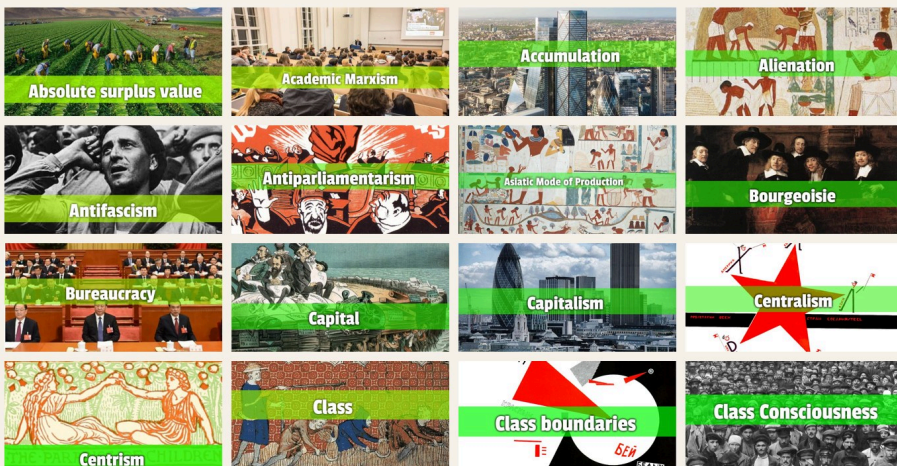




Marxist Dictionary

*Marxist concepts defined from the historical
experience of the working class*

SCHOOL OF MARXISM

dictionary.marxismo.school

Contents

Absolute surplus value
Academic marxism
Accumulation of capital
Alienation
Anti-fascism
Anti-parliamentarianism
Asiatic mode of production
Bourgeoisie
Bureaucracy
Capital
Capitalism
Centralism
Centrism
Class
Class boundaries
Class consciousness
Class struggle
Collectivities
Commodification
Commodity
Commodity fetishism
Communism
Communist left
Communist morality
Culture
Decadence
Defensism
Democracy
Dialectics
Dictatorship
Discrimination
Empiricism
Environmentalism
Exploitation
Fascism
Feminism
Feudalism
Fictitious capital
Finance capital
Financialization
Formal and real subsumption of labor under capital
Historical materialism
Ideology
Imperialism
Individualism
Internationalism
Juvenalism
Labor
Labor power
Lumpenproletariat
Mass strike
Maximalism
Militarism
Mode of production
Nation
National and democratic tasks of the bourgeois revolution
Nationalism

National liberation	Right to self-determination
Opportunism	Rising capitalism
Oppression	Sectarianism
Organic composition of capital	Semicolonial countries
Pacifism	Slave-owning mode of production
Party	Socialism
Pauperization	Socialism in one country
People	Soviet
Permanent revolution	Spanish Communist Left
Petty bourgeoisie	Stalinism
Popular front	State
Precarization	State capitalism
Primitive communism	Surplus labor
Productive forces	Surplus value
Progress	To cupellate
Proletarianization	Trade union
Proletariat	Tragedy of the commons
Rate of profit	Trotskyism
Rate of surplus value	United Front
Reformism	Utopia
Relative surplus value	Value
Religion	Wage
Revisionism	Wage labor
Revolutionary defeatism	Zinovievism

Absolute surplus value



Total amount of value extracted from labor power. The increase in surplus value in absolute terms occurs through a reduction in the hourly wage or an unpaid increase in working time.

Definition in “Capital”

The surplus-value produced by prolongation of the working day, I call absolute surplus-value. On the other hand, the surplus-value arising from the curtailment of the necessary labour-time, and from the corresponding alteration in the respective lengths of the two components of the working day, I call relative surplus-value.

Karl Marx. Capital, Book I, Chapter X, 1867.

Absolute surplus value in the class struggle

For capital, increasing absolute surplus value simply means paying less per hour worked: lowering wages, signing 4-hour contracts that then turn out to be full-time, working unpaid overtime, etc.

The less capitalized a sector or a region is, the more urgent, in the face of crisis, is the need to increase exploitation in absolute terms. That is why the tendencies towards **pauperization** appear first in the countries with the weakest national capitals and, within each country, in the sectors with the greatest difficulties of capitalization.

Academic marxism



An academic current that defines Marxism as a “method of analysis” that can be developed outside of the class struggle.

Under the label “academic Marxism” a multitude of approaches and schools are actually grouped together, united by the idea that “Marxism is a method” and that as such it can be “applied” or “developed” in different contexts regardless of its aims and of the social context in which the theory is developed. Starting with the university itself.

Marxist critique of “academic Marxism”

Marxism is not a method

Nothing could be further from Marxism than to propose a set of steps or a recipe, let alone a “procedural machine”, an automaton, as an “infallible formula” for the analysis of reality. Not even **historical**

materialism can be understood as a method in that sense; in any case, it would rather be a framework, a set of premises for the analysis of social reality in order to understand historical change as the transformation of **modes of production**, as a totality.

Among these premises there are, by the way, two that are extremely rare in these schools:

- materialism: it is not the history of “ideas” or of “ideologies” that explains historical change, but the transformations in the productive, material base of society;
- and the old dialectical principle that in any system the whole determines the parts, while the parts, or the aggregation of the parts, do not allow us to explain the whole.

Marxism is a critique (=demolition) of the very foundations of the academy

A good part of Marx’s works are titled or subtitled with the word “critique”: critique of the Philosophy of the State (Philosophy of History, we would say today), critique of Political Economy (economic theory), etc. All his work is in reality a “critique”. And the fact is that **Marx does not propose a “critical thought”, but the critique of thought**. And when he says critique, we must in reality read “demolition”.

Because his critique of thought begins by placing it as a historical product, as an expression of material social reality and of the **class struggle** that it generates. That is, Marx turns the critique of thought into a critique of **ideology**, and that is how he treats the different sciences. That is why the denial of the autonomy of the sciences as defined by the academy, not to mention their particular “methods”, lies at the very essence of the Marxist critique of thought.

There is no methodology that can be separated from Marxism; there is no application, no procedure, no method to be distilled from the work of Marx and of the revolutionaries who followed him that can live apart from the **class struggle**. Once again, the part cannot exist apart from the whole. Marxism is a continuous effort that implies a revolutionary demolition of **ideology**, a continuous iconoclasm,

Marx and Engels -it is worth remembering- were irrepressible iconoclasts, even in relation to themselves, because there is no other way to **escape the compartmentalization of the closed system**. The former answered those who spoke to him of the Marxists of continental Europe: "I am not a Marxist". In this way he tacitly established an a-dogmatic definition of revolutionary thought, which is very poorly understood today.

Engels, for his part, expressed how he and Marx had set to work on site on a large amount of materials that needed to be developed. Now it is necessary to add the materials that the world class struggle has generated since then. We are therefore deliberately committing a desecration. Only one thing matters: whether or not it is in line with the long continuity of all the desecrations that revolutionary thought has committed, and which it cannot avoid committing if it is not to suffocate.

Preface to the Italian edition of "For a Second Communist Manifesto", 1967

There is no Marxism outside or apart from the class struggle

Communism is a process of negation of capitalism that has been underway from the very moment the **proletariat appears as a universal class**.

Communism is for us not a state of affairs which is to be established, an ideal to which reality [will] have to adjust itself. We call communism the real movement which abolishes the present state of things.

Marx and Engels. *The German Ideology*, 1846

Marxism is the theoretical expression of the maximum possibilities, immediately and historically, of that ongoing negation. **Like every expression of a movement, it cannot exist apart from it.** That is, it can neither exist as a dogmatic body, as a doctrine fixed once and for all, nor can it exist outside the organized struggle of the working class.

In reality what is called Marxism is the theoretical expression of the struggle of the working class, of its ultimate possibilities and its means. In other words: the most advanced theoretical form, the one most free of ideological illusions, of *class consciousness*. And once again: as such it cannot exist apart from the class that gives rise to it; to believe so would be to fall back into the separation between body and soul proper to religious idealism... which is not very Marxist.

It is true that this error existed within the workers' movement itself in the form of Kautsky's "consciousness implanted in the class from outside". And it is true that revolutionaries such as Lenin made it their own at certain moments of isolation. But even though it was still an error, they at least attributed that "injecting" role to the political organization, a body that arose from and brought together the most advanced sectors, however small, of the working class. But the error becomes an evident aberration when "the party" is replaced by "the academy", that is, by an organ of the state -or its officials- whose function is none other than to indoctrinate and manufacture ideology.

The University is an organ of the class state

“Marxism” cannot come out of the university, because the university is an organ of a different and hostile class whose function is precisely to create **ideology**, that which Marxism seeks to demolish. Nor can it come out of individuals, whether professors or plumbers, because class consciousness is the product of the movement and struggle of a class and can therefore only have a collective existence and expression, however small in numerical terms.

The figure of the “Marxist professor”, an individual capable of replacing an entire class and of working out alone the understanding of its historical situation and of the steps it must take, is simply absurd from a Marxist perspective. It is the position that the famous Doctor Eugen Dühring claimed for himself, whose theory Engels devastatingly dissects.

Does that mean the class movement will not be able to win over university professors? No, of course not. But has anyone thought about what tremendous virulence and strength the current class movement would have to be showing in order to have “won over” the thousands of “Marxist professors” who “teach” in universities all over the world?

And in any case... what does it mean for the workers’ movement to “win over” an intellectual? What did “winning over”, for example... Marx, Engels, Rosa Luxemburg, Lenin or Trotsky consist of? Of integrating them as militants into its organizations, not of “integrating their contributions” without their having to commit themselves to the material movement, something only the “Dührings” of each epoch ever sought.

Accumulation of capital



Cycle in which:

- 1. Labor power is exploited, producing surplus value;*
- 2. Surplus value is realized in the market for goods and services;*
- 3. The result of exploitation is distributed in the form of profit in the capital market, in order finally...*
- 4. ...to be reincorporated into production as expanded capital.*

Phases of the accumulation of capital

1. Exploitation of labor power

Unlike previous **modes of production**, exploitation in capitalism takes a completely economic and commodity form. The bourgeoisie does not seize the product of the workers' labor by force of arms. On the

contrary, it buys their **labor power** on the market under the apparent conditions of a free exchange between equals.

What characterizes the capitalist epoch, then, is that labor power takes, for the worker himself, the form of a commodity belonging to him, and his labor the form of wage labor. On the other hand, from that moment onwards the commodity form of the products of labor becomes generalized for the first time.

Karl Marx. Capital, 1867.

The price that the individual capitalist pays for **labor power** is the wage. But if the worker had the opportunity to produce on his own account, the wage would not exist as such, because he would refuse to sell his labor in exchange for a smaller quantity of goods than he could produce by himself. That is why the establishment of capitalism requires the prior existence of the workers as a **proletariat**, that is, a dispossessed class that has no commodities to sell other than its own **labor power**.

For the transformation of money into capital, therefore, the owner of money must find the free worker in the commodity market; free in the double sense that, on the one hand, as a free man he disposes of his labor power as his own commodity, and that, on the other hand, he has no other commodities to sell, is free of, stripped of, unencumbered by all the things needed to put his labor power into action.

Karl Marx. Capital, 1867

The absence of alternative commodities to sell leads the workers to sell their **labor power** at its cost of production. In other words: the mass of wages paid by capital is equivalent to the social cost of

reproducing a similar quantity and quality of labor power for the next period. In this, labor power is no different from the other commodities the bourgeoisie buys in order to produce.

Economists say that the act of producing -that is, the consumption of a series of commodities in order to transform them into other commodities- produces “value”. In capitalism this has a meaning: “creating value” means that the mass of money in constant terms that returns to the balance sheet of the owners of capital at the end of the cycle is larger.

Marxist critique reminds us that this “value added” in production is nothing other than unpaid hours of labor, **surplus labor**. **Surplus labor** is the whole secret of the increase in value, that is, of the existence of that **surplus value** which economists are both fascinated by and conceal with their theories of value.

Capitalist production is in essence the production of surplus value, the absorption of surplus labor.

Marx. Capital, 1867

Like the ruling classes of the class-divided societies that preceded it, the bourgeoisie measures the success of its economy by its capacity to appropriate the result of social labor and direct it towards its own ends. But unlike previous **modes of production**, capitalism tends to continually increase production and expand the market, to transform previous social relations into commodity relations and to modify the means of production so as to enjoy a greater quantity of social product.

The bourgeoisie cannot exist without constantly revolutionising the instruments of production, and thereby the relations of production, and with them the whole relations of society. Conservation of the old modes of production in unaltered form, was, on the contrary, the first condition of existence for all earlier industrial classes. Constant revolutionising of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones.

All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind.

The need of a constantly expanding market for its products chases the bourgeoisie over the entire surface of the globe. It must nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, establish connexions everywhere.

Karl Marx and Frederick Engels. “**Manifesto of the Communist Party**”, 1848

To understand how capitalism carries in its very foundations the need to expand and to increase both production and productive capacities, we have to move on to the next phases of the accumulation process and bring in first the market for goods and services and then the capital market.

2. Realization of surplus value in the market

Surplus value, like every form of value, does not exist as such; it is not a physical property, it is the idealization of a social relationship: the relationship of exploitation of labor by capital that allows the owners of capital to appropriate labor power without paying for it. But for the capitalist this does not end in the factory; he is not an accumulator of the commodities he produces; his aim is not to accumulate a treasure but to accumulate capital.

And for that he has to go to the market and turn the commodity produced into money by selling it. Only when production goes out to the market and is sold in a new exchange (the first was the purchase of raw materials, means of production and labor power) does the exploitation of labor translate into a sum of money greater than the one invested. That is the moment when surplus value “is realized”, becomes material in the form of money.

Once realized, surplus value is reintegrated into the cycle to produce new surplus value in an even greater quantity.

