

14 Self-Management and Hierarchy

Whether in work, production, the business firm; in administration, politics, the State; or in education and scientific research, we live in a society whose organization is *hierarchical*. Hierarchy is not an invention of modern society. Its origins reach far back in time—though it has not always existed, and there have been nonhierarchical societies that have functioned quite well. In modern society, however, the hierarchical (or, what boils down to nearly the same thing, bureaucratic) system has become practically universal. As soon as there is any collective activity, it is organized according to the hierarchical principle, and the hierarchy of command and power coincides more and more with the hierarchy of wages and incomes. The result is that people almost never succeed in imagining that things could be otherwise, or that they themselves could be something definite except in terms of the place they occupy in the hierarchical pyramid.

The defenders of the present-day system try to justify it as the sole “logical,” “rational,” “economical” one. We have already tried to show that these “arguments” have no validity and justify nothing, that they are false when taken separately and contradictory when considered together.¹ We will have occasion to return to them later. The current system is also presented, however, as the sole one possible, allegedly imposed on us by the necessities of modern production, the complexity of social life, the grand scale on which all activities take place today, and so forth. We will try to show that there is nothing of the sort, and that the existence of a hierarchy is radically incompatible with self-management.

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Self-Management and Command Hierarchy

Collective Decision and the Problem of Representation

Socially speaking, what does the hierarchical system signify? That one stratum of the population directs society and that the others only execute its decisions; also, that this stratum, which receives a larger income, profits from the production and the work of society much more than the others. In brief, it may be said that society is divided between a stratum that has power and privileges at its disposal, and the rest, which is dispossessed of these. The hierarchization—or bureaucratization—of all social activities is today only the (increasingly preponderant) form of the division of society. As such, it is both result and cause of the conflict tearing through society.

If that is so, it becomes ridiculous to ask, Is self-management, is the functioning and the existence of a self-managed system, compatible with the maintenance of hierarchy? It is the same as asking whether the suppression of the present-day penitentiary system is compatible with the maintenance of prison officers, head guards, and prison wardens. As one knows, however, what goes without saying goes still better being said. All the more so in this case, since for millennia it has been driven into people's heads from childhood onward that it is “natural” for some to command and for others to obey, for some to have too much and for others not to have enough of the necessities of life.

We want a self-managed society. What does that mean?

A self-managed society is a society that manages itself, that is to say, that directs itself on its own. This, however, must be made still more precise. A self-managed society is one in which all decisions are made by the collectivity that, in each case, is concerned by the object of those decisions. That is to say, a system in which those who accomplish an activity decide collectively *what* they have to do and *how* to do it, within the limits outlined solely by their coexistence with other collective units. Thus, decisions concerning people working in a shop ought to be made by those working there; decisions concerning several workshops at once, by the entirety of laboring people concerned or by their elected and revocable delegates; decisions concerning the entire business firm, by all the firm's personnel; those concerning a neighborhood, by its inhabitants; and decisions concerning all of society, by the totality of men and women living there.

But what does deciding signify?

To decide is to decide oneself. It is not to leave the decision to “competent people,” subject to some vague “control.” Neither is it to designate people who, themselves, are going to decide. It is not by designating once every five years those who will make laws that the French population would make its own laws. It is not by designating once every seven years the person who will decide the country's policy that it would decide itself about that policy. It does not decide; it *alienates* its power of decision to “representatives” who, by this very fact, are not and cannot be *its* representatives. Certainly, the designation of representatives, or of delegates, by different collectivities, as well as the existence of organs—committees or councils—formed by such delegates will be, in a host of cases, indispensable. Such a procedure, however, will not be compatible with self-management unless those delegates

genuinely represent the collectivity from which they emanate, and that implies that they remain subject to its power. That, in its turn, signifies that this collectivity not only elects them but also can revoke them each time it deems that necessary.

Therefore, to say that there is a hierarchy of command made up of "competent people" who are in principle irremovable, or to say that there are "representatives" who are irremovable for a certain specified time period (and who, as experience proves, become practically irremovable thereafter), is to say that there is no self-management, or even "democratic management." It is equivalent in effect to saying that the collectivity is directed by people whose management of common affairs has henceforth become their specialized and exclusive affair, and who, *de jure* or *de facto*, are beyond the power of the collectivity.

Collective Decision, Education [formation], and Information

On the other hand, to decide is to decide *in full knowledge of the relevant facts* [*en connaissance de cause*]. It is no longer the collectivity that decides, even if formally it "votes," if someone or some ones alone have information at their disposal and define the criteria on the basis of which a decision is made. This signifies that those who decide have to have *all* the relevant information at their disposal. It also means, however, that they are able to define for themselves criteria on the basis of which they decide. To do that, they have to have an increasingly broad *education*. Now, a command hierarchy implies that those who decide possess—or rather, claim to possess—a monopoly on information and education and, in any case, have privileged access thereto. Hierarchy is based on this fact, and it constantly tends to reproduce itself. For in a hierarchical organization all information rises from the base to the summit and does not redescend, or circulate (in fact, information does circulate, but it does so *against* the rules of hierarchical organization). In addition, all decisions descend from the summit to the base, which itself is charged merely with executing them. This boils down pretty much to saying that there is a command hierarchy and that these two patterns of information traffic [*circulations*] each flow only one way: the summit collects and absorbs all the information rising toward it, and it sends back to the executants only the minimum strictly necessary for the execution of orders it addresses to them, orders that emanate from it alone. In such a situation, it is absurd to think that there could be any self-management, or even "democratic management."

How can one decide if one does not have at one's disposal the information necessary really to decide? And how can one *learn to* decide if one is always reduced to executing what others have decided? As soon as a command hierarchy is established [*s'instaure*], the collectivity becomes opaque for itself, and enormous waste is introduced. It becomes opaque because the information is retained at the summit. Waste is introduced because uninformed or ill-informed laboring people do not know what they should know in order to carry out their jobs, and especially because the collective capacities for self-direction, as well as inventiveness and initiative, which are formally reserved for those in command, are hindered and inhibited at all levels.

Therefore, to want self-management—or even "democratic management," if the

word democracy is not used simply for decorative purposes—and to want to maintain a command hierarchy is a contradiction in terms. It would be much more consistent, on the formal level, to say, as the defenders of the present-day system actually do, that the command hierarchy is indispensable and that, therefore, a self-managed society cannot exist.

Only, that is false. When one examines the functions of hierarchy, that is to say, what purpose it serves, one notices that in large part these functions have meaning and exist only as a function of the present-day social system, and that others, those that would remain meaningful and useful in a self-managed social system, could easily be collectivized. We will not, within this short text, discuss the question in its full breadth. We will try to shed light on some of its more important features, making specific reference to the organization of the business firm and of production.

One of the most important functions of the present-day hierarchy is *to organize compulsion* [*contrainte*]. In work, for example, whether on the shop floor or in the office, an essential part of the "activity" of the hierarchical apparatus, from foremen to managerial personnel, consists of surveillance, control, sanctions, a direct or indirect imposition of discipline, and assurance of the execution of the orders given to those who are to execute them. And *why is it necessary* to organize compulsion? Why is it necessary *that there be* compulsion? Because laboring people do not in general spontaneously manifest any overwhelming enthusiasm to do what management wants them to do. And why is that? Because neither their work nor the product of their work belongs to them, because they feel alienated and exploited, because they have not themselves decided what they are to do and how to do it, or what will come of what they do; in brief, because there is a perpetual conflict between those who work and those who direct the work of others and profit from it. In sum, therefore, it is necessary that there be a hierarchy in order to organize compulsion—and it is necessary that there be compulsion because there is division and conflict, that is to say as well, because there is hierarchy.

Hierarchy is presented in more general terms as being there to settle conflicts. Here one masks the fact that hierarchy is itself the source for a perpetual conflict. For, as long as there is a hierarchical system, there will be, for this very reason, the continual rebirth of a radical conflict between a privileged managerial stratum and the other categories, who have been reduced to roles of execution.

It is said that if there were no compulsion, there would be no discipline, that each person would do what he pleases, and that chaos would ensue. This, however, is another sophism. The question is not whether there must be discipline and sometimes even compulsion, but *what kind* of discipline, decided by whom, controlled by whom, under what forms, and for what ends. The more the ends discipline serves are foreign to the needs and desires of those who are to carry them out, the more the decisions concerning these ends and the forms of discipline are external to them, and the more there is need for compulsion in order to win respect for these decisions and forms of discipline.

A self-managed collectivity is not a collectivity without discipline, but a collectivity that decides itself how to organize its self-discipline and, should the case arise, the sanctions against those who deliberately violate this discipline. As concerns work in particular, the question cannot be discussed seriously if one presents the

self-managed firm as strictly identical to the contemporary business firm save for the removal of its hierarchical shell. In the business firm today, one imposes on people jobs that are foreign to them and about which they have no say. The astonishing thing is not that they are opposed to this, but that they are not infinitely more opposed than is the case. It cannot be believed for a single instant that their attitude toward their work would remain the same when their relation to it would be transformed and when they would begin to become the masters of it. On the other hand, even in a business firm today, there is not *one* form of discipline, but *two*. There is the discipline the hierarchical apparatus constantly tries to impose through the application of constraints and the use of monetary or other sanctions. And there is the much less apparent, but no less effective, discipline that arises within groups of laboring people in a work team or in a shop; this second sort of discipline acts, for example, so as to tolerate neither those who work too much nor those who work too little. Human groups have never been and never are chaotic conglomerates of individuals moved solely by egoism and engaged in war with each other, as the ideologues of capitalism and of the bureaucracy, who are expressing here merely their own mentality, would have us believe. In groups, and in particular those occupied with an ongoing shared task, norms of behavior and collective pressure to win respect for these norms always arise.

Self-Management, Competence, and Decision Making

Let us now proceed to the other essential function of hierarchy, which appears to be independent of the contemporary social structure: the functions of decision making and direction. The question that arises is the following: Why are the collectivities themselves not able to accomplish this function, to direct themselves, and to decide for themselves; why would it be necessary for there to be a particular stratum of people, organized in a separate apparatus, that decides and directs? In answer to this question, the defenders of the present-day system provide two sorts of responses. One leans on the invocation of "knowledge" and "competence": those who know, those who are competent, are to decide. The other response states, in more or less covert terms, that in any case someone has to decide, because otherwise there would be chaos—in other words, because the collectivity is incapable of directing itself.

