

## On the Content of Socialism, I

### From the Critique of Bureaucracy to the Idea of the Proletariat's Autonomy

The ideas set forth in this discussion perhaps will be understood more readily if we retrace the route that has led us to them. Indeed, we started off from positions in which a militant worker or a Marxist inevitably places himself at a certain stage in his development and therefore positions everyone we are addressing has shared at one time or another. And if the conceptions set forth here have any value at all, their development cannot be the result of chance or personal traits but ought to embody an objective logic at work. Providing a description of this development, therefore, can only increase the reader's understanding of the end result and make it easier for him to check it against his experience.<sup>1</sup>

Like a host of other militants in the vanguard, we began with the discovery that the traditional large "working-class" organizations no longer have a revolutionary Marxist politics nor do they represent any longer the interests of the proletariat. The Marxist arrives at this conclusion by comparing the activity of these "socialist" (reformist) or "communist" (Stalinist) organizations with his own theory. He sees the so-called Socialist parties participating in bourgeois governments, actively repressing strikes or movements of colonial peoples, and championing the defense of the capitalist fatherland while neglecting even to make reference to a socialist system of rule. He sees the Stalinist "Communist" parties sometimes carrying out this same opportunistic policy of collaborating with the bourgeoisie and sometimes an "extremist" policy, a violent adventur-

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ism unrelated to a consistent revolutionary strategy. The class-conscious worker makes the same discoveries on the level of his working-class experience. He sees the socialists squandering their energies trying to moderate his class's economic demands, to make any effective action aimed at satisfying these demands impossible, and to substitute interminable discussions with the boss or the State for the strike. He sees the Stalinists at certain times strictly forbidding strikes (as was the case from 1945 to 1947) and even trying to curtail them through violence<sup>2</sup> or frustrating them underhandedly<sup>3</sup> and at other times trying to horse-whip workers into a strike they do not want because they perceive that it is alien to their interests (as in 1951-52, with the "anti-American" strikes). Outside the factory, he also sees the Socialists and the Communists participate in capitalist governments without it changing his lot one bit, and he sees them join forces, in 1936 as well as in 1945, when his class is ready to act and the regime has its back against the wall, in order to stop the movement and save this regime, proclaiming that one must "know to end a strike" and that one must "produce first and make economic demands later."

Once they have established this radical opposition between the attitude of the traditional organizations and a revolutionary Marxist politics expressing the immediate and historical interests of the proletariat, both the Marxist and the class-conscious worker might then think that these organizations "err" [*se trompent*] or that they "are betraying us." But to the extent that they reflect on the situation, and discover for themselves that reformists and Stalinists behave the same way day after day, that they always and everywhere have behaved in this way, in the past, today, here, and everywhere else, they begin to see that to speak of "betrayal" or "mistakes" does not make any sense. It could be a question of "mistakes" only if these parties pursued the goals of the proletarian revolution with inadequate means, but these means, applied in a coherent and systematic fashion for several dozen years, show simply that the goals of these organizations are not our goals, that they express interests other than those of the proletariat. Once this is understood, saying that they "are betraying us" makes no sense. If, in order to sell his junk, a merchant tells me some load of crap and tries to persuade me that it is in my interest to buy it, I can say that he is trying to deceive me [*il me trompe*] but not that he is betraying me. Likewise, the Socialist or Stalinist party, in trying to persuade the proletariat that it represents its interests, is trying to deceive it but is not betraying it; they betrayed it once and for all a long time ago, and since then they are not traitors to the working class but consistent and faithful servants of other interests. What we need to do is determine whose interests they serve.

Indeed, this policy does not merely appear consistent in its means or in its results. It is embodied in the leadership stratum of these organizations or trade unions. The militant quickly learns the hard way that this stratum is irremovable, that it survives all defeats, and that it perpetuates itself through co-optation. Whether the internal organization of these groups is "democratic" (as is the case with the reformists) or dictatorial (as is the case with the Stalinists), the mass of militants have absolutely no influence over its orientation, which is determined without further appeal by a bureaucracy whose stability is

never put into question; for even when the leadership core should happen to be replaced, it is replaced for the benefit of another, no less bureaucratic group.

At this point, the Marxist and the class-conscious worker are almost bound to collide with Trotskyism.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, Trotskyism has offered a permanent, step-by-step critique of reformist and Stalinist politics for the past quarter century, showing that the defeats of the workers' movement—Germany, 1923; China, 1925-27; England, 1926; Germany, 1933; Austria, 1934; France, 1936; Spain, 1936-38; France and Italy, 1945-47; etc.—are due to the policies of the traditional organizations, and that these policies have constantly been in breach of Marxism. At the same time, Trotskyism<sup>5</sup> offers an explanation of the policies of these parties, starting from a sociological analysis of their makeup. For reformism, it takes up again the interpretation provided by Lenin: The reformism of the socialists expresses the interests of a labor aristocracy (since imperialist surplus profits allow the latter to be “corrupted” by higher wages) and of a trade-union and political bureaucracy. As for Stalinism, its policy serves the Russian bureaucracy, this parasitic and privileged stratum that has usurped power in the first workers' State, thanks to the backward character of the country and the setback suffered by the world revolution after 1923.

We began our critical work, even back when we were within the Trotskyist movement, with this problem of Stalinist bureaucracy. Why we began with that problem in particular needs no long involved explanations. Whereas the problem of reformism seemed to be settled by history, at least on the theoretical level, as it became more and more an overt defender of the capitalist system,<sup>6</sup> on the most crucial problem of all, that of Stalinism—which is *the* contemporary problem par excellence and which in practice weighs on us more heavily than the first—the history of our times has disproved again and again both the Trotskyist viewpoint and the forecasts that have been derived from it. For Trotsky, Stalinist policy is to be explained by the interests of the Russian bureaucracy, a product of the degeneration of the October Revolution. This bureaucracy has no “reality of its own,” historically speaking; it is only an “accident,” the product of the constantly upset balance between the two fundamental forces of modern society, capitalism and the proletariat. Even in Russia it is based upon the “conquests of October,” which had provided socialist bases for the country's economy (nationalization, planning, monopoly over foreign trade, etc.) and upon the perpetuation of capitalism in the rest of the world; for the restoration of private property in Russia would signify the overthrow of the bureaucracy and help bring about the return of the capitalists, whereas the spread of the revolution worldwide would destroy Russia's isolation—the economic and political result of which was the bureaucracy—and would give rise to a new revolutionary explosion of the Russian proletariat, who would chase off these usurpers. Hence the necessarily empirical character of Stalinist politics, which is obliged to waver between two adversaries and makes its objective the utopian maintenance of the status quo; it even is obliged thereby to sabotage every proletarian movement any time the latter endangers the capitalist system and to overcompensate as well for the results of these acts of sabotage with extreme violence every time reactionaries, encouraged by the demoralization of the proletariat, try to set up a

dictatorship and prepare a capitalist crusade against “the remnants of the October conquests.” Thus, Stalinist parties are condemned to fluctuate between “extremist” adventurism and opportunism.