The mystery underlying the circulation of commodities in the capitalist system (money used to buy commodities which, in a new form, are sold again for a larger sum of money) turns out to be nothing other than the conversion of money into **capital**. The cycle of circulation of commodities which in earlier commodity economies produced at most “hoarding”, an accumulation of money that was separated from the cycle of production, becomes in **capitalism** a cycle of accumulation of capital.

As the conscious bearer of this movement, the owner of money becomes a capitalist. His person, or rather his pocket, is the point from which money starts and to which it returns. The objective content of this circulation -the valorization of value- is his subjective purpose, and it is only insofar as the growing appropriation of abstract wealth is the sole driving motive of his operations that he functions as a capitalist, that is, as capital personified, endowed with consciousness and will. Use value must therefore never be regarded as the direct aim of the capitalist.

Nor must the isolated profit, but rather the restless movement of profit-making. This absolute drive for enrichment, this passionate chase after exchange value, is common to the capitalist and the hoarder, but while the hoarder is merely a capitalist gone mad, the capitalist is a rational hoarder. The never-ending augmentation of value, which the hoarder seeks to achieve by saving his money from circulation, is achieved by the more shrewd capitalist by throwing his money again and again into circulation.

The independent forms, the money forms, which the value of commodities assumes in simple circulation, merely mediate the exchange of commodities and vanish in the final result of the movement. In the circulation $M - C - M$, on the other hand, both the commodity and the money function only as different modes of existence of value itself: money as its general mode of existence, the commodity as its particular or, so to speak, merely disguised mode. Value constantly passes from one form to the other without being lost in this movement, and thus becomes an automatic subject.

If we pin down the particular forms of appearance which self-valorizing value successively assumes in the course of its life, we reach the following statements: capital is money, capital is

commodities. In reality, however, value here becomes the subject of a process in which, while constantly assuming the form of money and of commodities in turn, it changes its own magnitude, throws off surplus value from itself as original value, valorizes itself.

The movement in which it adds surplus value is in fact its own movement, and its valorization is therefore self-valorization. It has acquired the occult quality of adding value because it is value. It brings forth living offspring, or at least lays golden eggs.

As the dominant subject of this process, in which it now assumes and now casts off the form of money and the form of commodities, but preserves and expands itself through all these changes, value needs above all an independent form in which its identity with itself may be established. And it possesses this form only in money. That is why money is the starting point and the end point of every process of valorization. It was £100, and now it is £110, and so on.

But money itself counts here only as one form of value, since value has two forms. Without assuming the form of a commodity, money does not become capital. Money, then, does not appear here in opposition to the commodity, as it does in hoarding. The capitalist knows that all commodities, however shabby they may look or however badly they may smell, are in faith and in truth money, inwardly circumcised Jews, and what is more, wonderful means for making more money out of money.

Karl Marx. "Capital", Book I, Chapter IV

One element to bear in mind in this phase is that, because of the "restricted bases" of the capitalist sector of any economy, there can only be "overproduction", that is, by definition wages are not enough to buy everything produced... the accumulation process, or what

amounts to the same thing, **capitalism**, **needs** to expand from the very first moment. First towards its internal non-capitalist markets. Second towards external ones. That was the material driving force of the worldwide expansion of capitalism.

Since the aim of capital is not the satisfaction of needs but the production of profit, and since it achieves this aim only by methods that regulate the volume of production according to the scale of production, and not the other way round, **there must constantly be a rift between the restricted dimensions of consumption on a capitalist basis and a production that constantly tends to overcome this barrier immanent to it.** Moreover, capital consists of commodities, and therefore the overproduction of capital implies the overproduction of commodities.

Hence the curious phenomenon that the same economists who deny the overproduction of commodities admit that of capital. If it is said that within the various branches of production there is not a general overproduction but a disproportion, this means nothing other than that, within capitalist production, proportionality between the various branches of production is established as a constant process out of disproportionality, because here the interconnection of production as a whole imposes itself on the agents of production as a blind law, and not as a law grasped by their associated intellect and thereby brought under their collective control.

Furthermore, in this way **it is demanded that countries in which the capitalist mode of production is not developed should consume and produce to a degree suited to the countries of the capitalist mode of production.** If it is said that overproduction is only relative, this is quite correct; but the whole capitalist mode of production is only a relative mode of production, whose limits are not absolute, but are absolute for it, on its own basis.

How else could there be a lack of demand for the very commodities that the mass of the people lack, and how would it be possible **to have to seek this demand abroad, in more distant markets, in order to be able to pay the workers at home the average of the indispensable means of subsistence?**

Because only in this specific, capitalist context does the surplus product acquire a form in which its owner can make it available for consumption only insofar as it is reconverted into capital for him. Finally, if it is said that in the last instance the capitalists only have to exchange their commodities among themselves and eat them up, the whole character of capitalist production is forgotten, and so is the fact that what is at stake is the valorization of capital, not its consumption.

In short, all the objections to the palpable manifestations of overproduction (manifestations that pay no heed to such objections) amount to saying that the limits of capitalist production are not limits of production in general, and therefore not limits of this specific mode of production, the capitalist one either. But the contradiction of this capitalist mode of production lies precisely in its tendency towards the absolute development of the productive forces, which comes permanently into conflict with the specific conditions of production within which capital moves, and which are the only ones within which it can move.

Karl Marx. Chapter XV of Book III of “Capital”, 1894.

The chronic lack of markets of capitalism could only lead it to reach a limit. A limit that marks the passage from **rising capitalism** to the **decadence** of the capitalist mode of production. That limit would be heralded by the entry of capitalism into its **imperialist phase** and preceded by “winds of catastrophe” of war.

The existence of non-capitalist buyers of surplus value is a direct vital condition for capital and its accumulation. In this sense such buyers are the decisive element in the problem of the accumulation of capital. But one way or another, in fact, the accumulation of capital as a historical process depends in many respects on non-capitalist social strata and forms. (...)

Capitalism needs, for its existence and development, to be surrounded by non-capitalist forms of production. (...) The second fundamental precondition, both for the acquisition of means of production and for the realization of surplus value, is the extension of the action of capitalism to societies with a natural economy. (...)

Imperialism is the political expression of the process of accumulation of capital in its struggle to conquer the non-capitalist environments that are not yet exhausted. Geographically, these environments still cover today the widest territories of the Earth.

But compared with the powerful mass of capital already accumulated in the old capitalist countries, which struggles to find markets for its surplus product and possibilities of capitalization for its surplus value; compared with the speed with which territories belonging to pre-capitalist cultures are today being turned into capitalist ones, or in other words: compared with the high degree of the productive forces of capital, the field still seems small for its expansion.

This determines the international game of capital on the world stage. Given the great development and the increasingly violent competition among the capitalist countries to conquer non-

capitalist territories, imperialism increases its aggressiveness against the non-capitalist world, sharpening the contradictions between the contending capitalist countries.

But the more violently and energetically capitalism brings about the total collapse of non-capitalist civilizations, the more rapidly it will cut the ground from under the accumulation of capital. Imperialism is as much a historical method for prolonging the existence of capital as a sure means of objectively putting an end to its existence. This is not to say that this end must be cheerfully reached. The very tendency of capitalist development towards it already manifests itself in winds of catastrophe.

Rosa Luxemburg. "The Accumulation of Capital", 1913.

3. Distribution of the result of exploitation in the form of profit through the capital market

Capital expanded with new profits is not tied to a company. In reality, the various companies are nothing but possible placements of capital, which compete with one another in the capital market to be more attractive, that is, to offer better **rates of profit** to the capitals seeking placement. The function of the capital market is precisely to homogenize the rates of profit of the different placements.

They behave towards one another as they would if we pictured the total sum of the capitals that make up the capital of the capitalist classes as a single magnitude on which the total surplus value were calculated [...] There is no doubt that, calculated in this way, each fragment of this total capital would receive an aliquot part of the total surplus value, in proportion to its share in it. [...]

The volume of profit depends on the volume of capital, on the number of *shares in that general capital which are owned by the capitalist*; hence competition among capitals tries to treat each capital in itself as a fragment of the total capital, regulating accordingly its share in surplus value and therefore in profit.

The capitalists tend to divide among themselves (a tendency in which competition precisely consists) the quantity of unpaid labor that they squeeze out of the working class -or the products of that quantity of labor- not in the proportion in which a **specific** capital directly produces surplus labor, but, *first*, in the proportion in which this specific capital represents an aliquot part of the total capital and, *second*, in the proportion in which the total capital produces surplus labor. The capitalists share out the spoils of the appropriated labor of others like hostile brothers, in such a way that on average one appropriates the same quantity of unpaid labor as the other.

Karl Marx. Theories of Surplus Value, Chapter VIII.

By equalizing -or tending to equalize- the rates of profit of the possible placements of capital, the equivalence between the surplus labor/surplus value extracted and the profit obtained by capital in a country or an industrial branch is blown apart, not to mention in a

particular company. It becomes at best a coincidence, a statistical anomaly. In fact, generally speaking, surplus value will differ from profit in each particular company.

4. Reincorporation into production as expanded capital (the aim of capital accumulation)

The capital market “closes” capitalism as a system, orienting the uses of capital, that is, the concrete forms of exploitation, towards their most efficient forms for the aims of the system; that is, it “constantly revolutionizes the means of production”, incorporating technical and organizational innovations that will allow capital as a whole to extract more surplus labor.

However, one of the characteristics of capitalism in its **decadence** is that the chronic absence of markets produces a lack of profitable applications for capital. Not everything can be placed without choking the rate of profit. Capital that is “over-accumulated” in relation to demand is diverted towards speculation and becomes **fictitious capital**: the kind we see on the stock exchanges, the futures markets, etc. A gigantic mass of capital, that is, of rights to exploit, separated from production and therefore with feet of clay, which acts as an accelerant of the catastrophic character of financial crises.

Alienation



A fracture, due to historically specific social relations, between the self-consciousness of the species and its own needs and nature. Alienation is a product of the division of humanity into classes which makes humanity appear to be opposed to the result of its labor and therefore opposed both to itself and to Nature as a whole.

Origins of alienation

The division of society into classes, which probably occurred some 6,000 years ago, is a recent phenomenon in the life of a species that has been on the planet for 500,000 years and for most of that time lived under a regime of primitive communism based on a hunting, fishing and gathering economy. The communal regime was

maintained in the early cities, and it seems that cities organized around forms of **primitive communism** survived in Europe until as recently as the 4th century BCE.

But the division into classes was inevitable with the development of the **productive forces** that was taking place with the new technology. It was certainly a leap forward in the **progress** of the species, but it also meant a profound trauma. The myths of an earlier “Golden Age” have come down to us, scattered through religions and beliefs, which were themselves born to alleviate that painful split of the species, so explosive that a specialized and costly social body, the **state**, had to appear to keep the social whole minimally cohesive under the new dominant type of productive relations: exploitation.

With the fracture of society into exploited and exploiting classes, there appear the division of labor between personal and social labor, the sexual division of labor and the division between manual and intellectual labor. Private property sets things against the members of the society that produces them, and these members against each other. Town and countryside become opposed. The consciousness of the species is split. From the diffuse animism of primitive communism, which tried to represent the then incomprehensible natural cycles, one passes to theogonies of superior, ordering gods that abstract the vengeful, parasitic and brutal character of the first ruling classes.

With the separation between labor and life, between social community and productive community, life itself breaks apart and flees to the heavens. Beliefs in the “hereafter” begin. The human has become alien to the human; it has “alienated” itself, and alienation defines the new society.

The proletariat as the ultimate expression of alienation

If agrarian regimes were fundamentally based on exaction, on extra-economic exploitation by means of tributes or taxes, capitalism integrates exploitation into the very heart of social relations. As labor is commodified and surplus value is consecrated as the basis of the system of accumulation, exploitation itself becomes invisible, and the division into classes presents itself as “natural”.

And at the same time, the contradiction intrinsic to private property - the opposition between producers and product - becomes universal: in a capitalist society crises of “overproduction” are accompanied by the pauperization of great masses of the **proletariat**. The exploited class is thus universally denied: the very exploitation that defines it is denied, and its own conditions of existence as a class are denied by the contradictions of the system.

This revolution is carried out by the class which society does not consider as such, does not recognize as a class, and which is already in itself the expression of the dissolution of all classes, nationalities, etc., within present society

Marx and Engels. The German Ideology, 1846

It is this total denial that in reality makes it a universal class, because only by raising the banner of generic human needs can it get out of its situation.

In the fully developed proletariat, all humanity, even the appearance of humanity, is abstracted; in the conditions of existence of the proletariat, all the conditions of existence of present society are condensed in their most inhuman form; man has lost himself, but at the same time he has not only acquired a theoretical consciousness of that loss, but has been directly compelled, by misery that is henceforth inescapable, impossible to palliate, absolutely imperative - by the practical expression of necessity - to rebel against that inhumanity; and it is for all this that the proletariat can free itself.

But it cannot free itself without abolishing its own conditions of existence. It cannot abolish its own conditions of existence without abolishing all the inhuman conditions of existence of present society that are condensed in its situation. It is not in vain that it goes through the harsh but strengthening school of labor.

Marx and Engels. The Holy Family, 1844

Communism as the end of alienation

The **proletariat**, by denying itself as a class through revolution, pushing the whole of society toward **communism**, is the negation of a negation. It therefore offers the only possible way out for Humanity, its affirmation as such and with it the overcoming of alienation. **Communism**, a society without division of labor and without class division, “the real beginning of human history,” means the end of every division created by the fracture into classes, and therefore the end of social alienation. Marx realizes this very early, in 1844, when he is preparing the notes that will serve as the basis for the core of his work.

Communism as the positive overcoming of private property as man's self-estrangement, and therefore as the real appropriation of the human essence by and for man; therefore as man's return to himself as a social, that is, human, man; a complete, conscious return, accomplished within the whole wealth of human development up to the present.

This communism, as fully developed naturalism, equals humanism, and as fully developed humanism equals naturalism; it is the genuine resolution of the conflict between man and nature, and between man and man, the definitive resolution of the strife between existence and essence, between objectification and self-affirmation, between freedom and necessity, between the individual and the [human] species. It is the riddle of history solved, and it knows itself to be this solution.