No one challenges the importance of knowledge and competence, nor, above all, the fact that today, *a certain knowledge* and *a certain competence* are reserved for a minority. Nevertheless, here again such facts are invoked to cover over sophisms. It is not those who have more knowledge and competence in general that direct in the present-day system. Those who direct are those who have shown themselves capable of rising within the hierarchical apparatus, or those who, in terms of their family and social origin, have been given the breaks after having obtained a few diplomas. In both cases, the "competence" required to maintain oneself or to rise within the hierarchical apparatus is concerned much more with the ability to defend oneself and to come out on top in the competition among individuals, cliques, and clans within the bureaucratic-hierarchical apparatus than with any aptitude for directing collective work. In the second place, just because someone or some ones

possess some scientific or technical knowledge or competency does not mean that the best way to use them is to confer on them the management of a set of activities. One can be an excellent engineer in one's specialized field without for all that being capable of "directing" a whole department in the factory. Moreover, we need only notice what really happens in this regard. Technicians and specialists are generally confined to their particular field. "Managers" surround themselves with a few technical consultants, gather their advice on the decisions to be made (advice that often contains divergent opinions), and finally "decide." The absurdity of the argument here is clear. If the "manager" decided as a function of his "knowledge" and his "competence," he would have to be knowledgeable and competent about everything, either directly or in order to decide which, among the divergent opinions of the specialists, is the best. That obviously is impossible, and managers in fact settle things arbitrarily, by exercising their "judgment." Now, this "judgment" by a single person has no more reason to be valid than the judgment that would be formed in a self-managed collectivity on the basis of a real experience infinitely broader than that of a single individual.

Self-Management, Specialization, and Rationality

Knowledge and competence are by definition specialized, and they are becoming more so with each passing day. Removed from his specific field, the technician or specialist is no more capable than anyone else of making a good decision. Even within his particular field, indeed, his point of view is inevitably limited. On the one hand, he does not know the other fields, which necessarily interact with his own, and he tends naturally to neglect them. Thus, in business firms as in administrative offices today the question of the "horizontal" coordination of managerial services is a perpetual nightmare. It long ago reached the point where specialists of coordination had to be created in order to coordinate the activities of management specialists—who have thereby shown themselves incapable of managing themselves. On the other hand and above all, when specialists are placed in a managerial apparatus they are for this very reason separated from the real production process, from what goes on there, from the conditions under which laboring people have to carry out their work. Most of the time, the decisions made in offices [*bureaux*] on the basis of scientific calculations, though perfect on paper, prove inapplicable such as they are, for they have not adequately taken into account the real conditions under which they will have to be applied. Now, by definition, the collectivity of laboring people *alone* knows these real conditions. Everyone knows that, in business firms today, this is a source for perpetual conflicts and enormous waste.

On the other hand, knowledge and competence can be rationally utilized if those who possess them are reintegrated into the collectivity of producers, if they become one of the components of the decision-making of this collectivity. Self-management requires cooperation between those who possess a particular sort of knowledge and competence and those who perform productive labor in the strict sense. It is totally incompatible with a separation of those two categories. Only if such cooperation is established [*s'instaure*] will this knowledge and this competence be able to be utilized to their full extent. Today, however, these skills and abilities are utilized only in

small part, for those who possess them are confined to limited tasks narrowly circumscribed by the division of labor established within the managerial apparatus. Above all, this cooperation alone can ensure that knowledge and competence will actually be placed in the service of the collectivity, and not for particular ends.

Could such cooperation occur without conflicts arising between "specialists" and other laboring people? If a specialist states, on the basis of his specialized knowledge, that this or that metal, because it possesses such and such properties, is the most suitable for this tool or that part, one does not see why and on what basis that would lead to gratuitous objections on the workers' part. Even in this case, moreover, a rational decision requires that the workers not be left out—for example, because the properties of the material chosen play a role in the machining of the parts or tools. The truly important decisions concerning production always include, however, a dimension that is central to *the role and to the place of people in production*. Thereupon, there exists—by definition—no knowledge and no competence that might take precedence over the point of view of those who will actually have to carry out the work. An assembly-line organization can be neither rational nor acceptable if it has been decided on without taking into account the point of view of those who will have to work on it. Because they do not take this viewpoint into account, these decisions are at present almost always handicapped; and if, nonetheless, production somehow continues, it will be because the workers have organized among themselves to keep it going and have transgressed the official rules and instructions about how their work is to be organized. Moreover, even if one were to suppose that these decisions are "rational" from the narrow point of view of productive efficiency, they are still unacceptable precisely because they are, and can only be, based exclusively on the principle of "productive efficiency." This means that they tend to subordinate laboring people completely to the manufacturing process. Now, that is due not to the maliciousness of management, to its stupidity, or even simply to the quest for profit. (The proof is that "labor organization" is strictly the same in the Eastern-bloc countries and in Western countries.) It is the direct and inevitable consequence of a system in which the decisions are made by people other than those who will have to carry them out; such a system *cannot* have another "logic."

A self-managed society, however, cannot follow this "logic." Its logic is entirely other; it is the logic of the liberation of people and of their development. The collectivity of laboring people might very well decide—and, in our opinion, it would be right to do so—that for it, less arduous, less absurd, freer, and more happy workdays are infinitely preferable to a few extra pieces of manufactured junk. For such absolutely fundamental choices, no "scientific" or "objective" criterion holds water: the sole criterion is the judgment of the collectivity itself concerning what it prefers, made on the basis of its experience, its needs, and its desires.

This is true on the societal scale. No "scientific" criterion permits anyone whatsoever to decide that it is preferable for society to have more leisure time next year rather than more consumer goods, or vice versa, more rapid growth or less rapid growth, etc. He who says that such criteria exist is either ignorant or an impostor. The sole criterion that in these domains has any meaning is what the men and the women who make up society want, and they alone can decide what that is; no one can do so in their stead.

Self-Management and Hierarchy of Wages and Incomes

Absence of Objective Criteria for the Establishment of a Pay Hierarchy

A self-managed society is no more compatible with a hierarchy of wages and incomes than it is with a command hierarchy.

First of all, the wage and income hierarchy corresponds at present to the command hierarchy—completely in Eastern-bloc countries, in good part in Western countries. Yet, we must also see how this hierarchy is recruited. A son of a rich person will be a rich person, a son of a manager [*cadre*] will have all the chances in the world to become a manager. Thus, in large part the strata occupying the higher levels of the hierarchical pyramid perpetuate themselves by heredity. And that does not occur by chance. A social system always tends to reproduce itself. If some social strata have privileges, the members thereof will do everything they can—and their privileges signify precisely that they are capable of doing so to a large extent—to transmit these privileges to their descendants. To the extent that, in such a system, these strata have need of "new men"—because the managerial apparatuses are expanding and proliferating—they select, among the offspring of "lower" strata, those deemed most "apt" in order to coopt them within their own strata. To this extent, it may appear that the "work" and the "abilities" of those who have been coopted have played a role in their career, and that their "merits" are being rewarded. Once again, however, "abilities" and "merits" here signify essentially the ability to adapt oneself to the reigning system, the better to serve it. From a self-managed society's point of view, such abilities have no meaning.

Certainly, some people may think that, even in a self-managed society, the most courageous, the most tenacious, the most hard-working, the most "competent" individuals should have the right to a particular "reward," and that this reward ought to be monetary. And this nourishes the illusion that there might be a justifiable hierarchy of wages.

This illusion does not resist examination. No more than in the present-day system does one see on what basis differences in pay could be founded logically and justified with figures to back them up. Why should this bit of competence be worth for its possessor four times as much income as that granted to another, and not twice or twelvefold? What sense is there in saying that the competency of a good surgeon is *worth exactly* as much as—or more, or less, than—that of a good engineer? And why is it not worth exactly as much as that of a good train engineer or a good teacher?

Once removed from a few very narrow domains, and stripped of general significance, there are no objective criteria for measuring and comparing the competencies, knowledge, and know-how of different individuals. And if society itself covers the cost for an individual to acquire such know-how—as is practically the case already today—it is unclear why the individual who has already benefited once from the privilege this acquisition constitutes in itself should benefit from it a second time under the form of a higher income. The same thing goes, moreover, for "merit" and "intelligence." There are certainly individuals who are born more gifted than others as regards certain activities, or who become so. These differences are in general small, and the development of such differences especially depends on one's family,

social, and educational setting. But in any case, to the extent that someone has a "gift," the exercise of this "gift" is in itself a source of pleasure when it is not hindered. And as for the rare individuals who are exceptionally gifted, what really matters is not monetary "reward" but creating what they are irresistibly driven to create. If Einstein had been interested in money, he would not have become Einstein—and it is likely that he would have made a rather mediocre boss or financier.

Sometimes the incredible argument is advanced that without a hierarchy of wages society would not be able to find people willing to carry out the most "difficult" functions—and the functions of trained staff person [*cadre*], manager, etc., are presented as such. We are familiar with the oft-repeated phrase of those "in charge": "If everyone earned the same amount, then I would prefer sweeping up." However, in countries like Sweden, where wages differences have become much smaller than in France, business firms do not function less well than in France, and we are not seeing trained staff rushing for the brooms.

What is becoming more and more noticeable in industrialized countries is rather the contrary: those leaving companies are those who occupy the truly most difficult jobs—that is to say, the most arduous and the least interesting. Wage hikes do not succeed in stopping the hemorrhage of personnel in these positions. For this reason, these jobs are being abandoned more and more to immigrant manpower. This phenomenon is to be explained by the obvious fact that, unless forced to do otherwise by poverty, people are increasingly likely to refuse employment in idiotic jobs. One never notices the opposite phenomenon, and one can wager that things will continue in this direction. According to the very logic of this argument we therefore arrive at the following conclusion, namely, that the most interesting jobs are the ones that should be remunerated *the least*. For, no matter what the circumstances, these jobs are the most attractive, that is to say, the motivation for choosing them and for performing them is already to be found, in large part, in the very nature of the work.

Self-Management, Job Motivation, and Production for Needs

But what do all these arguments aimed at justifying hierarchy in a self-managed society boil down to saying? What is the hidden idea lying at their foundation? It is that people choose a job and perform it only in order to earn more than others. Though presented as an eternal truth concerning human nature, this idea in reality expresses merely the capitalist outlook, which has more or less penetrated society (and which, as the persistence of wage hierarchy in Eastern-bloc countries shows, remains dominant there as well). Now, this mentality is one of the conditions for the existence and self-preservation of the present-day system—and conversely, it can exist only insofar as the system continues. People attach importance to income differences *because* such differences exist and *because*, in the present-day social system, they are regarded as important. If one *can* make ten thousand dollars a month rather than one thousand, and if the social system everywhere nourishes the idea that he who makes ten thousand is *worth* more, is better than he who makes only one thousand—then indeed many people (not all, however, not even today) will be motivated to do everything to make ten thousand rather than one thousand. If, however, such a

difference does not exist in the social system, if it is considered to be just as absurd to want to make more than others as we (at least most of us) consider it today absurd to want at all costs to have a title of nobility, then other motivations, which themselves have a true social value, will be able to appear, or rather to open up, for example, interest in the work itself, the pleasure of doing well what one has chosen by oneself to do, inventiveness, creativity, the esteem and the recognition of others. Conversely, as long as that miserable motivation of economic considerations stands, all these other individual motivations will remain atrophied and crippled from infancy onward.

