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What Is To Be Done?

The Wrong Question

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cause the whole spiritual and personal dimension of life and individual existence is actively involved in the configuration of struggles.

The self-liberation of the working class must be the process of the total liberation of all its human abilities and feelings, or it will not happen.

When we ask ourselves the question, “What is to be done”, as in the title of the famous book by Lenin, we are posing the wrong question if our goal is to make a real contribution to the development of a revolutionary movement for our time.

1. *The Basis of “What Is To Be Done”*

As much as all the reformists and their pseudo-revolutionary disciples, who have attached the adjectives “left”, “revolutionary”, “radical”, etc. to an ultra-distorted Marxism and anarchism (and their spin-offs), may dislike hearing this, their main point of departure—historical rather than “logical”—lies in ruins.

They started from the basis of a widespread workers movement that, after rejecting the revolution, grew until it became an active force for the organization of capitalist society. This movement is finished, not because it no longer plays this role effectively—its essential historical role—but because it is increasingly opposed to the interests of the working class. And it is in this opposition to the class that the basis of its potential inefficacy as controller of labor power and as mediator between the class and capital resides.

This conflict between the old movement and the class is not visible, however, because it is structured as a confrontation between the isolated subjective will of the workers and their means of action, the traditional “labor” organizations. Hence the semblance of a conflict between the rank and file of these organizations and their leadership, and the appearance that this can be remedied by exchanging one group of leaders for another.

With regard to this point we must understand the importance of viewing organization as an inherent aspect of praxis. Apart from the question of their social character as forms of organization, empirical organizations are working-class orga-

nizations only when they effectively perform as instruments of the struggle of the working class; otherwise, they become capitalist organizations for the control of the workers. If this is not taken into account, the development of the working class in its struggle will be understood as a development *that has its organization outside of itself*, in the existing workers organizations, and the most one can say is that the problem consists in the fact that the latter have become bureaucratic, that they are led by traitors, or even that their members comprise an aristocracy, etc., etc. In this way a peripheral symptom is confused with the root of the problem.

(In reality, due to their form adapted to capitalist social relations, traditional organizations always prevent or retard the development of the autonomous organization of the working class on the basis of its struggles: they keep the class reduced to the level of the most purely immediate demands—organization with regard to each concrete struggle—and do not allow the class to develop new levels and more advanced forms of organization that would directly clash with the traditional organization. In fact, the emergence of assemblies and unitary committees was due more to the force of circumstances than to the desires of the trade unions, which preferred to retain all initiative in their own hands, deciding everything in their offices or committees, or having the exclusive right to negotiate working conditions before a more or less passive assembly. The dynamic of these organizations is intrinsically limited by the character of the social relations that give form to their internal and external activities; for this reason, their discourse and their activities are oriented towards their self-preservation as eternal forms and are opposed to a qualitatively different development.)

The question, then, is not *what is to be done*—which is answered by the elaboration of a program and tactics and the formalization of a particular type of organization, and is limited to putting all this into effect, to its *execution*. Besides other crit-

The working class will not free itself by transforming itself into a productive force for struggle. It already is a productive force for struggle by virtue of its social condition of being in conflict with capital. Consequently, it cannot discover in this field (the class struggle) and in its techniques, which consist of a purely external activity that confronts one group of individuals with another group of individuals on the basis of their belonging to social classes, to answer to the question of *how to emancipate itself* from this social condition. It is not a question of *how to fight*, because the struggle is, when posed in this fashion, only an executory movement. One fights one way or another as one lives, feels and thinks. The question concerns the internal, essentially spiritual dimension, which develops through struggle, but which is not inherent to the struggle and for whose development the struggle itself is only a means (once the historical conditions make the revolutionary development of the ruled class a necessity⁸). This connection between social struggle and individual self-transformation is possible be-

⁸ It is possible that the working class will not react to its disaster and that it will be destroyed as a class. Chronic unemployment, marginalized youth, growing poverty. But this is not the end. As events in France have shown, the question is not whether it will fight or not, but what the conscious content of the struggle will be. When there is no other choice, the “lumpen” express themselves in irrational revolt, which justly returns to society—including the passive working class—what they received from it: *betrayal and hypocrisy in the form of shamelessness and violence*. Naturally, not all of them are “lumpen”, just as not all of the “machine wreckers” of the 19th century were petty artisans. Nor is everything said against these revolts derived from a revolutionary position but, usually, reflects the same positions taken in their day by the aristocratic trade unions against the Luddite movements: collaboration in their repression. Ultimately, the proletariat will have to spring into action and mature in its consciousness by the means determined by history, not due to the will of a party or any kind of orthodoxy. In the French case, the consequences of what took place will have an enduring impact on the French proletariat. For the moment, it appears that it has for the most part united with its bourgeoisie against “violence” and given encouragement to the xenophobic extreme right. But this is far from over.