Karl Marx. Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts, 1844

Anti-fascism



Stalinist policy that conceals the defense of the capitalist order and the alliance with a part of the bourgeoisie under the supposed need to defeat “first” the counterrevolution in its fascist form.

From the *third period* and *social-fascism* to *anti-fascism*

In 1928 the Third International approved “**socialism in one country**” at its Sixth Congress... that is, its subordination -and therefore that of the world Revolution it represented- to Russian **state capitalism**. **Zinoviev** proclaimed the entry into a “third period” of the revolutionary wave in which the main enemy would be social democracy, which, according to him, had become an appendage of fascism. The first “anti-fascist” group would thus be the “Roter

Frontkämpferbund”, the paramilitary group of the KPD, devoted to organizing street fights and clashes with its Nazi counterparts and with social democratic youth groups.

The theory of “social-fascism” could only further alienate the millions of workers still organized in formally social democratic trade unions, cultural and sports organizations and cooperatives. Not so much because of the influence of the SPD as because of the experience of seeing the “Roter Frontkämpferbund” and the Nazi SA as a security problem for their own premises. The result was Hitler’s electoral advances and the KPD’s inability to give them a class response. Aware of this, the German Stalinists and Zinovievists proclaimed “after Hitler, our turn”. Obviously, once Hitler reached government, what came was nothing but the destruction of the class associative fabric by Nazism and the dismantling and repression of the workers’ movement in Germany.

The invention of anti-fascism as a Comintern tactic

When the Comintern closed this stage in 1935 at its Seventh Congress, the result of its turn would be even worse: anti-fascism had become class collaboration under the slogan of the **Popular Front**: forming electoral alliances with the “democratic” parties to help them win elections under a patriotic anti-fascist discourse.

Its congress proclaims at the same time that all the countries of the world, from fascist Germany to democratic Norway, from Great Britain to India, from Greece to China, have the same need for a “People’s Front” and, wherever possible, a People’s Front government. The congress is important because it marks the Comintern’s definitive entry -after a series of hesitations and false steps- into its “fourth period”, whose slogan is “all power to Daladier” [French republican minister], whose flag is the tricolor, and whose anthem is the Marseillaise, which drowns out the strains of the Internationale.

“The Stalinist turn”. Leon Trotsky, 1935

Anti-fascism as a battering ram against the Spanish Revolution

The generalized workers’ insurrection of 19 July 1936 answered the military coup by arming the proletariat and dismantling the republican state in half of Spain. The PCE then became the main “party of order”, champion of the reconstitution of the state and the defense of private property. Its strategy would put the Comintern’s “anti-fascist” policy to the test.

Stalinism tried to divert the armed proletariat, organized in a multitude of committees and local organizations with little or no coordination, into the war against Franco’s army under the argument of “first victory, then revolution”, while in the rear it encouraged the reconstitution of the state -and its repressive and military bodies-, rebuilding the state around the Catalan government and the **Popular Front**.

The latter was the electoral expression of the “anti-fascist” alliance formed with the republican parties, the PSOE, the PCE itself and the POUM on a program of restoring the democratic order and private property and dissolving the militias, with the regimentation of the armed workers into the republican army reconstituted with Russian military advisers; that program was what united the internal counterrevolution and the external imperialisms in the massacre of the Spanish revolution.

Anti-fascism as a recruiting slogan for imperialist war

Once the Spanish Revolution had been defeated, anti-fascism would become a slogan of imperialist recruitment, first in Spain, through the International Brigades, and then during the Second World War, when Hitler broke his pact with Stalin. Even the centrist sector of the Fourth International, born to proclaim **revolutionary defeatism** when hostilities broke out, used “anti-fascism” as a way of escaping its duties and finding common ground with the state.

The S.W.P. deliberately held back revolutionary formulations against the imperialist war and refused to take any action of struggle against it. It justified itself by claiming to camouflage itself from the eye of the police and to adapt its tone to what the then patriotic ears of the proletariat could take in.

But the most despicable and at the same time tragic thing about opportunism is that, while cutting itself off from the revolutionary education and mobilization of the masses, it does not, for all that, escape the blows of reaction unless it submits to it entirely. Thus the leaders of the S.W.P. found themselves sarcastically accused by their government of internationalism and revolutionary defeatism, the very thing they were dodging, and went to prison for a year and a half or two for a crime they had the duty to have committed, but which they always took good care not to commit. [...]

The American leaders of the S.W.P. had little of the fiber and mental consistency of a Liebknecht. Before their judges they proclaimed not the need to transform the imperialist war into civil war, but into a “true war against fascism”. They clumsily accused the American government of being unable to finish off Berlin, and their press put forward splendid programs for defeating Hitler.

The words revolutionary defeatism made them squirm, and they vetoed them. All internationalist formulations were carefully struck out of magazine and newspaper, including even the mere word “imperialism” unless it referred to the national enemy. Throughout the whole war -an overwhelming argument in itself- they did not organize a single action against it, nor hand out a single leaflet. Finally, comparing their policy with that of the centrist parties of the time, the British I.L.P. and the Spanish P.O.U.M., the similarity between the two went as far as

terminological identity. In a word, the S.W.P. replaced revolutionary politics with the bourgeois and Stalinist politics of anti-fascism, a mere trick of imperialist conscription, twin to the Hitlerite struggle against plutocracy.

“The Fourth International”. G. Munis. 1959

Not content with that, they would support the “anti-fascist partisan guerrillas” which, organized and backed by the allied imperialisms in Italy, Yugoslavia, Greece and other countries, would repress the class movements tending to turn the imperialist war into revolution as soon as the Russians, the British or the Americans “liberated” the territory. From the mass strikes in Northern Italy -which had defeated the fascist state and the German occupiers- to the Greek insurrection, where the Stalinists carried out repression hand in hand with the British army.

Nothing else can be expected from an ideology that calls on us to “renounce everything except victory”... over fascism. That is, to renounce everything in order to maintain a form of government devoted to upholding the existing social order.

Anti-parliamentarianism



A tactic that upholds the counterproductive character of attempting today an electoral participation similar to that of the social democratic parties during the rising phase of capitalism.

Before anti-parliamentarism: Social democracy and electoral participation

During **rising capitalism** the **proletariat** is, in a large part of Europe, a recognized political subject within bourgeois society. The latter accepts that the workers be “represented” within its institutions of government, aware that there is a margin, within its own domination, for the workers to win advantages and opportunities for their own organization and constitution as a class (legal recognition of strikes, of universal suffrage, etc.). The effort to obtain this recognition is part of the process of the political constitution of the class and of the

development of its organization as such (**centralism**). In that context anti-parliamentarianism would have been a dissolving factor, a suicidal tactic.

The first great service that the German workers rendered to their cause consisted in the mere fact of their existence as a Socialist Party that surpassed all others in strength, in discipline and in speed of growth. But they rendered another as well: they supplied their comrades in all countries with a new weapon, one of the sharpest, by showing them how to use universal suffrage.

Universal suffrage had long existed in France, but it had been discredited by the abusive use the Bonapartist government had made of it. And after the Commune there was no workers' party to make use of it. In Spain too this right had existed since the Republic, but in Spain all the serious opposition parties had always made electoral abstention their rule. The experiences that had been made in Switzerland with universal suffrage also served for anything but to encourage a workers' party.

The revolutionary workers of the Latin countries had grown used to regarding the right to vote as a snare, an instrument of deception in the hands of the government. In Germany it was otherwise.

The "Communist Manifesto" had already proclaimed the struggle for universal suffrage, for democracy, as one of the first and most important tasks of the militant proletariat, and Lassalle had taken up this point again. And when Bismarck found himself compelled to introduce universal suffrage as the only means of interesting the masses of the people in his plans, our workers immediately took the matter seriously and sent August Bebel to the first Constituent Reichstag.

And from that day on, they have used the right of suffrage in such a way that it has brought them countless benefits and has served as a model for the workers of all countries. To put it in the words

of the French Marxist programme, they have transformed universal suffrage from «moyen de duperie qu'il a été jusqu'ici en instrument d'émancipation» —from a means of deception, which it had been until now, into an instrument of emancipation.

And even if universal suffrage had brought no other advantage than that of allowing us to count our forces every three years; that of increasing in equal measure, through the periodically verified and unexpectedly rapid rise in the number of votes, the workers' certainty of victory and the dread of their adversaries, thereby becoming our best means of propaganda; that of informing us accurately of our own strength and that of all the opposing parties, thus supplying us with the best possible instrument for gauging the proportions of our action and guarding us equally against untimely timidity and untimely foolhardiness; even if this were the only advantage we obtained from universal suffrage, it would be enough and more than enough.

But it has given us much more. With electoral agitation, it has provided us with a unique means of getting in touch with the masses of the people where they are still far from us, of forcing all parties to defend their ideas and their actions before the people in the face of our attacks; and, moreover, it opened to our representatives in parliament a platform from which they can speak to their adversaries in the Chamber and to the masses outside it with an authority and a freedom quite different from those one has in the press and at meetings. What use was their anti-socialist law to the government and the bourgeoisie, if the electoral agitation campaigns and the socialist speeches in parliament were constantly breaching it?

But with this successful use of universal suffrage an entirely new method of proletarian struggle came into operation, a method of struggle that went on developing rapidly. It was found that the state institutions in which the rule of the bourgeoisie is organized offer the working class new opportunities to fight these very same institutions. The workers took part in elections to provincial diets, to municipal councils, to industrial courts; they contested every post with the bourgeoisie wherever a sufficient part of the proletariat had a say in filling it. And so it came about that the bourgeoisie and the government came to fear the legal action of the workers' party far more than its illegal action, electoral successes far more than insurrectionary ones.

Frederick Engels. *Introduction to "The Class Struggles in France, 1848 to 1850"*, 1895.

The "parliamentarism" of the Second International

The parliamentary activity of the workers' parties before the First World War took as its model German social democracy and its slogan "not a penny and not a man for this system", which meant **always voting against all government budgets** at every level of government.

The result is contradictory and interesting for what it reveals about the period: in general terms, electoral and parliamentary activity helped, within that intransigent framework, to strengthen the organization and constitution of the class; the democratic program of the bourgeoisie was pushed forward, and legal reforms favorable to the possibility of workers' organization were obtained, as well as long-lasting economic conquests such as the reduction of the working day. But **opportunist tendencies**, conciliatory tendencies, were also carried into the parties; they would end up expressing themselves openly as

“revisionism” and undermining the social democratic parties from within, incorporating them into the “national union” with the bourgeoisie and turning them into a fundamental piece in the mobilization of the workers for war.

The impossibility of a class parliamentarism in decadence; anti-parliamentarianism as an alternative tactic

In capitalist **decadence**, everything that makes the parliamentary activity and representation of the workers possible disappears when the organized class fabric does: the space of “workers’ democracy” formed by the innumerable organizations -from the party to the cultural organizations, by way of the cooperatives. Confronted with the revolution and riding a system with no capacity for expansion, the bourgeoisie no longer has room for workers’ parties in its institutions; anti-parliamentarianism gradually emerges as a necessary tactic.

During the period running from the First World War to the Spanish Revolution, **state capitalism** becomes universal, and with it the totalitarian organization of the bourgeoisie around a new type of “interventionist” state merged with big capital and the monopolies. What happens with steel or coal also happens with **labor power**: the **trade union** goes from wholesaler to monopolist and is integrated into the economic apparatus of the state. In this process the space of “workers’ democracy” formed by the innumerable organizations - from the party to the cultural organizations, by way of the cooperatives- will be destroyed by the two main forms of counter-revolution: **fascism** and **Stalinism**.

Freed from the counterweight of “workers’ democracy”, organized bourgeois “civil society” (parties, associations, etc.) is absorbed by the state machinery: from representing the fractions of capital before the

political apparatus, it comes to represent the state before the different sectors of society.

The **petty bourgeoisie** will have an oscillating relationship: in periods of conflict with the bourgeoisie it will generate its own political and parliamentary expressions... which will end up absorbed or vanished when the conflicts subside.

The political apparatus itself is transformed from head to toe: liberal democracy disappears as such -in the most fragile capitalisms not even the forms are maintained- and the representative system ceases to pivot on a Parliament that works as a metaphor of the market -the “marketplace of ideas” that clash and find equilibria between particular interests- and becomes instead the representation of an “opinion” industrially manufactured by a new monopoly: the mass media.

These media reproduce and amplify the totalitarianism of the state: they occupy the whole space of “opinion” by filling all physical space - from the living room to the car, from the train to, in many places, the elevator- and virtual space -the cell phone, social networks- with news and “debates” whose diversity emphasizes the “non-existence” and “impossibility” of an alternative to capitalist **commodification**. Underlying this is the fact that, far from being able to “open its hand” to a framework that would allow the constitution as a class, it needs to deny the very existence of the class as a political subject and even, at the height of discursive delirium, to deny its existence even as a sociological class. The whole media and propaganda apparatus, infinitely multiplied, will devote itself to manufacturing ideologies that deny and divide the class: **nationalism**, racism, **pacifism**, **feminism**... always presenting false “realistic” dichotomies between “the bad and the even worse”.

“Revolutionary parliamentarism” and counter-revolution

The process of transition towards **state capitalism**, which begins with **imperialism**, leaves the parties of the Second International in pieces. **Opportunism** -which has grown strong in the parliamentary groups of the workers’ parties- not only translates at specific moments into **revisionism**; the **reformist** right wing, headed by the trade union leaderships, will, at the outbreak of the war, turn the gigantic machine of workers’ organization into an apparatus of war recruitment, dissolving it into the **nation** and leading a central part of the proletariat to the imperialist slaughter.

Aware of the role of parliamentarism in this process, which had placed the center of the socialist parties in the electoral machine, the Third International will propose the tactic of “revolutionary parliamentarism” as a way of updating the original tactic of the times of Engels, Liebknecht senior and Bebel.