But neither can these parties nor the Russian bureaucracy remain hanging indefinitely in midair like this. In the absence of a revolution, Trotsky said, the Stalinist parties would become more and more like the reformist parties and more and more attached to the bourgeois order, while the Russian bureaucracy would be overthrown with or without foreign intervention so as to bring about a restoration of capitalism.

Trotsky had tied this prognostication to the outcome of the Second World War. As is well known, this war disproved it in the most glaring terms. The Trotskyist leadership made itself look ridiculous by stating that it was just a matter of time. But it had become apparent to us, even before the war ended, that it was not and could not have been a question of some kind of time lag, but rather of the *direction* of history, and that Trotsky’s entire edifice was, down to its very foundations, mythological.

The Russian bureaucracy underwent the critical test of the war and showed it had as much cohesiveness as any other dominant class. If the Russian regime admitted of some contradictions, it also exhibited a degree of stability no less than that of the American or German regime. The Stalinist parties did not go over to the side of the bourgeois order. They have continued to follow Russian policy faithfully (apart, of course, from individual defections, as take place in all parties): They are partisans of national defense in countries allied to the USSR, adversaries of this kind of defense in countries that are enemies of the USSR (we include here the French CP’s series of turnabouts in 1939, 1941, and 1947). Finally, the most important and extraordinary thing was that the Stalinist bureaucracy extended its power into other countries; whether it imposed its power on behalf of the Russian army, as in most of the satellite countries of Central Europe and the Balkans, or had complete domination over a confused mass movement, as in Yugoslavia (or later on in China and in Vietnam), it instaurated in these countries regimes that were in every respect similar to the Russian regime (taking into account, of course, local conditions). It obviously was ridiculous to describe these regimes as degenerated workers’ States.<sup>7</sup>

From then on, therefore, we were obliged to look into what gave such stability and opportunities for expansion to the Stalinist bureaucracy, both in Russia and elsewhere. To do this, we had to resume the analysis of Russia’s economic and social system of rule. Once rid of the Trotskyist outlook, it was easy to see, using the basic categories of Marxism, that Russian society is divided into classes, among which the two fundamental ones are the bureaucracy and the proletariat. The bureaucracy there plays the role of the dominant, exploiting class in the full sense of the term. It is not merely that it is a privileged class and that its unproductive consumption absorbs a part of the social product comparable to (and probably greater than) that absorbed by the unproductive consumption of the bourgeoisie in private capitalist countries. It also has sovereign control over how the total social product will be used. It does this first of all by determining how the total social product will be distributed among wages and

surplus value (at the same time that it tries to dictate to the workers the lowest wages possible and to extract from them the greatest amount of labor possible), next by determining how this surplus value will be distributed between its own unproductive consumption and new investments, and finally by determining how these investments will be distributed among the various sectors of production.

But the bureaucracy can control how the social product will be utilized only because it controls production. Because it *manages* production at the factory level, it always can make the workers produce more for the same wage; because it manages production on the societal level, it can decide to manufacture cannons and silk rather than housing and cotton. We discover, therefore, that the essence, the foundation, of its bureaucratic domination over Russian society comes from the fact that it has dominance within the relations of production; at the same time, we discover that this same function always has been the basis for the domination of one class over society. In other words, at every instant the actual essence of class relations in production is the antagonistic division of those who participate in the production process into two fixed and stable categories, directors and executants. Everything else is concerned with the sociological and juridical mechanisms that guarantee the stability of the managerial stratum; that is how it is with feudal ownership of the land, capitalist private property, or this strange form of private, nonpersonal property ownership that characterizes present-day capitalism; that is how it is in Russia with the "Communist Party," the totalitarian dictatorship by the organ that expresses the bureaucracy's general interests and that ensures that the members of the ruling class are recruited through co-optation on the scale of society as a whole.<sup>8</sup>

It follows that planning and the nationalization of the means of production in no way resolve the problem of the class character of the economy, nor do they signify the abolition of exploitation; of course, they entail the abolition of the former dominant classes, but they do not answer the fundamental problem of who now will direct production and how. If a new stratum of individuals takes over this function of direction, "all the old rubbish" Marx spoke about will quickly reappear, for this stratum will use its managerial position to create privileges for itself, it will reinforce its monopoly over managerial functions, in this way tending to make its domination more complete and more difficult to put into question; it will tend to assure the transmission of these privileges to its successors, etc.

For Trotsky, the bureaucracy is not a ruling class since bureaucratic privileges cannot be transmitted by inheritance. But in dealing with this argument, we need only recall (1) that hereditary transmission is in no way an element necessary to establish the category of "ruling class," and (2) that, moreover, it is obvious how, in Russia, membership in the bureaucracy (not, of course, in some particular bureaucratic post) can be passed down; a measure such as the abolition of free secondary education (laid down in 1936) suffices to set up an inexorable sociological mechanism assuring that only the children of bureaucrats will be able to enter into the career of being a bureaucrat. That, in addition, the bureaucracy might want to try (using educational grants or aptitude tests "based

upon merit alone”) to bring in talented people from the proletariat or the peasantry not only does not contradict but even confirms its character as an exploiting class: Similar mechanisms have always existed in capitalist countries, and their social function is to reinvigorate the ruling stratum with new blood, to mitigate in part the irrationalities resulting from the hereditary character of managerial functions, and to emasculate the exploited classes by corrupting their most gifted members.

