

THE “ASSOCIATED PRODUCERS:”

Dictatorship, Proletariat, Socialism

“Between the capitalist society and the communist society lies the period of revolutionary transformation of the former into the latter. To this there corresponds a period of political transition in which the State can be nothing but the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat” (19, 28)*.

A great deal of water, a great deal of ink, and a great deal of blood too, have flowed away since the day Marx first spoke of the “dictatorship of the proletariat.”¹ In a sense, there is nothing surprising in this. What clear result could follow from such a coupling of the name of a Roman magistrature (“slave-owning!”) with that of the class invested by Marxism with the mission of finishing with “pre-history” and inaugurating the true history

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* Unless otherwise indicated, the figures in parentheses refer to the volume and page number of Marx-Engels, *Werke*, ed. Dietz, Berlin.

¹ Cf. the exhaustive study by Hal Draper, “Marx and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat,” in *Etudes de Marxologie*, No. 6, Paris, 1962.

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of the human race? Moreover, as Marx would say, confused ideas become insane when they take hold of the masses.

What did Marx mean by this locution "dialectically" loaded with archaic reminiscences and futurist shivers? To answer this one should call in question a certain number of accepted ideas. Let us begin with four.

1. NO PERSONAL POWER

In contemporary language, dictatorship signifies above all unlimited personal power, erected into a supreme regulating principle (*Führerprinzip*), or practised as a "cult of personality." This is the exact opposite of the Roman *dictatura*, an extraordinary magistrature presupposing a state of siege, and provided with a triple series of limitations aimed at guaranteeing the Republic against the risk of personal power: the fact that the dictator was prohibited from promulgating new laws, the legal term of six months, and the necessity for the master of the horse to be at the dictator's side. If one looks through the list of dictators (cf. Bandel, *Die römische Diktatur*, Breslau 1910), one finds that not one of them showed the slightest sign of being tempted to usurp. In any case, dictatorship had already fallen into disrepute and become outworn by the period of the second Punic War, and was to disappear at the end of the 3rd century, at the very moment when the Roman crisis broke. It is characteristic that Caesar kept his first dictatorship only for eleven days, just long enough to have himself elected Consul...

There were no ideologists in Rome. That is why the term has always retained its precise constitutional sense. On the other hand, "dictatorship" today means a conceptually impure mixture of paternalism in the Aristotelian sense of the term, (the father is a *despot* within the *oikos*), of authoritarianism in the Roman sense of the term (the Senate is the *auctor* of the populace, which is subordinate to it), and of what amounts to more or less a caricature of Caesarism. The first instance of this confusion (to my knowledge) occurs in Filmer's *Patriarcha* (1680), in which monarchical absolutism is identified on the one hand with paternal power and on the other hand with dictatorial power. It is precisely against this fallacious confusion that Locke's first essay on civil

government is directed, as is also Algernon Sidney's *Discourses Concerning Government*. But while Locke attacks the very concept of political paternalism, Cromwell's great adversary produces (Chapter II, section 13) a very interesting account of dictatorship: "Though I do therefore grant that a power like to the dictatorian, limited in time, circumscribed by law, and kept perpetually under the supreme authority of the people, may be virtuous, *it could not be made into an argument in favour of absolute monarchy*, for the latter claimed to have *power in itself, subject to no law*." One thinks of Lenin: "The scientific notion of dictatorship is applied to a power which nothing limits, which absolutely no law, no rule, holds in check, and which is directly founded on violence. The notion of dictatorship is nothing other than this."²

Marx know his classics *at least* as well as Sidney. Need one add that the dictatorship he talks of has nothing to do with "personal power" and the "cult of personality"? The semantic philologist who is seeking for the word which, in Marx, designates this type of governmental practice, will be wrong to seek it under the rubric of "Socialism." On the other hand, his search will be rewarded if he makes it in the opposite direction. Indeed, socialism is the opposite of "Imperialism," a term which, in Marx, is used uniquely and exclusively to designate the ideology of the partisans of "personal *dictatorship*."³ But *nomina perdidimus rerum*. And it is not without malicious pleasure that I let the author of *Das Kapital* to speak for himself: "The essential principle of monarchy is the despised and despicable man, the *dehumanized* man; — and Montesquieu is very wrong to consider honour as the principle of the monarchy. He achieves this by maintaining the distinction between monarchy, despotism and tyranny. But these are the names for *one and the same* idea, or at best superficial variations on one principle. Where the monarchical principle predominates, men are in the minority; where that principle is not contested, there is no honour" (1,340).

While it is vain to seek in Marx or Engels the least justification of personal, individual or "collegiate" power, neither must one

² Lenin, *Contribution à l'histoire de la question de la dictature*, 1920; *Œuvres*, Moscow, 1961, XXXI, p. 366. Two years later, he was to write: "We live in a chaos of illegality" (XXXIII, p. 372).

³ Cf. vol. XVII, p. 555.

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insult them by attributing to them any pretension to the "ideological monopoly."⁴

2. NO ORTHODOXY

In current parlance, and even more in current practice, *dictatorship* has become synonymous with the orthodoxy of the state and with ideological monolithism. *Cuius regio, eius ideologia*: from Rome we pass to Byzantium and the prosaic *dictatura* is transfigured into a sort of Holy Synod mystically invested with the mission of imposing the truth and of purging humanity of its error.

