

Socialism or Barbarism

Solidarity

1962

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Solidarity Introduction (to 1969 Edition)

In May 1961 a small gathering' of revolutionary socialists was held in Paris. Present were comrades from 'Socialisme ou Barbarie' (France), 'Unita Proletaria' (Italy), 'Socialism Reaffirmed' (Great Britain) and 'Pouvoir Ouvrier Belge' (Belgium).

The text agreed upon (published in this pamphlet) attempts to redefine socialist objectives and methods of struggle in the conditions of the early sixties. Much had happened in the previous decades. Profound changes had occurred in the structure of capitalism. The promise of the October Revolution had not materialised. Instead a monstrous bureaucracy had assumed power over large areas of the world. In the West the traditional organisations of the working class had proved enormous obstacles to struggle and to the fulfilment of the aspirations of working people.

But there had been positive aspects too. The Hungarian Revolution of 1956 had demanded workers' management of production, the equalisation of wages and the rule of the Workers Councils. In the West, the working class — its strength and capacity to fight unbroken at job level — was slowly emerging from a long and difficult experience: the experience of 'its own' organisations (whether parties or unions). Young people were showing increasing disaffection towards traditional parliamentary politics. There had been a steady growth in anti-authoritarian consciousness and an increasing awareness of the need for direct action.

At the time the text appeared, the 'left' was floundering. It could not even understand the changing world around it, let alone come to grips with it and mould it in the image of socialism. The very notion of what socialism was all about had become utterly bureaucratised, if not assimilated with the long-term tendencies of capitalism itself (nationalisation, planning, economic growth, etc.). Ideas and slogans that may have had some meaning fifty years previously were being repeated, parrot-wise. They evoked no echo, for they were largely irrelevant to contemporary reality. It was hardly surprising that young people saw in the traditional organisations the mirror-images of everything they rejected.

The 1961 text was a first attempt at a reconstruction of revolutionary theory from rock bottom up. Its authors felt that without a development of revolutionary theory there could be no development of revolutionary practice. The text embodied a number of specific statements relating to the changing structure of modern capitalism, to the nature of its present contradictions, to the class nature of Russian and Eastern European societies, to the 'Third World', to the socialist programme, to how and why the traditional working class organisations had degenerated, to what a socialist programme should be and to what kind of revolutionary organisation was needed. The main features of this analysis — which is still valid today — were later embodied in our statement 'As we see it'.

In the words of our introduction of 1961, the task of theoretical reconstruction must 'find a solid basis in the everyday experience of ordinary people. It presupposes a radical break with all present organisations, their ideology, their mentality, their methods of work, their actions. Everything which has existed and exists in the workers' movement (ideology, parties, unions, etc.) is irrevocably and irretrievably finished, rotten, integrated into exploiting society. There

can be no miraculous solution... Everything must be begun anew, but starting from the immense experience of a century of workers' struggles, and with a proletariat closer today to real solutions than it has ever been before'. The French events of May '968 highlight both the correctness of this analysis and the urgency of the tasks ahead.

Of the various groups participating in the Paris Conference, SOLIDARITY (previously 'Socialism Reaffirmed') alone survives. Some of the original groups were organisationally premature. Others, after a long pioneering battle under the difficult conditions of a movement ahead of its time, have handed on the torch. Others yet have reverted to a more traditional type of political thinking. But the ideas have made their way. They are argued about today wherever revolutionaries meet to discuss politics. In one form or another they have now become part of contemporary revolutionary thought. (It is difficult to realise that ten years ago terms like 'privatisation', 'depolitisation', the 'consumer society' — or that concepts like the 'traditional organisations', 'selfactivity' and 'self-management' — were only used by infinitesimal minorities.)

On the scale of history the increasingly widespread acceptance of this kind of thinking far transcends in significance the perpetuation of this or that organisation. Today dozens of small groups base themselves on these ideas; even larger organisations are being subverted by them. In France, in May 1968, the validity of these conceptions emerged through the real actions of men. (Daniel Cohn-Bendit, for instance, was specifically to state how profoundly they had moulded his own political thinking.)

We are reprinting this text after an interval of several years. During this period the libertarian movement has grown in size but it is still in a state of considerable confusion. We hope the ideas outlined in this text will help equip it with a coherent and relevant guide to revolutionary action in the period that lies ahead.

May 1969.