It is easy to see that it is not a question here of a problem particular to Russia or to the 1920s. For the same problem is posed in every modern society, even apart from the proletarian revolution; it is just another expression of the process of concentration of the forces of production. What, indeed, creates the *objective* possibility for a bureaucratic degeneration of the revolution? It is the inexorable movement of the modern economy, under the pressure of technique, toward the more and more intense concentration of capital and power, the incompatibility of the actual degree of development of the forces of production with private property and the market as the way in which business enterprises are integrated. This movement is expressed in a host of structural transformations in Western capitalist countries, though we cannot dwell upon that right now. We need only recall that they are socially incarnated in a new bureaucracy, an economic bureaucracy as well as a work-place bureaucracy. Now, by making a *tabula rasa* of private property, of the market, etc., revolution *can*—if it stops at that point—make the route of total bureaucratic concentration easier. We see, therefore, that, far from being deprived of its own reality, bureaucracy personifies the final stage of capitalist development.

Since then it has become obvious that the program of the socialist revolution and the proletariat’s objective no longer could be merely the suppression of private property, the nationalization of the means of production and planning, but rather *workers’ management* of the economy and of power. Returning to the degeneration of the Russian Revolution, we established that on the economic level the Bolshevik party had as its program not *workers’ management* but *workers’ control*. This was because the Party, which did not think the revolution could immediately be a socialist revolution, did not even pose for itself the task of expropriating the capitalists, and therefore thought that this latter class would remain as managers in the workplace. Under such conditions, the function of workers’ control would be to prevent the capitalists from organizing to sabotage production, to get control over their profits and over the disposition of the product, and to set up a “school” of management for the workers. But this sociological monstrosity of a country where the proletariat exercises its dictatorship through the instrument of the soviets and of the Bolshevik party, and where the capitalists keep their property and continue to direct their enterprises, could not last; where the capitalists had not fled, they were expelled by the workers, who then took over the management of these enterprises.

This first experience of workers’ management only lasted a short time; we cannot go into an analysis here of this period of the Russian Revolution (which is quite obscure and about which few sources exist),<sup>a</sup> or of the factors that determined the rapid changeover of power in the factories into the hands of a new

managerial stratum. Among these factors are the backward state of the country, the proletariat's numerical and cultural weakness, the dilapidated condition of the productive apparatus, the long civil war with its unprecedented violence, and the international isolation of the revolution. There is one factor whose effect during this period we wish to emphasize: In its actions, the Bolshevik party's policy was systematically opposed to workers' management and tended from the start to set up its own apparatus for directing production, solely responsible to the central power, i.e., in the last analysis, to the Party. This was done in the name of efficiency and the overriding necessities brought on by the civil war. Whether this policy was the most effective one even in the short term is open to question; in any case, in the long run it laid the foundations for bureaucracy.

If the management [*direction*] of the economy thus eluded the proletariat, Lenin thought the essential thing was for the power of the soviets to preserve for the workers at least the leadership [*direction*] of the State. On the other hand, he thought that by participating in the management of the economy through workers' control, trade unions, and so on, the working class would gradually "learn" to manage. Nevertheless, a series of events that cannot be retraced here, but that were inevitable, quickly made the Bolshevik party's domination over the soviets irreversible. From this point onward, the proletarian character of the whole system hinged on the proletarian character of the Bolshevik party. We could easily show that under such conditions the Party, a highly centralized minority with monopoly control over the exercise of power, no longer would be able to preserve even its proletarian character (in the strong sense of this term), and that it was bound to separate itself from the class from which it had arisen. But there is no need to go as far as that. In 1923, "the Party numbered 50,000 workers and 300,000 functionaries in its total of 350,000 members. It no longer was a workers' party but a party of workers-turned-functionaries."<sup>9</sup> Bringing together the "elite" of the proletariat, the Party had been led to install this elite in the command posts of the economy and the State; hence this elite had to be accountable only to the Party, i.e., to itself. The working class's "apprenticeship" in management merely signified that a certain number of workers, who were learning managerial techniques, left the rank and file and passed over to the side of the new bureaucracy. As people's social existence determines their consciousness, the Party members were going to act from then on, not according to the Bolshevik program, but in terms of their concrete situation as privileged managers of the economy and the State. The trick has been played, the revolution has died, and if there is something to be surprised about, it is rather how long it took for the bureaucracy to consolidate its power.<sup>10</sup>

The conclusions that follow from this brief analysis are clear: The program of the socialist revolution can be nothing other than *workers' management*. Workers' management of power, i.e., the power of the masses' autonomous organizations (soviets or councils); workers' management of the economy, i.e., the producers' direction of production, also organized in soviet-style organs. The proletariat's objective cannot be nationalization and planning without anything more, because that would signify that the domination of society would be handed over to a new stratum of rulers and exploiters; it cannot be achieved by handing over

power to a party, however revolutionary and however proletarian this party might be at the outset, because this party inevitably will tend to exercise this power on its own behalf and will be used as the nucleus for the crystallization of a new ruling stratum. Indeed, in our time the problem of the division of society into classes appears more and more in its most direct and naked form, and stripped of all juridical cover, as the problem of the division of society into directors and executants. The proletarian revolution carries out its historical program only insofar as it tends from the very beginning to abolish this division by reabsorbing every particular managerial stratum and by *collectivizing*, or more exactly by *completely socializing*, the functions of direction. The problem of the proletariat's historical capacity to achieve a classless society is not the problem of its capacity to physically overthrow the exploiters who are in power (of this there is no doubt); it is rather the problem of how to positively organize a collective, socialized management of production and power. From then on it becomes obvious that the realization of socialism on the proletariat's behalf by any party or bureaucracy whatsoever is an absurdity, a contradiction in terms, a square circle, an underwater bird; socialism is nothing but the masses' conscious and perpetual self-managerial activity. It becomes equally obvious that socialism cannot be "objectively" inscribed, not even halfway, in any law or constitution, in the nationalization of the means of production, or in planning, nor even in a "law" instaurating workers' management: If the working class cannot manage, no law can give it the power to do so, and if it does manage, such a "law" would merely ratify this existing state of affairs.

Thus, beginning with a critique of the bureaucracy, we have succeeded in formulating a positive conception of the content of socialism; briefly speaking, "socialism in all its aspects does not signify anything other than worker's management of society," and "the working class can free itself only by achieving power for itself." The proletariat can carry out the socialist revolution only if it acts autonomously, i.e., if it finds in itself both the will and the consciousness for the necessary transformation of society. Socialism can be neither the fated result of historical development, a violation of history by a party of supermen, nor still the application of a program derived from a theory that is true in itself. Rather, it is the unleashing of the free creative activity of the oppressed masses. Such an unleashing of free creative activity is made *possible* by historical development, and the action of a party based on *this* theory can *facilitate* it to a tremendous degree.