We are far from the *Communist Manifesto*, which praised the bourgeoisie for having created "a world in which everything solid is dissolved and in which men are at last obliged to look with disenchanted eyes at the conditions of their life and at their reciprocal relations" (4,465). And Engels, who saluted the bourgeoisie for being the "first dominant class to attempt to take clear cognizance of the conditions of its own existence," (22,334) would shrug his shoulders if told that one day the nostalgia of old unitarian cosmologies and the obsession of unanimity would make it possible for the "fathers of the Peoples" to be transformed into "paragons of the sciences and the arts" and for inquisitors, both great and small, to proliferate everywhere.

Marx, who said that he was not a "Marxist," had nothing but contempt for his so-called disciples who transformed his theory into an "universal passport" (19,111). As for Engels, he never ceased to denounce the clericalism of American and Russian "Marxists" who held their "doctrine of importation" to be "the unique dogma of salvation" (36,589), and who quoted Marx's writings "as if they were classical of New Testament texts" (39,75). Need one add that they never dreamed of imposing their hypotheses as definitive truths or of hounding down the "revisionists" and the heterodox?

In their hands, the word "orthodoxy" has only one sense, and that is a purely pejorative one. Thus the accusation of wanting

⁴ In the discussion which follows, I take the liberty of referring the reader to my essay *L'idéologie froide*, Paris, 1967, pp. 15-35.

to impose an “official and orthodox doctrine” repeatedly recurs in Marx’s and Engels polemics against Bakunin,⁵ whom they reproached with a fanaticism comparable to that of Nechayev and with which he wished to inculcate his disciples. They therefore said that they were horrified to see him “preach to the youth of Russia the cult of ignorance under the pretext that present-day science is merely an official science... as if there was such a thing as official mathematics, official physics, official chemistry...”⁶

Just as, in our day, it has become “normal” or “normalizing,” to send several armoured divisions to secure the closure of a literary review, it is worth recalling that Marx began his political career with a savage denunciation of censorship.⁷ “In the very essence of censorship,” he said, “there is a fundamental vice which no law can correct.” This lies in the fact that “no-one can fight against liberty; at most one can fight against the liberty of others. Liberty has always existed, only sometimes as the privilege of a few, sometimes as the right of all... It is not a question of knowing whether freedom of the press should exist; it has always existed. The question is to know whether freedom of the press is the privilege of a few individuals or a right of the human spirit; of knowing whether what is a non-right for some can be a right for others.” Furthermore, censorship is an obstruction which only becomes real through the mediation of censors, “simple mortals,” whom the state magically transforms into “spies of the heart, omniscient persons, philosophers, theologians, political thinkers, Delphic oracles.”

“Imitate Pompey,” said Marx to the apologists of censorship; “stamp on the ground and from every official building there will sprout a Pallas Athena armed from head to foot” (1,21). This is what happened in our day when the “encyclopaedic eminences”

⁵ Cf. vol. XVIII, pp. 117, 333, 346, 307.

⁶ Marx-Engels, *Un Complot contre l'International*, 1873, vol. 18, p. 400. Today the list can be extended to include biology, cybernetics and psycho-analysis, as well as poetry, novels and music. On the other hand, it is important to note that Bakunin never advocated the imprisonment or the assassination of scholars or artists insufficiently furnished with “class consciousness.”

⁷ Marx, *Remarques sur la nouvelle réglementation de la censure prussienne*, 1842, vol. I, 3-25; *Débats sur la liberté de la presse*, 1842, vol. I, pp. 28-77.

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who peopled the Prussian censorship bureaux united themselves in the collective person of the Party with a capital P, to which they communicated their universal "scientific competence" which allowed them at the same time to monopolize the conscience of society. Can this then be the "dictatorship of the proletariat?"

3. NO SINGLE PARTY

Nowhere in Marx can one find the slightest trace of Stalin's pseudo-theory according to which each class can only be represented by a single party. The "communists" that the *Communist Manifesto* speaks of "do not for a distinct party vis-à-vis other workers' parties." "They do not have interests distinct from those of the proletariat as a whole. They do not postulate particular principles according to which they claim to model the proletarian movement."⁸ Their first aim: the "constitution of the proletariat as a class," the "conquest of democracy," the "conquest of political power by the proletariat" and the "overthrow of bourgeois domination" are expressly defined as being "the same for all workers' parties" (Mark cites the Chartists in England and the agrarian reformers of the United States). As regards their final aim: the abolition of classes and the institution of an "association where there will be no more political power in the proper sense of the term,"⁹ this aim by no means implies the rule of the single party which Leninism imposed as a transitory measure and which Maoism wants to perpetuate "for ten generations if not more."¹⁰ Only Marx's *calumniators*, such as Bakunin, impute such an intention to him.

The germs of the modern conception of the single party can at a pinch be found in the Blanquists, but it is precisely on this point that Marxism opposed Blanquism most vigorously. With Blanqui, said Engels, "it is not a question of the dictatorship of the *whole* revolutionary class, of the proletariat, but of the dictatorship of the minority which has carried out the act and which has organized itself in advance under the dictatorship or the

⁸ Vol. 4, pp. 481, 482, 492, 474.

⁹ Marx, *Misère de la philosophie*, 1847; Paris, 1947, p. 135.

¹⁰ Cf. *Débat sur la ligne générale du mouvement communiste*, Peking, Foreign Languages Publishing House 1965, p. 438. That is, almost half a millennium...

domination of a single man, or a number of men" (18,529). Most fortunately, he adds, these ideas, "long since antiquated," have been discredited, and only find an echo "in immature, impatient workers." Therefore he rejoiced to see the Blaquist *émigrés* "turning into a socialist workers' faction" and adopting Marxist ideas on the "dictatorship of the proletariat" in its function as a transition leading to the abolition of classes and of the state" (18,266).