1. Class Society Today

I. THE NATURE OF CLASS SOCIETY.

1. Capitalism remains a class society despite the great changes it has undergone in the course of the last century. The same struggle between the classes dominates social life. The same alternatives confront the working class: to submit to ever-increasing exploitation, alienation and enslavement — or to eliminate the exploiting classes, to destroy their social system, and to establish working class power. Only then will it be possible to reorganize society on a new basis and to give a new purpose to human life.
2. The relations of production remain the basis of the class structure of any society. In all countries of the world these relations are capitalist relations because they are based on wage labour. The wage-earners, both as individuals and as a social group, are expropriated from the means of labour, from the products of labour, and from the control of their own activity. They are concentrated in enterprises of various sizes where they are subjected to the ruthless will of capital, personified in the bureaucratic managerial apparatus.
3. Society remains basically divided into two classes. One class disposes of the means of production (either in law or in fact — either individually or collectively). It manages both production and society in its own interests. It determines the distribution, of the total social product and enforces it through its control of the State machine. The other class consists of wage earners whose means of life is the sale of their labour power, and who in the course of work merely execute orders imposed from above.
4. To an increasing degree every sphere of productive life has been 'proletarianised'. Capitalism has invaded all sectors of the economy. Even in the offices the dominant social form has become the enterprise based on wage labour and organised on an industrial pattern. Within industry there has been an increase of 'non-productive' personnel, who in their turn are becoming 'proletarianized'. Office staff, other 'white collar' worker's in industry or commerce, and certain categories of Government employees, are henceforth just as much proletarians as are manual workers. They too are wage slaves. They too are submitted to a ruthless division of labour and perform mere tasks of execution, carefully measured and controlled from above. Because of the numerical increase of jobs of this type, they too are deprived of any real prospect of a change in their conditions of life. Despite the illusions some may retain concerning the 'status' they once enjoyed, these strata belong to the proletariat. This is shown quite clearly by the methods of organization and struggle they are increasingly compelled to resort to, in the defence of their most elementary interests.

II. THE WORKING CLASS.

5. The evolution of capitalism has not altered the essential features of working class status in modern society. In the field of production the extraordinary increase in technical knowledge and the increased productivity of machines have resulted in an increased subjugation of the worker to capital. The utterly absurd nature of work under capitalism is being shown up more and more. The struggle at the point of production dominates the whole organization of work. It even affects the evolution of technology. Because of working class resistance to the bureaucratic organization of work the capitalists have to impose an over increasing control in the factory, over every aspect of working class activity, whether individual or collective. This takes the form of an increasing division of labour, of time and motion study, and of a perpetual tendency to speed-up.
6. The division of tasks in modern industry is carried out to an absurd degree. The purpose is to convert the yield of the individual worker into something increasingly easy to measure, and therefore to control. The purpose is also to assist the imposition upon workers of methods of production against which they constantly rebel. The tempo of living labour is increasingly subordinated to that of the machine. The situation is only very superficially different in the automated sectors of production. Here the sustained nervous tension, the loneliness and the monotony of supervisory functions create the same sense of destruction of the worker as a human being. The same process takes place in office work and in other sectors of the economy. Capitalist production is characterised by the total alienation of labour. The worker is reduced to the role of a simple 'executant' of infinitely divided tasks. He is robbed of the control of his own activities. These have been rigidly drawn up, defined and organized in the offices. He is converted into a mere instrument in the hands of those who manage production, into a mere appendage of the machine.
7. Despite a slowly increasing level of consumption the status of the workers as workers has not fundamentally altered. The working class remains exploited. It remains robbed of roughly half the product of its labour which goes to the parasitic consumption of the exploiting class, to the expenditure of the exploiters' State, and into investments over which the workers have no control. The nature and objective of these investments are determined by the class nature of society, by the interests of its ruling class. A given pattern of investment serves to reinforce and reproduce a given type of social structure.
8. The fate of the workers in political and social life has not changed either. The workers remain a subordinated class. The whole orientation of modern society (of its economy, of its State, of its housing, of its education, of the objects it will consume and of the news it will get, of the questions of war and peace themselves) remains decided by a self-perpetuating minority. The mass of the population have no power whatsoever over this minority, be the society 'democratic' or 'totalitarian'.

III. CONTEMPORARY CAPITALISM.

9. The transformations undergone by capitalism during the last century show themselves primarily in the increasing concentration of both capital and managerial functions. In the

countries of 'private capitalism' this concentration has taken certain well-known forms (monopolies, giant enterprises, trusts and holding companies, the creation of 'satellite' companies around the big enterprises, cartels, agreements, professional associations of capitalists, etc.). But it also shows itself more specifically by the new role played by the State. The State has become the main economic factor in contemporary society. The modern capitalist state *absorbs* about 25 per cent. of the total social product, *handles* (directly or indirectly) about 50 per cent. of this product, *owns* a substantial proportion of the total capital (often concentrated in key sectors such as coal and railways) and finally *acts* as a central agency for the regulation of the economy as a whole, in the interests of the capitalist class.