Henceforth it is indispensable to develop on every level the consequences of this idea.

### Marxism and the Idea of the Proletariat's Autonomy

We must say right off that there is nothing essentially new about this conception. Its meaning is the same as Marx's celebrated formulation "The emancipation of the workers must be conquered by the workers themselves."<sup>11</sup> It was expressed



likewise by Trotsky: "Socialism, as opposed to capitalism, consciously builds itself up." It would be only too easy to pile up quotations of this kind.

What is new is the will and ability to take this idea in total seriousness while drawing out the theoretical as well as the practical implications. This could not be done till now, either by us or by the great founders of Marxism. For, on the one hand, the necessary historical experience was lacking; the preceding analysis shows the tremendous importance the degeneration of the Russian Revolution possesses for the clarification of the problem of workers' power. And on the other hand, and at a deeper level, revolutionary theory and practice in an exploiting society are subjected to a crucial contradiction that results from the fact that they belong to this society they are trying to abolish. This contradiction is expressed in an infinite number of ways.

Only one of these ways is of interest to us here. To be revolutionary signifies both to think that only the masses in struggle can resolve the problem of socialism and not to fold one's arms for all that; it means to think that the essential content of the revolution will be given by the masses' creative, original, and unforeseeable activity, and to act oneself, beginning with a rational analysis of the present and with a perspective that anticipates the future.<sup>12</sup> In the last analysis, it means to postulate that the revolution will signify an overthrow and a tremendous enlargement of our present form of rationality and to utilize this same rationality in order to anticipate the content of the revolution.

How this contradiction is relatively resolved and relatively posed anew at each stage of the workers' movement up to the ultimate victory of the revolution, cannot detain us here; this is the whole problem of the concrete dialectic of the historical development of the proletariat's revolutionary action and of revolutionary theory. At this time we need only establish that there is an intrinsic difficulty in developing a revolutionary theory and practice in an exploiting society, and that, insofar as he wants to overcome this difficulty, the theoretician—and, likewise indeed, the militant—risks falling back unconsciously on the terrain of bourgeois thought, and more generally on the terrain of the type of thought that issues from an alienated society and that has dominated humanity for millennia. Thus, in the face of the problems posed by the new historical situation, the theoretician often will be led to "reduce the unknown to the known," for that is what theoretical activity today consists of. He thereby either cannot see that it is a question of a new type of problem or, even if he does see that, he can only apply to it solutions inherited from the past. Nevertheless, the factors whose revolutionary importance he has just recognized or even discovered—modern technique and the activity of the proletariat—tend not only to create new kinds of solutions but to destroy the very terms in which problems previously had been posed. From then on, solutions of the traditional type provided by the theoretician will not simply be inadequate; insofar as they are adopted (which implies that the proletariat too remains under the hold of received ideas) they objectively will be the instrument for maintaining the proletariat within the framework of exploitation, although perhaps under a different form.

Marx was aware of this problem. His refusal of "utopian" socialism and his statement that "every step of real movement is more important than a dozen

programs” express precisely his distrust of “bookish” solutions, since the latter are always separate from the living development of history. Nevertheless, there remains in Marxism a significant share (which has kept on growing in succeeding generations of Marxists) of a bourgeois or “traditional” ideological legacy. To this extent, there is an ambiguity in theoretical Marxism, an ambiguity that has played an important historical role; the exploiting society thereby has been able to exert its influence on the proletariat movement from within. The case analyzed earlier, where the Bolshevik party in Russia applied traditionally effective solutions to the problem of how to direct production, offers a dramatic illustration of this process; traditional solutions have been effective in the sense that they effectively have brought back the traditional state of affairs or have led to the restoration of exploitation under new forms. Later we will come upon other important instances of bourgeois ideas surviving within Marxism. It is useful nevertheless to discuss now an example that will bring to light what we are trying to say.

How will labor be remunerated in a socialist economy? It is well known that in the “Critique of the Gotha Programme,” where he distinguishes the organizational form of this postrevolutionary society (the “lower stage of communism”) from communism itself (where the principle “from each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs” would reign), Marx spoke of the “bourgeois right” that would prevail during this phase. He understood by that equal pay for an equal quantity and quality of labor — which can mean unequal pay for different individuals.<sup>13</sup>

How can this principle be justified? One begins with the basic characteristics of the socialist economy, namely that, on the one hand, this economy is still an economy of scarcity where, consequently, it is essential that the production efforts of society’s members be pushed to the maximum; and on the other hand, that people still are dominated by the “egoistic” mentality inherited from the preceding society and maintained by this state of scarcity. The greatest amount of effort in production therefore is required at the same time that this society needs to struggle against the “natural” tendency to shirk work that still exists at this stage. It will be said, therefore, that it is necessary, if one wants to avoid disorder and famine, to make the remuneration of labor proportional to the quality and quantity of the labor provided, measured, for example, by the number of pieces manufactured, the number of hours in attendance, etc., which naturally leads to zero remuneration for zero work and in the same stroke settles the problem of one’s obligation to work. In short, one ends up with some sort of “output-based wage.”<sup>14</sup> Depending on how clever one is, one will reconcile this conclusion, with greater or lesser ease, with the harsh criticism to which this form of wage payment has been subjected when it is applied within the capitalist system.

Doing this, one will have purely and simply forgotten that the problem no longer can be posed in these terms: Both modern technique and the forms of association among workers that socialism implies render it null and void. Whether it is a matter of working on an assembly line or of piecework on “individual” machines, the individual laborer’s work pace is dictated by the work pace of the

unit to which he belongs—automatically and “physically” in the case of assembly work, indirectly and “socially” in piecework on a machine, but always in a manner that is imposed upon him. Consequently, it no longer is a problem of individual output.<sup>15</sup> It is a problem of the work pace of a given unit of workers (which in the final analysis is the factory unit), and this pace can be determined only by this unit of workers itself. The problem of *remuneration* therefore comes down to a *management* problem, for once a general wage is established, the concrete rate of remuneration (the wage-output ratio) will be determined by determining the pace of work; the latter in its turn leads us to the heart of the problem of management as the problem that concretely concerns the producers as a whole (who, in one form or another, will have to determine that such and such a production pace on one line of a given type is equivalent as an expenditure of labor to another production pace on another line of another type, and this will have to be done between various shops in the same factory as well as between a variety of factories, etc.).