Consequently, creativity cannot develop on the basis of the advocacy of theories, but on the basis of new forms of practice that allow the free development of individuals, in both their external and internal lives simultaneously, as a precondition for free collective development.

7. *Revolutionary Praxis Must Be Integral*

This implies a continuous process of free learning; it cannot be predetermined by alleged “eternal” truths of the past, even if they are only “eternal” with respect to the “workers movement under capitalism”. All this ideological garbage is not worth shit. Without an open mind and without the development of one’s abilities for thought and action a revolutionary praxis is not possible, aside from the question of, in a concrete sense—at any particular moment and in any given conditions—whether it is a correct or coherent praxis, etc., which requires for its part a constant effort to reach the concrete and dynamic truth of things and people.

In this way, what those of us who want to consciously work to prepare for the revolution must do is to become capable of uniting *self-transformation and transformation* in our own individual praxis. Otherwise, we will not be able to understand the process on a social scale and without understanding the process on a social scale we will not understand how our individual process is developing. Here it is not enough to make a radical distinction between “private life” and “public life”, between our social interests and our deepest psychological desires, between the “thought of the struggle” and all the other spheres of human life.

tion, the nervous system—which, consciously experienced, is the *lucid silence* from which *thought* emerges and in which the conscious contemplation of mental contents is possible.

icisms that must be directed at this way of thinking, it cannot function in practice, because this way of posing the question does not touch the root of the problem: *the contradiction between the autonomous activity of the masses and their alienated organizations*.

The question, when framed in this manner (*what is to be done*), was, and is, *in and of itself* mistaken.

2. *Refocusing the Question from the Perspective of the Relation between Theory and Practice*

The question is not *what is to be done*, but *HOW IS IT TO BE DONE*—which can be more correctly expressed as: *HOW TO ACT FOR THE REVOLUTIONARY GOAL*. But this refocusing also eliminates the “*doing*” or “*making*” from our question. The revolution is “made” when it is previously planned. Instead, what we have to “make” is, in addition, the whole process leading to the revolution, which does not involve the elaboration of a program and all the rest—this is only the more theoretical and abstract side of the task—but basically consists of a process involving the *total self-transformation of the revolutionary class* by way of struggle. This process passes through distinct stages: first, autonomous organization for the immediate struggle; second, the autonomous constitution into an independent class and the construction of its own autonomous movement; and third, the final development of a radical and integral revolutionary praxis.

The theoretical dimension, furthermore, cannot develop prior to and independently of this process, without which it is worth no more than a working hypothesis—rather than an effective truth. If the theory and the “organization” of the theory are constructed apart from the real movement they will ultimately deviate from the real needs of the class, and will

become more and more abstract until they confuse their own abstractions with reality. This is true of postmodern theoreticians of all schools. If we cannot make theoretical progress because we lack a practical basis, the most sensible thing to do would be to undertake to clarify our theory and bring it up to date strictly in the light of the course of history, making the most of our accumulated experience. In fact, what is crucial for the development of theory is not the quantity of experience but, on the one hand, the quality of that experience—the level of development it expresses—and on the other hand the quality of the analytical and synthesizing ability of those who process this experience in order to translate it into general concepts and ascertain their applicability.

Where the class struggle has not acquired a revolutionary character, we cannot subject the various theoretical interpretations to the test of practice, except in a limited way. It must therefore be assumed that the only direct authority regarding the veracity of these theories is the working class itself in its historical existence, and that their political value is only that of proposals for action and reflection for today and tomorrow. Any attempt to formulate programs, build organizations, etc., in the formalist sense of at least defining “embryos” of the real programs and organizations of the future, etc., is an enterprise doomed to failure or, even worse, to be turned to other ends.