The point is to participate in parliaments precisely in order to break the monopoly of opinion, to represent the class opposition between the reactionary deals and “reforms” under way and the workers, whose deputies in the bourgeois countries will vote against or abstain in every vote.

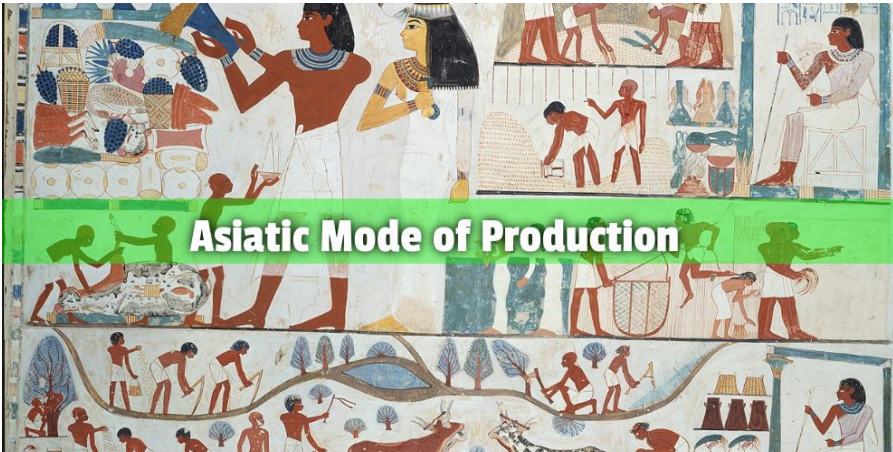
However, “revolutionary parliamentarism”, in the absence of an organized class fabric capable of counteracting and resisting the “opinion industry”, is an illusion. It will soon become clear that even the conditions that at first made it conceivable as a tactic had already disappeared in most countries during the war. In the rest, the counter-revolution will sweep them away. Anti-parliamentarianism becomes the only possible tactic.

Would a “revolutionary parliamentarism” be possible today?

1. The workers' press, the basis of socialist agitation in the 19th century, could compete in the market during **rising capitalism** because there were mass workers' organizations such as the **trade union**, but also workers' cultural and educational associations of all kinds in every corner of the industrialized territory. This was a capitalism which, though it hardly encouraged class organization, was not yet totalitarian either. Moreover, there was still a certain free market. Only in some countries had the bourgeoisie created by-products to confront the workers' press: the first British "tabloids". In the world of hyper-concentrated capital articulated around the state, newspapers have become gigantic multimedia conglomerates beyond the reach of any party or group of workers. To try to compete with them in the battle for everyday "opinion" is as utopian as to claim that every militant group should have its own Google or Amazon. And, needless to say, there is no organized, mass class fabric in neighborhoods and workplaces.
2. Once you are in the game you accept what the game claims to measure... even if you know it measures something else. "Opinion" remains alien terrain, one more product of the monopolies. Mobilizing only to reap the frustration of a defeat is precisely what the left of capital loves to do, always intent on destroying the self-confidence of the class.
3. Even if an electoral "victory" were achieved, a parliamentary group of workers' "representatives" could not obtain tangible results for the workers as a whole. There are no sustainable improvements possible for labor under a capital in permanent crisis. Only revolutionary parliamentarism would be possible: the refusal of any compromise and the denunciation of all false "reforms". But could it hold out against the media industry without mass organizations sustaining it?

4. The very existence of workers' "representatives" who have not emerged from the struggles, who are not revocable by the organized proletariat itself, but are elected through the state, would be counterproductive. The constitution of the class as a political subject, the development of **class consciousness**, can no longer rely on an alien state. The emancipation of the workers, that is, their affirmation independently of the bourgeoisie, is incompatible with representation in **state capitalism**. Anti-parliamentarianism is, for the time being, the possible tactic.

Asiatic mode of production



Asiatic mode of production: mode of production based on the collective exploitation of the peasantry articulated by a bureaucratic state by means of a system of tributes levied in produce and labor time. The peasantry retains remnants of tribal organization and the communal ownership of land, but local and tribal particularities tend to be blurred by the impact of large public works which increase productivity and homogenize the organization of social labor.

General features



Chinese imperial examinations. The organization of a massive bureaucratic class, selected from a unique examination system on the basis of syllabi that ensured technical training and moral indoctrination in the defense of the state (Confucianism), was one of the great stabilizers of the Asiatic mode of production in China.

We can date the origin of the Asiatic **mode of production** to the Indus (Mohenjo Daro) and Mesopotamian (Sumer) civilizations, Mycenaean Greece, Egypt, Nubia and China. With great stability in sustaining the balances between classes, up to a millennium and a half later different formations and states will appear or survive under this mode of production in present-day Ethiopia, North America (Aztec empire), the Andes (Inca Tahuantinsuyo), Korea (Baekje, Silla, early Joseon empire) and Indochina (Siam and Khmer empires).

The institutions in the Asiatic mode of production are reminiscent of institutions of conquest, in which an invading nomadic people institutionalizes and regulates the plunder over a set of subjugated peoples who were organized in former structures that remain under primitive communism or under forms of barbarism based on the agrarian commons.

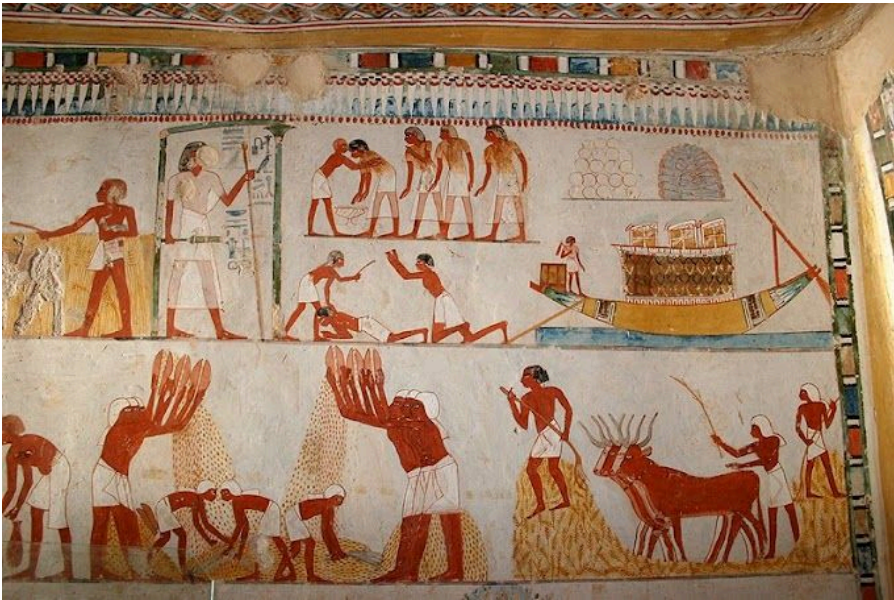
This transformation of the invader into the exploiting class of a locally clustered mass of peasants transforms in turn the nature of communal property. The new ruling class gradually turns from necessary guarantor into collective owner of the principal means of production, the land.

...the global unity, which stands above all these small communities, presents itself as the supreme or sole owner, and thus the real communities only present themselves as hereditary owners. Since this unity is the authentic owner and the authentic presupposition of communal property, the unity itself can present itself as a particular entity, which is above the multiple particular entities, in which the individual, in reality, is deprived of property.

Grundrisse, Marx, 1857

In this movement, the ruling class of the Asiatic mode of production will orient social labor towards the construction of **large infrastructures** (roads, waterworks, grain warehouses) and will develop a **state apparatus with a bureaucracy separate from the ideological-religious structure, professionalized and specialized**.

Class structure



The peasantry, originally a collection of subject tribes, each with its own communal property systems, became more homogenized as reliance on state public works equalized productive techniques, increased productivity and placed larger segments of production directly in the hands of the state bureaucracy.

The fundamental classes of the Asiatic mode of production were the nobility (exploiting class), the peasantry (exploited class), and the state bureaucracy in charge of the organization of the state.

Communal property having become a “concession” of the despot (pharaoh, emperor, Inca, etc.) the nobility will function as a strictly hierarchical collective exploiter separated from the central figure and his immediate family. The inevitable deification of the despot -

materialization of the unity of a state reigning over diverse and dispersed tribal units- will in fact separate the ruling nucleus symbolically and physically from the nobility as a whole.

The nobility of the Asiatic mode of production will have a warrior and military component separate from the priestly stratum, upon which will fall not only the great ceremonials of state, but the bulk of the direction of the organization of social labor.



As the enforcement arm of the nobility, a relatively large class of specialized bureaucrats developed, responsible for keeping the tax system going, organizing labor levies, and directing the execution of public works.

To the needs of this bureaucracy in systematizing and organizing the exploitation of the peasant communities we owe the birth of writing and arithmetic (to record the levies), the first accounting systems (to keep the royal inventories), geometry (to calculate the tribute

according to the cultivated area) and the first mechanical systems of registration and calculation (from the Asian abacus to the Andean quipu).

CÔTADOR MAIOR TEZORERO
 TAVANTISVOOVIPOC
 CYRACA CON DOR CHAVA



con tador y tezoreiro

con tador

Under the nobility of the Asiatic mode of production and its state bureaucracy, the dispersed and diverse peasantry will tend to form a relatively homogeneous class. Born out of the domination of one tribe or set of tribes over others, the peasantry has, in principle, a tremendous diversity of local institutions linked to communal ownership with their own belief systems, forms of kinship and, in some cases, chiefdoms that sketch out an exploiting class.

Along with the nobility and the peasantry, in the Asiatic mode of production will appear more or less developed an ideologically and legally very controlled mercantile bourgeoisie, that is, **oppressed**, considered morally and politically inferior to the peasantry. It will be prevented from growing by its inability to form and reproduce capital in a very thinly commodified economy on whose endogenous forces it could not lay the foundations of its own system of exploitation.

In addition, groups of slaves -product of wars and repression- and wage workers linked to the great public constructions appeared. The first recorded strike is that of the workers building a royal Egyptian necropolis in 1154 BCE.

The class struggle under the Asiatic mode of production

The dynamic element of the Asiatic mode of production in its ascendant period will come associated with the centralizing tendencies of the ruling class and the increase in the productivity of labor and resources thanks to hydraulic works and roads.

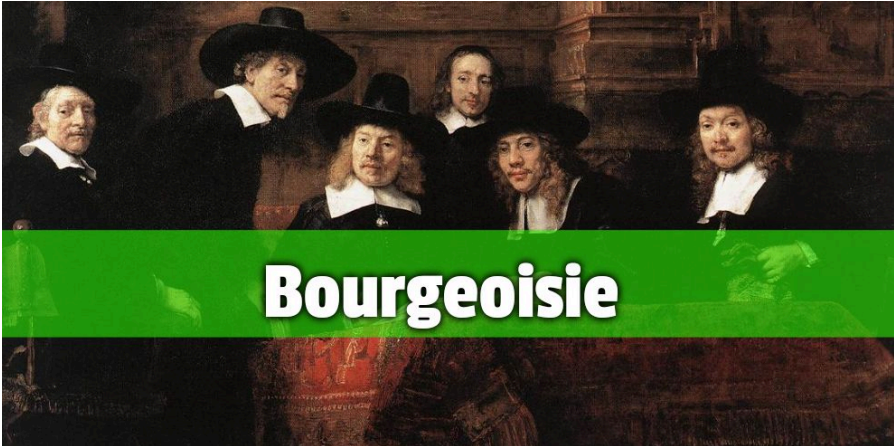
Where the Asiatic mode of production is fully developed - as in Ancient Egypt - there will be the destruction or total absorption of local chiefdoms and nobility into the nobility and state bureaucracy, and above all a homogenizing tendency of the forms of labor imposed by the bureaucracy and the use of the great imperial infrastructures,

which will come to create a fairly homogeneous peasantry. These were neither easy nor peaceful processes. The 15th century in what is now Mexico and in the Andes make this clear.

By contrast, the periods of decline of the various civilizations that developed under the Asiatic mode of production will see a fall in agrarian productivity and exacerbate the centrifugal tendencies of the peripheral sectors of the nobility - opening the door to a possible development of chiefdoms towards **feudalism**. And as a counterforce a tendency towards the despotic domination of the center... which opened the prospect of a transformation of the class structure towards the institutions characteristic of slavery.

Other times, factions of the nobility and bureaucracy will in their struggle simply destroy the viability of public works, thus undermining the basis of their own power until the “common ruin of the contending classes” occurs, often following tribal/peasant rebellions or invasions by rival empires.

Bourgeoisie



The exploiting class of the capitalist mode of production that organizes and directs the process of surplus value production and capital accumulation.

The origins of the bourgeoisie

The bourgeoisie was born as a mercantile class linked to long-distance trade. Medieval merchants and money-changers would use their profits to progressively take control of the guilds and craftsmen, beginning the production of **surplus value**.

It would not be, however, until it achieved the conversion of land into a commodity that it could extend the cycle of **accumulation** and reorder society around itself and the needs derived from the reproduction of capital. The peasant masses driven from the

countryside would become the basis of the first modern **proletariat** and the condition that made the mass industrialization of production possible for the bourgeoisie.

From the serfs of the Middle Ages sprang the chartered burghers of the earliest towns; from this urban estate the first elements of the bourgeoisie developed.

The discovery of America and the rounding of Africa opened up fresh ground for the rising bourgeoisie. The markets of India and China, the colonisation of America, trade with the colonies, the increase in the means of exchange and in commodities generally, gave to commerce, to navigation and to industry an impulse never before known, and thereby accelerated the development of the revolutionary element in the tottering feudal society.

The old feudal or guild organisation of industry could no longer meet the demand, which grew with the opening of new markets. Manufacture took its place. The guild-masters were pushed aside by the manufacturing middle class; the division of labour between the different corporate guilds vanished in the face of the division of labour within each single workshop.