10. The concentration of capital and the increasing intervention of the capitalist state have resulted in certain changes in the capitalist economy itself. Some old problems have been solved, many new ones created. The failure to recognize these changes accounts for the sterility of much that passes as 'marxist analysis' today. The ruling classes have succeeded in controlling the level of economic activity and in preventing major crises or depressions. This is a result both of the changing structure of the economy and of the conscious intervention of the State to stabilise economic activity and to guarantee its expansion. Unemployment has enormously diminished. The increase of wages is both more rapid, and especially more regular, than previously. This is a result both of working class struggle and of a new policy on the part of the employers, aimed at buying discipline at the point of production in exchange for certain wage concessions. Wage increases now approximately follow increases in the productivity of labour. This means that the proportion of the total social product going to workers and to capitalists remains approximately constant. An increase in mass consumption has become indispensable to the smooth functioning of the modern capitalist economy. It has in fact become an irreversible aspect of it. The old 'image' of capitalism as characterised by economic slumps, increasing unemployment, and stagnation — if not lowering of living standards, must be discarded. The reality of contemporary capitalism is the expansion of both production and consumption, interrupted by minor fluctuations. This expansion is obtained at the cost of an ever increasing exploitation and alienation of the producers in the course of their labour.

IV. CHANGING STRUCTURE OF THE RULING CLASS

11. The concentration of capital through these various mechanisms has resulted in certain changes in the classical social structure. These relate to the social composition of the ruling class and to the means whereby individuals may accede to this class. As the 'rationalization' and organisation from outside of all human activities becomes the dominant feature of capitalist society, bureaucratisation spreads to all spheres of social life. In the process, inherited, individual wealth becomes relatively less important as a means of access to the commanding positions of the economy and of the State.
12. The 'traditional' ruling class (based on heavy industry, manufacture, shipping, banking, insurance, etc.) is being forced to share, on an increasing scale, the functions of administration and management (both of the economy and of society at large) with a growing bureaucratic stratum. This stratum is becoming an integral part of modern capitalist so-

cieties, indispensable to their 'efficient' functioning, and reflecting deep and irreversible changes in the structure of their economies.

13. The bureaucracy has some of its roots in production. The concentration of capital and the 'rationalization' of production from outside create the necessity for a bureaucratic apparatus in the factory. The function of this apparatus is to 'manage' the labour process and the labour force and to coordinate the relations of the enterprise with the rest of the economy. The bureaucracy also finds roots in the increasing number of individuals involved in the higher reaches of state activity (nationalised industries, government economic agencies, etc.). This is a result of the profound changes that have taken place in the economic role of the state. The bureaucracy finally finds its roots in the political and trade union organisations of the working class itself. To straight-jacket the workers, to integrate them more and more into the existing social order, requires a specific apparatus. This apparatus participates to an increasing degree in the day-to-day management of capitalist society, of which it is an integral part. The bureaucracy is not a homogeneous social formation. It has developed to varying degrees in various countries. Its economic basis is the final stage in the concentration of capital, namely the tendency of monopoly capitalism to fuse completely with the state. In the countries of classical capitalism the managerial bureaucracy is not based on any fundamentally new mode of production or new pattern of circulation of commodities. It is based on changes in the economic basis of capitalism itself.
14. The growth of the bureaucracy has profoundly altered the internal structure of the ruling class. New elements have had to be incorporated and the diffusion of privileges extended. New hierarchical relationships emerge. The process has been a very uneven one, the resistance of the old ruling classes to fusion with the new strata varying considerably from place to place. It has varied according to the economic problems confronting the capitalists, according to the pressures of the working class for more radical solutions and according to the degree of historical insight which the rulers have achieved.

V. THE PERSISTING CONTRADICTIONS IN CAPITALISM.

15. These modifications of capitalism have done nothing to lessen the contradictions of the system which lie in the field of production and of work. These are the contradictions contained in the alienation of the worker. Capitalism attempts by all possible means to transform the workers into mere executors of tasks decided by others, into mere cogs of its industrial machine. But if it succeeded in this attempt, capitalism would cease to function. Capitalism constantly attempts to exclude the workers from the management of their own activities – but is at the same time constantly obliged to seek their participation. This contradiction dominates every capitalist enterprise. It provides the framework within which the class struggle is constantly regenerated, whatever the level of wages.
16. Attempts by the capitalists to solve this contradiction by the 'rationalization' of their enterprises, by Taylorism, by work study methods, by the use of industrial sociologists and psychologists, by talk of the 'importance of human relations' have all miserably failed. They have done nothing to lessen the intensity of the class struggle which today opposes work-

ers and management, in every country in the world, in disputes concerning conditions and tempo of work and the control of human activity in the process of production.