The splintered and isolated character of revolutionary groups is not conducive to any in-depth advances in this sense, except for the attempt to serve as a “rearguard” directed against all these errors, and for preserving a sharp, non-contemplative critical attitude towards these theoretical and analytical efforts, subjecting them to constant revision and viewing them as only limited approximations. They are limited because they express the points of view of very small groups within the working class and because their historical influence is also limited—at least until the future. In the case of opportunist or sectarian groups, this problem is

addition, justifies and mystifies this attempt, thus setting itself in opposition to future progress.

Starting from the assumption that what must be done is to propagate the ideology, program and organization of the party, these “party men and women” must see the destruction of their traditional bases of activity—the old workers movement—as a true disaster. For them it is the end. And they do have a point: *either they disappear, or they become capital’s last agents.* (As a third possibility, they could rise to a new understanding, but all their baggage weighs them down at every step and locks them into a veritable ideological prison.) In reality, by setting themselves in opposition to the inevitable they unconsciously adopt the role of capital’s agents and endeavor—with real enthusiasm—to interpret it in the best possible light within the theater staged by capital to distract the workers from their lives of spiritual and material poverty.

Our activity must be completely different, since the *creative action* capable of generating a new ascendant social formation—the community of revolutionary proletarians—can only essentially exist as *autonomous activity*, not as *activity determined from without or by external factors* (as in the case of a supposed theory of the vanguard which thus comes to “complement” the necessity of mass action, whose participants are supposedly ignorant). If the working class does not also experience the crisis and destruction of its old forms of action, thought and organization, which are becoming dysfunctional, discouraging and bourgeois, then it will never be capable of breaking with them and plunging into creative and open action which can radically transform the human world. *Because it bears repeating that creativity does not come from thought, but precedes thought:* it comes from the free interaction of the various factors of praxis as a whole.⁷

⁷ With regard to autonomous intellectual activity, creativity comes from the chaotic interaction of the totality of the mind and, by implica-

The first opposition is expressed in the crisis of capitalism and the tendential exacerbation of the class struggle. The second is expressed in the crisis of the workers movement and in the struggle within the working class for a revolutionary workers movement. The first is the objective basis for the development of the second, while it is the second that determines whether or not the suppression of the first is possible.

To the extent that the social relations created by the proletariat for itself make possible a development of its productive force, that is, of the entirety of its social abilities and autonomous activity, in such a way that it becomes incompatible with the rule of capital and with its own submission to wage labor (which is then recognized as the most abject form of human degradation), as well as with the forms of leisure and culture adapted to this slavery, the proletariat transforms itself and struggles to transform society in a revolutionary way. We therefore have a general response to the question, “*how to act?*” ***We should act in such a way that our praxis serves this autonomous development of the proletariat as a revolutionary subject, considered in all its facets (practical, organizational and theoretical), and in the various effective and constitutive moments of its collective existence (creative, reflective and executory).***

The followers of revolutionary parties do not understand this and their only reaction to the historic collapse of the old workers movement is to view it as a catastrophe that must be averted. That is, since they did not undertake the effort of definitively destroying it—it must be history which is responsible for this task under the whip of the bourgeoisie, which is in charge of rapidly and progressively destroying everything in it which still smacks of “worker—they, too, insist on preventing such an outcome. From the historical point of view, then, this self-proclaimed “revolutionary left” is the most reactionary force, since it is trying to prevent the inevitable and, in

also combined with their lack of practical moorings, which distances them from this kind of self-questioning. The former seek the solution of the problems of the working class in collaboration—critical or uncritical—with the reformist organizations. The latter pretend to isolate themselves from this collaboration, although this is impossible in practice.

In both cases, these groups fail to seriously pose the problem of their relations (or, if you prefer, interactions) with reformist forces as an inevitable practical reality as long as the working class itself does not break away from them in large numbers. Tacitly defending or virulently opposing collaboration leads, in the former case, to reducing the critique of class collaboration to an abstraction without any real practical application. In the latter case, when it does not lead to total self-isolation, it collaborates in an unconscious and unplanned way, generating confusion in its own ranks and among the working class in general.¹

¹ For example: “critically” participating in struggles that are progressive in an immediate sense, because they seek necessary improvements, but which in practice are under the control of trade unions and parties, whether reformist or pseudo-revolutionary. In practice, by promoting the struggle one does so to the advantage of these institutions unless one maintains an independent and coherent line from the beginning, which is based on an analysis of concrete conditions. It is very easy to preserve revolutionary coherence outside of the real class struggle, but once one is in the middle of it abstract positions do not matter, what matters is real action. It is by means of real action, in order to encourage and orient the struggle, that our participation will have objective value. It is necessary to make everything clear and to intervene at the right moment; it is not enough to define a few general principles and orientations. Even when openly questioning official leadership, it is necessary to have clear proposals about how to act and how to overcome the obstacles with which we are confronted.