But the markets kept ever growing, the demand ever rising. Even manufacture no longer sufficed. Thereupon steam and machinery revolutionised industrial production. The place of manufacture was taken by modern large-scale industry; the place of the industrial middle class was taken by industrial millionaires — the leaders of whole industrial armies —, the modern bourgeois.

Modern industry has established the world market, for which the discovery of America paved the way. The world market prodigiously accelerated the development of commerce, of navigation and of communication by land. This development has, in its turn, reacted on the extension of industry; and in proportion

as industry, commerce, navigation and railways extended, the bourgeoisie developed, increased its capital and pushed into the background every class handed down from the Middle Ages.

We see, therefore, how the modern bourgeoisie is itself the product of a long course of development, of a series of revolutions in the modes of production and of exchange.

Each step in the development of the bourgeoisie was accompanied by a corresponding political advance. An oppressed estate under the sway of the feudal lords; an armed and self-governing association in the commune; here an independent urban republic; there taxable “third estate” of the monarchy; afterwards, in the period of manufacture, a counterpoise against the nobility in the semi-feudal (estates-based) or absolute monarchies and, in general, the cornerstone of the great monarchies, the bourgeoisie has at last, since the establishment of modern industry and of the world market, conquered for itself exclusive political sway in the modern representative State.

Karl Marx and Frederick Engels. **Manifesto of the Communist Party**, 1848

The bourgeoisie as ruling class of an ascendant capitalism

Throughout the 19th century, the heart of the **ascendant period of capitalism**, as it extends the world market, the bourgeoisie will seize power in practically every country where capitalism has become the organizing axis of society. It will, however, find an objective limit to its revolutionary expansion across the world in the size of the remaining extra-capitalist markets and their capacity to absorb and realize

surplus value. Capitalism enters its **imperialist phase** and the needs of **accumulation** transform its internal organization and the very form of the bourgeoisie.

What, in the last instance, does the economic phenomenon of the joint-stock company mean? It represents, on the one hand, the unification of a number of small fortunes into one large capital for production. It represents, on the other, the separation of production from capitalist ownership. That is to say, it denotes that a double victory has been won over the capitalist mode of production: but still on a capitalist basis.

What, then, do the statistics cited by Bernstein mean, according to which a growing number of shareholders participate in capitalist enterprises? The statistics demonstrate precisely this: at present a capitalist enterprise does not correspond, as before, to a single owner of capital but to a number of capitalists.

Consequently, the economic notion of “capitalist” no longer corresponds to an isolated individual. The industrial capitalist of today is a collective person, composed of hundreds, even thousands of individuals. The category of “capitalist” has become a social category. It has been “socialised”, within the framework of capitalist society.

Rosa Luxemburg. **Reform or Revolution**, 1899

The decadent bourgeoisie

This tendency towards the “socialization” of the concept of capitalist will be radicalized with the entry of capitalism into **decadence**. From 1914 onwards, the fusion of the industrial bourgeoisie around the

banks, and of the resulting finance capital into the state, the refuge of the last remnants of the aristocracy, becomes the generalization of **state capitalism** throughout the world.

Under different forms, ranging from the almost total statization of national capital under the Stalinist regimes to the nominal “liberalism” of the US, the bourgeoisie is transformed into a “state bourgeoisie”.

Its power as a class is no longer defined by the individual ownership of the means of production, already blurred by the change in ownership structure that the explosion of joint-stock companies represented, but by its *collective* position as manager of the state and of a national capital that definitively no longer “fits” within its borders.

Bureaucracy



Bourgeois layer dedicated to the management of the state apparatus

The bureaucracy in Europe

In most European countries the bureaucracy of today's **state capitalism** is the direct heir -literally in many cases- of the managers of the absolutist state characteristic of the long **decadence** of feudalism. In France or Great Britain, it is not difficult to find among the “senior civil service” or the diplomatic corps long lineages of bureaucrats who represent elements of continuity of the **state apparatus** between the ruling classes of feudalism and **capitalism**.

All the more so in Spain or Portugal, where the bourgeoisie did not come to power in a revolutionary way, but as a result of a process of fusion with other exploiting layers: aristocracy, landowners, etc. This process culminates late, already in the 20th century and at the very

moment when capitalism as a whole enters into **decadence**. And it does so precisely around the state of the Restoration and its bureaucrats, to form the basis of the **state capitalism** we know today.

As a result of its own situation in the state and its stability as a group, the bureaucracy continues today to be a very important link in the political articulation of the bourgeoisie, a connecting link between the managing bourgeoisie, both corporate and financial, and the political leaders.

The Stalinist bureaucracies

The **state capitalism** consolidated with the counter-revolution in Russia was a particular, extreme and yet defining case of capitalist **decadence**. With the proletarian revolution in Russia isolated, drowned in a sea of millions of small agrarian proprietors (petty bourgeoisie), and the proletariat that had made the revolution scattered by hunger and the mobilization of the civil war, production was consciously reconstituted as a **state capitalism** under the control of very weakened **soviets**.

Real power soon fell to a bureaucratic layer whose future was linked to the reconstruction of national capital. Its political expression would be **stalinism**, its first slogan “**socialism in one country**”, its main enemy the revitalization of the world revolution and its legacy the long breath of the counter-revolution, a new imperialist world war and an ultra-bureaucratic model of **state capitalism** that, with different variants, marked the twentieth century.

In all this, what kind of property relations did the October Revolution establish? Certainly not socialist ones. That revolution was made by true communists, but they had no other aim than the permanent revolution (Lenin in the April Theses), waiting for the proletariat of the developed countries to come to their aid.

Even the tactics of the Bolsheviks before the seizure of power were entirely inspired by that perspective, which is enough to reject them at the present hour. After the magnificent attempt called war communism, which, far from responding only to the urgencies of the civil war, pointed directly to the disappearance of wage labor, there was a turn towards state capitalism as Lenin conceived it: capitalist relations of production and distribution, but real political power of the proletariat, based on the soviets.

The effective preservation of that power was, in Lenin's eyes, the only guarantee of a future socialist development; it would allow them to wait for the victory of other revolutions in industrialized countries and to move on together to the transitional society and to communism. It can be said today that the only truly socialist thing that existed in the former Soviet Union was, despite its defects, political power.

Once the power of the soviets had disappeared and the Bolshevik party had been corrupted, nothing remained but state capitalism pure and simple, which went on consolidating itself and recognizing itself as such from the NEP to the five-year plans. The relations of property, production and distribution were brought back to the most rigorous capitalist norms.

Thus a counter-revolution was carried out such as history had never known, and whose main concern is to prevent any proletarian revolution in the world. Is further proof needed after

the surrender of power to Hitler in 1933, after the crushing of the Spanish revolution, not by Franco, but by the Russian government and its Spanish stalinists, after the imperialist policy of national resistance and all the reactionary work of Moscow and its parties since the postwar period?

“Critique of the Draft Manifesto for a New Workers’ Party of the Workers’ League of England”, 1961

The bureaucracy as a group with its own interests and perspectives within the ruling class

Being a product of the state, the bureaucracy has its own characteristics that reflect its logic within the ruling class. These characteristics become all the more central the further **decadence** advances.

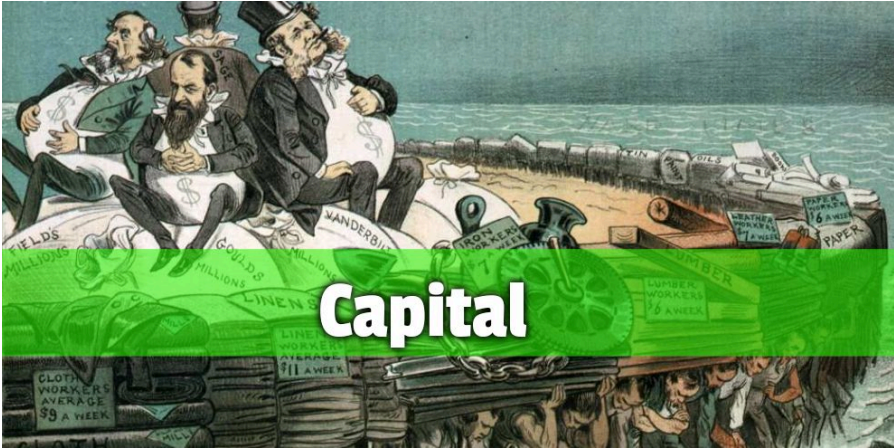
Unlike the corporate bourgeoisie, which still claims to be a reflection of the entrepreneurial myth and a product of the market, and unlike the political leaders, tied to the democratic myth, the bureaucracy understands the extra-economic nature of its power as the main guarantee of the preservation of the social order.

It is therefore a fundamentally conservative group that will place the emphasis on the procedural and the normative, that is, on the regulation of disputes between factions of the ruling class and on the regimentation and, if necessary, repression of the **class struggle**.

The bureaucracy presents and understands itself as the guarantor of the conditions of **accumulation** and is called upon to play a greater political role as the contradictions within and around **state capitalism**

become more acute: from its participation as ministers to the “judicialization” of political conflicts, from “technocratic” governments to military juntas.

Capital



Capital is an accumulable right of exploitation that guarantees its holder the use of a certain amount of social resources and hours of labor. Its system of circulation and accumulation ensures that those applications that contribute most to the increase in overall unpaid labor dispose of a greater proportion of resources and labor to exploit in each cycle.

The right to dispose of unpaid labor

Capital, therefore, is not only, as Adam Smith says, the command over labour. It is essentially the command over unpaid labour. All surplus-value, whatever particular form (profit, interest, or rent) it may subsequently crystallise into, is in substance the materialisation of unpaid labour-time. The secret of the self-expansion of capital resolves itself into having the disposal of a definite quantity of other people's unpaid labour.

Karl Marx. *Capital*, Book I, chapter XVI, 1867

As money and as commodity

Capital is therefore, above all, a social institution, a set of social relations and “rights” guaranteed to its holders. That is why, throughout its process of *accumulation*, it alternately takes the form of money and of commodity. It can be the money with which the commodities necessary for the production process are bought, including *labor power*, or the machine and the tools, material or immaterial, that are used in it.

If we fix the particular forms of appearance that self-valorizing value alternately adopts in its life cycle, we arrive at the following statements: capital is money, capital is commodities. But in reality value here becomes the subject of a process in which, while continually changing the forms of money and commodity, it alters its own magnitude, throws off surplus value from itself as original value, valorizes itself. The movement in which it adds surplus value is in fact its own movement, and its valorization is therefore self-valorization. It has acquired the occult quality of adding value because it is value. It brings forth living offspring, or at least lays golden eggs.

Karl Marx. “Capital”, Book I, chapter IV, 1867

Constant and variable

The capital used in production can be broken down into two parts, both in the production process and in the process of value creation. If in the production process we have an objective component (machines, land, money...) and a subjective one, inseparable from flesh-and-blood people (**labor power**), in the process of valorization these components become “constant capital” and “variable capital”.

The first is the part that is converted into objects useful for production, the second the part that is converted into **labor power**, living labor that generates **value**.

That part of capital then, which is represented by the means of production, by the raw material, auxiliary material and the instruments of labour, does not, in the process of production, undergo any quantitative alteration of value. I therefore call it the constant part of capital, or, more shortly, constant capital.

On the other hand, that part of capital, represented by labour-power, does, in the process of production, undergo an alteration of value. It both reproduces the equivalent of its own value, and also produces an excess, a surplus-value, which may itself vary, may be more or less according to circumstances. This part of capital is continually being transformed from a constant into a variable magnitude. I therefore call it the variable part of capital, or, shortly, variable capital. The same elements of capital which, from the point of view of the labour-process, present themselves respectively as the objective and subjective factors, as means of production and labour-power, present themselves, from the point of view of the process of creating surplus-value, as constant and variable capital.

Karl Marx. "Capital", Book I, chapter VI

Capitalism



A mode of production based on the commodification of human labor and its products, whose specific objective is the production of surplus value, that is, the extraction of surplus labor that generates an increase, in constant terms, in the mass of money returning to the balance sheet of the owners of capital at the end of each production cycle.

The particularities of capitalism compared to previous modes of production

Under capitalism the expropriation of the working class takes place by fundamentally economic means

Capitalism is the first mode of production in which the expropriation of the working class takes place by fundamentally economic means. It is not the armed exaction of the feudal lord or the use of violence by

the state that directly expropriates part of the product of other people's labor.

On the contrary, it is the **apparently *free* and generalized exchange of commodities that makes it possible to extract unpaid labor, in the form of surplus value,** from the working class characteristic of this mode of production: the **proletariat**.

Of course, direct exaction still exists in many forms -through the state, for example- but it is neither the main source, nor the characteristic feature, nor the basis of the functioning of the system.

Capitalism is a system, not a social relation that can exist in isolation

Beneath the appearance of a complex system of *voluntary* exchanges, capitalism in reality conceals the appropriation of the unpaid labor of the workers as a whole by capital as a whole. It is not the sum of the results of exploitation *company by company*; it is a *system*: it requires an institutional framework that dominates the whole of society, turns human labor power into a commodity, forces the great majority to sell it *freely* on the market for goods and services in order to survive and, finally, allows capital to organize itself in a parallel capital market that distributes profits.

That is to say, there is no capitalism in a single company. And there is no capitalism without a capitalist state. That is why, even though there had been a bourgeoisie since the Middle Ages, capitalism did not begin until a series of revolutions in England, the USA and France gave state power to the bourgeoisie. The specifically capitalist function of the new state born then was to establish the social and legal relations that turned labor into the only commodity owned by the great mass of the population. Conditions that forced this new social class, the *proletariat*, to sell it *voluntarily* in order to survive.

Capitalism needs to develop the productive forces permanently

Like the ruling classes of the class-divided societies that preceded it, the bourgeoisie measures the success of its economy and its system - capitalism- by its ability to appropriate the product of social labor and direct it towards its own ends.

But unlike previous **modes of production**, **capitalism** tends continually to increase production and expand the market, to transform previous social relations into commodity relations, and to transform the means of production so as to enjoy a greater amount of social product.