Let us recall, if need be, that in no way does this signify that the problem necessarily becomes any easier to solve. Maybe even the contrary is the case. But finally it has been posed in correct terms. Mistakes made while trying to solve this problem might be fruitful for the development of socialism, and the successive elimination of such mistakes would allow us to arrive at *the* solution. As long as it is posed in the form of an “output-based wage” or “bourgeois right,” however, we remain situated directly on the terrain of an exploiting society.

Certainly, the problem in its traditional form still can exist in “backward sectors”—though this does not necessarily mean that one should provide a “backward” solution. But whatever the solution might be in such a case, what we are trying to say is that historical developments tend to change both the form and the content of the problem.

But what is essential is to analyze both the mechanism and the mistake. Faced with a problem bequeathed by the bourgeois era one reasons like a bourgeois. One reasons like a bourgeois first of all in that one sets up an abstract and universal rule—this being the only form in which problems can be solved in an alienated society—forgetting that “law is like an ignorant and crude man” who always repeats the same thing<sup>16</sup> and that a socialist solution can only be socialist if it is a concrete solution that involves the permanent participation of the organized unit of workers in determining this solution. One also reasons like a bourgeois in that an alienated society is obliged to resort to abstract universal rules, because otherwise it could not be *stable* and because it is incapable of taking concrete cases into consideration on their own. It has neither the institutions nor the point of view necessary for this, whereas a socialist society, which creates precisely the organs that can take every concrete case into consideration, can have as its law only the perpetual determining activity of these organs.

One is reasoning like the bourgeois in that one accepts the bourgeois idea (and here one is correctly reflecting the real situation in bourgeois society) that individual interest is the supreme motive of human activity. Thus, for the bourgeois mentality of English “neosocialists,” man in socialist society continues to be, before all else, an *economic man*, and society therefore ought to be regulated

starting out from this idea. Thus transposing at once both the problems of capitalism and bourgeois behavior onto the new society, they are in essence preoccupied by the problem of incentives (earnings that stimulate the worker)<sup>17</sup> and forget that already in capitalist society what makes the worker work are not incentives but the control of his work by other people and by the machines themselves. The idea of *economic man* has been created by bourgeois society in its image; to be quite exact, in the image of the bourgeois and certainly not in the image of the worker. The workers act like “economic men” only when they are obliged to do so, i.e., vis-à-vis the bourgeois (who thus makes money off of their piecework), but certainly not among themselves (as can be seen during strikes, and also in their attitudes toward their families; otherwise, workers would have ceased to exist a long time ago). That it may be said that they act in this way toward what “belongs” to them (family, class, etc.) is fine, for we are saying precisely that they will act in this way toward everything when everything “belongs” to them. And to claim that the family is visible and here whereas “everything” is an abstraction again would be a misunderstanding, for the everything we are talking about is concrete, it begins with the other workers in the shop, the factory, etc.

### Workers’ Management of Production

A society without exploitation is conceivable, we have seen, if the management of production no longer is localized in a social category, in other words, if the *structural* division of society into directors and executives is abolished. Likewise we have seen that the solution to the problem thus posed can be given only by the proletariat itself. It is not only that no solution would be of any value, and simply could not even be carried out if it were not reinvented by the masses in an autonomous manner, nor is it that the problem posed exists on a scale that renders the active cooperation of millions of individuals indispensable to its solution. It is that by its very nature the solution to the problem of workers’ management cannot be fitted into a formula, or, as we have said already, it is that the only genuine law socialist society acknowledges is the perpetual determining activity of the masses’ organs of management.

The reflections that follow, therefore, aim not at “resolving” the problem of workers’ management theoretically — which once again would be a contradiction in terms — but rather at clarifying the givens of the problem. We aim only at dispelling misunderstandings and widely held prejudices by showing how the problem of management is *not* posed and how it *is* posed.

If one thinks the basic task of the revolution is a negative task, the abolition of private property (which actually can be achieved by decree), one may think of the revolution as centered on the “taking of power” and therefore as a *moment* (which may last a few days and, if need be, can be followed by a few months or years of civil war) when the workers seize power and expropriate de facto and de jure the factory owners. And in this case, one actually will be led to grant a

prime importance to the “taking of power” and to an organ constructed exclusively with this end in view.

That in fact is how things happen during a bourgeois revolution. The new society is prepared for completely within the old one; manufacturing concentrates employers and workers, the rent peasants pay to landed property owners is stripped of every economic function as these proprietors are stripped of every social function. Only a feudal shell remains around this society that is in fact bourgeois. A Bastille is demolished, a few heads cut off, a night falls in August, some elected officials (many of whom are lawyers) draft some constitutions, some laws, and some decrees—and the trick is played. The revolution is over, a historical period is closed, another is opened. True, a civil war may follow: The drafting of new codes will take a few years, the structure of the administration as well as that of the army will undergo significant changes. But the essence of the revolution is over before the revolution begins.

Indeed, the bourgeois revolution is only pure negation as concerns the area of economics. It is based upon what already is there, it limits itself to erecting into law a state of fact by abolishing a superstructure that in itself already is unreal. Its limited constructions affect only this superstructure; the economic base takes care of itself. Whether this occurs before or after the bourgeois revolution, once established in the economic sector, capitalism spreads by the force of its own laws over the terrain of simple commercial production that it discovers lying stretched out before it.

There is no relationship between this process and that of the socialist revolution. The latter is not a simple negation of certain aspects of the order that preceded it; it is essentially *positive*. It has to construct its regime—constructing not factories but new relations of production for which the development of capitalism furnishes merely the presuppositions. We will be able to see this better by rereading the passage where Marx describes the “Historical Tendency of Capitalist Accumulation.” Please excuse us for citing a long passage.