17. Under a different form, the same contradiction is also to be found in every aspect of collective life. For instance political life is organized in such a manner as to exclude the vast majority of the population from any effective management of their own affairs. The corollary is indifference and apathy. These in turn make it difficult for capitalist political institutions even to function according to the requirements of the capitalist class itself. A minimum of genuine participation is required to prevent these organizations being shown up for the complete sham that they are.
18. The development and bureaucratisation of capitalism have not lessened its irrationality and its fundamental anarchy. Both at the level of the factory and at the level of society as a whole, the bureaucratic capitalist management is a mixture of despotism and confusion which produces a fantastic human and material wastage” The ruling classes and their bureaucratic apparatus constitute a small minority of society. They are separated both from the immense majority of mankind and from social reality itself. Because of this they are incapable of effectively managing even their own system, in their own interests. They are even less capable of solving the immense problems confronting humanity today. Because of this, and despite the elimination of economic crises of classical type, capitalism cannot and will never be able to avoid crises of another kind: moments when the irrationality of the whole system explodes in one way or another, bringing with it periodic breakdowns of the 'normal' functioning of society.
19. The crisis of all capitalist institutions is deeper than ever. Day after day capitalism demonstrates its incapacity to solve the problem of relations between men in the process of production. It also demonstrates its inability to solve any of the other major problems of social life in the 20th century. Its political institutions are an object of contempt for the general population, which is increasingly losing interest in 'traditional' politics. There is a general decay of all its values: moral, political, social and cultural. The crisis in the traditional conception of the family and the increasingly bureaucratic, artificial and absurd nature of 'education' in modern society have provoked, in all industrial countries, an immense revolt of youth. Youth today tries to live its life both outside and against established society. This has immense revolutionary implications.
20. The only objective which the ruling class is still capable of proposing to humanity is the carrot of 'a rising standard of living'. All that they mean by this is an increase in the consumption of material goods. But this increase is constantly outpaced by the increase in 'needs' which capitalist society automatically generates or quite artificially creates. The struggle for status and the acquisition of wealth is far more intense in an advanced industrial community than in a primitive African village. The slow but regular increase in living standards, which is a feature of contemporary capitalism, is counteracted by the increasing fatigue and alienation at work. It does not lessen the smouldering dissatisfaction of millions of individuals with their conditions of life, nor does it lessen the underlying social tensions. We have only to look for confirmation of this assertion, at the sustained nature of the class struggle in precisely those countries where working class wages are highest.

VI. RUSSIA, EASTERN EUROPE, ETC.

21. The situation is fundamentally similar East of the Iron Curtain. In these countries a bureaucracy has taken over the functions of management of the economy and of the State previously performed by private capitalists. This bureaucracy manages production and decides in a sovereign manner, through its control of the State machine, on the distribution of the social product. This bureaucracy was either born of the degeneration of the proletarian revolution (as in Russia) or through the incorporation of various countries into the sphere of Russian domination (as in Eastern Europe). In certain 'backward' countries the bureaucracy stepped into the political vacuum created by the complete disintegration of all established social relations. In countries such as China, for instance, it assumed its dominant position through the 'leadership' it provided to the masses in revolt. The rise to power of the bureaucracy in these countries is assisted by the absence or relative weakness of a class-conscious proletariat capable of imposing its own solutions to the crisis of modern society.
22. In these countries the bureaucracy has often revolutionised the property relations, either expropriating or fusing with the traditional ruling classes. Nowhere however has it altered the relations of production, the contradiction between rulers and ruled in the productive process. These societies remain class societies. The class struggle continues within them. Its objectives are not merely a redistribution of the surplus value. It is also to determine which class (bureaucracy or proletariat) shall dominate production and society.
23. The centralisation of economic life and a merciless dictatorship have allowed the bureaucracy in these countries to proceed with an extremely rapid accumulation of capital, based on an intense exploitation of labour. The bureaucracy has been able to industrialise the countries it dominates far more rapidly than private capitalism was ever able to do. But industrialisation is not socialism. Neither 'nationalisation' nor 'planning' eliminate classes and the struggle between them. Whether they be in private hands or 'nationalised' the means of production will never be genuinely collective property as long as the workers do not, *in fact*, dispose of them, in other words as long as the workers do not directly and totally manage production, determining both its methods and its objectives,
24. In these countries the bureaucracy manages production in an absolute manner. It does so both at the level of the individual enterprise (where organisation, methods of work and patterns of remuneration do not differ in any respect from what pertains in a capitalist factory) and at the level of the economy as a whole. 'Planning' is not subject to any kind of control by the masses. It is the instrument whereby the bureaucracy guides the whole of production in its own interests and fulfils its long-term objectives. The political dictatorship of the 'Communist' Parties and their absolute control over all aspects of life are the indispensable means whereby the bureaucracy ensures its privileges and maintains its total domination over society.