Sectarian groups commonly think that their coherence is safeguarded by their open opposition to the dominant organizations and their leaders, but this opposition has little practical impact if it is not effectively and cohesively concretized for the working class at crucial moments of the struggle. Their weakness, furthermore, makes it easy for them to look for support among minority groups within the traditional workers movement

In the best cases, it is naturally quite easy for radical sectarian groups to support the “autonomous” struggles of the workers. In reality, however, what they are often supporting are *autonomously organized reformist struggles* that have not even consolidated a significant level of autonomy—beyond the practical imperative of defending their interests against the inaction or apathy of their official organizations. This, if possible, confuses matters even more, and allows one to see conscious revolutionary (and therefore politically significant) tendencies where they do not exist and where there is not yet any real opposition among the proletarians to the capitalist system and the old labor movement.

It is true that, in movements that are more or less self-organized, conscious autonomous tendencies can emerge and develop among a minority of their supporters, but do not yet affect the movement *in general*, nor can this be expected to take place on a significant scale (although anything is possible) given the historical trajectory of the *class* struggle up to the present day. Most of these movements are still driven more by the force of circumstances and in response to historically-imposed conditions, than as a result of a consciousness that at least recognizes the necessity of forming new organizations that are radically different from the traditional organizations (even if this is limited to assemblyist forms during struggles that are consciously removed from party and trade union control).

The question of whether or not a struggle is truly autonomous, or whether tendencies in favor of class autonomy really exist, is well illustrated by the most concrete case of mass assemblies. The latter are extremely flexible forms, so

which are critical of the latter, with the excuse that these workers are ideologically closer to them, but this not only does not diminish but also obscures the practical distance that separates us from those trade union and party sectors that, at the moment of truth, will not advance beyond a reformism radicalized with revolutionary verbiage.

then the problem must be posed as the problem of the development of the class itself, and not of its vanguard.

Once again, it is a matter of the relation of theory to practice, now seen as a division of labor between the masses and the vanguard, that is, in its subjective concrete form within the proletarian movement. The question is: *How can we contribute to the development of the creative action of the class in such a way as to lead it towards revolutionary consciousness?*

If theory is not determinant here, then our reflection must be focused merely on previously existing conditions: a social subject inscribed in determined social relations, in which it functions as a key productive force, and whose action is characterized by the creation of its own social relations for its articulation as a subject—*because the normal social relations turn it into an object*. Given this situation, the development of its creative activity can only depend on two factors, which we shall consider on a strictly general level:

1. *The opposition between the working class as a productive force for capital and the capitalist relations of production themselves* (which leads to the decline of capitalism as a mode of production);
2. *The opposition between the working class as a productive force for itself, of its own movement, and the social relations amidst which it finds itself, in order to constitute itself as an independent social subject within the present-day framework* (which, except for partial and brief attempts, have almost always led until now not to class autonomy but to the autonomization of the workers organizations against the class itself and, under certain conditions, to their transformation into direct extensions of capitalist power).

the majority of this minority, it is still only a matter of a radicalized mystification of reformist ideology, combined, to one degree or another, with distinctly bourgeois elements.

the objective situation, making decisions, consciousness and psychology in general) with spontaneity. Spontaneity is a reality even when the working class still acts as a mass of isolated alienated individuals. Such a situation manifests an *alienated spontaneity* that reproduces the parameters of existing society, which had previously “trained” and “socialized” the class in accordance with those parameters. Spontaneity, then, to the extent that it is still subject to capitalist alienation, is not a *creative spontaneity*. The same is true of direct democracy: if direct democracy is a necessary but not sufficient condition for workers self-determination, it is also true that spontaneity is a necessary aspect of creative autonomous activity, but it is not enough. More precisely, *it is only when autonomous activity, and therefore spontaneity as well, reach a level that is incompatible with existing social relations, that it can be said that spontaneity functions as a key that opens the doors of the repressed or subconscious creative abilities of the workers*. In this manner, the working class, by means of its autonomous activity, liberates, with its own practical energy, the creative potential that pulsates within it and which is repressed by capitalism, destroying its state of alienation on the subjective plane (consciousness, intellect) and on the objective plane (class organization, class struggle).