A hierarchical system is based on competition between individuals, and the struggle of all against all. It constantly lines people up against each other, inciting them to use all available means to "rise to the top." To present the cruel and sordid competition that takes place in a hierarchy of power, command, and incomes as a sports competition in which the "best" are winners in an honest game is to take people for imbeciles and to believe that they do not see how things really happen in a hierarchical system, whether it be in the factory, in an office, in the university, and now even more and more in scientific research, since the latter has become an immense bureaucratic enterprise. The existence of hierarchy is based on the merciless struggle of each person against all others—and it exacerbates this struggle. This is, indeed, why the jungle becomes all the more ruthless the higher one rises in the hierarchy—and why one encounters cooperation only at the base, where possibilities for "promotion" are reduced or nonexistent. Moreover, the artificial introduction, by the firm's management, of differentiations at this level aims precisely at breaking up such cooperation. Now, from the moment there are privileges of any kind, but particularly those of an economic nature, competition between individuals is immediately reborn, as is the tendency to cling to the privileges one already possesses and, to this end, to try to acquire as well more power for oneself and to remove it from the control of others. From that moment onward, there can no longer be any question of self-management.

Finally, wage and income hierarchy is equally incompatible with a rational organization of the economy of a self-managed society, for such a hierarchy immediately and heavily falsifies expressions of social demand.

Indeed, a rational organization of a self-managed society's economy implies that, so long as the objects and services produced by society still have a "price"—so long as they cannot be distributed freely—and therefore so long as there is a "market" for individual consumer goods, production will be oriented in accordance with the indicators of this market, that is to say, ultimately by the solvent demand of consumers. For, to begin with, there is no other defensible system. Contrary to a recent slogan, which can receive only metaphorical approval, one cannot give to everyone "everything right away" [*tout et tout de suite*].² It would, on the other hand, be absurd to limit consumption by means of authoritarian rationing, which would be equivalent to an intolerable and stupid tyranny over the preferences of each. Why distribute to each person a record and four movie tickets a month, when there are people who prefer music to images, and others who prefer the contrary—not to mention the deaf and the blind? A "market" of individual consumer goods is truly defensible only insofar as it is truly democratic—that is, only if each person's ballot carries the same

weight. These ballots are each person's income. If these incomes are unequal, immediately the vote is rigged: some people's votes would count much more than those of others. Thus today, the "vote" of the rich person for a villa on the Côte d'Azur or a personal airplane carries much more weight than the vote of an ill-housed person for decent housing, or of an unskilled worker for a second-class train ticket. And we must also be aware of the immense impact the unequal distribution of incomes has on the structure of consumer-goods production.

An arithmetical example making no claim to rigor, but which is fairly near to reality in its order of magnitude, allows us to illustrate this point. Suppose one could group the lowest 80 percent of the French population in terms of income around a mean of twenty thousand francs per year after taxes (the lowest incomes in France, which comprise a quite numerous category of people, along with senior citizens who earn little or nothing in the way of a pension, are far below the minimum wage) and the remaining 20 percent around a mean of eighty thousand francs per year after taxes. With a simple calculation, we can see that these two categories would share equal halves of the income available for consumer spending. Under these conditions, a fifth of the population would dispose of as much buying power as the other four-fifths. That means, too, that around 35 percent of the country's production of consumer goods are oriented *exclusively* toward satisfying the demand of the most favored group of the population *after* the satisfaction of the "basic" needs of this group; or again, that 30 percent of *all* persons employed work in order to satisfy the *nonessential* needs of the most favored categories of the population.^a

We see, therefore, that the orientation the "market" imposes on production under these conditions would not reflect the needs of society, but rather a deformed image in which nonessential consumption of the well-to-do strata would have a disproportionate weight. It is difficult to believe that, in a self-managed society, where these facts would be known by all with exactitude and precision, people would tolerate such a situation; or that, were such conditions still to prevail, they would consider production as their own business, and feel that it concerned them—and without these prerequisites there could not for a minute be any question of self-management.

The abolition of wage hierarchy is therefore the sole means for orienting production in accordance with the needs of the collectivity, for eliminating the struggle of all against all and the economic mentality, and for permitting the true participation of all men and of all women in the management of the collectivity's affairs.

Notes

1. See "Hierarchy of Wages and Incomes," chapter 13 in this volume.

2. T/E: The slogan of "tout, tout de suite" was among those that appeared in May 1968 during the student rebellion in France.

a) Assuming that the consumption/investment ratio is 4:1—which is roughly the order of magnitude observed in reality.

15 The Revolutionary Exigency

OLIVIER MONGIN: Cornelius Castoriadis, just a few years ago only a small minority had any suspicion of the importance and originality of your articles in *Socialisme ou Barbarie*. The republication of your principal political texts, programmatic statements, and manifestos from *Socialisme ou Barbarie* in paperback and the appearance of a particularly dense philosophical work, *L'Institution imaginaire de la société*, were necessary before your work was recognized and entered into the public domain. Nevertheless, it seems that this impromptu discovery has not necessarily facilitated people's access to your thought. Indeed, many knots remain tied for those who have not followed your itinerary.

It is for this reason that we want to ask you what connection there is between the militant activist of *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, the economist, and the philosopher. Does it make sense to distinguish between them? To pose this question in another way, does your critique of Marxism, for example, lie at the origin of your philosophical critiques? Is your criticism of political representation unrelated to your criticism of classical philosophical representation? In short, we would like to ask you to situate in an organic way what often risks being perceived as a series of merely juxtaposed reflections.

The Myth of Marxist Economics

CORNELIUS CASTORIADIS: As I have always lived them, the ideas of philosophy and of politics (therefore also of the philosopher and of the militant) allow of no radical

Interview with Olivier Mongin, Paul Thibaud, and Pierre Rosanvallon, recorded July 6, 1976. Originally published as "L'Exigence révolutionnaire," *Esprit*, February 1977, pp. 201–30, with a bibliography. Reprinted in *GS*, pp. 323–66.

16

The Hungarian Source

For years to come, all questions that count can be summed up as follows: Are you for or against the action and the program of the Hungarian workers?¹

I should apologize for quoting myself. But, twenty years later, I stand by these lines—more firmly, and more savagely, if possible, than when I wrote them. And it is not what happened, or rather, what did not happen during this time in the “sphere of ideas”—the silence surrounding the 1956 Hungarian Revolution in virtually all “Left,” “New Left,” and “extreme Left” literature—that would alter my attitude. Indeed, this silence is a rather sinister index both of the quality of this output and of the underlying motivations of people who consider themselves to be “revolutionaries.” It is hardly an exaggeration to say that this silence is one of the signs of

Text originally written in English for the American review *Telos* (St. Louis, Mo.), where it was published (no. 29, Fall 1976) with numerous alterations allegedly pertaining to its “editing” [T/E: in Castoriadis’s 10/18 French edition publication note, the italicized word “editing” appears in English]. Most of these alterations were limited to a flattening of the wording, while some of them actually adversely affected the meaning. Maurice Luciani’s translation from the original typescript is published as “La Source hongroise,” in *CS*, pp. 376–411. I thank him for his excellent work. [T/E: And I thank John Fekete, the editor of the Fall 1976 issue of *Telos*, for sending me in 1991 a photocopy of what may be the last surviving copy of Castoriadis’s English-language typescript. This photocopy serves as the basis for the present version, which has been standardized for the *PSW* series and adapted on occasion to bring out the author’s full meaning in English. I have tried to be as faithful to the original English typescript as possible, restoring all cuts *Telos* made. When the last line of a page has disappeared as a result of the photocopying process, I have consulted both the French translation and the “edited” *Telos* version. At times, the *Telos* editing has been helpful; at others, the changes made were to be avoided at all costs. I also have translated a paragraph that had been added to the 1979, French-language version of this article; it appears between brackets below.]

the domination of reactionary ideas in the contemporary world; what it means is that the Stalinist bureaucracy continues, even if more indirectly than before, to dictate the allowed and forbidden topics of discussion. (Today, the *relevant* reactionary ideas are, of course, the ideas of the bureaucracy—not those of Ronald Reagan. Besides, there is little doubt that Reagan and Brezhnev would agree about Hungary.)

Of course, the actual impact of the Hungarian Revolution cannot be gauged by this standard alone. Opposed to the ideological *repression* (a word to be taken here in its psychoanalytical sense, as well) of the memory of the 1956 events, there has certainly been a continuous “working through” of their meaning. Apart from their probable subterranean effects in Eastern countries and in Russia itself, there is little doubt that the wide diffusion of the idea of self-management over the last two decades is to be linked to the exemplary demands of the Hungarian workers’ councils. Here again, it is of course no accident if most of the organizations advocating “self-management” (in particular, but by no means only, reformist parties and unions) keep silent about Hungary and prefer to refer, for example, to the more respectable (and contentless) Yugoslavian “model.” This divorcing of the idea of self-management from the power of workers’ councils and the destruction of the existing order allows them to present self-management as something that could be just added on, without many tears, to the present system. Nevertheless, the spreading of the idea of self-management is undermining the foundations for the bureaucracy’s domination, and it is by no means sure that the reformist bureaucrats will succeed in making of it a mere embellishment for the established order.

I spoke about the silence that, for years now, has surrounded the Hungarian Revolution. The *bibliography* covering the Hungarian events of 1956 has now reached the level of several thousand volumes. Most of these writings, however, are by specialists for specialists; they are indicative much more of the tremendous expansion of the academic writing and publishing business than of a true recognition of the revolutionary significance of 1956. In the decades following 1789, or 1917, there was little “academic” or “scientific” writing about the French or the Russian Revolutions. There was, however, an extraordinary proliferation of *political* writing about them. People were writing in order to *take sides*—they were *for* or *against*. Those who were for invoked the French or Russian events as an example, invited the people in their countries to act like the Parisian population or the Petrograd workers, tried to explain and defend these actions against the reactionary ideologues of the times.

To be sure, the French and Russian Revolutions were “victorious” (though not for long), and the Hungarian Revolution was “defeated” (though this happened only because of the invasion of the country by the mightiest army on Earth). But so was the Paris Commune of 1871, and this did not prevent revolutionaries, over the ensuing half century, and still today, from celebrating its example and discussing its lessons. That the Hungarian Revolution was crushed by the Russian army might, perhaps, explain its lesser resonance among popular strata; *not* the systematic silence about it among “revolutionaries,” and “left-wing intellectuals.” Or is it that ideas cease to be true and valid when the Russian tanks start firing against them?

Things become clearer, nevertheless, when one considers the content, the meaning, the implications of the Hungarian Revolution. This silence can then be under-

stood for what it is: the direct consequence of the radical character of this revolution, and the attempt to repress its significance and its memory.

Modern society is a society of bureaucratic capitalism. The purest, total, most extreme form of bureaucratic capitalism has been achieved in Russia, China, and the other countries masquerading as "socialist." The Hungarian Revolution of 1956 has been the first and, until now, the only total revolution against total bureaucratic capitalism—foreshadowing the content and orientation of the future revolutions in Russia, China, etc. For decades, "Marxists," intellectuals of the "Left," militants, etc., have been—and still are—discussing the causes and exact date of the Russian "Thermidor," the degree of degeneration of the Russian Revolution, the social nature of the regime in Russia and the Eastern European countries. (Are they degenerated workers' states? Degenerated nonworkers' states? Socialist states with capitalist deformations? Capitalist states with socialist deformations?) The Hungarian workers and youth took to arms and put a final practical end to these discussions. They demonstrated through their deeds that the difference between the workers and the "workers' state" is the difference between life and death, and that they would rather die fighting against the "workers' state" than live as workers under a "workers' state."