2. The Socialist Programme

25. ALL historical experience has shown that no reforms can alter the fate of the worker in capitalist society or solve the crisis confronting society. The programme of yesterday's reformists has been realised today in a whole series of countries. In the process it has proved its own futility! Historical experience has also shown that no stratum, category, or organisation can achieve socialism 'on behalf of' the proletariat and in its place. Socialism will only be built through the radical destruction of the present social system. To the extent that present society is more and more dominated by the bureaucracy this means that socialism will only be built through the destruction of *all* bureaucracies (including those presenting themselves as the 'leadership of the proletariat'). This means that socialism will only be achieved through the autonomous and self-conscious activity of the working masses. 'The emancipation of the working class is the task of the working class itself.
26. Socialism does not only mean the abolition of private capitalism. It means the abolition of all dominating and privileged strata in society. It therefore implies the abolition of any social group claiming to manage production or the State 'on behalf of the proletariat'.
27. The socialist revolution must proclaim and realise the expropriation of the capitalists and the suppression of the bureaucracy in the workshops, in the state, and in society at large. It must give the management of production in the factories to the workers (manual workers, employees and technicians) who operate them. The organs of this management will be assemblies of workers, shop assemblies, departmental assemblies, factory assemblies and factory councils composed of elected representatives, revocable at all times. Production will be planned according to human needs. A variety of alternative plans will be drawn up, electronic equipment being used to an increasing degree to work out the inter-related needs of various sectors of the economy. This is the purely *technical* aspect of planning. The implications of the various plans (in relation to such basic human questions as hours of work, level of consumption, level of investment) will then be presented to the people. A meaningful and genuine choice will become possible. This is the *political* aspect of planning. All revenue derived from the exploitation of labour will be abolished. There will be equality of wages and pensions until it proves feasible to abolish money.
28. The State is the pivot of all systems of exploitation and oppression in contemporary society. The socialist revolution will have to destroy the state as an instrument of coercion, independent and separate from the bulk of the population. The administration of production and the forms of social organisation will be radically different from the present one. The new institutions will be managed by those who work in them. The standing army and the police force will be abolished. The 'armed people' themselves will defend the revolutionary power, against attempts at counter-revolution. The main threats to the new society will come not only from the deposed ruling class. It will also come from bureaucratic tendencies

within the working class itself, particularly those advocating the delegation of industrial management or political power to 'specialised' minorities, The functions of government will be in the hands of assemblies of elected and permanently revocable representatives of the factory committees and of other sections of the working population.

29. The socialist revolution will give a new purpose to man's life. The elimination of bureaucratic anarchy and waste, combined with the changed attitude of workers towards the productive machine over which they have real mastery, will permit society to develop production and consumption to unsuspected degrees. But this development will *not* be the fundamental preoccupation of the socialist revolution. From the very onset the revolution will have consciously to turn towards the transformation of man. It will devote great efforts to changing the very nature of work (from subjection to the machine, which it is today, into an endeavour where creative faculties will be allowed to flourish to the full). It will have to create a universal education of a totally new kind. It will have to abolish the barriers between education and work, between intellectual and manual training, between the school and real life. It will have to abolish the division between town and country and seek to create integrated human communities.
30. These objectives must not be relegated to an unforeseeable 'communist' future.. If they are, people will feel that things have not really changed in the areas that concern them most, The activity of the masses will wane. For the sake of 'efficiency', 'specialists' will step in and start taking the decisions themselves. They may do so at first with the best of revolutionary intentions, but the revolution will soon begin to degenerate. The socialist revolution only stands a chance of being victorious (as a *socialist* revolution) if from the very first day it is capable of showing mankind a *new* way forward and a *new* pattern of life in all fields of human activity.

3. Degeneration Of Working Class Organisations

31. In the countries of modern capitalism the class struggle shows contradictory aspects. In production the struggle shows an intensity never witnessed hitherto. It takes place both in the field of purely economic demands but also, and on an increasing scale, on questions concerning conditions of work and life in the factory. The 'wildcat' strikes in the USA and the 'unofficial' strikes in Britain provide repeated examples of this tendency. But outside the factory the class struggle does not manifest itself as it used to. Or it only manifests itself in an abortive way, deformed by the bureaucratic working class organisations. Occasionally these mobilize particular categories of workers and bring them out in 'disciplined' and bureaucratically managed strikes. Or else the 'struggle' finds expression in purely electoral support for the so-called workers' parties, In the field of politics the present period is characterised by an almost total absence of proletarian participation. This phenomenon (which has been called apathy or depolitisation) goes much deeper than any previous or temporary fluctuation in the level of working-class political activity.
32. In today's society the proletariat does not appear to have objectives of its own. It does not mobilize itself — except in an electoral sense — to support the parties which claim to represent it. The active members of these parties are rarely workers. Looked at from the outside the proletariat appears utterly dominated by its political and trade union machines. But this domination is an increasingly hollow one. It masks a total absence of working class participation. The support is purely passive. The roots of this situation are to be found in two intimately interrelated processes; the evolution of modern capitalism and the bureaucratisation of working class organisations.
33. The degeneration of working class-organisations is not due to 'bad leaders' who 'betray'. The problem has much deeper roots. It is due primarily to the pressures and influences of capitalist society on the proletarian movement. Originally created to overthrow bourgeois society, the political and trade union organisations of the working class have increasingly adopted the objectives, methods, philosophy and patterns of organisation of the very society they were striving to supersede. There has developed within their ranks an increasing division between leaders and led, order-givers and order-takers. This has culminated in the development of a working class bureaucracy which can be neither removed nor controlled. This bureaucracy pursues objectives of its own.
34. The traditional organisations come forward with claims to 'lead' the working class. In reality they see the class as a mass to be manoeuvred, according to the pre-conceived ideas of those who dominate the particular Party machine. They all see the objective of working class emancipation as an increased degree of working class participation in general

'prosperity'. The reformists claim that this can be achieved by a better organisation of traditional capitalism. The Stalinists and Trotskyists claim that what is needed is a change in the formal ownership of the means of production and planning from above. Their *common philosophy* boils down to an increase in production and consumption guaranteed by the rule of an elite of managers, seated at the summit of a new hierarchy based on 'ability', 'experience', 'devotion to the cause', etc... This objective is no different from the essential objectives of contemporary capitalism itself.