6. The Creative Action of the Class and the Autonomous Development of the Proletariat as Revolutionary Subject

If the problem of the *configuration of the mode of action* of the working class begins—as we said above—in creative and primordial action, in “the beginning which leads to all the rest”,⁶

⁶ Regardless of the fact that, for an absolutely tiny minority of the working class, theoretical understanding is already a reality—*although for*

they may or may not have an autonomous character. Only when it is the assembly itself that really directs the struggle can we speak of autonomous organization in its most basic form. If the assembly is actually only a consultative body—even if it does not officially have such a character—if it is utilized as a base of support for trade union proposals, or if it is led from the base by a conscious minority that drags in its wake a majority which is still too immature to seriously participate in decision making, in all these cases there is no *effective* workers autonomy but, at the most, a glimpse of such autonomy. It is always necessary to distinguish between form and content. The same is true of forms of struggle such as sabotage, blockading roads, etc.

Once we have taken account of the scope of the problem in terms of practice, which demands the greatest theoretical acumen, attentiveness to the concrete situation and a capacity for constant self-criticism, we come to the question: How to act?

3. Knowledge and Praxis: Creative Action and Executory Action

Those who only think about *what is to be done* are fundamentally preoccupied with “effectively” implementing their prefabricated programs and organizations. If, however, the problem begins not with *executory* action, but with *creative* or *formative* action, then the perspective is radically reversed.

Theory has to function as a mediation between *creative action*, which leads to knowledge, and *executory action*, which transforms this knowledge into a component of subsequent action.²

² This is what lies behind the radically divergent interpretations of Marxian theory that support both council communism and Bolshevism.

Executory action is that action which is determined by prior theorization. *Creative action*, on the other hand, is action which produces new experiences that serve in turn to generate new theorizations or to modify previous theorizations. In this sense, to speak of *creative action* is to speak of an *action which is not determined by prior theorizations* (plans, programs, directives, etc.), previous to the action itself. It is, however, necessary to specify that reality does not allow itself to be classified by these unilateral dichotomies and oppositions, which are only of interest in the context of our mental operations.

In practical reality, human action always includes both an *executory aspect* and a *creative aspect*, although in alienated activity these aspects are disconnected to a greater or lesser extent at a conscious level, reciprocally and in their relation to the environment in which the action takes place. These interrelations between the executory and creative aspects of action, and between both aspects and the total human environment, are therefore produced unconsciously. In fact, *creative action* is not generally recognized as such or, at least, it is not recognized with respect to its transformative basis: the prevailing consciousness tends to reduce creativity to the creation of new forms, as opposed to the creation of new practical and intellectual contents.³ The process of building their consciousness

³ That is, creativity is basically conceived as a *generative capacity for adaptation and diversification*, not as a *generative capacity for radically new original contents*, which may have previously seemed unimaginable or inconceivable, or even something that no one would have ever thought of. The development of the first, adaptive and diversifying, aspect of creativity, leads to the generation of ideas, forms of activity and objects that serve as more effective or flexible means for the achievement of concrete practical goals that were previously posited by practice or by thought. Its general result is technology and science. But it is innovative creativity that generates ideas, forms of activity and objectives that stimulate awareness in the human being of new needs and make new experiences possible. Its general result is the transformation of the way life is conceived, felt and enjoyed. In today's society, however, this aspect of creativity is subordinated to commodity pro-

theory functions in this context as a means, a stimulus and a catalyst for this self-determination in action, not as a substitute for it.

Theory is offered to the class in the form of proposals, subject to its theoretical consideration and practical testing. The revolutionary theory of council communism does not claim to function in itself as the point of departure and axis of action for the autonomous activity of the working class, but at the most as a particular part of that activity.

Not even the general consciousness that exists in the class, as a product of the accumulation of previous practical experience, which we may consider as a "general theory", really functions as a point of departure and axis of action for the class as a whole, since this "general theory" is an expression of the past, while the point of departure and axis of action are situated in the present and are in the process of continuous change toward the future. So that, in reality, the point of departure of the struggle is previous practice, which has adopted the form of this general consciousness, and the axis of the struggle (its means and its basic orientations) emerge from the continuous transformation of the general consciousness of the class in action, such that consciousness only has a determinant role at the level of tactics: the evaluation of changes in the situation as they take place and making decisions in accordance with these changes.