The bourgeoisie cannot exist without constantly revolutionising the instruments of production, and thereby the relations of production, and with them the whole relations of society. Conservation of the old modes of production in unaltered form, was, on the contrary, the first condition of existence for all earlier industrial classes.

Constant revolutionising of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones. [...] The need of a constantly expanding market for its products chases the bourgeoisie over the entire surface of the globe. It must nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, establish connexions everywhere.

Karl Marx and Frederick Engels. **Manifesto of the Communist Party**, 1848

How capitalism turns the working class it creates into a universal class

This fundamentally economic, apparently automatic character of exploitation under capitalism means that the negation of the proletariat is total.

The proletariat itself is defined as the opposite of everything that characterizes society: in a society defined by the generalized exchange of commodities, it has no other commodity to sell than its own labor power; in a society whose ruling class groups itself and organizes society into national states, the proletariat has a *universal condition* that represents the *dissolution of all nationalities*.

Everything that defines human experience, everything that defines the *human being* under capitalism -commercial freedom, equality before the state, fraternity within the nation- is alien to it. Commercial freedom is, for the proletariat, wage slavery; equality before the state, its negation as a political class; national fraternity, the obligation to *sacrifice itself* for national capital in crises and wars.

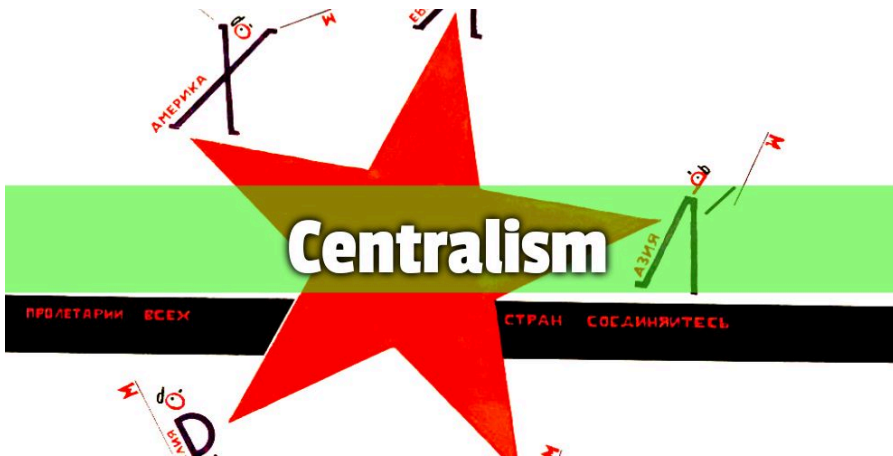
Under capitalism, every need becomes subordinated to the needs of capital and is therefore *universally* denied in the proletariat.

Let us recall for a second the trade unionist who tells us that *you cannot demand what the company's accounts cannot sustain without losses*, the official who tells us that medical treatments or pensions *must be subordinated to the deficit target*, the leader who says that *the borders cannot be opened* to migrants looking for work because there is no *capacity for employment*, or the politician who tells us that he will not authorize lockdowns in the face of the pandemic because *the economy is suffering...*

...while the share of the value of national output devoted to paying capital income has been rising for sixty years, the hospitals of the ruling classes offer every existing treatment to anyone who can pay for it, the borders have always been open to capital and its managers, and the bourgeoisie all over the world lives confined in its fortress neighborhoods without that posing any problem at all.

It is from this total and universal negation that its main characteristic is born: it is a *universal class*, and not only because it exists worldwide, but because of the nature of the demands that appear in its struggles, even in their most limited forms: the proletariat fights for generic, universal human needs, not for privileges to exploit other social classes. That is why it is the revolutionary class of the capitalist mode of production. Only a universal class, exploited and universally oppressed and negated, can be the bearer of a program that in turn negates every form of exploitation, oppression or discrimination: **communism**.

Centralism



Tendency towards an organizational unification which expresses the character of the proletariat as a universal class.

The class basis of centralism

Centralism is based on the identity and unity of interests that correspond to a class which does not fight for any particular privilege or interest, but for generic universal interests all over the world. That is why **internationalism** and centralism necessarily go hand in hand in every genuine expression of class struggle: if centralism affirms class unity within each of its expressions in a territory, internationalism affirms it among them.

Centralism is not the concentration of power in a few but

in all

In the working class, “centralism” does **not** mean adherence to a formal principle, the defence of a certain typology of *command* structures. And it certainly does not mean concentrating power in a single person or group, but on the contrary, extending the scope of decision of any class struggle organization to all its members, reflecting the universal character that permeates every class expression and putting it before any particularism, any sentiment or prejudice, imaginary privilege or real discrimination. In other words, centralism is the organizational expression of the idea of the unity of the class of the **proletariat** as a universal political subject.

Workers’ centralism is that of an assembly organizing a strike, not that of a board of directors standing on an organizational chart. When there is a strike, the spontaneous tendency is for its organization to fall into a single center: the assembly of all workers and for that assembly to bring together all workers regardless of their nationality, their sex, the employment contract they have - whether permanent or temporary - and who signs it - the main company or a subcontractor.

When the strike spreads, the committees (elected, with a direct mandate and revocable at any time) are united in turn into “delegate committees” which, when mobilizations become widespread, integrate in turn all kinds of representations of the non-exploiting classes through neighborhood, city, etc. assemblies.

The tendency towards unity is also present in community, defensive and working class expressions: resistance funds, solidarity networks, etc. only function and become valid spaces for the development of **class consciousness** if they are capable of overcoming in practice the identity divisions imposed by a society whose division into classes is

expressed under a thousand particularisms and differentiated discriminations without possible historical overcoming within the capitalist system.

Centralism and the Party

The universal nature of the class is expressed in its entire historical being. Its total **alienation** from society, its being the negated class in any of the dimensions of capitalism, makes it live and assert the negation of every nationality and every particularism. This negation becomes a positive affirmation of the universality of its movement and its project.

This revolution is carried out by the class which society does not regard as such, does not recognize as a class, and already expresses the dissolution of all classes, nationalities, etc., within the present society

Marx and Engels. **The German Ideology**, 1845-1846

In the organizational practice of the **party** this translates into **centralism**.

A pronounced centralist spirit exists throughout social democracy. Having grown up on the economic soil of capitalism, which tends to be centralist, and being obliged to wage its battle within the political framework of the great bourgeois centralized state, social democracy is, from birth, a determined enemy of all particularism and all federalism.

Since social democracy has to defend the general interests of the proletariat as a class in the framework of a concrete state, against the partial and group interests of the proletariat, it shows the logical tendency **to merge all the national, religious and professional groups of the working class into a single unitary party.** (...) Social-democratic centralism has to be of an essentially different character from the Blanquist one; it cannot be anything else but the impetuous concentration of the will of the conscious and militant vanguard of the working class in front of its isolated groups and individuals, it is, so to speak, the “self-centralism” of the leading sector of the proletariat

Rosa Luxemburg. **Organizational Questions of the Russian Social Democracy**, 1904

Centralism is a natural tool for the development of class consciousness. By dissolving the boundaries and “identities” created by class society and capitalism within the proletariat, it affirms the unity and universality of its immediate historical project, **socialism**, while developing each concrete struggle to its maximum, which is also the maximum of its centralization.

It is therefore not surprising that already the first working class political organizations (Cabet’s “Icarian Communists” and Weitling’s “League of the Just”) operated centrally through permanently active international correspondence networks and single (unified)

congresses in which the participants were genuine delegates delivering the proposals and results of the work on the texts under discussion from those who could not travel. That even in the first half of the nineteenth century equality was affirmed within a single organization for all its members, regardless of gender, nationality or ethno-religious origin, says much about the necessarily centralist nature of class political organization.

Even more so if we put it in contrast with the forms of the petty bourgeoisie. Proudhonian federalism, the chaos of Bakuninist secrecy and the individualistic atomization of the student movements of '68 or the "occupy" express well a class that tries to define itself through consumption and to generate tailor-made "identities", as opposed to a class that is born of production and faces the **alienation** that is born of its social organization.

In the Second International, its left wing - Rosa Luxemburg, Lenin, Zetkin - fought hard against the formation of autonomous national "identity" groups and against the "federative" approach to organization.

“Autonomy” under the Rules adopted in 1898 provides the Jewish working-class movement with all it needs: propaganda and agitation in Yiddish, its own literature and congresses, the right to advance separate demands to supplement a single general Social-Democratic programme and to satisfy local needs and requirements arising out of the special features of Jewish life. In everything else there must be complete fusion with the Russian proletariat, in the interests of the struggle waged by the entire proletariat of Russia. As for the fear of being “steam-rollered” in the event of such fusion, the very nature of the case makes it groundless, since it is autonomy that is a guarantee against all “steam-rolling” in matters pertaining specifically to the Jewish movement, while in matters pertaining to the struggle against the autocracy, the struggle against the bourgeoisie of Russia as a whole, we must act as a single and centralized militant organization, have behind us the whole of the proletariat, without distinction of language or nationality, a proletariat whose unity is cemented by the continual joint solution of problems of theory and practice, of tactics and organization; and we must not set up organizations that would march separately, each along its own track; we must not weaken the force of our offensive by breaking up into numerous independent political parties; we must not introduce estrangement and isolation and then have to heal an artificially implanted disease with the aid of these notorious “federation” plasters.

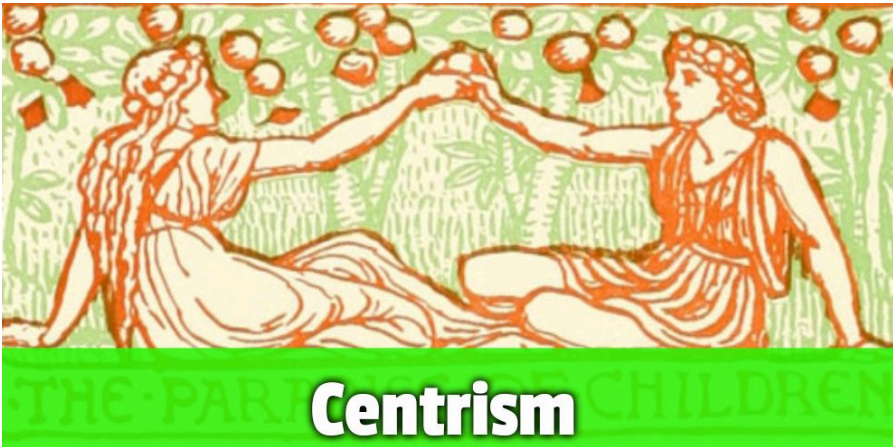
Lenin. “Does the Jewish Proletariat Need an “Independent Political Party?””, 1903

This approach was extended to all the “identities” that were considered at the time - of sex or generational - and which were later transferred to the Third International. As Clara Zetkin recalled in 1921

to those in charge of disseminating the International's programme among women in each national section:

There is only one movement, only one organization of communist women -formerly socialist- within the communist party together with communist men. The aims of communist men are our aims, our tasks.

Centrism



A political position, impeccable in its literal wording, that is stated in a consciously ambiguous way, allowing a slide in practice towards positions that, without requiring any new statement, nevertheless fall outside the class boundaries (internationalism, centralism).

The class nature of centrism

Centrism does not reflect the interests of a specific stratum, but the influence of capitalist **ideology** within the class through the opportunist tendencies in its militant groups.

Centrism reflects the transitional process within the proletariat, the different waves within its different layers and the difficulties that obstruct the advance towards definitive revolutionary positions.

L. D. Trotsky. **What is centrism?**

Centrism and opportunism

Centrism is an **opportunism** in deeds that dresses itself up either as theoretical intransigence in the letter or as a merely formal or legal concession to circumstances. An example of this latter form of centrism can be seen clearly in the degenerative process of the Fourth International during the second imperialist war.

Russia was still absent from the war when the first symptoms of going astray appeared in the American party (*Socialist Workers Party*). Shortly afterwards, with the whole world already in the slaughter, the S.W.P. deliberately withdrew its revolutionary formulations against the imperialist war and refused to take any action of struggle against it. It justified itself by claiming to be camouflaging itself from the police eye and adapting its tone to what the then patriotic ears of the proletariat could take in.

But the most despicable and at the same time tragic thing about opportunism is that, while cutting off its own access to the revolutionary education and mobilization of the masses, it does not, however, escape the blows of reaction unless it submits to it entirely. Thus the leaders of the S.W.P. found themselves sarcastically accused by their government of internationalism and revolutionary defeatism, the very thing they were dodging, and went to prison for a year and a half or two for a *crime* they had the duty to commit, but which they always took good care not to commit. [...]

Before their judges they proclaimed not the need to transform the imperialist war into civil war, but into a *true war against fascism*. They clumsily accused the American government of being incapable of finishing off Berlin, and their press presented splendid programs to *defeat Hitler*. The words *revolutionary defeatism* gave them the creeps and they vetoed them. All internationalist formulations were carefully struck out of magazine and newspaper, including the mere word **imperialism** unless it referred to the national enemy.

Throughout the whole war -an argument overwhelming in itself- they did not organize a single action against it, nor did they hand out a single leaflet. In short, comparing their policy with that of

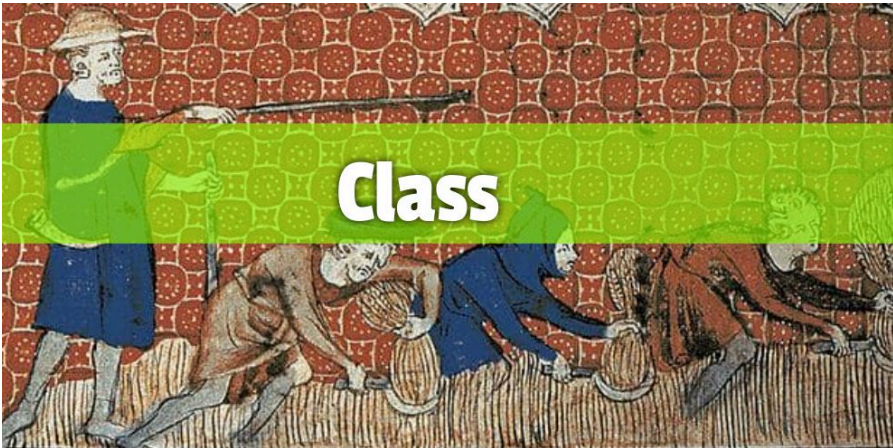
the centrist parties of the time, the British I.L.P. and the Spanish P.O.U.M., the similarity between the two even reached the point of terminological identity. In a word, the S.W.P. replaced revolutionary policy with the bourgeois and Stalinist policy of antifascism, a mere trick of imperialist conscription twin to the Hitlerian struggle *against plutocracy*.