Like the fragmented bureaucratic capitalism of the West, the total bureaucratic capitalism of the East is full of contradictions and torn by permanent social conflict. Contradictions and conflict recurrently reach acute levels, and the system heads toward an open crisis. The pressure of the exploited and oppressed population may reach a point of explosion. Or, before that, the ruling bureaucracy may attempt some "reforms." The fields where contradictions and conflict make themselves most manifest, and in the most pressing manner, are, of course, "economics" and "politics." The near-permanent economic chaos, which is consubstantial with bureaucratic "planning" and which is rooted, more deeply, in the fundamental conflict in production,² and the omnipresent political repression appear as the more intolerable aspects of total bureaucratic capitalism. These two aspects are, obviously, highly interdependent and reciprocally conditioned—and both necessarily result from the system's social structure. Fantastic as this may sound, they seem to be considered as secondary blemishes or reformable defects by virtually the whole of the international "Left." Thus, "reforms" that would eliminate them while preserving the substance of the system (a new case of squaring the circle) are welcomed by the [Communist] candidate bureaucrats of the West and their open or disguised ideologues ("socialists"; dissident and now even "orthodox communists" in Italy, France, and elsewhere; Trotskyists; "progressive" journalists; various types of intellectual fellow travelers, from existentialist philosophers of yesterday like Sartre and the *Les Temps Modernes* team to "radical economists" of today like [D. M.] Nuti, etc.). It is not difficult to understand why and how these strange bedfellows were more or less unanimous in their support for Gomulka in 1956–57 and in their "opposition" to the Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, whereas, with regard to the Hungarian Revolution, they resorted to shameful slanders (the "Communists"), approved the final Russian invasion (Sartre), frowned upon the "spasmodic," "elementary," and "spontaneous" actions of the Hungarian workers ([Ernest] Mandel) or retreated into silence as quickly as they could. In Poland in 1956 the people did not take up arms. Despite their development and their effervescence, the workers' coun-

cils never explicitly questioned the existing structure of power. The Communist party succeeded, at the price of a minor self-purge and of some personnel changes, in keeping the situation in its essentials under control through the entire critical period—and thus in stifling, eventually, the mass movement.³ Things were even more clear in Czechoslovakia in 1968—and the protests of the "Left" even louder. You see, in this case there was no danger, virtually no sign of autonomous activity on the part of the masses. The Communist party's (CP) new leadership was attempting to introduce some "democratic" reforms and a degree of decentralization into the economy. It goes without saying that the population could not but favor these measures. A reform from above, with the support of the people—what a golden dream for today's "revolutionaries"! As Mandel would say, this would "have allowed millions of proletarians to identify themselves again with the Workers' State." Under these circumstances, it is of course permissible to blame the Russian tanks.

In Hungary, however, the movement of the masses was so powerful and so radical that both the CP and the whole of the existing state apparatus were literally pulverized in a few days. There was not even a "dual power"; whatever power there was, it rested with the armed youth and the workers' councils. The "Program"⁴ of the workers' councils was totally incompatible with the conservation of the bureaucratic structure of society. It asked for the self-management of the enterprises, abolition of work norms, a drastic reduction in income inequalities, control over general planning activities, control over the composition of the government, a new orientation for the country's foreign policy. And all this was agreed upon and clearly formulated *in the span of a few days*. To remark that some point in these demands was "unclear" and that others were "inadequate" would be, in the context, ludicrously irrelevant. Had the Revolution not been crushed by the Kremlin murderers, its development would have forced the necessary "clarifications" and "completions" and would have shown if the councils and the people were or were not able to find in themselves the capacity and the strength to establish a new structure of power and a new institution of society.

At the same time, the Revolution was freeing and unleashing all the forces and tendencies of the Hungarian nation. Freedom of speech and organization for all, irrespective of one's particular political creed, were immediately considered self-evident. And, just as self-evident, this was considered intolerable by the various representatives of "progressive humanity" in our time. Freedom of speech and organization was seen as a sign of the "impure," "mixed," "confused" character of the Hungarian Revolution—when it was not cynically presented as the "proof" that the Revolution was nothing but an "imperialist conspiracy." One might wonder as to why capitalist imperialism can stand freedom of speech most of the time, and "socialist" imperialism cannot stand it for a single moment. But let us leave aside the problem of freedom as such. What is the historical and sociological meaning of this extraordinary proliferation of parties, organizations, etc., in the span of a few days? Precisely this: that a genuine revolution was taking place. This proliferation, and the expression of the corresponding spectrum of ideas, is indeed *the* distinctive mark of the Revolution. It is not despite, but because of, this unlimited manifestation of political tendencies, of this "chaotic" (for the bureaucrats and philistines) character of the social explosion, that we recognize in the Hungarian events of 1956 a revolu-

tion. It is—rather, it ought to be—a commonplace that a true revolution is always national: all sections and strata of the nation abandon their passivity and conformity to the old order, all strive to take an active part in its destruction and in the shaping of the new order. The whole of the heretofore oppressed society seizes the opportunity to express itself, everybody stands up and speaks out loud his ideas and his demands. (That *we* may disagree with many of them, and say so equally loudly, is a totally different matter.) This is what happened during the French Revolution after 1789, and in the Russian Revolution after February 1917 (the very suspect and intolerable mess created by both would have been, very probably, condemned on grounds of “impurity,” “confusion,” etc., by the critics of the Hungarian Revolution). The revolution is this state of overheating and fusion of society, accompanied by the general mobilization of all categories and strata and the breaking up of all established barriers. It is this character that makes understandable the extraordinary liberation and multiplication of the creative potential of society during revolutionary periods, the breaking up of the repetitious cycles of social life, the sudden *opening* of history.

Despite its short life span, the Hungarian Revolution has posited organizational forms and social significations that represent a social-historical institutional *creation*. The source of this creation was the activity of the Hungarian people—intellectuals, students, workers. “Theoreticians” and “politicians” as such did not contribute anything to it; they rather continued to bring the Hungarian people deceit and mystification. The intellectuals played an important positive role, since they started, months before the final outburst (in the Petöfi Circle and elsewhere), to *demolish* the “political,” “ideological,” and “theoretical” nonsense by means of which the Stalinist bureaucracy was presenting its totalitarian dictatorship as “people’s democracy” and “socialism.” They played this role not by “bringing to the people” a new, ready-to-wear “truth,” but by courageously exposing the old lies for what they were. New, positive truths were created by the people during and by means of their autonomous activity. I call them positive because they were *embodied* in actions and organizational forms, designed not only for the struggle *against* exploitation and oppression by the bureaucracy, but as new forms of organization of the collective life on the basis of new principles. These principles entail a radical break with the established social structures (East or West) and, once made explicit, make nonsense of the inherited political “philosophy” and “theory.” This, in turn, overthrows the traditional relationship between “theory” and “practice”—as well as between “theoretical” and plain people. In the Hungarian Revolution—as in some other previous historical instances—we find a new point of departure, a new source, which both forces us to reflect anew the problem of *politics*—that is, of the total institution of society—in the modern world and provides us with some of the means for doing so.

At this point, some noises about “spontaneism” if not about “obscurantist demagoguery” may be heard. Before answering these charges, let us take a look at the contributions of distinguished theoreticians and politicians before or during the 1956 events. Consider, for instance, György Lukács. He certainly was one of the very few creative Marxist theoreticians who appeared after Marx. What did *he* do? From about 1924 until 1956 he *provided cover*, ideologically speaking, for Stalin and

Stalinism, the Moscow Trials, the Gulag, “socialist realism,” and developments in Hungary since 1945; he implemented, successively, the orders of Zinoviev, Bukharin, Zhdanov, [Josef] Révai, etc. He did so *in full knowledge*—of the facts, *and* of “the most revolutionary conception history has ever produced,” Marxism.⁵ When did he dare to start seeing the light? When, spontaneously and *against* the implications of his theoretical teaching, the masses erupted. He spent his life swearing by *die List der Vernunft*—the Cunning of Reason, and made himself into an extreme impersonation of *die Unlist der blossen Vernunft*—the blindness of sheer “reason.”

Or consider Imre Nagy, the “politician.” What help did he offer—where was his “political” cunning against the treacherous lies of the Russian bureaucracy? Did he, for a single moment, find in himself the clarity of mind and the resolve to speak out loud these words: Whatever happens, never believe the Russians—and I know what I am talking about? No. He muddled through, and tried to ask for help . . . from the United Nations! History in the making and its bloody drama were, if ever, there in person: armored tanks and guns facing the naked hands and breasts of millions of people. And Nagy the “statesman,” the *Realpolitiker*, could only think of the United Nations, the sinister *guignol* theater where the Washington and the Moscow bandits, assisted by their respective second- or third-order ruffians, make speeches against each other in public and carry out their dirty business in the corridors.

Such was the output of the nonspontaneous, conscious, learned, and highly skilled professionals of theory and politics. The output of the nonprofessionals was a radical revolution—not foreseen, not prepared, not organized by anybody and, so, “spontaneous,” like all revolutions in history.

The Hungarian people did not act “spontaneously” in the sense a baby cries “spontaneously” if hurt. They acted out of their social and historical experience, and made something out of it. Now, when the self-styled “theoretician” or “revolutionary” looks contemptuously at what he calls “spontaneity,” the hidden postulate in the back of his mind is this: it is impossible that this rabble could ever learn anything from their lives, draw any sensible conclusions, put two and two together—let alone bring forward new ideas and try to find *their* solutions to *their* problems. The essential identity of this postulate with the basic tenets of the ruling classes, over thousands of years, concerning society and man hardly needs to be stressed.

A long parenthesis seems necessary here. One cannot help being struck by the fact that “Marxist” and “leftist” intellectuals continue to spend their time and energy writing on and on about the relation between Volume 1 and Volume 3 of *Das Kapital*, commenting on and reinterpreting this or that comment on Marx by this or that interpreter of Marx, heaping glosses on glosses of *books*—and hardly ever consider actual history, the effective creation of forms and meanings in and through the activity of people. Thus history is, once again, reduced to the history of ideas—and a very narrow set of ideas at that. One of the consequences is that history tends to be less and less understood. For history is not just the array of historical “facts”; what matters, from a revolutionary point of view, is the *interpretation* of these facts, which cannot be left to the historians of the university establishment. Certainly, this interpretation is a function both of the “theoretical ideas” and of the political project of the interpreter. But it is the organic connection between these three elements: the project, the ideas, and the full consideration of actual history as a *source* (and

not as dead material) that is the distinctive trait of the work of a revolutionary intellectual and that can only mark his radical departure from the traditional, dominant conception of "theoretical work." And it is this connection that is in fact severed in 99 percent of "left-wing" literature today.

Much more, however, is involved here. For both the project and the ideas have their origin in actual history, in the creative activity of people in modern society. The revolutionary project is not a logical inference from a correct theory. Rather, the successive theories in this field are attempts at a universal formulation of that which masses of people, over the last two hundred years, workers at first, then women, students, national minorities, etc., have expressed in their struggle against the established institution of society—be it during revolutions, or in the factory, or in their day-to-day lives. By "forgetting" this fact, the "revolutionary" intellectual lands himself in a ridiculous contradiction. He proclaims that his theory enables him to understand and even to judge history—while seemingly ignoring that the essential *source* of his theory is the past historical activity of people. In this way, he blinds himself to this activity as it manifests itself *in the present*. For example, the Hungarian Revolution.