Thus it is that the "dictatorship of the proletariat" designates the opposite of the dictatorship of a party. Once more we see why the Paris Commune (in which the Marxists were in a minority) represented in the eyes of Marx "the political form at last found for the emancipation of the workers" (17,342).

If the "dictatorship" is neither that of an individual nor that of a party, still less that of an "unique dogma of salvation," in what does the dictatorial character of the workers' power consist?

On this point the propaganda no less of the partisans than of the adversaries of "Marxism" unite to present the dictatorship of the proletariat as the reign of a new Leviathan. Was Marx a prophet of the implacable statism which haunted the dreams of Spencer and of Leroy-Beaulieu? Is the "classless society" the "American Lacedaemon" spoken of by Flaubert, a new version of the Jesuit state of Paraguay?¹¹ Is the violence "attending on the birth of society" that Marx speaks of synonymous with a Caesarian operation?

This is the fourth confusion that will have to be resolved.

4. AGAINST BUREAUCRACY AND "STATE SOCIALISM"

For Marx,¹² a profound analogy exists between political and economic alienation; the same inevitable usurpation and objective mystification by means of which capital concentrates in itself the "unity" and the "will" of the mass of workers and rears up

¹¹ A symbol in the imagery of the 19th century of the *non plus ultra* of totalitarianism. Thus Marx attributed to Bakunin the sinister intention of wanting to "eternalize dictatorship" in his "barrack-room communism" which would become "more authoritarian than the communism of the most primitive peoples" and which would "go much further than the Jesuit state of Paraguay." 18, pp. 341, 425, 438.

¹² Cf. my study: "Etat, bureaucratie, démocratie," *Res Publica*, Brussels, vol. VII, (1950), No. 4.

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as a crushing force face to face with that crowd of atoms, the separate workers, these things also transform the centralizing State into a fetishized personification of the general will. Every progress of bureaucratic centralization, every extension of the domain that is subject to authoritarian regulation, implies a deeper and deeper frustration of society which backs steadily before the advance of the State and relinquishes the free disposal of itself. In the *18 Brumaire* (1852), in the three successive editions of the *Civil War in France* (1871), Marx sketches in a tableau worthy of Kafka, or rather of Orwell, of the development of the centralized State apparatus, “initially forged in the time of absolute monarchy as an arm to be used by modern society in its struggle to be emancipated from feudalism.” The “gigantic clean sweep of the French Revolution” simply served to continue the task of centralization and levelling begun by the monarchy. Napoleon “finally perfected this State mechanism” and thus we arrived at the complete domination of the State over society. “In the face of executive power,” writes Marx, “society renounces any will of its own and submits itself to the orders of a foreign will, that of authority: the executive power, contrary to the legislative power, expresses the heteronomy of the nation as opposed to its autonomy” (8,196-7).

What the citizens lose in the way of self-determination, of collective initiative, masses itself against them in the State to turn on them and reduce them to slavery. Thus the general interest is transformed into “the private property of the bureaucracy” and into a power which oppresses the citizens. According to Marx’s admirable formula, “each *common* interest was immediately *detached* from society, *opposed* to it as being a superior, general interest, was *taken out the hands of the members of society* and transformed into an object of governmental activity.” The running of communal business becomes the business of the State, monopolized by the “hierarchy of officials,” those “priests of the divinity of the State” (17,539); public services become the “private property of the creatures of the central government” (17,339), the “secret attributes of a caste of specialists” (17,544-5) whose tentacular ramifications “choke the living body of the civil society like a *boa-constrictor*” (17,538).

In the State Marx sees “the proper force of the members of so-

ciety opposing them and organizing itself against them:” (17,543) it is a “tumour of society,” a “stifling nightmare” (17,539), the product of an “unnatural abortion” (17,541). That is what he thought he saw in the France of the Second Empire, “in which the executive power has at its command an army of officials, more than half a million of them, and consequently has in a state of complete dependence on it an enormous quantity of interests and existences, in which the state compresses, controls, regulates, watches over and keeps under tutelage the civil society, from its vastest activities to its most intimate movements, from its most universal modes of existence to the private lives of individuals, in which this parasitic body, thanks to the most extraordinary centralization, acquires an omnipresence, an omniscience, a capacity for intervention whose only analogy is with the absolute subordination, the incoherent deformity of the social body” (8,150).

De Tocqueville and Stuart Mill, the two other great liberals of the 19th century, were the only ones to take this denunciation of the centralizing state and its bureaucracy, “the fearful parasitic body which covers as with a membrane the body of society and prevents it from breathing” (8,196) to such lengths. What would they have said had they known the totalitarian *Gleichschaltung*? For the sphere of totalitarian regulation is no longer limited to the “bridges, school buildings, communal properties, railways, national property and universities” to which the “monstrous” statism of the Second Empire could be reduced (8,197), but embraces the totality of economic and social life including culture and private life.

On this point de Tocqueville has gone much further than Marx. He has not confined himself to denouncing the “powerful stranger known as the government and its tendency to monopolize movement and existence,” but he also describes with stupefying precision the future role of the state in the industrial system: destined to become the chief provider of capital and the chief author of long-term investment, from now on—A.D. 1840!—the State is to be “the greatest of the industrialists,” the one whose enterprises “day by day compress populations into an ever narrower dependence.”¹³ “State capitalism”—the final phase of the concent-

¹³ De Tocqueville, *De la Démocratie en Amérique*, Paris, 1951, I, 93; II, 317.