As soon as the capitalist mode of production stands on its own feet, then the further socialization of labor and further transformation of the land and other means of production into socially exploited and, therefore, common means of production, as well as the further expropriation of private proprietors, takes a new form. That which is now to be expropriated is no longer the laborer working for himself, but the capitalist exploiting many laborers. This expropriation is accomplished by the action of the immanent laws of capitalistic production itself, by the centralization of capital. One capitalist always kills many. Hand in hand with this centralization, or this expropriation of many capitalists by few develop, on an ever-extending scale, the co-operative form of the labor-process, the conscious technical application of science, the methodical cultivation of the soil, the transformation of the instruments of labor into instruments of labor only usable in common, the economizing of all means of production by their use as the means of production of combined, socialized labor, the entanglement of all peoples in the net

of the world-market, and with this, the international character of the capitalistic regime. Along with the constantly diminishing number of the magnates of capital, who usurp and monopolize all advantages of this process of transformation, grows the mass of misery, oppression, slavery, degradation, exploitation; but with this too grows the revolt of the working-class, a class always increasing in numbers, and disciplined, united, organized by the very mechanism of the process of capitalist production itself. The monopoly of capital becomes a fetter upon the mode of production, which has sprung up and flourished along with, and under it. Centralization of the means of production and socialization of labor at last reach a point where they become incompatible with their capitalist integument. This integument is burst asunder. The knell of capitalist private property sounds. The expropriators are expropriated.<sup>18</sup>

What in fact exists of the new society at the moment when the “capitalist integument is burst asunder”? All its premises: a society composed almost entirely of proletarians, the “rational application of science in industry,” and also, given the degree of concentration of business enterprises this passage presupposes, the separation of property ownership from the actual functions of directing production. But where can we find already realized in this society socialist relations of production, as bourgeois relations of production were in “feudal” society?

Now, it is obvious that these new relations of production cannot be *merely* those realized in the “socialization of the labor process,” the cooperation of thousands of individuals within the great industrial units of production. For these are the relations of production *typical* of a highly developed form of *capitalism*.

The “socialization of the labor process” as it takes place in the capitalist economy is the premise of socialism in that it abolishes anarchy, isolation, dispersion, etc. But it is in no way socialism’s “prefiguration” or “embryo,” in that it is an *antagonistic* form of socialization; i. e., it reproduces and deepens the division between the mass of executants and a stratum of directors. At the same time the producers are subjected to a collective form of discipline, the conditions of production are standardized among various sectors and localities, and production tasks become interchangeable, we notice at the other pole not only a decreasing number of capitalists in a more and more parasitic role but also the constitution of a separate apparatus for directing production. Now, socialist relations of production are those types of relations that preclude the separate existence of a fixed and stable stratum of directors of production. We see, therefore, that the point of departure for realizing such relations can be only the destruction of the power of the bourgeoisie or the bureaucracy. The capitalist transformation of society *ends* with the bourgeois revolution; the socialist transformation of society *begins* with the proletarian revolution.

Modern developments themselves have abolished the aspects of the problem of management that once were considered decisive. On the one hand, managerial labor itself has become a form of wage labor, as Engels already pointed out; on the other hand, it has become itself a *collective labor of execution*.<sup>19</sup> The

“tasks” involved in the organization of labor, which formerly fell to the boss, assisted by a few technicians, now are performed by offices bringing together hundreds or thousands of persons, who themselves work as salaried, compartmentalized executives. The other group of traditional managerial tasks, which basically involve integrating the enterprise into the economy as a whole (in particular, those involving market “analysis” or having a “flair” for the market—which pertain to the nature, quality, and price of manufactured goods in demand, modifications in the scale of production, etc.), already has been transformed in its very nature with the advent of monopolies. The way this group of tasks is accomplished has been transformed too, since its basics are now carried out by a collective apparatus that canvasses the market, surveys consumer tastes, sells the product, etc. All this already has happened under monopoly capitalism. When private property gives way to State-run property, as in [total] bureaucratic capitalism, a central apparatus for coordinating the functioning of enterprises takes the place both of the market as “regulator” and of the apparatuses belonging to each enterprise; this is the central planning bureaucracy, the economic “necessity” for which should issue, according to its defenders, directly from these functions of coordination.

There is no point in discussing this sophism. Let us simply note in passing that the advocates of the bureaucracy demonstrate, in a first move, that one can do without bosses since one can make the economy function according to a plan and, in a second move, that for the plan to function, it has need of bosses of a different kind. For—and here is what interests us—the problem of how to coordinate the activity of enterprises and sectors of production after the market has been abolished, in other words, the problem of planning, already has been virtually abolished by advancements in modern techniques. Leontief’s method,<sup>20</sup> even in its present form,<sup>21</sup> removes all “political” or “economic” meaning from the problem of how to coordinate various sectors or various enterprises, for it allows us to determine the consequences for a entire set of sectors, regions, and enterprises once we have settled upon the desired volume of production of end-use articles. At the same time, it allows us a large degree of flexibility, for this method makes it possible, if we want to modify the plan while work is in progress, to draw out immediately the practical implications of such a change. Combined with other modern methods,<sup>22</sup> it allows us both to choose the optimal methods for achieving our overall objectives, once they are settled upon, and to define these methods in detail for the entire economy. Briefly speaking, all of the “planning activity” of the Russian bureaucracy, for example, could be transferred at this point to an electronic calculator.

The problem, therefore, appears only at the two extremes of economic activity: at the most specific level (how to translate the production goal of a particular factory into the production goals to be carried out by each group of workers in the shops of this factory) and at the universal level (how to determine the production goals for end-use goods of the entire economy).

In both cases, the problem exists only because technique (in the broad sense of this term) develops—and it will develop even more in a socialist society. Indeed, it is clear that with an unchanging set of techniques the type of solution (if

not the solutions themselves, whose exact terms will vary if, for example, there is accumulation) would be given once and for all, and that it would be merely a matter of allocating tasks within a shop (perfectly compatible with the possibility of interchangeable producers being able to switch between different jobs) or of determining the end-use products. The incessant modification of the different possible ways of carrying out production along with the incessant modification of final objectives will create the terrain on which collective management will work itself out.