To drive home the point, consider the work of Marx. Had this work been just "a synthesis" of classical German philosophy, English political economy, and French utopian socialism, it would have remained just another theory. The difference comes from the political ideas that animated Marx. But what is the source of these ideas? There is virtually *nothing* among them—at any rate, nothing retaining any relevance and value today—that can be attributed to Marx himself. Virtually all of it has its source in the working-class movement as it was forming itself between 1800 and 1840; virtually all of it is already there, black on white, in the English working-class literature of this time.⁶ And what was the only "addition" Marx was able to make, to his political ideas, after the *Communist Manifesto*? The idea of the destruction of the existing state apparatus and the "dictatorship of the proletariat"—which was, as he himself pointed out, the lesson of the Paris Commune, a lesson embodied in the activity of the Parisian workers and, first and foremost, in the new institutional form they created: the Commune itself. This creation Marx had not been able to foresee—despite his theory and despite his genius. Being Marx, and "not a Marxist," he was able to recognize it—after the event.⁷

Let us return to our main argument. What would be "nonspontaneity," to what is "spontaneity" opposed? Would it be to "consciousness"? But is anybody saying that the Hungarian workers, for instance, were *unconscious*? In what sense? Sleepwalkers? Under the influence of LSD? Zombies? Or is it that they were not conscious "enough"—or not "in the proper way"? But what, then, is "enough" consciousness—or "the proper way" of being conscious? Mr. Mandel's, perhaps? Or Mr. Sartre's? Or would it be Absolute Knowledge? Whose? Is there anybody around representing it? And what is he *doing* with it? We do know, anyhow, what Kautsky and Lenin have done with their knowledge.

Or is the opposite of "spontaneity" organization? But the question is precisely: *What* organization, and *whose* organization? The "spontaneous" action of the Hungarian workers and people was action *toward* organization, and even more: their spontaneity was exactly that, *their self-organization*. And this is also what the bureau-

crat pseudotheoretician hates the most: that the workers *organize themselves* in workers' councils—instead of waiting, in enthusiastic passivity, for him to come and "organize" them. And how does he organize them, if he is given a chance? Like the dominant classes have done, for centuries, in factories and in armies. This he does, clearly, if and when he takes power, but also before that—in a big union, for instance, or in a "Bolshevik party," where structure, form, and content of relations simply reproduce the relations extant in capitalist society: hierarchy, division between a stratum of directors and a mass of executants, veil of pseudoknowledge cast over the power of a self-coopting and self-perpetuating bureaucracy, and so on—that is, the form appropriate for the reproduction and perpetuation of political alienation (and, by way of consequence, of overall alienation). If the opposite of "spontaneity"—that is, of self-activity and self-organization—is *hetero-organization*, organization by politicians, "theoreticians," "professional revolutionaries," etc.—then, clearly, the opposite of "spontaneity" is *counterrevolution*, or conservation of the existing order.

The revolution is exactly that, self-organization of the people. By the same token, it obviously presupposes a becoming-conscious of the essential characteristics and mechanisms of the established system, and of the desire and the will to invent a new solution to the problem of the institution of society. (It is clear, for instance, that the understanding the Hungarian workers did possess, in act, of the social character of the bureaucracy as an exploitative and oppressive class, *and* of the conditions for its existence, was, *from a theoretical point of view*, infinitely superior to all the pseudo-theoretical analyses contained in thirty years of Trotskyist literature and in most of the other "left-wing Marxist" writings.) Self-organization is here *self-organizing*, and consciousness is *becoming-conscious*; both are *processes*, not *states*. It is not that people have finally found "the" appropriate form of social organization, but rather that they realize that this "form" *is* their activity of organizing themselves, in accordance with their understanding of the situation and of the ends they set for themselves. In this sense, the revolution cannot but be "spontaneous," both in its inception and in its unfolding. For the revolution *is* explicit self-institution of society. "Spontaneity" here means nothing else but creative social-historical activity at its highest expression, that which has as its object the institution of society itself. Of this, all the revolutionary outbursts of modern times offer indisputable instances.

No historical action is "spontaneous" in the sense of arising in a vacuum, of being totally unrelated to its conditions, its environment, its past. And every important historical action is spontaneous precisely in the pristine sense of the word: *spontaneous*, source.⁸ History is creation—and this means emergence of that which is not already contained in its "causes," "conditions," et cetera, which is not repetition, neither *stricto sensu* nor in the sense of a "variant" of the already given, but position of new forms and figures and of new meanings—that is, *self-institution*. To put it in a more narrow, more pragmatic, more operational way: spontaneity is the excess of the "result" over the "causes."⁹

The Hungarian workers acted from their experience—and their action was an *elaboration*, in a nontrivial sense, of this experience. But this action was not a "necessary," causally determined reaction or response to the given situation, any more than *this* elaboration was the result of a "logical" process of deduction, inference, or the

like. In half a dozen Eastern European countries the general conditions to which one might try to impute the 1956 explosion were present in essentially similar form for quite a few years, and, for that matter, in Russia itself for a much longer period of time. That they had been essentially similar is, after all, proved by the events in East Germany in 1953, Poland in 1956 (and 1970 and 1976), Czechoslovakia in 1968, as well as by the more limited and less well known revolts in Russia (e.g., Novocherkassk). However, it is only in Hungary that the activity of the people reached the level of intensity that could produce a revolution. That Hungary and the Hungarian people are particular is certain. So is every country and every people. We all know that all individual entities are absolutely singular and, in this respect, absolutely alike. The "particularities" of Hungarian history, etc., are of no help in trying to "explain" exhaustively why this particular form of revolution took place in this particular country at this particular moment.¹⁰ A concrete historical investigation can, of course, help in "rendering intelligible"—*ex post facto*: one should never forget the endless problems entailed by this clause—a considerable part of the concatenations between events, actions, and reactions of people, etc. It can *never* jump from this description and partial understanding of conditions, motivations, actions, etc., to the "explanation of the result."

Thus, for instance, a revolution is "caused" by exploitation and oppression. But exploitation and oppression have been there all the time, for centuries (thousands of years). Then, exploitation and oppression have to reach an "extreme point." Which is this "extreme point"? And has it not been reached, recurrently, without a revolution ensuing? Then again, this has to coincide with an "internal crisis" of the ruling classes, the crumbling or collapse of the regime. But what more crumbling and collapse could you want than the state of most of Europe after 1918—or after 1945? In the end, the masses must have reached a sufficient level of consciousness and combativeness. And what determines the level of consciousness and combativeness of the masses? The revolution has not taken place, because the conditions for a revolution were not ripe. The most important of these conditions is a sufficient level of consciousness and combativeness on the part of the masses. Sufficient for what? Well, sufficient for making a revolution. In short, a revolution has not taken place because a revolution has not taken place. This is the gist of "Marxist" (and any "deterministic" or "scientific") wisdom on the matter.¹¹

Things are even clearer when one considers not the "revolt" as explosion and destruction of the old order, but the revolution as a self-organized activity aiming at the institution of a new order. (The distinction is, of course, a separating abstraction.) In other words, when one considers the *positive content* of what I called before an elaboration of the experience. The intolerable old state of affairs could have been met with an additional dose of resignation. Or by a revival of religious sentiment. Or by demands for more or less "moderate" reforms. Instead, the movement short-circuited all other "solutions," and people started fighting and dying for a wholesale reconstruction of society. It would be a hard task for a theoretician to try to prove that this was the *only* "logical" and/or "feasible" alternative to the Hungarian state of affairs in 1956; innumerable instances to the contrary have been and continue to be provided by many countries in the world. The positive content of workers' councils, the demands for self-management and abolition of work norms, etc., was not

a deduction, inference, choice of "the only other alternative," etc. It was an elaboration that *transcended* the given (and all that is given with the given, implied or contained in it) and posited something new.

That this something new stands in a deep, organic relationship to the previous creations of the working-class movement and the content of other phases of revolutionary activity does not limit its importance; on the contrary. It emphasizes that the Hungarian Revolution belongs to the series of struggles, now going on for almost two centuries, that aim at the radical reconstruction of society. It shows in the activity of the Hungarian people a new moment in the unfolding of the revolutionary project—and, at the same time, ensures that its creations possess a significance that transcends, by far, the particular moment and conditions of their birth.

The forms of organization created by the Hungarian workers—the councils—belong to the same type as the forms created previously and elsewhere by working-class revolutions. The aims and demands formulated by these councils are in line with the aims and demands advanced by the whole history of the working-class movement, be it in formal structures or in the informal day-to-day fight going on in the factories of the world, whereas on certain basic points (self-management, abolition of work norms) they are more explicit and more radical. There is, thus, in the modern world a *unity* of the revolutionary project. This unity, again, we can render "more intelligible" by pointing to historical inheritance and continuity, to the similarity of the conditions in which the working class is placed by the social system, in particular of conditions of life and work. Although these factors are relevant and important, they can never give us the sum of "necessary and sufficient conditions" for the production of the content of the "responses" in 1871, 1905, 1917, 1919, 1936–37—or, indeed, for the failure of such a production in other instances. For what we have here is not an "objective" unity, not a unity as the identity of a class of "effects" stemming from a class of "identical causes," but a unity in the making, in the making of itself, a unity *making itself* (and, of course, *not yet made*): a unity of social-historical creation.

Without minimizing the importance of the numerous other aspects of the Hungarian Revolution, I shall concentrate here on the significance of the workers' councils and of some of their aims and demands. In discussing what I consider to be the potential meaning of the councils and of their demands, I am interpreting; so is, of course, anybody else talking about this subject or any other. I am interpreting, in connection with my own political position and perspective—and with the ideas I have been able to form. I am interpreting the Hungarian events of 1956—which are "particular" and "extreme." I hold that it is in these "particular" and "extreme" events that we can best see—beyond the blur of the habitual and the banal—the undiluted, concentrated, corrosive potentialities of the present historical situation. (In the same way, May 1968 in France was "particular" and "extreme"—and it is *because* of this, because it was a *limit situation*, that new potentialities were revealed, nay, created, during and through the May 1968 events.) Finally, these events lasted only a few weeks. I hold that these weeks—like the few weeks of the Paris Commune—are, *for us*, no less important and no less meaningful than three thousand years of Egyptian pharaonic history.

And I hold this to be so because I hold that what is contained potentially in the constitution and the aims of the Hungarian workers' councils is the destruction of the traditional, inherited, instituted social significations of *political power*, on the one hand, and of *production and work*, on the other hand, and therefore the germ of a new institution of society. This entails, in particular, a radical break with the inherited philosophy of politics and of work.