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ration of capital—is described by Engels in his *Anti-Dühring* (1877-78) as being the fourth and last period of the evolution of capitalism: “...the official representative of capitalist society, the State, must finally take charge of the economy.” But the State is the “ideal collective capitalist:” “the more it absorbs productive forces into its property, and the more it becomes a collective capitalist in fact, the more does it exploit its citizens. The workers remain as wage-earners, as proletarians. The capitalist relationship is not suppressed; on the contrary, it is pushed to the limit.” (20,259) Therefore Engels declared himself horrified at the sight of socialists falling into “superstitious veneration of bureaucracy,” and forgetting the abyss which separates statism from socialization. “Since Bismarck flung himself into statism,” he writes (*loc. cit.*), “we have witnessed the appearance of a certain *false socialism* which here and there has actually degenerated into a type of *servility*, and which summarily proclaims *all* statism to be socialist, even that of Bismarck. If the Belgian state, for very pedestrian financial and political reasons, has built its own principal railways; if Bismarck, without any economic reasons, has nationalized the chief railways simply in order to organize and use them better in time of war, to turn railway employees into electoral cattle in the service of the government, and above all to give himself a new source of revenue independent of the decisions of the parliament, these were by no means, directly or indirectly, consciously or unconsciously, socialist measures...” He reverts to the subject in a letter to Bernstein (March 6, 1881): “When the bourgeois of Manchester represent every act of state intervention in free competition as ‘socialism,’ they are bringing about a disingenuous mystification... Our duty is not to *believe* them, but to *criticize* them.” He always speaks of “the abomination of State socialism” with horror (36,109) when he describes how it functions in Java, in India and in Russia, “where one sees how primitive communism forms the most solid of bases for exploitation and despotism,” as well as in Bismarck’s Germany with its “barrack-room communism.” (22,425) He was therefore delighted to see the Social-Democrat party’s declaration in its Erfurt programme (1891) to the effect that it “has nothing in common with what is called ‘state socialism’—a system which substitutes the state for private enterprise and which thus unites

in a single whole the power of economic exploitation and political oppression.”¹⁴

For de Tocqueville, only the free development of “associations” could shake the “social body” and wrest it out of the “sort of administrative somnolence which administrators are accustomed to call the reign of law and order.” (1,91) For Marx, these associations could only be those of the working class when it became conscious of itself and transformed itself into a “class of its own.”

CLASS AND ITS ACTION

Nowadays our conception of “class consciousness” is a narrowly political, partisan one. But for Marx politics simply form one of the dimensions of the total action by means of which the proletariat ceases to be a passive object—an object subjected both to “the despotism of capital” and to the “blind necessity” of the capitalist method of production—to emerge as a class “of its own” and to assert itself as a creative element in history. “The party in the eminently historical sense of the term,” spoken of by Marx in his letter to the poet Freiligrath (29 February 1860), does not designate any particular political party, more or less non-existent at that time, but the sum total of the forces through which is manifested “auto-activity,” “auto-affranchisement,” “auto-affirmation” on the part of the proletariat, and the “political economy of the workers” and the “self-government of the producers.”

According to Marx, the purely political organizations of this “party” which “rises spontaneously from the soil of modern society” are merely “ephemeral” expressions, simple “episodes.” Far different is the condition of trade unions.

¹⁴ *Werke*, vol. 22, p. 232. Here we find an episode with a certain symbolic value. While denouncing “State socialism,” the Erfurt programme demanded the nationalization of a number of professions (doctors, lawyers, pharmacists, nurses, etc.), and foresaw the total takeover by the state of social security. Engels did not fail to draw attention to this contradiction (22,237): what would he say of the “Marxists” of today, who demand the *maximum* extension of nationalization at the same time as denouncing the State for being the instrument of the monopolies? This did not escape de Tocqueville’s keen eye (II, 299): “the majority (of parties) consider that the government acts badly; but all consider that the government must act without ceasing and must take everything in hand...” The appeal to the State “characterizes all the political systems born in our day, and is found at the roots of the oddest utopias...”

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"Schools of socialism," trade unions have a "social power" which considerably exceeds the restricted domain of "questions of wages and of working hours." For "without realizing it, trade unions have become the centres of working-class organization, just as municipalities and communes were centres for the bourgeoisie in the Middle Ages."¹⁵ Just as the mediaeval commune was not only a defence against feudal violence but also the organized expression of bourgeois autonomy, so also trade unions are not only an "indispensable arm in the war of daily skirmishes between capital and labour," but also, and above all, the organs of the future power of the workers inasmuch as they are "organized forces for the abolition of the wage system" and the socialist self-direction of the workers. And hence one understands Engels' anger when he reproached the editors of the Programme of Gotha with having spoken of the socialist society of the future without mentioning "the organization of the working class as a class by means of the trade unions. Now this is an absolutely essential point for this is the true (*eigentliche*) organization of the proletariat class." (34,128)

If the trade unions constitute the embryos of the future *workers' power*, the *cooperatives* represent even now a first "victory of the political economy of labour over the political economy of capital"¹⁶ and the *germs of future socialist production methods*: "the value of these great experiments [consumer cooperatives and above all cooperative manufacture] cannot be over-stressed. Through action, and not through reasoning, they have proved that large-scale production in accordance with the requirements of modern science can proceed without a class of masters employing a class of hands; they have shown that, as with slave and serf labour, wage labour is merely a transitory and inferior form destined to give place to cooperative labour, performing its task with a consenting hand, with a lucid mind and a joyous heart."