In other words, theory can be decisive in victories and defeats, but it is not itself the motor of progress for the class (which is not measured by these momentary victories or defeats, either). This motor is not even situated at the level of consciousness. It can, at most, accelerate this progress by anticipating the obstacles in its path and by augmenting the ability to mount a subjective response to these obstacles, avoiding errors or at least avoiding the repetition of errors.

But it is not my intention to identify the *creative* aspect of action (which simultaneously involves the transformation of

Nonetheless, insofar as the masses have not yet developed a clear orientation of their own, these individuals and groups can momentarily play the role of representatives of the masses if they have understood the general nature of the movement. Furthermore, since this understanding is necessarily limited, it must continuously clash with the changing dynamic of the masses and, unlike the case where the theory itself is considered as a flexible and determined tool, alienated praxis and its ideological justification lead their supporters to openly oppose tendencies of the masses in order to mould them in accordance with their own abstract parameters.

In today's circumstances, this contradiction between substitutionist elements and the autonomous activity of the masses is still attenuated because, given the enormous spiritual power of capitalism, the spontaneous tendency of the alienated masses is to adhere to the system and to remain within the framework of reformism and bourgeois democracy. As long as this does not change, although it is eroded to some extent by the increasingly more powerful impact on the situation of the masses by the tendency of declining capitalism to bring about the absolute degradation of labor and the decomposition of the social structure, the substitutionist elements will try in many cases to "dilute" their political platform for the masses out of fear of being rejected by them, thereby concealing their true political tendency and, basically, their real intentions.

In complete opposition to any kind of substitutionist praxis, council communists do not attempt to predetermine the action of the class, nor do our theoretical contributions to the process of the formation of class consciousness through reflection and debate constitute a guide for action in the sense of predetermining the means, the course and the result of action, independently of its own progress and the development of the conscious autonomous activity of the class. That is, for us it is the really acting subject, the proletarian class as a whole, which must determine its own course of action, and all revolutionary

is, for most individuals, a spontaneous process and is only formally conscious (when it rises to the stage of the conceptual construction of experience, but even then without involving a conscious evaluation of its contents).

For all these reasons, the *creative* aspect of human activity—which is inherent in the interactions involving action within the individual himself, between him and his environment, and between the effects on his environment and the other forces which are operative in that environment—is subjectively considered as secondary and subordinate to *executory action* which, *by its very nature, elevates theory to the determinant role in human praxis*. The question, then, of transforming human praxis itself is thus addressed from the point of view of changing theory in order to change practice, instead of the reverse—i.e., instead of abiding by the criterion of historical materialism. At the same time, *the amplification of creativity, and the raising of the latter to consciousness* is not thought of as fundamental for the purpose of moving towards the conscious development and exercise of the mind's abilities to operate in the process of *creative action* (in both its practical as well as its reflective moments), which demands a development of attentiveness, the capacity for the conscious assimilation of information, and the coordination of the energies and impulses of the individual which are superior to alienated modes of activity.

But this creative development of abilities and conscious action is just as necessary for the class as a whole as it is for revolutionaries. Otherwise, it could not be used to liberate the creative potential of the class and to channel it for the purpose of its self-development as revolutionary subject. In order to visualize all of this in practice, it is not necessary to refer to a very sophisticated example, like a process of artistic creation;

duction and is only acknowledged as a quality that pertains exclusively to exceptional individuals.

we may take the example of the development of a spontaneous proletarian struggle in a factory.⁴

⁴ A struggle implies a process of interaction within each individual between his needs and his consciousness, among individuals themselves, and between individuals and external forces and conditions. It is this process of interaction which can transform all these interactions in a revolutionary way.

The rigidities comprised by previously formed or internalized mental, social and external relations tend, for their part, to block and constrain this interaction, which signifies the activation of the entire subjective potential of transformation.

This process determines and develops in the different moments and arenas of the process of struggle. It includes the evaluation of the situation and of the possibilities for action; the definition of goals, clarifying real needs; the determination of the methods of struggle and organization; the definition of tactics and concrete tasks. Everyone, in accordance with the circumstances, must continuously reevaluate all these aspects.