### **Alienation in Capitalist Society**

By alienation—a characteristic moment of every class society, but one that appears to an incomparably greater extent and depth in capitalist society—we mean to say that the products of man’s activity (whether we are talking about objects or institutions) take on an independent social existence opposite him. Instead of being dominated by him, these products dominate him. Alienation is that which is opposed to man’s free creativity in the world created by man; it is not an independent historical principle having its own source. It is the objectification of human activity insofar as it escapes its author without its author being able to escape it. Every form of alienation is a form of human objectification; i.e., it has its source in human activity (there are no “secret forces” in history, any more than there is a cunning of reason in natural economic laws). But not every form of objectification is necessarily a form of alienation insofar as it can be consciously taken up again, reaffirmed or destroyed. As soon as it is posited, every product of human activity (even a purely internal attitude) “escapes its author” and even leads an existence independent of that author. We cannot act as if we have not uttered some particular word, but we can cease to be determined by it. The past life of every individual is its objectification till today; but he is not necessarily and exhaustively alienated from it, his future is not permanently dominated by his past. Socialism will be the abolition of alienation in that it will permit the perpetual, conscious recovery without violent conflict of the socially given, in that it will restore people’s domination over the products of their activity. Capitalist society is an alienated society in that its transformations take place independently of people’s will and consciousness (including those of the dominant class), according to quasi-“laws” that express objective structures independent of their control.

What interests us here is not to describe how alienation is produced in the form of alienation in capitalist society (which would involve an analysis of the birth of capitalism as well as of its functioning) but to show the concrete manifestations of this alienation in various spheres of social activity as well as their intimate unity.

Only to the extent that we grasp the content of socialism as the proletariat’s autonomy, as free creative activity determining itself, as workers’ management in all domains, can we grasp the essence of man’s alienation in capitalist society. Indeed, it is not by accident that “enlightened” members of the bourgeoisie as



well as reformist and Stalinist bureaucrats want to reduce the evils of capitalism to essentially economic evils, and, on the economic level, to exploitation in the form of an unequal distribution of national income. To the extent that their critique of capitalism is extended to other domains it again will take for its point of departure this unequal distribution of income, and it will consist basically of variations on the theme of the corrupting influence of money. If they look at the family or the sexual question, they will talk about how poverty makes prostitutes, about the young girl sold to the rich old man, about domestic problems that are the result of economic misery. If they look at culture, they will talk about venality, about obstacles put in the way of talented but underprivileged people, and about illiteracy. Certainly, all that is true, and important. But it only touches the surface of the problem, and those who talk only in this way regard man solely as a consumer and, by pretending to satisfy him on this level, they tend to reduce him to his (direct or sublimated) physical functions of digestion. But for man, what is at stake is not “ingestion”<sup>23</sup> pure and simple; rather it is a matter of self-expression and self-creation, and not only in the economic domain, but in all domains.

In class society, conflict is not expressed simply in the area of distribution, in the form of exploitation and limitations on consumption. This is only one aspect of the conflict and not the most important one. Its fundamental feature is to be found in the limitations placed on man’s human role in the domain of production; eventually, these limitations go so far as an attempt to abolish this role completely. It is to be found in the fact that man is expropriated, both individually and collectively, from having command over his own activity. By his enslavement to the machine, and through the machine, to an abstract, foreign, and hostile will, man is deprived of the true content of his human activity, the conscious transformation of the natural world. It constantly inhibits his deep-seated tendency to realize himself in the object. The true signification of this situation is not only that the producers live it as an absolute misfortune, as a permanent mutilation; it is that this situation creates at the profoundest level of production a perpetual conflict, which explodes at least on occasion; it also is that it makes for huge wastefulness—in comparison to which the wastefulness involved in crises of overproduction is probably negligible—both through the producers’ positive opposition to a system they reject and through the lost opportunities that result from neutralizing the inventiveness and creativity of millions of individuals. Beyond these features, we must ask ourselves to what extent the further development of capitalist production is possible, even “technically,” if the direct producer continues to be kept in the compartmentalized state in which he currently resides.

But alienation in capitalist society is not simply economic. It not only manifests itself in connection with material life. It also affects in a fundamental way both man’s sexual and his cultural functions.

Indeed, society exists only insofar as there exists an organization of production and reproduction of the life of individuals and of the species—therefore an organization of economic and sexual relations—and only insofar as this organi-

zation ceases to be simply instinctual and becomes conscious — therefore only insofar as it includes the moment of culture.

As Marx said, “A bee puts to shame many an architect in the construction of her cells. But what distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees is this, that the architect raises his structure in imagination before he erects it in reality.”<sup>24</sup> Technique and consciousness obviously go hand in hand: An instrument is a materialized and operative signification, or better yet a mediation between a deliberate intention and a still-ideal goal.

What is said in this quotation from Marx about the fabrication of bees’ honeycombs can be said as well about their “social” organization. As technique represents a rationalization of relations with the natural world, social organization represents a rationalization of the relations between individuals of a group. Beehive organization is a nonconscious form of rationalization, but tribal organization is a conscious one; the primitive can describe it and he can deny it (by transgressing it). Rationalization in this context obviously does not mean “our” rationalization. At one stage and in a given context, both magic and cannibalism represent rationalizations (without quotation marks).

If, therefore, a social organization is antagonistic, it will tend to be so both on the level of production and on the sexual and cultural planes as well. It is wrong to think that conflict in the domain of production “creates” or “determines” a secondary or derivative conflict on other planes; the structures of class domination impose themselves right away on all three levels at once and are impossible and inconceivable outside of this simultaneity, of this equivalence. Exploitation, for example, can be guaranteed only if the producers are expropriated from the management of production, but this expropriation both presupposes that the producers tend to be separated from the *ability* to manage — and therefore from culture — and reproduces this separation on an larger scale. Likewise, a society in which the fundamental interhuman relations are relations of domination presupposes and at the same time engenders an alienating organization of sexual relations, namely, an organization that creates in individuals deep-seated inhibitions that tend to make them accept authority, etc.<sup>25</sup>

Indeed, there obviously is a dialectical equivalence between social structures and the “psychological” structures of individuals. From his first steps in life the individual is subjected to a constant set of pressures aimed at imposing on him a given attitude toward work, sex, ideas, at cheating him out of [*frustrer*] the natural objects of his activity and at inhibiting him by making him interiorize and value this process of frustration. Class society can exist only insofar as it succeeds to a large extent in enforcing this acceptance. This is why the conflict is not a purely external conflict, but is transposed into the hearts of individuals themselves. This antagonistic social structure corresponds to an antagonistic structure within individuals, each perpetually reproducing itself by means of the other.