First of all, cooperative production proves on a practical plane that the requisite work of control "no longer needs to be carried out by the capitalist," that the "capitalist as a functionary of

¹⁵ Marx, *Résolution sur les syndicats* adopted at the 1st Congress of the international workers' association at Geneva in 1866; vol. XVI, pp. 196-7.

¹⁶ Marx, *Adresse Inaugurale de l'Association internationale des travailleurs*, 1864, XVI, p. 11.

production has become superfluous.”¹⁷ Furthermore, added to this “negative” lesson, is that the abolition of the wage system, with the control of production by the workers themselves, can be carried out “in a positive manner.”¹⁸ Thus Marx requested that the workers should “recognize the cooperative movement as one of the transforming forces of modern society.” Its “great merit,” he says, is to have “shown through action that the present system of *subordinating labour to capital*, a despotic one which generates misery, can be supplanted by the *republican system of associating free and equal producers*.”¹⁹ Engels is equally optimistic: if the German workers seemed to him “capable” of coping with the task of the socialist reconstruction of economy and society, it was also amongst other reasons because “their numerous production and distribution cooperatives had proved that they could manage them at least as well as, and much more honestly than, the bourgeois.”²⁰

Imbued with a Hegelian faith in the dialectic of industrial things to come (increasing opposition between a more and more concentrated and centralized capital and more and more socialized and homogenized labour), Marx believed that the workers would take their syndical and cooperative experiments to the limit and would, sooner or later, discover what these limits were. A revolutionary war-cry: Abolish wages! would then replace the reformist demand: Improve wages!²¹ Again, the workers would soon discover that “limited as it is to exiguous forms, the results of the individual efforts of the wage-slaves, the cooperative movement is powerless to transform capitalist society on its own.” (16,195) They would understand that in order to put into effect the “republic of associated, free and equal producers,” to “convert social production into a large and harmonious system of cooperative labour, *general* changes are indispensable.” But since these changes are unrealizable “without using the organized force of

¹⁷ Marx, *Das Kapital*, ed. Dietz, 1951, III, p. 422.

¹⁸ Marx, *Das Kapital*, III, pp. 481-2.

¹⁹ Marx, *Rapport du Comité central de l'Association internationale des travailleurs*, 1865, XVI, p. 195 ff.

²⁰ Engels, Letter to Otto von Boenigk, 21.8.1890. What would he say to contemporary Denmark?

²¹ Cf. Marx, *Salaire, prix et profit*, 1865, XVI, p. 152.

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society," sooner or later they would reach the conclusion that "government power must be wrested from the hands of capitalists and landed proprietors and pass into the hands of the working classes themselves." Spurred on by their immanent logic, both the trade union and the cooperative movements would transcend themselves and would become part of the "political movement," meaning "every movement in which the working class as a class would be opposed to the dominant classes and would seek to exert an external pressure on them" (external to the trade union movement proper).²²

The "emancipation through work" presupposes the conquest of political power by the proletariat, beginning with the "conquest of democracy."²³ Marx was so deeply convinced that sooner or later universal suffrage would bring about the "political domination of the proletariat" that he went so far as to affirm that the American workers had become the "true custodians of political power in the Northern States!"²⁴ "Conquest of democracy," "political domination" and "dictatorship of the proletariat" are three successive moments in one and the same process. It is this that enables Engels to declare without hesitation that "dictatorship" has been the common aim of all workers' parties from the Chartists to the Marxists! "Every political party," he says, "aspires to achieve domination in the State. Similarly the German Social Democratic Workers' Party of necessity wishes to establish *its own* supremacy, the supremacy of the working class. Moreover, *all* true proletariat parties since the English Chartists (*sic*), believe that to organize the working class to form an independent political party is the first condition of their struggle, and that the dictatorship of the proletariat is its ultimate end. (18,267)

However paradoxical it may appear today, the transfiguration of the Chartists into adpts of the "dictatorship of the proletariat"

²² Marx, Letter to Bolte, 23.11.1871. He writes "A partial, local strike is a purely economic movement," whereas the "movement directed towards the destruction of the eight-hour rule, etc., is a *political* movement." What would he say to the gigantic battle of American trade unions for a guaranteed annual wage?

²³ Marx-Engels, *Le Manifeste Communiste*, 1848, IV, p. 481.

²⁴ Marx, *Au Président Abraham Lincoln*, 1864; XVI, p. 19. For Marx, America was the workers' continent *par excellence*, the country in which "the worker is master," XVIII, p. 161.

throws some little light on this obscure concept. It is clear that, in this context, dictatorship loses any specific political significance, and simply designates “class domination.” This is what Marx means when he places the “revolutionary workers’ dictatorship” in opposition to the “dictatorship of the bourgeoisie.” (18,300) But how can an entire class, made up of several million individuals, and even, according to Marx, forming the majority of the population, seize and wield political and economic power, if it be not through the medium of its elected representatives? This, for Marx, was self-evident. This did not fail to scandalize Bakunin. He rejected the “(Marxist) theory of revolutionary dictatorship” and even called Marx an authoritarian, simply because he questioned the authenticity and legitimacy of every representative institution. Carried away by the dream of “direct democracy” and by his no less nebulous projects for reorganizing society “from bottom to top,” he reproached Marx with trying to construct the “dictatorship of the proletariat” based on the “fiction of the pseudo-representation of the people.” “What is meant,” he asks, “by the expression: the proletariat organized to form a dominant class? Does it mean that the proletariat will be entirely taken up with directing public affairs?”²⁵ “What happens in a trade unions?” Marx answers him. “Does the whole trade union form its executive committee? Will all division of labour cease in the factory, and will all the resulting diversity of duties cease? And in the Bakunin plan for reorganization ‘*from bottom to top*’ will everyone go to the *top*? In which case, there will be no *bottom*, will there?...”