The workers' councils were formed almost everywhere, and they covered the country in a matter of hours. Their exemplary character does *not* stem from their being *workers' councils*; it is not linked to their "proletarian composition," to their springing from "productive enterprises," or even to the external aspects of the council "form" as such. Their decisive importance lies in (a) the establishment of *direct democracy*—in other terms, of *true political equality* (equality as to power); (b) their rootedness in existing concrete collectivities (which need not be only the "factories"); and (c) their demands relative to *self-management* and the abolition of work norms. Implied in these points is a striving toward the abolition of the established *division* of society and of the *essential separation* between the main spheres of collective activity. Involved here are not only the division between "classes," but the division between the "rulers" and the "ruled" (including the division between "representatives" and "represented"); the division between a separate "government" or narrow "political" sphere and the rest of social life, and especially "work" and "production"; and the division between immediate, day-to-day interests and activities, on the one hand, and a "political universal," on the other hand. Abolition of the division and of the essential separation does *not*, of course, mean the establishment of an undifferentiated "identity" of each and of all, of a "homogeneous" society, etc. (*This dilemma—either society is antagonistically divided, split one way or the other, or there is total homogeneity and a general lack of differentiation—is one of the hidden postulates of the inherited political thought, and is shared by Marx, for whom the elimination of the division of society and of state power, politics, etc., will result from the homogenization of society brought about by capitalism.*) Abolition of division and separation entails the recognition of the differences between segments of the community (the negation of these differences by abstract universals like "citizen," "proletarian," "consumer," etc., reestablishes this separation within each and every individual), and requires another type of *articulation* of these segments.

In the council organization all decisions have to be made—in principle, and whenever this is materially possible—by the whole collective of the people concerned, that is, by the general assembly of the "constituency" (be it a factory, an administration, a university, or a district). A body of delegates ensures the implementation of the decisions of the general assembly and the continuity of the direction of common affairs in between its meetings. The delegates are elected and permanently revocable (i.e., subject at any moment to instant recall). But neither this permanent revocability, nor even the election of the delegates are here decisive. There could be other means (e.g., rotation) to achieve the same end. The important point is that the power to decide rests with the general assembly, which can reverse decisions of the delegates, and that the "power" of the delegates is *residual*, that is, it exists only insofar as the general assembly cannot be in session around the clock every day.

This power of the general assemblies means, immediately, the abolition of the

instituted division between the "rulers" and the "ruled." In particular, it eliminates the prevalent (and typically modern, *not* ancient) political mystification that democracy is equivalent to representation—by which, of course, is meant *permanent* representation. Being an irrevocable (even if, formally, limited in time) delegation of power from the "represented" to the "representatives," representation is a form of political alienation. Political power is expropriated from the "represented" and appropriated by the "representatives." To decide is to decide oneself. It is *not* to "decide" who is going to decide. This expropriation is veiled by the juridical form of periodical elections. The well-known critique of "elections" under present social and political systems needs no repeating here. It is more important, perhaps, to stress a generally neglected point. Political "representation" tends to "educate"—that is, diseducate—people in the conviction that they could not manage the problems of society, that there exists a particular category of men endowed with the specific ability to "govern." Permanent representation goes with "professionalized politics." Thus, it contributes to political apathy, which in turn widens the gap, in people's minds, between the extent and the complexity of the problems of society and their own ability to tackle them.

Needless to add, neither the power of general assemblies nor the revocability and accountability of delegates is a panacea, "guaranteeing" that the revolution will not degenerate in bureaucratic or other fashion. The development, and ultimate fate, of the councils or any other autonomous organ depends on the self-mobilization and self-activity of the masses, on what people will and will not do, on their participation and involvement in the life of the collective organs, on their readiness to bring their full weight to bear during the processes of discussion, elaboration, decision, implementation, control. It would be a contradiction in terms to seek an institutional form that would, by its own virtue, ensure this participation, that would coerce people to be autonomous and constrain them to be self-activating. The council form—or any other analogous form—does not, and cannot, *guarantee* the development of such an autonomous activity; rather, *it makes this development possible*. The established political forms—be it "representative democracy," or the power, or even the "leadership," of a party—*guarantee* that such a development would be *impossible* and *make it impossible* by their very existence. What is here at stake is the "deprofessionalization" of politics, the abolition of politics as a special and separate sphere of activity and skill, and, conversely, the universal *politicization* of society, which means just that: the business of society is, in act and not in words, everybody's business. (This is the exact opposite of Plato's definition of justice: *Ta seatou pratein kai me polupragmonein*, to do one's own business and not to mess around with all sorts of things.)

A revolutionary phase starts necessarily with an outburst of autonomous activity on the part of the people, and, if it proceeds beyond the stage of a "revolt" or a "revolutionary episode," it goes on to establish autonomous mass organs. It displays a tremendous amount of activity and passion, abnegation, and "self-sacrifice," an extraordinary expenditure of energy. Individuals become actively interested in public affairs as if these were their own personal affairs—and *this is indeed what they actually are*. Thus, the revolution manifests itself to society as the unveiling of its own repressed truth. This deployment goes hand in hand with almost miraculous, un-

believable feats and performances of social, political, practical, and technical inspiration and invention (abundantly illustrated once more during the Hungarian Revolution and, not least, by the audacity and skill with which the Hungarian workers' councils went on fighting [János] Kadar for more than a month after the second Russian invasion and the total occupation of the country by a huge Russian army).

The continuation and further development of the autonomous activity of the people itself depends upon the character and the scope of the power of the mass organs, the relevance of the matters decided upon for the concrete existence of people, the difference that the decisions taken make or fail to make for their lives. (In this sense, the main problem of postrevolutionary society is the creation of institutions that allow the continuation and the development of this autonomous activity, without requiring heroic feats twenty-four hours a day.) The more people can see in their actual experience that their day-to-day existence depends crucially on their active participation in the exercise of power, the more they will tend to participate in this exercise. The development of self-activity feeds upon itself. Conversely, any limitation of the power of the autonomous mass organs, or any attempt to transfer a "part" of this power to other instances (Parliament, "party," etc.), can only favor the opposite movement, toward lesser participation, declining interest vis-à-vis the common affairs, and finally apathy. The bureaucratization process starts when part of the decisions pertaining to common affairs are removed from the competence of the mass organs and, under various rationalizations, entrusted to specific bodies. If this is allowed to happen, the participation of people and the activity of the mass organs will inevitably decline. The ensuing vacuum will be filled by more bureaucratic instances that will "have to" decide upon more and more matters. Eventually, people will abandon the mass organs where nothing of substance is decided on any more, and revert to the state of cynical indifference toward "politics," which is not only characteristic of present societies *but the very condition of their existence*. This state of affairs will then appear, to sociologists and philosophers, both to "explain" and to "justify" the bureaucracy (after all, somebody has to take care of public affairs).¹²

Now, people's concrete lives and day-to-day existence depend, inseparably, *both* on what is going on at the "general" social, political level *and* on what is happening in the particular collectivity to which they belong and the specific activities in which they are engaged. The separation and antagonism of these two spheres is an essential expression of separation and alienation in present-day society. Here lies the importance of the Hungarian workers' councils' demand for self-management and for the constitution of councils in all sectors of national life. A "participation" in general political power that leaves people powerless over their immediate environment and the management of their concrete activities is, of course, a mystification. And so is a "participation" or "self-management" confined, for example, to the business enterprise while leaving "general political power" in the hands of a separate stratum. What is entailed by the demands of the Hungarian workers' councils is the overcoming of this separation and opposition: that people manage the concrete collectivities to which they belong—and not only in "factories," but "in all sectors of national life," *and* that they participate in political power *not* under another guise, as "citizens" who vote, etc., *but* through the very organs of management that were their direct expression, namely, the councils.¹³ Thus, the abstract dilemma divi-

sion/homogenization of society is eliminated; what we are led to is a mode of *articulation* between total society and the particular segments composing it.

Thus, irrespective of any other considerations, one can see clearly through the mystifications of the Yugoslav "workers' councils" and "self-management of business enterprises." There can be no "self-management of business enterprises" if a separate state apparatus and power are maintained; *even* in the narrow field of the "management of the business enterprise," the initiative and activity of the people are stunted and finally destroyed if they are confined to some secondary points concerning the operation of the factory (and, essentially, the increase of its output), when the "League of Yugoslavian Communists" retains total power over all important matters, and so, finally, *over what is happening in the factories themselves*. One can also see, conversely, why the power of the councils or other council-like organs (e.g., soviets in Russia after October 1917) will rapidly become a hollow form if they are confined to "political" power and matters in the narrow, current sense of the word. This was the line Lenin was advocating *on paper* when he spoke about "soviet power"; in actual fact, of course, he was striving to get all power for the Bolshevik party, and he succeeded. For then the division between a "political" sphere, in the traditional sense, and the concrete existence of people is reintroduced and reaffirmed. If the councils or the soviets are called upon only to vote laws and decrees and to nominate commissars, all they obtained was the abstract shadow of power. Thus, separated from the everyday life of people and from their activities in the factory and in work, having a more and more distant relation with the interests and preoccupations of concrete collectivities, busying themselves (or rather, *being supposed* to busy themselves) with distant, general governmental affairs, the soviets were bound to appear rapidly in the eyes of the population (even if they had not been dominated and manipulated by the Bolshevik party) as just another "official instance" not belonging to them, not caring about what *they* cared about.¹⁴

When I speak about autonomous organs of the masses, I do not call them autonomous only because, for example, they do not "obey" given individuals or parties or the "government." I call them autonomous because and insofar as *they do not accept the established institution of society*. This means, in particular, first, that they do not accept, outside themselves, any other source of legitimate power; and, second, that they abolish, within themselves, the division between those who direct and those who execute. The first point does not just imply either that they create a situation of "dual power" or even that they tend to assume for themselves all power, but that the autonomous organs posit themselves as the only legitimate source of decisions, rules, norms, and law—that is, as organs *and* as embodiment of a new institution of society. The second point entails that they abolish, through their deeds, the division between a "sphere of politics," or of "government," and a "sphere of everyday life" as essentially and antagonistically separated—or, in other words, the division between the specialists of the universal and the specialists of drilling, boring, plumbing, plowing, and so on. This second point *is* in fact the concrete implementation of the first in the field that is, immediately, of the greatest importance. For, the institution of "historical" societies, over thousands of years, in the political field, and the core schema of the institution of social relations in all other fields, has been the institution of a *hierarchy* between men. This institution has been, inseparably, a "real-

material" institution, embodied in social networks and individual positions, instrumented in possessions, privileges, rights, spheres of competence, tools, and weapons; and of a social imaginary signification, or rather, of a magma of social imaginary significations—the kernel of which differs among particular societies—whereby people are defined, conceived, and "acted," reciprocally *and* for themselves, as "superior" and "inferior" along one or several socially instituted lines of order. The internalization, by each and every individual, of this hierarchical ordering—even more: the virtual *impossibility* for any individual to think of himself and of the others and even *to exist*, socially and psychically, without placing himself at some point on this hierarchical order (be it the lowest) has been and remains a cornerstone of the institution of society. Contemporary bureaucratic capitalism tends to push hierarchical organization to its limit, and to give it the most universal form and the purest expression, when it posits this form of organization as the "rational" organization par excellence.¹⁵ In two main areas, the hierarchical, pyramid-like structure of "organization," omnipresent in contemporary society, is replacing the traditional bipartition of capitalist society. Hierarchy has replaced this duality completely, for more than fifty years now, in Russia, and over the last quarter century in Eastern Europe and China. This *is* the dominant form of exploitative and oppressive relations in the world today.¹⁶

This structure and the significations consubstantial with it are refused and refuted by the council-like organizations. By vesting with power all those who are concerned, the hierarchical structure and division between those who direct and those who are confined to tasks of execution is destroyed. It thus materializes full political equality. Decisions are not made by specialists of specialized disciplines, or by specialists of the universal. They are made by the collective of the people who will have to implement them, and who, therefore, are in the best position to judge, not only about abstract "optimalities" of means in relation to ends, but also about the concrete conditions of this implementation and, above, all, its real costs—their own effort and work. This entails, for example, in the sphere of production, that matters relating to a particular place of work—say a shop in a factory—and not interfering with the activities of other shops have to be decided by the people in this shop. In the same way, matters concerning many shops, or a department, have to be decided by the people of these shops, or of the department; and matters pertaining to the factory as a whole, by the general assembly of people working in the factory or by their elected and revocable delegates. The relevance, correctness, etc., of the decisions made can thus be judged by those most concerned in a minimum of time and at minimum cost, and experience, both on these matters *and* on the actual exercise of direct democracy, can start building up. This is another illustration of what I called articulation.