35. The degeneration is not due to the intrinsic evils of organisation (as some anarchists would claim). Nor is it due to the fact that reformists and Stalinists have 'wrong ideas' and provide 'bad leadership' (as sundry Trotskyists and Leninists still maintain). Still less is it due to the bad influence of particular individuals (Gaitskell, Stalin, etc...). What it really reflects is the fact that even when struggling to overthrow the capitalist system the working class remains a partial prisoner of the system, and this in a much more subtle way than is usually understood. It remains a prisoner because it continues to conceive of *its* liberation as a task to be entrusted to the leaders of certain organisations to whom the class can confidently delegate its historical role.
36. The bureaucratised working class organisations, parties and unions, have long ceased to express the historical interests of the workers. The reformist bureaucracy aims at securing a place for itself in the management of the capitalist system as it is. The Stalinist bureaucracy aims at instituting in various countries a regime of the Russian type where it would itself become the dominant social group. In the meantime the Stalinist bureaucracy aims at using the working class in the West as pawns for the foreign policy of the Russian bloc.
37. Despite their periodic conflicts with the ruling class, both reformist and Stalinist parties and unions have as their ultimate objective the integration of the proletariat into class society. They are the vehicles through which capitalist ideas, attitudes and mentality seep into the proletariat. They seek to canalise and control all manifestations of working class revolt against the existing social order. They seek to limit the more extreme excesses of the system, the better to maintain exploitation within 'tolerable' limits. They give the workers the idea that they are genuinely represented and that they 'participate' in the management of society. Finally, and above all, they repeatedly negotiate wage concessions in exchange for an increased subjugation of the working class in the process of production itself.
38. The political and trade union organisations of the working class are confronted with an insoluble dilemma. On the one hand they are institutions belonging to established society. On the other hand they aim at maintaining within their framework a class whose conditions of life and work drive it to destroy that very society. The individual participation of revolutionaries in these organisations should be determined by prevailing conditions (degree of working class composition and participation, national traditions, nature of the organisations, etc.). But it is out of the question for revolutionaries to take over important posts in these parties or unions, or for the revolutionary organisations to set themselves the target of 'reforming' or 'capturing' them. Working class illusions about the possibility of 'democratizing' or changing these outfits must not be encouraged, and must in fact

be exposed. The organisations which the working class needs must base themselves on a totally different ideology and structure and use entirely different methods of struggle.

39. Apathy and depolitisation result from the bureaucratic degeneration. The working class organisations have become indistinguishable from bourgeois political institutions. They bemoan the lack of working class participation but each time the workers attempt massively to participate, they shout that the struggle is 'unofficial' or against the 'best interests' of the union or of the Party. The bureaucratic organisations prevent the active intervention of workers. They prostitute the very idea of socialism which they see as a mere external modification of existing society, not requiring the active participation of the masses.
40. Apathy and depolitisation also result from the transformations undergone by capitalist society. Economic expansion, full employment, the gradual increase in wage rates, mean that for a whole period (which has not yet come to an end) the illusion of progress still affects the working class. A higher standard of living appears possible and becomes one of the main preoccupations. This attitude is deliberately and very skilfully fostered and manipulated by capitalism, for its own ends.

4. The Way Forward

41. The working class is undergoing a profound experience of modern capitalist society. Possibilities are steadily increasing for workers to achieve the deepest possible insight into their real condition and to understand the real problems they will have to face in order to free themselves in production. The steady increase of consumption of a capitalist type creates its own problems. Goods in increasing quantity are bought at the cost of increasing exhaustion at work (this often makes the enjoyment of the goods quite impossible!). 'Needs' appear to be never ending. The absurd rat-race after a ceaselessly increasing standard of living generates its own resistances. These help loosen the grip the ruling class exerts on this method of manipulating the masses. Workers will increasingly see the key problem confronting them as that of their condition, as human beings, within production and at work. This problem is quite insoluble within capitalist society, whatever the level of wages. The problem confronting workers will become more and more explicitly that of transforming production itself: in other words that of workers' management.
42. In parallel with this development is the growth of working class experience of its own bureaucratic organisations. This will help it understand that the only valid solution to its problems is through autonomous action, through taking its fate into its own hands.
43. There is factual evidence that the working class is going through precisely such an experience. Increasing numbers of strikes in Britain and in the USA relate to conditions in the factory. This problem is gradually becoming the central one confronting the working class. Even if only implicitly and to a small degree, it is the question of management of the enterprise and of production which is raised every time the workers challenge managerial rights. The increasing number of 'wildcat' strikes in the USA and of 'unofficial' strikes in Britain show clearly that many sections of the working class are beginning to understand the real nature of the trade union bureaucracy. The same problems, in all their breadth, were at the centre of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956. During this great uprising the workers sought both to destroy the bureaucracy as such and to impose their own rule over production, through their workers' councils, the organs of their own power.
44. To rise above its present situation the working class, must build, its revolutionary organisations. It is more than ever obvious that such organisations are needed to assist workers in the class struggle today. This was shown very clearly by the recent experience of the Belgian General Strike.