Bakunin was right in saying that “the election through universal suffrage of representatives of the people and of leaders of the State is the last word both of the Marxists and of the democratic school.” Is it not surprising to witness the transformation of Marx into a prophet of totalitarianism and of bureaucracy? However, Bakunin’s attacks in no way shook his faith in the political capacities of the masses. “One thing is absolutely certain,” Engels was to say, “and that is that our Party and the working class can achieve domination only in the form of a democratic

²⁵ Bakunin, *Etatisme et Anarchie*, 1873, pp. 277-280. Quoted at length by Marx, *Marginal Notes on Bakunin*, 1874; *Werke*, 18, p. 633 ff.

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republic. Indeed, the latter is the specific form of the dictatorship of the proletariat, as the great French revolution has already shown: "the "specific form" of proletarian dictatorship is "the concentration of all political power into the hands of the representatives of the people." Shortly before his death, in a letter addressed to Paul Lafargue, March 6, 1894, Engels returns to the same topic, partly in order to stigmatize "State socialism—a childhood disease of proletarian socialism," partly in order to affirm that "the Republic is the *ready made* political form for the future domination by the proletariat," this despite the fact that for the time being it is "the form of the domination of the bourgeoisie."

Marx and Engels did not wish to suppress representative institutions and to limit or abolish universal suffrage, but to make it as effective as possible. Their problem was admirably formulated by de Tocqueville (II, 326): "The creation of national representation in a highly centralized country will lessen the evil of extreme centralisation, but will not destroy it... It is useless to require that the very citizens you have caused to depend to such an extent on the central power choose *from time to time* representatives of this power; this exercising of their freedom of choice, which is of paramount importance, but which occurs *so rarely and for such a short time* will not prevent them from gradually losing the ability to think, to feel and to act of their own accord..." One begins to see why Marx and Engels acclaimed the Paris Commune with such cries of joy—it was the first attempt to restore to society the powers usurped by the State. "Nothing," said Marx, "could be more foreign to the spirit of the Commune than to replace universal suffrage by a hierarchical investiture" (17,340). On the contrary, "the people, divided into communes," must learn to use universal suffrage, not to decide "once every three or six years which member of the ruling class was to represent it and crush it underfoot in the Parlement," but to put its own affairs in order "just as every employer uses his individual suffrage to choose his workers and the administrators for his business."

Marx never doubted that the masses were capable of self-administration. "It is a well-known fact," he adds, "that where their real business is involved, societies, like individuals, usually know

how to put everyone in their places, and, should they make a mistake, they know how to correct it promptly." If he remained impassive in the face of Bakunin's attacks, it was because he firmly believed that a class can exercise *political* power through the intermediary of its representatives, democratically elected and democratically controlled. But before discussing his views on the exercise of *economic* power by the ex-proletariat class transformed into "associated producers," we must consider his views on the "political form of the emancipation of the workers."

Like the Paris Commune (as interpreted and transfigured by Marx) the proletarian State, or rather "half-State" had, to begin with, to reduce to a strict minimum its intervention in social life. And to begin with it had to be stripped of all its traditional "cultural" elements.

CULTURAL NEUTRALIZATION OF THE STATE

Far from seeing the State as the "vigilant" guardian of some "orthodoxy," Marx demands its immediate expulsion from the sphere of culture. For instance, he angrily opposed his own disciples who, blinded by the "superstitious cult of the State" had dared to include in their programme an article demanding "the education of the people by the State." "An education of the people by the State," replies Marx, "is to be categorically condemned. It is one thing to determine by means of a general law the resources of primary schools, the required qualifications of the teaching personnel, the disciplines to be taught, etc., and, as in the United States, to ensure through Government inspectors that the law be carried out. It is quite another thing to make of the State the educator of the people! On the contrary, by the same token all governmental and Church influence must be banned from schools (...) For it is the State, not the people, that needs educating, and rigorously too" (19,30-31).

Particularly remarkable is Marx's refusal to countenance any attempts at indoctrination:

"Neither in primary nor in secondary schools should subjects be taught which admit of party or class interpretations. Subjects like natural sciences, grammar, etc. should alone be taught... (grammatical rules, for example, remain the same, whether ex-

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plained by a tory believer or a freethinker...) Where political economy, religion and other subjects are concerned, they can be taught neither in primary nor in secondary schools. This sort of teaching is for adults..." (16,562)

After such a definite statement of the principle of *neutrality* in schools it would be superfluous to cite Marx's thesis on religious freedom. But in these days of religious persecution as an integral part of the "educative mission" of the State, it seems not inappropriate to recall Engel's Philippic against Dühring's anti-Christian ukases (20,225), and against the Blanquists' absurd conceit of "transforming people into atheists by decree." (18,532) To avoid any misunderstanding, it seems wise to quote Engel's commentary on the Erfurt programme: "Complete separation of Church and State. All religious communities without exception will be treated as private societies by the State. They lose all public subsidies and all their influence over private schools. However, one cannot prevent them from founding schools from their own resources, which belong to them and where they teach their nonsense!..." (22,237)

Even as it abandoned its ideological trash, the new State was to retreat continuously before the free development of social spontaneity.