[1979: "No taxation without representation": this slogan of the rising bourgeoisie in its struggle with the monarchy perfectly and profoundly expresses the mind-set and the world structures the bourgeoisie was in the process of creating in its classical home territory. *No execution of decisions without an equal part played by all in the making of decisions* is one of the fundamental principles of a self-managed society, and follows immediately from the demands and activity of the Hungarian workers' councils.]

The abolition of the *division* and antagonism between specialists and non-specialists does not mean, of course, the suppression of their *difference*. Self-management does not entail that "competence" and specialized "knowledge," wherever they exist and are meaningful, are neglected or not taken into account; *quite the contrary*. (In fact, it is under today's social structure that they are *not*, and that the decisions made there depend mostly on the outcome of the strife between bureaucratic cliques and clans, each of which uses "its" specialists for purposes of public justification and cover-ups.) Specialists are not eliminated as such. Technicians, engineers, accountants, and so on, belong to the collective of the factory—to stick to this example—and can and have to be listened to, like everybody else *and* in their specific capacity as technicians, etc. A general assembly is perfectly capable of listening to an engineer who says, "If you want A, I don't know of any other way of doing it than X and Y; and I remind you that the choice of X will entail Z, the choice of Y will entail V and W." But it is the assembly, not the engineer, that will have to decide to do or not to do A, *and* to choose between X and Y. Can they be proved wrong? Certainly. But hardly more so than, for example, Pan American Airways. There, management, availing itself of the expert advice of hundreds of technicians, statisticians, computer experts, econometricians, transport economists, and so forth, extrapolated the demand curve for air transportation of the 1960s into the future—something a moderately intelligent first-year undergraduate would not have done—and landed themselves in near bankruptcy, from which they had to be rescued by the American government.

What is involved here is much more than the traditional statement of the limitations of any technical, specialized competence or knowledge, based on the separation between "means" and "ends" (more or less homologous to the separation between "values" and neutral or value-free "instruments"). This separation is an abstraction, possessing some validity only in fragmented and trivial domains—and, beyond that, a fallacy. We are not saying: people will have to decide *what* to do, and then technicians will tell them *how* to do it. We say: after listening to technicians, people decide what to do *and* how to do it. For the *how* is not neutral—and the *what* is not disembodied. What and how are neither *identical*, nor *external* to each other. A "neutral" technique is, of course, an illusion. A conveyor belt is linked to a type of product *and* a type of producer—and vice versa.¹⁷

The demand of the Hungarian workers' councils that work norms and standards be abolished, except where the workers themselves would decide otherwise, allows us to see this problem under a different angle and in a more concrete way—at the same time that it contains the seeds of a new conception of work, of man, and of their relationship. If the tasks have been decided on, and if the various technical "means"—instruments, materials, and so on—are taken as given, then living work itself seems to be just another "means" to be used in the most "rational" and "efficient" way. The "*how*" of this use appears to fall, self-evidently, within the province of the corresponding technicians, who have to determine "the one best way" of doing the work and the time allowed for doing it. The absurdity of the ensuing results, and the permanent strife thereby introduced into the work process, are known. We are not concerned here, however, with the critique of the irrational character of Taylorism and of the capitalist (and "socialist") "rationalization" of the

work process. Nor is the demand for the abolition of work norms and standards simply a means for the workers to defend themselves against exploitation, speedups, etc. The demand contains positive elements of paramount importance. It means that people charged with the implementation of a task are the ones entitled to make decisions concerning the rhythm of the work. This rhythm, conceived in the capitalist "rationalistic" framework as one of the moments in the implementation of a decision, as a part of the "means," is of course nothing of the sort: it is an essential dimension of the working life of the worker—that is, of his life *tout court*. And the workers cannot defend themselves against exploitation without *doing* something positive, relative to production itself. If externally imposed work norms and standards are abolished, the rhythm of work will still have to be regulated somehow, given the collective, cooperative character of modern production. The only conceivable instance of regulation is then the collective of the workers themselves. Groups of workers and workers' collectives on the shop floor, in departments, in the factory, will have to establish their own discipline and ensure its observance (as, indeed, they do informally and "illegally" already today). Implied here is the categorical rejection of the idea that "man strives to avoid labor . . . man is a fairly lazy animal" (Trotsky, in *Terrorism and Communism*)¹⁸ and that discipline at work can be arrived at only through external coercion or by financial stimuli. The coercive organization of work in exploitative systems is not a response to the "laziness of man"; rather, this "laziness" is a natural and understandable response to exploited and alienated work.¹⁹

The germinal character of the demands concerning self-management and the abolition of work norms can also be seen in another series of implications. Once the principle that power over activities belongs to those involved has been accepted and the separation between means and ends has been repudiated, it then follows that tools, machines, etc., can neither be taken as given nor imposed on the people using them by the engineers, technicians, etc., who would design them with a view solely toward "increasing productive efficiency," which in fact comes to mean: pushing even further the domination of the mechanical universe over men. A radical change in the relations of workers to work implies a radical change in the nature of the instruments of production; and, first and foremost, it implies that the point of view of the *users* of those instruments is the determinant one in the process of their conception and design. A conveyor-belt socialism would be a contradiction in terms, were it not a sinister mystification. Machines have to be adapted to men, not men to machines. This leads clearly to a repudiation of the basic characteristics of present-day technology—which is also required from the point of view of the changes necessary in the nature of the end-products of industry. Today's machines correspond to today's junk, and this junk requires this type of machinery. And both presuppose and tend to reproduce a certain type of man.

That numerous and by no means trivial problems would emerge along this road is of course clear. But nothing, as far as we can see, makes them insuperable—and certainly not *more* insuperable than the ones the present antagonistic institution of society creates every day. For instance, if the groups of workers themselves fix their own rhythm of work, there appears a problem both of "equality" of rhythms between different groups—in other words, of justice—and of integration of these various

rhythms into the total production process. Both these problems exist today, and they are *not*, in fact, "solved." A considerable degree of progress will be made when they are finally formulated and discussed explicitly. And it is likely that not only considerations of equity, but the interdependence of the various stages of the work process (and, in a stage that ought to follow rapidly, the rotation of people between shops, departments, etc.) would lead the workers' collective not to tolerate groups that would tend to make life too easy for themselves. In an analogous way, making machines according to the point of view of the users of machines would require a constant and close cooperation between machine makers and machine users. More generally, a collectivistic organization of production—and of all other social activities—implies, of course, a large measure of social responsibility and reciprocal control. The various segments of the community will have both to behave in a responsible way and to accept their role in the exercise of mutual control. Widespread and ongoing public discussion of problems shared in common and networks of delegates from the grass-roots organizations appear as the obvious instruments and vehicles for the coordination of social activities.

Here is not the place to discuss the even more general, important, and difficult questions a collectivistic, communitarian society will confront, such as those relating to the integration and orientation of the "overall economy" or of other social activities, to their mutual interdependence, to the general orientation of society, and so on.²⁰ In fact, as I have tried to emphasize for a long time now, the crucial problem for a postrevolutionary society is neither the problem of the "management of production" nor that of the "organization of the economy." It is the *political* problem proper—what might be called *the negative of the problem of the State*: society's capacity to establish and maintain its explicit and concrete *unity* without a separate and relatively autonomous instance charged with this "task"—the state apparatus. This problem, let me add parenthetically, was *in fact* ignored, despite appearances, in classical Marxism and by Marx himself. The idea that the State must be destroyed as a separate, nearly autonomous apparatus was *not* accompanied by a positive consideration of the political problem. Rather, this problem was made to "disappear" by providing the mythical perspective of an explicit, "material" unification and homogenization of society that the development of capitalism was supposed to bring about. "Politics" for Marx, Lenin, etc., concerns the struggle against the bourgeoisie, the alliance with other classes, etc.; in brief, the elimination of the "remnants of the ancient world," *not* the positive institution and organization of a new world. *For Marx, in a 100 percent proletarian society there would not and could not be a political problem.* (This is one of the meanings of his refusal to prepare "recipes for the socialist kitchens of the future.") And this is deeply rooted in his whole philosophy of history: perhaps socialism *or* barbarism, but, if *not* barbarism, then socialism—and socialism *is determined*. The wicked irony of history was that the first victorious revolution took place in a country where the population had been anything but "disciplined, united, organized by the very mechanism of the process of capitalist production itself."²¹ And the task of unifying and homogenizing Russian society had to be accomplished by the Bolshevik party and Stalin's totalitarian terror—fortunately, with less than total success.

But *we* cannot find the answer to the question of the unity of postrevolutionary

society in an "objective/subjective" process of homogenization that does not exist—nor could we do so even if it did exist. The political problem as such can never be eliminated. A unity of postrevolutionary society can be brought about—that means, constantly recreated—through the permanent *unifying activity* of the collective organs. This entails, of course, the destruction of any separate "state apparatus"—but also the existence and continuous remodeling of *political institutions*, for example, the councils and their networks—not *antagonistic* to the "real society," but neither direct and immediately *identical* to it. And there is, on this road, no magic guarantee that a social consensus will easily be elaborated and that all possible frictions between segments of the community will disappear; nor that, possibly helped by the tensions resulting from residual social antagonisms, a stratum would not emerge and attempt to occupy permanent positions of power, thus preparing a restoration of the division between directors and executants and of a separate state apparatus. But we cannot go beyond the following way of posing the question:

Either the people's autonomous collective organs will be able to invent a solution, or rather a *process* of solutions, to the problem of maintaining society together as a differentiated unity;

or, if the masses prove unable to progress in this direction, "substitute" solutions would, by necessity, be imposed—for example, the power of a "revolutionary party" and the reconstitution of a permanent bureaucracy. The "old rubbish" would then ipso facto be reestablished.

It is not that we do not know the way. There *is* no way—no way already in existence. The way will be opened, if and when it is, by the autonomous collective activity of the people. But we *do* know what is *not* the way—and what is the way leading to a totalitarian bureaucratic society.