All this was done in the name of tactics and educational efficiency. It is an old custom of opportunists to present their abandonment of principles as practicality or as making things easier for the masses, and at the same time, in moments of repression, as an unavoidable protective legalism. They claim to be deceiving the class enemy when in reality they are receiving its influence; they boast of educating and winning the masses, while they soften the revolutionary content of their own militants. The masses can only be drawn to revolutionary principles and action by formulations and attitudes of the utmost clarity.

The example of the S.W.P. spread. Shortly after its opportunist turn, the British section of the Fourth International, which had achieved considerable growth by supporting the strikes that Labourites and *Trade Unions* patriotically condemned, was also put on trial. Its main leader and defendant chose to defend himself, also invoking practical reasons, with the wretched opportunist verbiage of the *Socialist Workers Party*.

G. Munis. **The Fourth International**

Class



Each of the social groups defined by the productive relations prevailing in a given society.

The division into classes proper to each **mode of production** corresponds to differentiated class interests and to different, more or less incomplete and distorted forms of **consciousness** of those interests, which are expressed through the different **ideologies** present in each epoch.

The concept of class -and with it that of **class struggle**- is the premise on which the possibility of **a materialist critique of History** rests.

The fundamental idea that permeates the whole “Manifesto” - namely:

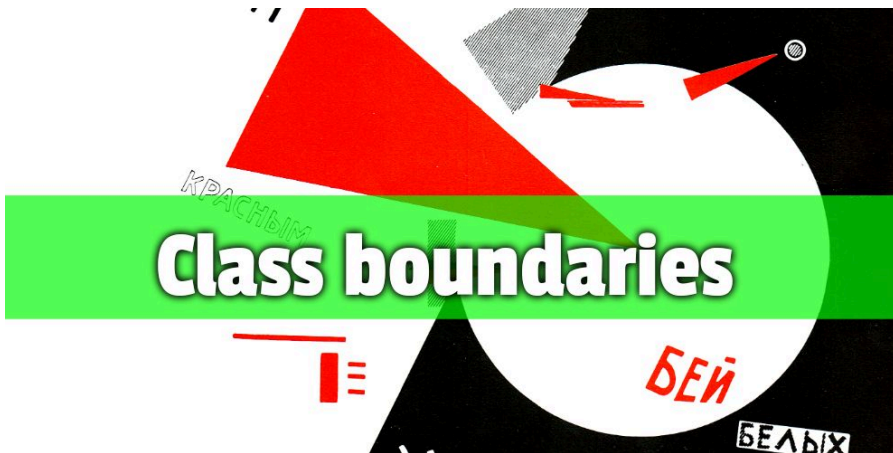
that economic production and the social structure necessarily derived from it in each historical epoch constitute the basis on which the political and intellectual history of that epoch rests;

that, therefore, all history (since the dissolution of the primitive regime of common ownership of land) has been a history of class struggle, of struggle between exploiting and exploited, dominant and dominated classes, in the different phases of social development;

and that this struggle has now reached a stage where the exploited and oppressed class (the proletariat) can no longer emancipate itself from the class that exploits and oppresses it (the bourgeoisie) without emancipating, at the same time and forever, society as a whole from exploitation, oppression and class struggles.

Frederick Engels. **Preface to the German edition of the Communist Manifesto**, 1883

Class boundaries



Basic political positions that express the nature of the proletariat as a universal class and whose negation means the passage of a tendency or method of analysis to the opposite class camp.

Meaning of class boundaries

The axes that define class boundaries are fundamentally two: **internationalism** and **centralism**. Internationalism expresses the universal nature of the **proletariat** in its most obvious geographical sense: the unity of interests of the class regardless of where it is exploited; centralism, its nature as a historical unity determined by **its future** and **its program**, not by the divisions, fractures and scars that, at every moment, reflect the **alienation** inherent and inevitable in a society divided into classes.

Thus, in **decadence**, when supporting any inter-bourgeois conflict can no longer have a **progressive** meaning, taking sides in any war between two bourgeois fractions or any two states can only be a negation of the most basic internationalism, turning whoever defends it into a recruiter for the imperialist slaughter. There is no other possible tactic in the face of any internal confrontation within the ruling class, or between it and factions or groups that support alternative forms of **state capitalism**, than **revolutionary defeatism**.

And in the same way, when an organization or current postulates the need to divide the struggles or political expressions of the class according to situations given by the contingent conditions of exploitation (type of contract, hiring company, etc.) or by “identities” defined by the discriminations suffered (race, nationality, sex, age group, etc.), it is in reality accepting the existence of permanently differentiated interests.

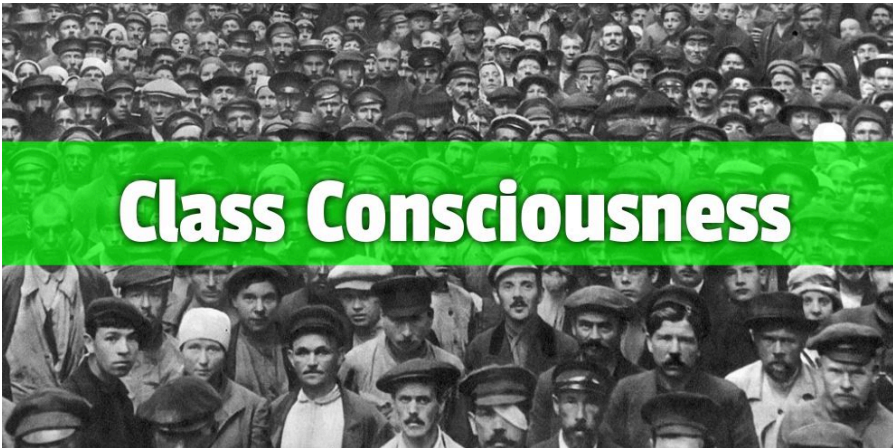
In both cases the universality of the program would disappear, and with it the character of universal class. In the first, universality would be replaced by a mere shifting sum of particular interests born of the organization of labor that capital decides at each moment. In the second, the class program would be subordinated to the interests of supposed political subjects (race, nation, sex, generation) that would transcend the class division of society.

To top it all, some versions -such as so-called “class feminism”- attempt to reconcile class with identity division. The revolutionary political subject would be defined by the “intersection” of two “identities”, that of class and that of sex, generating two differentiated political subjects with their own more or less compatible programs and organizations (the female and the male proletariat); but the proletariat is not an “identity”, and “class culture”, let alone “female class culture” or “male class culture”, is far from **class consciousness**.

Class consciousness is not based on the particularity of certain conditions or experiences but on the universality of exploitation, which is what drives a program, **a perspective based on the affirmation of generic, universal human needs...** the only perspective that carries the only **mode of production** that can overcome **capitalism: communism**, which is in turn the end of all exploitation and oppression within the species.

The road that leads to crossing class boundaries passes through various forms of **opportunism**, but it is always fed by a weakening of **communist morality**: confidence in the capacity of the universal working class to impose the satisfaction of human needs as the ordering criterion of society and its productive metabolism.

Class consciousness



Knowledge and affirmation of the ultimate needs and possibilities historically open to the revolutionary class and of the means necessary to realize them.

Class consciousness and constitution as a political subject

From the moment the **proletariat** appears, its antagonistic position to bourgeois society as a whole forces it to assert generic human needs. As a **universal class**, and one universally denied by capitalism, it can only form itself through a self-recognition, a self-affirmation of its own program, **communism**, and of the means to make it a reality (**internationalism**, **centralism**, etc.). In other words, the process of constitution as a class is, above all, the process of development and extension of class consciousness.

In the development of productive forces there comes a stage when productive forces and means of intercourse are brought into being which, under the existing relationships, only cause mischief, and are no longer productive but destructive forces (machinery and money);

And, at the same time, a class is called forth which has to bear all the burdens of society without enjoying its advantages, which, ousted from society, is forced into the most decided antagonism to all other classes; a class which forms the majority of all members of society, and from which emanates the consciousness of the necessity of a fundamental revolution, the communist consciousness.

Marx and Engels. *The German Ideology*, 1845-1846

Class consciousness is not a “state of opinion”, nor is it born from one. It is born from a historical necessity inscribed in the very being of the **proletariat** as an exploited and revolutionary class: the only interests it can consistently defend are those that reflect generic, universal human needs.

In any struggle, however small, the proletariat needs to affirm a practice that, even unconsciously, reveals itself to be **internationalist** and **centralist**, a way of confronting the order of things that dissolves all barriers, all the particularisms, oppressions and privileges produced by a **split society**.

It is not a question of what this or that proletarian, or even the whole proletariat, at the moment regards as its aim. It is a question of what the proletariat is, and what, in accordance with this being, it will historically be compelled to do. Its aim and historical action is visibly and irrevocably foreshadowed in its own life situation as well as in the whole organisation of bourgeois society today.

Marx and Engels. **The Holy Family**, 1844

Class consciousness, emancipation and revolution

The development of this class consciousness that expresses historical necessity is only attainable in the course of the class struggle. When Marx insists that “the emancipation of the working classes must be conquered by the working classes themselves”, to the point of making it the motto of the First International, he is stressing that class consciousness does not “come from outside”, but is born and develops within the very movement of the class.

Because the key word is “emancipation”. Emancipation does not mean **socialism**, but liberation from tutelage, from the patronage of the ruling class’s thought. The emancipation of the workers is the process in which their collective action -and behind it their class consciousness- frees itself from the dominant **ideology**, a process that merges with the Revolution itself.

Both for the production on a mass scale of this communist consciousness, and for the success of the cause itself, the alteration of men on a mass scale is necessary, an alteration which can only take place in a practical movement, a revolution; this revolution is necessary, therefore, not only because the ruling class cannot be overthrown in any other way, but also because the class overthrowing it can only in a revolution succeed in ridding itself of all the muck of ages and become fitted to found society anew.

Marx and Engels. *The German Ideology*, 1845-1846

Emancipation and militant expressions of the working class

That class consciousness is not something imposed on the class or “inoculated” into it from outside does not mean that it develops in a homogeneous way. The proletariat is not only the last revolutionary class, it is also an exploited and oppressed class, and as such it cannot develop its consciousness in a generalized way from the very first moment.

The proletariat, when it does not react, is only the force through which capitalism reproduces itself, taking advantage of the general apathy of its historical enemy. The working class is then only an amorphous conglomerate of people who get by as best they can to survive in an unbearable society, reproducing the atmosphere of competition and enmity, the unhealthy spirit of capitalism. In a word, it does not act as a class with common interests in the face of the capitalist vermin.

At other times, however, the proletariat acts united as a class bearing the only possible human future: communism. Then two kinds of society can confront each other, one reactionary and the other revolutionary.

Between these two states of affairs and these very facts there are individuals who are revolutionaries regardless of the momentary state in which the class as a whole finds itself; only their number varies according to the social situation. They are revolutionaries because they are aware that their goal and that of the class as a whole is communism.

These revolutionary individuals tend to organize themselves by affinity of ideas, ideas that do not fall from the sky but come from a particular interpretation of the history of the class struggle. From every confrontation between capital and the proletariat lessons are learned, from which revolutionary theory is born and which make it evolve.

G. Munis. **Organization and revolutionary activity**, 1979

The role of these **cupellations** is fundamental. They are specific organs in which, collectively, groups of workers and kindred elements develop the critique (=demolition) of **ideology** from the historical

experiences of the class, in order to nourish and give direction (=meaning) to present and future struggles.

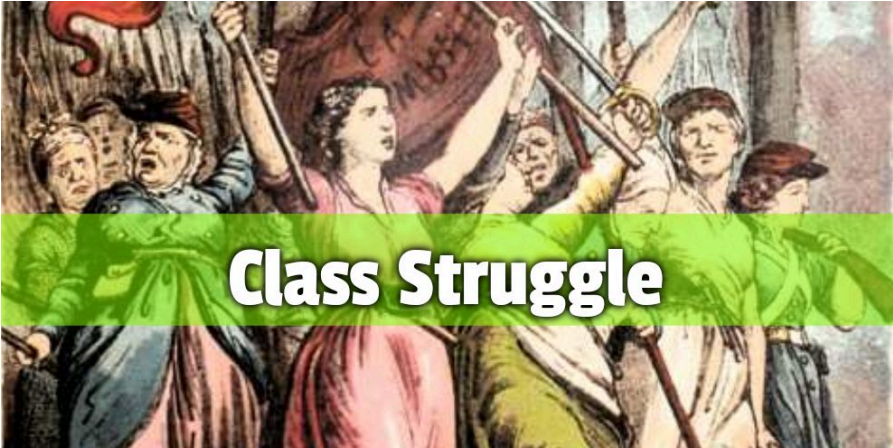
The objective conditions of the communist revolution are not enough to guarantee its victory, and the subjective conditions will not necessarily be engendered by the former. The subjective conditions are nothing other than the theoretical consciousness of previous experience and of the maximum possibilities offered to the proletariat; it is knowledge eager for human action and ready to turn its subjective existence into objective existence.

Party-State, Stalinism, Revolution. G. Munis, 1976

That subjective element forms the **party**, a party *in becoming*, present and necessary from the first political manifestations of the **proletariat**. It is neither an external body nor an entelechy. It is the process of constitution of a conscious minority with effective capacities for the political leadership of the class as a whole.