It is true, of course, that the development of creative interaction is not directly correlated with the maturity and knowledge required for the struggle, but it is fundamental for optimizing the process, making it possible for each individual to give his best, and also for this potential to be collectively utilized in a coherent convergence with the continuously changing situation.

At the same time, creative interaction leads to the generation of a consciousness of the existence of new, previously unrecognized needs, and to the generation of a new understanding of reality as a whole, which are combined to define new goals and new forms of action that correspond with those goals.

To summarize: it is the process of concrete interaction that determines both the efficacy of the struggle as well as its usefulness as a form of development of the revolutionary potential of the working class. The progress of the struggle, the movement and class consciousness in a revolutionary and ascendant sense will not come as a result of the power of numbers, of a more or less effective leadership, from organization, from theoretical development or as a product of a sudden and mysterious "enlightenment", but as the result of the concrete processes of creative interaction which develop in the proletariat, especially in the context of the struggle.

All the concrete conditions, regarding the workplace, the industry, the situation, the composition of the staff, the qualities of individuals, their existing consciousness, etc., affect the process. It is by way of these complex interactions that the culture of struggle will be formed in various proletarian

Naturally, we do not intend to fall into the unilateral illusion. Lenin himself was perfectly well aware of the fact that his knowledge proceeded from action; he simply did not subject this relation and its mediation by the process of the intellectual construction of knowledge to a very profound or critical analysis. Nor did he view the active side of the subject-object relation (the working class) as the determinant factor of knowledge (revolutionary theory). His point of view was that of the contemplative individual, not that of the worker subject to class antagonism and forced to think for himself in order to survive and to win his freedom. Pannekoek, for his part, did not consider this issue from only one side, but instead took into account the fact that it is action, not thought, that is the determinant factor, and that all theoretical elaboration only determined the form and the degree to which this action was translated into consciousness. For him it was not intellect, but the working class itself, that develops its consciousness through its autonomous activity as a class.

5. Substitutionism and the Limits of Thought

The most advanced and concrete thought cannot by itself understand the totality in the process of becoming that constitutes the practical reality of any particular time and place. The prior definition of the result of practice by theory responds to a voluntarist pretension and is essentially utopian. Only when we imagine ourselves faced with the passive masses of society can this concept appear to have any practical validity. At the moment when the masses take action, these pretensions turn against the development of the autonomous activity of the individuals and groups that attempt, with good or bad intentions, to lead the whole movement in a particular direction, as well as against the autonomous activity of the masses.

In reality, action is always different, creative and innovative. It can keep its internal determinations more or less constant and universal, but always generate new particulars and singularities. Predictable standards alternate with unpredictable changes. Consciousness is continually surpassed by reality, towards which it can adopt an attitude of openness and surrender to dialectical interaction, or an attitude of deliberate mental closure and voluntary separation. But the latter attitude only makes sense for a defender of a static form of thought that seeks to go against the current of reality itself, that wants to force reality into the mould of its abstract principles, and that sees the inherent creativity of the life of nature, society and individuals as a threat to its integrity and to the realization of its *egotistical* goals. We thus see that this concept of action has a *self-referential* character, that is, it encloses thought in a self-affirmative circle from which it cannot escape, which is reinforced by reestablishing itself every time that the force of reality tears the individual from his mental stability and violently drags him into the *creative chaos* of reality.

Those who cling to that kind of mentality may think that this whole discussion is unreal (as much when put into words, as we have here, as when faced with it in their everyday lives). In this society ruled by alienated relations, and in the alienated workers movement that reproduces those relations within itself, *leadership is closed*, dogmatic, and always attempts to determine action, while *spontaneity is usually presented as lacking conscious ideals and plans*. That the previously formed theoretical leadership should be open to the creative dimension of action, and that spontaneity should generate, parallel with action, its own orientations (orientations that are thus determined by and not determinant of the content of the ongoing action); this is rather rare, and much more so if the separation between leadership and spontaneity takes the form of a division of labor between leaders and executives.