5. The Revolutionary Organisation

45. The formation of a new revolutionary organisation will be meaningless (and indeed impossible) unless it bases its ideas, its programme, its structure and its methods of action on the historical experience of the working class, particularly that of the last 40 years. This means it must draw the full lessons of the period of bureaucratisation and that it must break with all that is mere ritual or hangover from the past. Only in this way will it be able to provide answers to the real and often new problems which will be posed to the working class in the period to come.
46. Both the conception of the crisis of modern society and the critique of capitalism must be radically changed. The critique of production and work under capitalism must be at the centre of the preoccupations of the revolutionary organisation. We must give up the idea that capitalism creates rational factories and rational machines and that it organizes work 'efficiently' although somewhat brutally and for the wrong ends. Instead we must express what every worker in every country sees very clearly that work has become absurd, that it means the constant oppression and mutilation of workers and that the bureaucratic organisation of work means endless confusion and waste. Material poverty must of course be exposed, where it exists. But the content of consumption under capitalism must also be exposed. It is not enough to criticize the smallness of the education budgets we must denounce the content of capitalist education. We must denounce the concept of the school as an activity apart from life and society. It is not enough to demand more subsidies for housing: we must denounce the idea of barrack-towns and the way of life they entail. It is not enough to denounce the present government as representing the interests of a privileged class. We must also denounce the whole form and content of contemporary politics as a business for 'specialists', concerned merely with a small number of circumscribed questions. A revolutionary organisation must break with traditional politics. It must show that revolutionary politics are not confined to talk of wages, government and international affairs, but that they deal with everything that concerns man and his social life.
47. The confusion about the socialist programme created by the degenerated organisations (whether reformist, Stalinist or Trotskyist) must be radically exposed. The idea that socialism only means the nationalisation of the means of production and planning — and that its essential aim is an increase in production and consumption — must be pitilessly denounced. The identity of these views with the profound orientation of capitalism itself must constantly be shown. Socialism is workers' management of production and of society and the power of the workers' councils. This must be boldly proclaimed and illustrated from historical experience. The essential content of socialism is the restitution to men of the domination over their own life, the transformation of labour from an absurd means of breadwinning into the free and creative action of individuals and groups, the constitution of integrated human communities and the union of the culture and the life of men. This

content of socialism should not be shamefully hidden as some kind of abstract speculation concerning an indeterminate future. It should be put forward as the only answer to the problems which torture and stifle society today. The socialist programme should be presented for what it is: a programme for the humanisation of labour and of society. Socialism is not a back-yard of leisure attached to the industrial prison. It is not transistors for the prisoners, It is the destruction of the industrial prison itself.

48. The traditional organisations base themselves on the idea that economic demands are the central problem for the workers and that capitalism is incapable of satisfying them. This idea must be repudiated, for it no longer accurately corresponds to reality. The activity of the revolutionary organisation in the unions should not be based on out-bidding other tendencies on economic demands. These are often supported by the unions and are eventually realisable by the capitalist system without major difficulty. The ability of the system to grant such wage increases is in fact the basis of the permanent reformism of the unions. Contemporary capitalism can only live by granting increases in wages and for that the bureaucratised and reformist unions are indispensable to it. This does not mean that revolutionaries should quit the unions or cease to fight for economic demands. It means however that neither of these points has the central importance that was formerly given to it.
49. Exploitation in contemporary society takes on more and more the form of a hierarchical relationship. The 'need' for such a hierarchical organisation is defended by both the capitalists and by the workers' organisations. It has in fact become the last ideological support for the whole system. The revolutionary movement must organise a systematic struggle against the ideology of hierarchy in all its manifestations, including the hierarchy of salaries and jobs in the factory and in the workers' own organisations.
50. In all struggles, the way in which the result is obtained is at least as important as what is obtained. Even from the point of view of efficiency, actions organised and led by the workers themselves are superior to actions decided and led bureaucratically. They alone create the conditions of progress, for they alone teach the workers to run their own affairs. The first rule guiding the activity of the revolutionary movement should be that its interventions aim not at replacing but at developing the initiative and the autonomy of the workers.
51. Even when the struggles in production reach a great intensity it is difficult for workers to pass from their own experience to an understanding of the problems of society as a whole. In this field the revolutionary organisation has a most important task to fulfil. This task must not be confused with sterile agitation or speculation concerning incidents in the political life of the capitalist or degenerated workers' parties. It means showing that the system *always* functions against the workers and that they cannot solve their problems without abolishing both capitalism and bureaucracy and without completely reconstructing society. It means pointing out to workers that there is a profound and intimate analogy between their fate as producers and their fate as men in society. Neither the one nor the other can be modified without abolishing the division of society into a class which takes the decisions and a class which merely executes orders. Only through long and patient work

in this direction will it be possible to pose anew — and in correct terms — the problem of mobilising the workers on general questions.

