments of workers' self-education which could end the separation between order-givers and order-takers and serve to form a *homogenous people* capable of implementing socialist democracy. But he also realizes that the fact that councils of workers hold some power in no way guarantees that they have a coherent revolutionary aim: for that, the worker members of the councils must explicitly want to transform the society and

bring about socialism. Since Adler is a theorist of *legalized dual power,* that is, of an absurdity that will never be capable of lasting as it gradually approaches revolutionary consciousness and prudently prepares a revolution for later on, he inevitably overlooks the single really fundamental element of the proletariat's self-education: revolution itself. To replace this irreplaceable terrain of proletarian homogenization and this sole mode of selection *for the very formation of the councils* as well as for the formation of ideas and coherent modes of activity within the councils, Adler comes to the point of imagining that there is no other remedy than this incredibly moronic rule: "The right to vote in workers council elections must depend on membership in a socialist organization."

Leaving aside the social-democratic or Bolshevik ideologies *about* the councils, which from Berlin to Kronstadt always had a Noske or a Trotsky too many, councilist ideology itself, as manifested in past *councilist organizations* and in some present ones, has always had several general assemblies and imperative mandates too few. All the councils that have existed until now, with the exception of the *agrarian* collectives of Aragon, *saw themselves* as simply "democratically elected councils," even when the highest moments of their practice, when all decisions were made by sovereign general assemblies mandating revocable delegates, contradicted this limitation.

Only historical practice, through which the working class must discover and realize all its possibilities, will indicate the precise organizational forms of council power. On the other hand, it is the immediate task of revolutionaries to determine the fundamental principles of the *councilist organizations* that are going to arise in every country. By formulating some hypotheses and recalling the fundamental requirements of the revolutionary movement, this article — which should be followed by others — is intended to initiate a *genuine and egalitarian* debate. The only people who will be excluded from this debate are those who refuse to pose the problem in these terms,

those who in the name of some sub-anarchist spontaneism proclaim their opposition to any form of organization, and who only reproduce the defects and confusion of the old movement — mystics of nonorganization, workers discouraged by having been mixed up with Trotskyist sects too long, students imprisoned in their impoverishment who are incapable of escaping from Bolshevik-type organizational schemas. The situationists are obviously partisans of organization — the existence of the *situationist organization* testifies to that. Those who announce their agreement with our theses while crediting the SI with a vague spontaneism simply don't know how to read.

Organization is indispensable precisely because it isn't everything and doesn't enable everything to be saved or won. Contrary to what butcher Noske said (in *Von Kiel bis Kapp*) about the events of 6 January 1919, the masses did not fail to become "masters of Berlin on noon that day" because they had "fine talkers" instead of "determined leaders," but because the factory councils' form of autonomous organization had not yet attained a sufficient level of autonomy for them to be able to do without "determined leaders" and separate organizations to handle their linkups. The shameful example of Barcelona in May 1937 is another proof of this: the fact that arms were brought out so quickly in response to the Stalinist provocation says a lot for the Catalonian masses' immense capacities for autonomy; but the fact that the order to *surrender* issued by the anarchist ministers was so quickly obeyed demonstrates how much autonomy for victory they still *lacked.* Tomorrow again it will be the workers' degree of autonomy that will decide our fate.

The councilist organizations that will be formed will therefore not fail to recognize and appropriate, as indeed a minimum, the Minimum Definition of Revolutionary Organizations adopted by the 7th Conference of the SI (see *Internationale Situationniste* #11). Since their task will be to work toward the power of the councils, which is incompatible