The point of these considerations is not only to emphasize the moment of identity in the essence of the relations of domination as they take place in the capitalist factory, in the patriarchal family, or in authoritarian teaching and “aristocratic” culture. It is to point out that the socialist revolution necessarily

will have to embrace all domains in their entirety, and this must be done not in some unforeseeable future and “by increments,” but rather from the outset. Certainly it has to begin in a certain fashion, which can be nothing other than the destruction of the power of the exploiters by the power of the armed masses and the instauration of workers’ management in production. But it will have to grapple immediately with the reconstruction of other social activities, under penalty of death. We will try to show this by looking at what kind of relations the proletariat, once in power, will entertain with culture.

The antagonistic structure of cultural relations in present-day society is expressed also (but in no way exclusively) by the radical division between manual and intellectual labor. The result is that the immense majority of humanity is totally separated from culture as *activity* and shares [*participe*] in only an infinitesimal fraction of the fruits of culture. On the other hand, the division of society into directors and executants becomes more and more homologous to the division between manual labor and intellectual labor (all management jobs being some form of intellectual labor and all manual jobs being some form of labor that consists of the execution of tasks).<sup>26</sup> Workers’ management is possible, therefore, only if from the outset it starts moving in the direction of overcoming this division, in particular with respect to intellectual labor as it relates to the production process. This implies in turn that the proletariat will begin to appropriate culture for itself. Certainly not as ready-made culture, as the assimilation of the “results” of historically extant culture. Beyond a certain point, such an assimilation is both impossible in the immediate future and superfluous (as concerns what is of interest to us here). Rather as appropriation of activity, as recovery of the cultural function itself and as a radical change in the producing masses’ relation to intellectual work. Only as this change takes hold will workers’ management become irreversible.

### Notes

1. Insofar as this introduction gives a brief summary of the analysis of various problems already treated in this review, we have taken the liberty of referring the reader to the corresponding articles published in *S. ou B.*

2. The April 1947 strike at Renault, the first great postwar working-class explosion in France, was able to take place only after the workers fought physically with Stalinist union officials.

3. See in *S. ou B.*, 13 (January 1954), pp. 34-46, the detailed description of the way in which the Stalinists were able to “scuttle” the August 1953 strike at Renault without overtly opposing it.

4. Or with other, essentially similar currents (Bordigism, for example).

5. Among its serious representatives, which nearly amounts to just Trotsky himself. Present-day Trotskyists, knocked about by reality as no ideological current has ever been knocked about before, have reached such a degree of political and ideological decomposition that nothing precise can be said about them at all.

6. In the last analysis, our ultimate conception of working-class bureaucracy leads to a revision of the traditional Leninist conception of reformism. But we cannot dwell here on this question.

7. See the “Lettre ouverte aux militants du PCI” in *S. ou B.*, 1 (March 1949), pp. 90-101. [T/E: This article, “Open Letter to PCI Militants,” is reprinted in *SB 1*, pp. 185-204, but is not included in the present edition.]

8. See “The Relations of Production in Russia.”

9. Victor Serge, *Russia Twenty Years After*, trans. Max Shachtman (New York: Hillman-Curl, 1937), p. 150.

10. See the editorial in *S. ou B.*, 1 (March 1949), pp. 27ff. [T/E: Reprinted in *SB 1*, pp. 139-84 and translated in this volume as “Socialism or Barbarism.”]

11. T/E: From the “Provisional Rules” written by Marx and adopted by the First International, in *The First International and After*, vol. 3 of Karl Marx, *Political Writings*, ed. David Fernbach (London: Penguin/New Left Books, 1974), p. 82.

12. See “La Direction prolétarienne,” in *S. ou B.*, 10 (July 1952), pp. 10-17. [T/E: Reprinted in *EMO 1*, pp. 145-62 and included in this volume as “Proletarian Leadership.”]

13. We have shown elsewhere that the amount of inequality would be extremely limited. See *DC*, *S. ou B.*, 13 (January 1954), pp. 66-69. [T/E: Not included in this present edition or in the 10/18 edition. It was to be included in the volume entitled *La Dynamique du capitalisme*, which never was published.]

14. Obviously the term is not being utilized here with the exact technical meaning it currently possesses.

15. Cf. the selections of *Tribune Ouvrière* published in this issue of *S. ou B.*, 17 (July 1955).

16. Plato, *The Statesman*, 294 b-c. [T/E: We have simply translated Castoriadis’s French.]

17. T/E: The word “incentives” appears in English in the original French text, followed by a parenthetical explanation in French.

18. *Capital* (New York: International Publishers, 1967), vol. 1, pp. 762-63.

19. See the article by Philippe Guillaume, “*Machinisme et prolétariat*,” in *S. ou B.*, 7 (August 1951), in particular, pp. 59ff.

20. We have set forth a few of this method’s basic concepts in *DC*, published in *S. ou B.*, 12 (August 1953), pp. 17ff. See also Leontief et al., *Studies in the Structure of American Economy* (1953; reprint, Armonk, N.Y.: Sharpe, 1976).

21. This is an important reservation, for the practical applications of this method hardly have been developed at all till now, for obvious reasons.

22. See Tjalling Koopmans, *Activity Analysis of Production & Allocation* (1951; reprint, New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1972).

23. T/E: When Castoriadis criticizes the consumeristic aspects of an emphasis on “digestion” and “ingestion,” we should keep in mind the etymologically related French word for (workers’) “management”: *gestion* (*ouvrière*).

24. *Capital*, vol. 1, p. 178.

25. On the profound relation between class structures and the patriarchal regulation of sexual relations, see the writings of W. Reich: *The Sexual Revolution* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, & Giroux, 1974), *Character Analysis* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, & Giroux, 1972), and *The Function of the Organism* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, & Giroux, 1973). In the last of these see the analysis of the neurotic structure of the fascist individual (section 3 of ch. 6: “Fascist Irrationalism”).

26. Between these two is situated the category of labor consisting of the execution of intellectual tasks, which is becoming more and more important. We will talk about this at the conclusion of this essay.

a) See now “*Le Rôle de l’idéologie bolchevique*” in *EMO 2*, pp. 385-416, and the Brinton text cited therein. [T/E: Castoriadis’s article is to be included in a proposed third volume of this edition as “The Role of Bolshevik Ideology in the Birth of the Bureaucracy.” See Appendix C for previously published translations; see also Maurice Brinton, *Bolsheviks & Worker’s Control* (London: Solidarity, 1970; Detroit: Black & Red, 1975).]