Returning to our subject, what must be emphasized is that the idea of *the effective priority of theory over practice*, instead of developing the basis of creative activity, leads to the marginalization of the creative aspect of activity in favor of a purely conceptual intellectual development. It is therefore an alienated intellectual development of the creative qualities of praxis, and thus dogmatic and doctrinaire as well as alienated from the interaction between thought and practice (which is itself spontaneously creative), thus yielding to essentially abstract thought. Not only because thought thereby becomes the “soul” of experience and forces the latter into the mould of its parameters, instead of creatively using it to produce new mental relations and to modify the old ones in order to lead to an always new overall view and an always more extensive theoretical ability. Also, this is particularly true because thought loses the habit of and is not trained to preserve a constant dialectical interrelation with practice during the course of action itself.

Action-in-process, however, is the true terrain of transformative thought. This is where all the richness, the complexity, and the various levels of depth possible for an analysis of reality are given, they are present in their real, sensory dynamic in our real life and are therefore also given to human consciousness in real life. Thought as an *a posteriori* activity following experience is an expression of either the alienation of the conceptualization of action, or at least of the mind’s impotence faced with the infinite complexity of the real—an impotence that we must always strive to attenuate.

milieus, and also by their means that this culture is transformed. All struggles, of course, will always share some common features, but any attempt to mould particular struggles according to a universal pattern, or a predetermined leadership, instead of causing the struggles to become the domain of the free unfolding of the abilities of individuals, might serve to attain short-term improvements, but over the long term would become prejudicial even to such short-term goals (with the change in objective and subjective conditions) and provide no benefits at all to the autonomous development of the working class.

4. *Creativity and Alienated Praxis*

Thus, the problem consists in discovering how the creative and the executory aspects of social action are related. Using other terms (which are partial aspects of the former terms) we can consider the duality of *spontaneity/organization or movement/leadership*.

With the development of alienated social relations these dualities take on the form of a *division of labor* between decision makers and executants, between organized and unorganized, etc. We thus reach a point where there is a real separation between *creative action*—which a minority seeks to monopolize and which is alienated by being conceived of as something that thought must rule over, and which is then integrated (in a false, ideological way) by the specialists in leadership—and *executory action*—which is reserved for the majority of the working class, in an attempt to dispossess it of the creative dimension of its own struggle. Viewed in this way, we can clearly see that this alienated division of labor within the workers movement is only the reflection, within the working class itself, of the spiritual rule exercised by the bourgeoisie and its specialists⁵ over the proletariat at the level of society as a whole.

It is not our intention to discuss the pretensions inherent to “leadership politics”. Our primary interest is mass action on the part of the class. If, in such mass action, the *executory* aspect predominates over the *creative* aspect, because it has been determined *a priori* as an *executory action* (hence determined by a minority), then we can speak of a *closed action*, dominated by a reiterative standard that causes action to be a circle that always returns to the same point: it begins with the execution of a previously elaborated theory, plan or program, and ends

⁵ Thus are the two great pivots of capitalism’s spiritual rule over those who bear the burden of the entire complex structure of alienating social relations that constitute the everyday life of the exploited formed.

with the verification of the theory, plan or program in the results of the action. This is a closed dialectic.

If the *creative* aspect prevails in an action—in other words, if the action remains open to the dynamic complexity of reality—then it is the case that theory can only be a *guide for understanding reality* (not for action, not something that determines action) and that the *changing complexity of reality always surpasses theory*. (That is, in reality the creative aspect is always the prevailing factor in practical activity, and the executory aspect is merely one moment among the continuous changes that alter both the situation of the environment and consciousness at the same time.) Such an action is an *open action*. It is not a closed circle, but a spiral: action alters its own point of departure, not only in the vulgar material sense (something which is more or less obvious in the class struggle), but also *at the level of the subject*: action transforms the individuals who take part in it; it quantitatively and qualitatively alters their real or potential level of autonomous activity.

Theory must, from the revolutionary point of view, abandon its pretension to determine practice (whether one’s own practice or—above all—that of others). Theory is not a *guide for action*, but a *guide for thinking about action*: every decision we make is influenced by the totality of interactions that shape reality, and the decision itself is a confluence of all these factors regulated by our needs, in such a manner that all of this is expressed through thought. *Theory as a guide for action is an essentially executory rather than a dialectical concept of theory*. There are, of course, occasions when we are unable to think about action in immediate response to events as they unfold, and we have to resort to the “archive” of our memory to derive some key points to put into practice immediately, with hardly even enough time to at least provide them with a form that is more appropriate in the context of the totality of conditions affecting our action in each concrete instance.