52. The revolt of youth in modern society and the break between the generations are without common measure with the previous conflicts of generations. Youth today no longer opposes adults with a view to taking their place in an established and accepted system. They refuse this system. They no longer recognize its values. Contemporary society is losing its hold on the generations it produces. The rupture is particularly brutal in politics. The vast majority of politically active workers and supporters of traditional 'left' organisations, whatever their good faith and goodwill, cannot make their reconversion. They remain trapped in the ideology of a previous period. They repeat mechanically the lessons and phrases learnt long ago, phrases which are now empty of all revolutionary content. They remain attached to forms of action and organisation which have collapsed. The traditional organisations of the left succeed less and less in recruiting the youth. In the eyes of young people nothing separates these organisations from the moth-eaten and rotten parties of privilege they meet on coming into the political world. The revolutionary movement will be able to give a positive meaning to the immense revolt of contemporary youth and make of it the ferment of social revolution if it can express what youth is looking for and if it can show youth effective methods of struggle against the world it is rejecting.
53. Ideas must be changed on the relation between the proletariat and the revolutionary organisation. The organisation is not, and cannot be, the 'leadership' of the proletariat. It should be seen as an instrument of the proletarian struggle. The role of the organisation is to help workers in struggle and to contribute towards clarifying and generalising their experiences. The organisation pursues these aims by the use of all methods consistent with its final objectives: the development by the proletariat of a lasting consciousness and ability to manage its own affairs.
54. The revolutionary organisation will not be able to fight the tendency towards bureaucracy (constantly engendered under capitalist conditions) unless it functions itself according to the principles of proletarian democracy and in a consciously anti-bureaucratic manner. This implies a total rejection of 'democratic centralism' and all other forms of organisation that encourage bureaucratisation. Genuinely revolutionary organisation implies a) the widest autonomy of all the local groups, b) direct democracy rather than delegation of decision-taking to be applied wherever possible, and c) centralisation, where necessary, to be achieved through delegates elected and revocable at any time by their local groups. More than constitutional guarantees are required however to defeat the tendency towards bureaucracy. This will only be overcome to the extent that a genuinely collective participation of all members can be achieved, both in relation to activities and in relation to the formulation of policy.
55. Revolutionary consciousness cannot be generated by propaganda alone. The revolutionary organisation must participate in the struggles of workers and other sections of the population, both assisting them and learning from them. While unconditionally defending the struggles of workers for their immediate interests, the organisation should put forward suggestions for linking these immediate struggles with the historical objectives of the pro-

letarian movement (demands against wage differentials, demands opposing the alienation of workers in production). The organisation should support all methods that make possible collective action and control by the workers of their own struggles (elected and revocable strike committees, mass meetings of workers before important decisions are taken, etc.). It should denounce bureaucratic forms of organisation and propagate the idea of more representative institutions (such, as the shop stewards' movement). It should finally seek to achieve the widest possible solidarity with workers engaged in struggle, seek to disseminate accurate information about these struggles and point out the lessons to be drawn from them.

56. The revolutionary organisation should also seek to bring closer together the proletarian struggle and the struggle of other sections of the population, equally deprived of any effective say in the management of the affairs that concern them most. The anti-war movement is particularly important in this respect. Both provide radical challenges to established society. Both necessitate a type of action only possible outside of the traditional organisations. Both command the enthusiasm of youth. Both are capable of generating new forms of struggle and of organisation profoundly relevant to the socialist future. Part of the propaganda and of the activities of the revolutionary organisation should be directed towards new layers of wage earners (white collar workers, office workers, students and intellectuals). The similarity between their objectives and those of the working class should repeatedly be pointed out, as should the only possible solution to both: the complete democratisation of society through the socialist revolution.
57. Revolutionary propaganda must go even further however. It must generalise the experiences of the working class in order to raise its struggle from the level of the factory to that of society as a whole. This implies a critique of capitalist society in all its aspects, along the general lines we have here outlined. It also means bringing back to the working class the real programme of socialism: collective management of a genuinely human society.

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Solidarity
Socialism or Barbarism
1962

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1969 reprint of a text published jointly by Socialism Reaffirmed (later Solidarity), Socialisme Ou Barbarie, Unita Proletaria and Pouvoir Ouvrier Belge following their May 1961 meeting which attempted to redefine socialist objectives and methods of struggle in the conditions of the early 1960s

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