The Hungarian Revolution was not given the time and the opportunity to face these problems. Nevertheless, in the short span of its development, it not only destroyed the ignoble mystification of Stalinist "socialism" but also posed some of the most important questions confronting the revolutionary reconstruction of human society and gave some germinal answers to them. We not only have to honor the heroic struggle of the Hungarian people; in their decision and resolve to manage for themselves their collective life and, to this end, to change radically an institution of society dating back to the origin of historical times, we have to recognize one of the creative sources of contemporary history.

August 1976

Notes

1. "La Révolution prolétarienne contre la bureaucratie," in *S. ou B.*, 20 (December 1956). [T/E: Reprinted in *SB 2*, pp. 277–78; now available as "The Proletarian Revolution against the Bureaucracy," in *PSW 2*, p. 62. For consistency's sake, I have cited my translation here. The first phrase in Castoriadis's typescript version of this citation reads somewhat differently: "Over the coming years, *all the questions that matter* will be condensed in this one."] The present text supposes on the part of the reader a certain familiarity with the principal facts relating to the events of 1956 in Hungary, and, in particular, the composition, activities, and demands of the workers' councils. Issues 20 (December 1956) and 21 (March 1957) of *Socialisme ou Barbarie* are in the main devoted to the events of 1956 in Hungary and Poland,

and contain documents and texts by refugees who participated in the Hungarian Revolution. For a few bibliographical indications, see *SB 2*, p. 265.

2. Cf. my article cited in note 1, especially pp. 62–75; also "On the Content of Socialism, III" (1958), in *PSW 2*. The extraordinary book by the Hungarian Miklos Haraszti, *A Worker in a Worker's State* (New York: Universe, 1981), demonstrates, once again, the total *identity* of the nature of relations of production and organization of the work process as between "capitalist" factories in the West and "socialist" factories in the East.

3. I discussed, at the time, developments in Poland, in "La Voie polonaise de la bureaucratisation," *S. ou B.*, 21 (March 1957), reprinted now in *SB 2*, pp. 339–71 [T/E: not translated for the present series]. It is worth quoting at some length the inimitable Ernest Mandel, lest the reader think that I am indulging in polemical exaggerations: "Socialist democracy will still have to engage in more battles in Poland. But the principal battle, which allowed millions of proletarians to *identify themselves again with the Workers' State*, is already won. . . . The political revolution, which, for a month now, has been shaking up Hungary, has shown a more spasmodic and more unequal development than the political revolution in Poland. It did not, like the latter, fly from victory to victory [*sic*]. . . . This is because, contrary to what was the case in Poland, the Hungarian Revolution was an elementary and spontaneous explosion. The subtle interaction [!] between objective and subjective factors, between the initiative of the masses and the *building up of a new leadership*, between pressure from below and the *crystallization of an opposition fraction above*, at the summit of the Communist party, interaction which made possible the Polish victory [?!], has been missing in Hungary" (*Quatrième Internationale*, December 1956, pp. 22 and 23; emphases added [T/E: the article was published under Mandel's pseudonym, E. Germain]). Rarely have the bureaucratic essence of Trotskyism, its nature as a fraction of Stalinist bureaucracy in exile, its yearning to return to the party apparatus at the occasion of some factional struggle within it and of some "pressure from below" been expressed with more clarity—and in a more laughable style.

4. I am referring to the points I consider most important as they were already formulated October 28 and 29, 1956. Unbelievable as it may appear, the demands formulated by the councils after November 11 (i.e., after the complete occupation of the country by the Russian army and the murder of thousands of people) were even more radical, as they called for the constitution of armed workers' militia and the establishment of councils in all branches of activity, *including government administrations*.

5. I am not talking about the persons as such, but about the significance of their behavior. The personal tragedy of Lukács (or of [Imre] Nagy, etc.) is, in this context, irrelevant. For Lukács in particular, the Hegelian Marxist, to weep about his "subjective drama" would be to add insult to injury.

6. The material contained in E. P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Pantheon, 1964) abundantly illustrates this point.

7. It is all the more striking to note that, despite this precedent, and despite Marx's recognition of the fundamental importance of the *form* of the Commune, Lenin's initial reaction to the spontaneous emergence of the soviets in Russia during the 1905 Revolution was negative and hostile. People were doing something different from what he, Lenin, had decided (on the basis of his "theory") they ought to be doing.

8. This is a hypothetical reconstruction of a not directly confirmed initial meaning. In Latin, *spons* is not used in the nominative case; in the other cases, it is usually translated by "will." The Greek *spendo* (whence *sponde*), however, means to pour a liquid, to make a libation (like the Hittite *sipant*, *ispant*); its original meaning cannot easily be distinguished from *leibo*, *kheo*. Cf. E[mile] Benveniste, *Indo-European Language and Society*, trans. Elizabeth Palmer (Coral Gables, FL: University of Miami Press, 1973), pp. 470ff. and 482 [1979 note].

9. The "identitary" postulate, which underlies all inherited philosophical and scientific thought, is equivalent to the assertion that such an excess, if and when it exists, is always "a measure of our ignorance." The presumption that goes with it is that this measure can, de jure, be reduced to zero. The shortest answer to this is, *Hic Rhodus, hic salta*. We can, confidently, sit back and relax waiting for the day when the difference between *Tristan und Isolde* and the sum total of its "causes" and "conditions" (the bourgeois society of the 1850s, the evolution of instruments and orchestra, Wagner's unconscious, etc.) will have been reduced to zero.

10. Though one can, of course, "explain" why this type of revolution did not take place in 1956 in Egypt, Iran, or Java.

11. For another illustration of this type of "argument": It is correct that one of the main differences

between Poland and Hungary in 1956 is that the Polish CP was able to "adapt" itself to the events—whereas the Hungarian CP was not. But *why* did the Polish CP succeed where the Hungarian CP failed? Precisely because in Poland the movement *did not go far enough*; this allowed the Polish CP to continue to exist, and to play its role, whereas in Hungary the violence and the radical character of the movement reduced the CP very rapidly to nothing. And this also "explains," up to a point, the different attitude of the Kremlin in the two cases. As long as the bureaucratic party remained alive and more or less in command in Poland, the Moscow bureaucracy believed—and rightly so—that it could spare itself an armed intervention and maneuver toward a gradual restoration of the bureaucratic dictatorship—which is what eventually took place. Such a maneuver seemed impossible in the case of Hungary, where the CP had been destroyed and the workers' councils were clearly showing their intention to demand and exercise power.

12. On a reduced scale, everybody has had the opportunity to observe this spiral of bureaucratic degeneration and apathy in the life of political organizations and trade unions in present-day society.

13. It is true that in Hungary demands for free elections to designate a new Parliament were formulated, and it seems that these demands had the support of the councils. This was, quite obviously, an understandable reaction to the previous state of affairs, the bureaucratic dictatorship. The question of the respective roles and power of this Parliament and the councils, had the Revolution been allowed to develop, must of course remain open. In my view, a development of the power and the activities of the councils would have brought about either a gradual atrophy of the Parliament, or a clash between the two.

14. Cf. my article, "Socialism or Barbarism" (1949) [T/E: now in *PSW 1*, in particular pp. 92-100]; also, "The Role of Bolshevik Ideology in the Birth of the Bureaucracy" (1964) [T/E: chapter 8 in this volume]. Unbelievable as it may sound, Lenin and Trotsky considered the organization of work, the management of production, etc., as purely *technical* questions that had nothing to do, according to them, with the "nature of the political power," which remained "proletarian"—since it was exercised by "the Party of the proletariat." To this corresponded their enthusiasm for the capitalist "rationalization" of production, Taylorism, piecework, etc. That this attitude corresponds in fact to one of the deepest layers of the thought of Marx himself, I have tried to show in the second of the articles mentioned above and in many other texts.

15. That this "rational" organization is, in fact, intrinsically and inherently *irrational*, full of contradictions and incoherencies, I have tried to show in "On the Content of Socialism, II" (1957) [T/E: in *PSW 2*]; "On the Content of Socialism, III" (1958) [T/E: also in *PSW 2*]; and "Modern Capitalism and Revolution, II" (1961) [T/E: also in *PSW 2*]. There *can* be no "rational" basis for a hierarchical-bureaucratic organization under modern (as opposed, e.g., to "Chinese mandarin") conditions. "Knowledge," "skill," "expertise" *should* be the criteria for the selection and appointment of people—and *cannot* be. The "solutions" to the problems facing the organization (firm, administration, party, etc.) are determined by the shifting results of the struggle for power constantly going on among rival bureaucratic groups, or rather *cliques* and *clans*, which are not accidental or anecdotal phenomena, but central pieces in the workings of the bureaucratic mechanism. The idea of a "technostructure" is, as such, a mystification: it is what the bureaucracy would like people to believe. Those at the top are at the top not qua experts in a technical field, but qua experts in the art of climbing up the bureaucratic ladder. The bureaucratic apparatus is forced, as it expands, to reproduce within itself the division of labor it imposes more and more on the whole of society; thereby it becomes separated, estranged from itself *and* from the factual substance of the problems. Any "rational" synthesis becomes impossible. But some synthesis must take place. Decisions must in the end be made. And they are: in the Oval Office (or in the corresponding Kremlin Bulb), between nixons, ehrlichmans, haldemans, and other petty delinquents of subnormal intelligence. This *is* the apotheosis of "technostructure," "scientific management," etc.—just as the Lockheed bribes are the apotheosis of "perfectly perfect competition," "optimization through free-market mechanisms," etc., of the Professors of Economics.

16. Which today's "Marxists" are unable to see, as they go on talking about "commodity production" in the West and "socialism," however "degenerate," "deformed," etc., in the East.

17. The idea of a neutral technique, as well as the idea that capitalist "rationalization" is rationalization without the quotation marks, is central to Marx's thought, even if it remains more or less hidden there. Cf. the texts cited in notes 14 and 15 above.

18. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1961, p. 133.

19. The same conclusions are arrived at when one considers the reality of production, that is, the be-

havior and the struggles of the workers, all over the industrial world, East or West. Everywhere the externally imposed, coercive "organization" and "discipline" of work is combated by the workers. This fight is not, and cannot be, only "negative," only a fight "against exploitation"; it is, of necessity, at the same time a fight for another organization of production. The workers fight against exploitation *in* production, i.e., *as* workers, as they work and in order to be able to perform their work (otherwise, they lose their job or money). To do this, they have to work, half the time, *against the rules*—"working to rule" is the best method of immediately bringing about chaos in production (another lovely indication of the "rationality" of capitalist organization). Thus already at present informal groups of workers have to define and apply not a single but a two-sided "work discipline": a discipline aimed simultaneously at "beating the boss" *and* at performing "a fair day's work."

20. I have discussed some of these problems—the most "immediate," in my view—in "On the Content of Socialism, II," cited in note 15 above.

21. T/E: I have slightly altered Castoriadis's version of this quotation to make it conform to the Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling translation of *Capital*, vol. 1 (New York: International Publishers, 1967), p. 763, the edition we have used in this translation series.