THE STATE DISARMED, DECENTRALIZED, DEBUREAUCRATIZED

"The Commune," writes Marx, "has achieved the essential of all bourgeois revolutions, a cheap form of government, by abolishing those two great sources of expenditure, a permanent army and State officialdom." (17,342) This Mancunian attitude on the part of the proletariat means, first, that "the purely repressive organs of the former governmental power must be amputated." The permanent army must be suppressed, to be replaced by the "people in arms." Again, "instead of being the instrument of the central government," the police will have to be "immediately stripped of its political attributes" and changed into an instrument of the organs of the "producers' self-government." (17,338)

Once these "material instruments" of the former bureaucratic State have been abolished, every sort of local and regional self-government must be systematically developed; the "few

duties arising from central government” must be limited to those which the general, ordinary needs of a country necessitate (17,545,) until the “political unity of the country” is completely refashioned by the “voluntary association of all local initiatives.” (17,564) The elements of “local and provincial self-government, without true bureaucracy in the French or Prussian manner” which exist in America, in England, in Holland and in Switzerland have as great a claim to consideration as forming the bases of the future “free self-government by the working populace” which would be the “best instrument for the reorganization of methods of production” as trade unions and cooperatives.²⁶ Thus Engels is enthusiastic about Clémenceau’s programme: “communal and departmental self-government, that is to say decentralization of the administration and abolition of the bureaucracy.” “If this programme,” he adds, “begins to be put into effect, it will be the greatest revolution in France since 1800.”²⁷

The abolition of the bureaucracy was by no means a magical, millenarianist operation. The “dictatorship of the proletariat” was to take its inspiration from the example of America and of the first Republic: “From 1792 to 1798,” writes Engels, “every French *département*, every commune had complete administrative autonomy, on the American model, and we must have the same. America and the first French Republic have shown us how to organize this autonomy and how to do without bureaucracy; Canada, Australia and the other British colonies are setting us the same example today (1891).” In short, he concluded, this is what the party must insert into its programme: “Complete autonomy of administration in the provinces, in districts and in communes, by officials elected through universal suffrage. Suppression of all local and provincial authorities created by the State.” (22,235-6)

Engels was indignant at the “superstitious veneration of the bureaucracy” which he observed in his disciples. One can picture his anger on discovering that their programme made no mention of the “first condition of all liberty, which is that every official should be responsible to every citizen and every other official

²⁶ Engels, Letter to F. Domela Nieuwenhuis, 4.2.1886.

²⁷ Engels, Letter to Bebel, 24 July 1885.

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for every act he accomplishes during his period of office, and answerable to ordinary law courts, according to common law..." (34,128). What would he say nowadays?

We are far from sophisticated distinctions between "formal liberties" and "true liberties." But Marx and Engels thus far exalted democracy not only because they knew that "the workers' movement is impossible without freedom of the press and rights of coalition and of assembly," (16,75) but also because they knew that without democracy, the "socialist method of production" would lose its meaning and would be forced to give birth to a new alienation, to a new exploitation of man by man.

ECONOMIC FUNCTION OF DEMOCRACY

What did Marx mean when he confronted the "blind law of supply and demand"—"the principle behind bourgeois political economy" with the "political economy of the working class," that is, the "control of social production by conscious foresight (*Ein- und Vorsicht*) by the collective?"²⁸ What did he mean by "socialist mode of production?" How did he define the concept of a "mode of production?"

First, what is the *means of regulating* a socialist economy? In all societies, the mass of products which correspond to what is needed require different, quantitatively determined, proportions of the totality of collective labour. This need to divide the labour of the community according to predetermined proportions between the different branches of production is a "natural law," common to all societies.²⁹ It is the "way in which" this law "is manifested" (*Erscheinungsform*) that differentiates the economic régimes and the various historical periods. It is manifested directly in all societies based on a division of labour which is "planned and authoritarian"³⁰ in which the requirements to be satisfied are fixed by tradition or by the sovereign (the feudal lord of the land or the oriental despot). In all these societies the individual workers function like the "organs of a single collective worker"

²⁸ Marx, *Adresse Inaugurale*, 1864, XVI, p. 11.

²⁹ Cf. Marx, Letter to Kugelmann, 11 July 1868.

³⁰ Marx, *Das Kapital*, I, 375.

subject to tradition or to another's will. On the other hand, the "law" takes on a radically different form in societies which are subdivided into a host of independent producers. In such an economic system, needs can be discovered and satisfied only through the intermediary of the market; similarly, labour becomes social, and the necessary cooperation between these isolated fragments becomes effective only through the intermediary of the exchange rate; finally, social understanding only comes into effect *post factum*:³¹ it is after production that the traders learn whether or not their produce corresponds to a need, and whether it will pay; crises and other perturbations inevitably ensue. The method of regulating the socialist economy, in Marx's sense of the term, is quite another matter. Here the producers are associates, they do not exchange their produce, but divide labour between themselves, "agreeing beforehand on the number of hours that must be set aside for material production."³² It is a collective convention based on the ratio between the sum of productive forces available and the sum of existing needs. As Lenin says, "the socialist society is a vast consumer cooperative, whose production is rationally organised with regard to consumption:"³³ the cooperative association begins by defining "the volume of social needs to be satisfied," calculates the working hours necessary for the production of corresponding articles, and divides the labour between the different production branches.

It is superfluous to point out that these operations presuppose an almost inconceivable degree of democracy, of diffusion of information and of active participation of cooperators. In 1845, the young Engels thought that it would be an "easy matter" to arrive at an exact knowledge of the needs to be satisfied: all that was needed was a "good statistical service," "which could easily be brought into force within two years," for the scheduling of production according to need to "become *eine Kleinigkeit*" (2,539). Unfortunately, neither Marx, nor Engels, nor any of their disciples ever specified the means whereby the totality of needs could be calculated through the "associated reasoning of

³¹ *Ibid.*, II, 314.

³² Marx, *Misère de la Philosophie*, 1847; Paris, 1947, pp. 63-4.

³³ Lenin, *Ceuvres*, IX, 383.

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producers.”³⁴ On the other hand, Engels provides an interesting indication of what would happen if competition were suppressed without producers’ being allowed to regulate production according to their specific needs, or, at least, to define the volume of their needs themselves, in the catastrophe he describes when he imagines a realization of Rodbertus’ utopia. The latter wanted to maintain the exchange system while forbidding competition, thereby falsifying the “only form of manifestation” which has any value in a society of producers exchanging their produce in the form of merchandise. “In such a society,” says Engels, “to want to determine value according to working hours while forbidding competitors to establish this determination of value in the only way it can be done, that is to say by affecting prices” is tantamount to suppressing every “guarantee that only the desired amount of each product will be produced, that we will not lack corn nor meat, while having beet sugar in abundance, and being glutted with spirits made from potatoes; that there will be no shortage of trousers and trouser-buttons will multiply in their millions...” (21,183).

If democratic self-determination of the needs of the consumer-producers constitutes the sole means of escape from this Kafkaesque situation, recently described by a Pole as “a moon economy,” democracy defines the very essence of the *socialist production system*: without democracy, the cooperative system of self-administration is a decoy. Besides, democracy is doubly useful on the level of *distribution*.

To begin with, the society of “associated producers” must support a vast number of people fulfilling economically unproductive functions. Naturally, Engels remarks, one could suppress the distinction between productive and unproductive labour by making productive labour compulsory. But in the immediate future, it is essential above all to “allow the workers, in accordance with customary democratic procedure, to make the necessary selections themselves for the upkeep of economically unproductive functions” (21,185). On the other hand, all non-democratic solutions, all arbitrary determination of the rate of overtime according to the cloth of the Prussian State, make everything depend on the

³⁴ Marx, *Das Kapital*, III, 286.

judgment of the bourgeoisie, which arbitrarily decides the worker's share in the product of his own labour and graciously allows it him..."

Further, democracy alone allows for a clear, precise, truly socialist definition of the "inequality rate" between ordinary and "specialized" labour. To Marx, "differences in peoples minds and intellectual capacities do not determine the difference between their *stomachs* and physical *needs*."³⁵ He therefore praised the workers of the Commune for having taken over all the administrative functions hitherto allotted amongst the upper classes and for having accomplished their labour, like Milton his *Paradise Lost*, for a few pounds" (17,544). This is very different from the philosophy of administrators in a situation which combines a relaxation of democratic control and atrophy of the critical faculty. This is what Bakunin said when he talked of those "worker-administrators who have ceased to be workers and who regard from a lofty place in the State the ordinary workers' world. In fact, they no longer represent the people, but themselves and their pretensions as rulers of the people. He who doubts this knows nothing of human nature." Marx's reply will appear naïve in its unlimited confidence in the power of democratic control: "If Bakunin were properly acquainted even with the situation of an administrator in a cooperative workers' factory, he would cast aside all his dreams of domination. He should have asked himself: what forms can administrative functions taken within the framework of this 'Workers' state,' if he insists on giving in this name" (18,635).

It is precisely in answer to this kind of question that Engels cites the Paris Commune as the example *aere perennius* of the "dictatorship of the proletariat." To protect itself against its own mandatories and functionaries, to avoid the transformation, inevitable in previous régimes of the State and its organs, initially the servants of society, into its masters, the Commune used two infallible methods. First, it made all posts connected with administration, justice or education depend on the choice of interested parties by means of universal suffrage, and, naturally, made them subject to revocation at any moment by these same interested

³⁵ Marx-Engels, *Die Deutsche Ideologie*, Dietz, 1953, pp. 584-5.

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parties. Secondly, it rewarded all services, from the humblest to the highest, with the same salary as that of the other workers" (22,198).

Twenty-six years later, Lenin in his turn studied the "infallible methods" employed by the Commune to tame the State. If the first method seemed to him to be the vital minimum of "meaningful democracy," in the second he saw the most obvious sign of the "passage" from purely political to workers' democracy. "Where the State is concerned," he wrote, this point (equal pay) is perhaps the most important of all. Now it is on this particularly obvious point that Marx's teachings are most often forgotten. The innumerable vulgarizing commentaries do not breathe a word about it. It is accepted that one hushes it up as being a 'puerile thing' which has had its uses, just as Christians have forgotten the 'puerility' of primitive Christianity..."³⁶

Today, half a century after this vigorous protest, it is to be feared that it is not only this "particularly obvious" point, but the sum total of Marx's message that has been forgotten and misted over by the clouds of incense that burn before his effigy. It is to be hoped that this brief evocation will help to rescue from oblivion these "puerilities" without which the socialist aim is nothing more than the dream of a non-existent sleeper—or a new "opiate of the masses."

³⁶ Lenin, *L'Etat et la Révolution*, 1917; *Œuvres*, XXV, 454.