It therefore unites program and will to act, although its constitution is not a voluntarist act, but a development parallel to that of the constitution of the class as a party within bourgeois society and, finally, as the ruling class in **socialism**, a transition to its own disappearance as a class, **communism**. Party and the unitary mass organization of the class are therefore two dimensions of the same process of the constitution of the proletariat as a political subject and of the development of its class consciousness.

Class struggle



The class struggle is the conflict that develops within every mode of production based on exploitation and therefore on class division. It informs all the ideological expressions of an era, shapes the state and drives its transformation or collapse.

Historical function of the class struggle

The class struggle materializes in social terms, that is, it “subjectivizes”, it endows with a subject, the conflicts that permanently arise between the productive forces of a society and the social relations within which they develop.

Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended, either in a revolutionary reconstitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes.

Karl Marx and Frederick Engels. **Manifesto of the Communist Party**, 1848

These struggles are not occasional or random; they are intrinsic to every class system and therefore accompany it from its origin until it is overcome. The oppressed classes will continuously try to shake off the yoke of their oppressors; the exploited, to free themselves from exploitation.

All history (ever since the dissolution of the primeval communal ownership of land) has been a history of class struggles, of struggles between exploited and exploiting, between dominated and dominating classes at various stages of social evolution.

Frederick Engels. **Preface to the German edition of the Communist Manifesto**, 1883

But although all the exploited classes have always fought against their situation, the insufficient development of society's productive forces (the material impossibility of abundance, of **communism**) reserved the role of revolutionary class for other classes. Only the *coloni* at the end of the slave era or the bourgeoisie under the feudal regime could, in their historical context, transform the juridical-political structure of society according to their particular interests while at the same time producing a *progressive* alternative for society as a whole.

With the coming to power of the bourgeoisie and the development of the capitalist mode of production, however, the exploited class and the revolutionary class coincide for the first time.

This struggle, however, has now reached a stage where the exploited and oppressed class (the proletariat) can no longer emancipate itself from the class which exploits and oppresses it (the bourgeoisie), without at the same time forever freeing the whole of society from exploitation, oppression and class struggles.

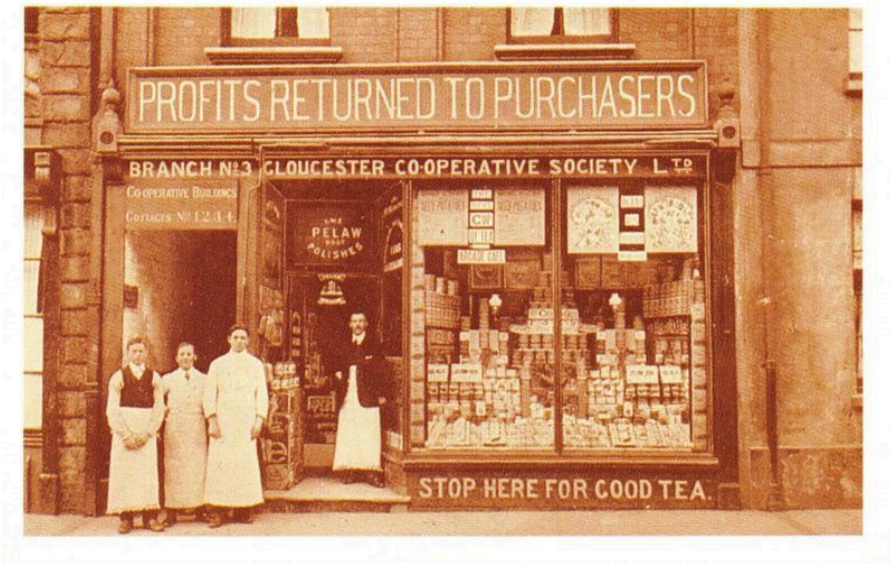
Frederick Engels. **Preface to the German edition of the Communist Manifesto**, 1883

Collectivities



Collectivities was the name given in Spanish, until the Spanish Revolution, to cooperatives - both producers' and consumers' - and communally run holdings set up by workers. During the Revolution the term was extended to the organizations that spontaneously organized the production and distribution of goods in an attempt to supply the militias but, above all, to abolish wage labor from its base and to try out a productive metabolism centered on the direct satisfaction of human needs.

From the first cooperatives to the Spanish Revolution



Gloucester 1910, consumers' cooperative set up by railway workers.

While consumers' cooperatives were considered *collectivities*, groupings of smallholders or stockbreeders and industrial associations were not considered *collectivities*. In that sense *collectivity* is much more precise and at the same time broader than *cooperative*. It embraces both producers' and consumers' cooperatives, but leaves out cooperatives of businesses and proprietors.

It was *collectivities* that set up the first workers' education and health systems in the 19th century, that built the **people's houses** in the early 20th century, and that financed a good part of the great industrial strikes.

In addition, during the years of the revolution (1936-37) the name *collectivities* was given to the organizations that spontaneously organized the production and distribution of goods in an attempt to supply the militias but, above all, to abolish wage labor from its base and to try out a productive metabolism centered on the direct satisfaction of human needs.

This second meaning is actually the one that gives the term its full sense, by revealing the deep intentions and goals of the experiences that preceded it. In fact, during the Spanish Revolution, in most cases it was old collectivities of day laborers - which in towns like Llerena integrated consumption and production - that served as the skeleton for the district-wide and whole-village collectivities that, from July 19 onwards, abolished wages and proceeded to distribute food and basic necessities according to the needs of each family.

Viewed in perspective, the collectivities were an important building block for the organization of the working class during its rise as a political subject, and the starting point from which, in the Revolution, it attempted to take over the productive apparatus in order to overcome its capitalist organization.

The collectivities in the Spanish Revolution

Within the framework of the Revolution, the collectivities became a moment of the seizure of the productive apparatus by the workers.

The expropriation of capitalism by workers and peasants must necessarily begin, as in Spain, with the workers taking possession of the economic units as they exist. In the countryside, which lacks the cellular agglutination of industry, grouping occurs spontaneously on the basis of villages and districts possessing a certain unity. It is the starting point of socialist property, but not socialist property itself. It is group property. That was the main defect of the collectivities, which the reactionary combination of Stalinists, reformists and bourgeois exploited to expropriate the proletariat.

The collectivities spread throughout the country, in countryside and city, immediately after July. Against them too, the enemies of the revolution did not launch their attack until they felt protected by sufficient armed forces. Worker and peasant property was generally recognized as a *fait accompli*.

G. Munis. **Property (Chapter VIII of “Jalones de derrota, promesa de victoria”)**, 1947

But beware: it is a moment in a dynamic process. It is the totality - the political and social revolution - that gives it meaning. But group ownership - which is what a collectivity is - is only that, a moment; it is not socialism in itself, nor revolutionary in itself, not even by virtue of attacking the commodification of labor power.

Group property cannot be more than a moment in the socialist transformation of production. It cannot possibly be retained for longer than the minimum time necessary for the workers in possession of the former capitalist enterprises to articulate all production and consumption on a national scale.

The intention of the proletariat and peasants in expropriating the bourgeoisie was in no way to become owners themselves, but to create the socialist economy.

The very experience of the collectivities led them to understand that these should be the starting point of a nationwide organization of production and distribution.

The socialist economy must always set itself two main objectives: to satisfy the needs of the poor population and to make the fullest use of all natural resources and technical possibilities. The latter constitutes the basis for satisfying the needs of the poor population and, developed on an international scale, must create the conditions for the complete disappearance of classes and of the State.

A task impossible to accomplish without planning the economy, without which it is not even possible to take advantage of all the productivity that modern technology allows. The seizure and setting in motion of the production centers by their respective workers was an obligatory first step. Stopping there was bound to prove disastrous.

G. Munis. **Property (Chapter VIII of “Jalones de derrota, promesa de victoria”)**, 1947

The collectivities are the spearhead not only of the day laborers (proletariat), but also of the independent peasantry living at subsistence level or, at least, without wage-earners.

Defeat does not detract from the example set by the peasants. Until now, the alliance of the peasants with the proletariat, particularly in countries with remnants of feudal agrarian organization, was posed on unequal ground.

On the industrial and urban terrain, expropriation of the bourgeoisie (socialist measures); in the countryside, distribution of land to the peasants (bourgeois-democratic measures). The Spanish revolution has revealed that the alliance of the proletariat and the peasants can be posed, at least in Spain, on a socialist basis. The technical insufficiencies of the country can be provisionally made up for by the revolutionary sufficiency of the peasantry.

The socialist lucidity of the Aragonese peasants went so far as to understand the need for economic coordination between their collectivities and the industrial collectivities of the proletariat. The first initiative in that direction came from the countryside, proposing a single system of production and administration for all the collectivities.

Through their own experience, the idea also imposed itself on the industrial collectivities. But it was absolutely impossible to carry out without the full possession of political power by the proletariat and the peasants. By the time the idea had become more or less clear, the capitalist State was already expropriating the proletariat, and its weapons, its organs of power and its revolutionary energy had been destroyed in May.

G. Munis. **Property (Chapter VIII of “Jalones de derrota, promesa de victoria”)**, 1947

Finally, one must not fall for the manipulation and reinterpretation - constant after 1968 - of the workers' collectivizations and the day laborers' and peasants' collectivities as "self-management."

The collectivities of 1936-37 in Spain are not a case of self-management *avant la lettre*. Some organized a sort of local communism with no commodity relations other than with the outside, precisely like the ancient societies of primitive communism. Others were trade or village cooperatives, whose members shared out among themselves the former profits of capital. All of them more or less abandoned the remuneration of workers according to the laws of the labor power market, as well as, some more than others, according to the necessary labor and surplus labor from which capital draws surplus value and the whole substance of its social organization. Moreover, the collectivities made gifts in kind to the combat militias, as abundant as they were repeated.

The collectivities can therefore be defined only by their revolutionary characteristics, in short, by their system of production and distribution in rupture with the capitalist notions of value (necessarily exchange value), autonomy of management being a mere form in contradiction with their deep content. So much so that it was not only the cause of their difficulties, but what allowed Stalinism and the government subservient to it to fight them and finally destroy them. Autonomy of management was thus the negation of the collectivities. They themselves realized it, but too late.

G. Munis. Letter of protest to the journal "Autogestion et Socialisme" (1972)

Commodification



Historical process of market expansion through the transformation of social relations and the production of goods into commodities.

Commodification and the market

From its very foundations capitalism is a vast commodifying process. It begins with the conversion of land and agricultural labor into commodities, the end of the common lands and the development of agricultural productivity. From there on, the whole development and expansion of **rising capitalism** will take the form of a generalized commodification of existing social relations.

The bourgeoisie, wherever it has got the upper hand, has put an end to all feudal, patriarchal, idyllic relations. It has pitilessly torn asunder the motley feudal ties that bound man to his “natural superiors”, and has left remaining no other nexus between man and man than naked self-interest, than callous “cash payment”.

It has drowned the most heavenly ecstasies of religious fervour, of chivalrous enthusiasm, of philistine sentimentalism, in the icy water of egotistical calculation. It has resolved personal worth into exchange value, and in place of the numberless indefeasible chartered freedoms, has set up that single, unconscionable freedom — Free Trade. In one word, for exploitation, veiled by religious and political illusions, it has substituted naked, shameless, direct, brutal exploitation.

The bourgeoisie has stripped of its halo every occupation hitherto honoured and looked up to with reverent awe. It has converted the physician, the lawyer, the priest, the poet, the man of science, into its paid wage labourers.

The bourgeoisie has torn away from the family its sentimental veil, and has reduced the family relation to a mere money relation.

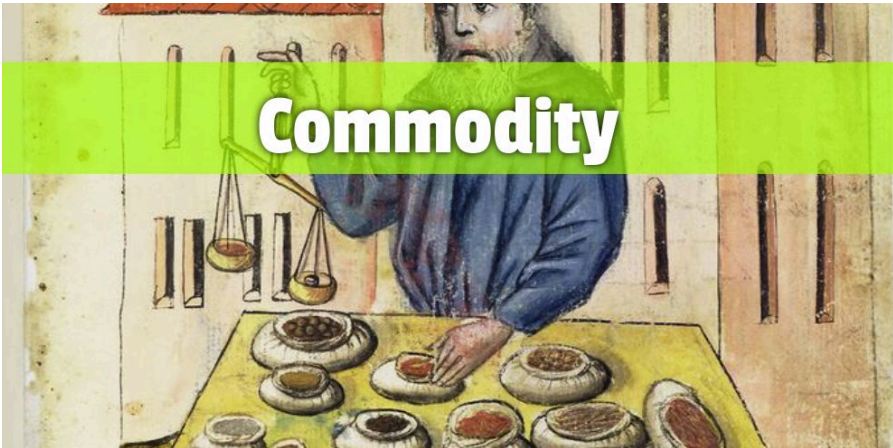
Karl Marx, Frederick Engels. *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, 1848

The development of the market will have an “inward” dimension, as a generalized commodification of social relations, and another as the overseas expansion of the market. From the British invasions of the Río de la Plata to Commodore Perry forcing Japan to open up to trade, each enlargement of the world market will set in motion the commodification of relations in each place, sometimes starting practically from scratch.

During British expansion, in vast regions where not even a marginal market existed, as in much of Africa, the whole weight of the state was thrown into forcing the imposition of wage labor -necessary to create **surplus value**, which is the aim of capitalism- by means of taxes on communities that had to be paid in the colonizer's currency. The only way to obtain currency was to work on the new plantations created by the first colonization companies.

The extra-economic violence of the tax thus imposed the cycle of capitalist production and accumulation in the form of a forced commodification of labor, which until then had been a direct application of human skill and strength to nature, and now became **labor power**, a commodity exchanged for its equivalent in money before a buyer endowed with equal formal rights in the process of buying and selling.

Commodity



Any result of human labor that is produced in order to be exchanged on the market.

Origin of the commodity

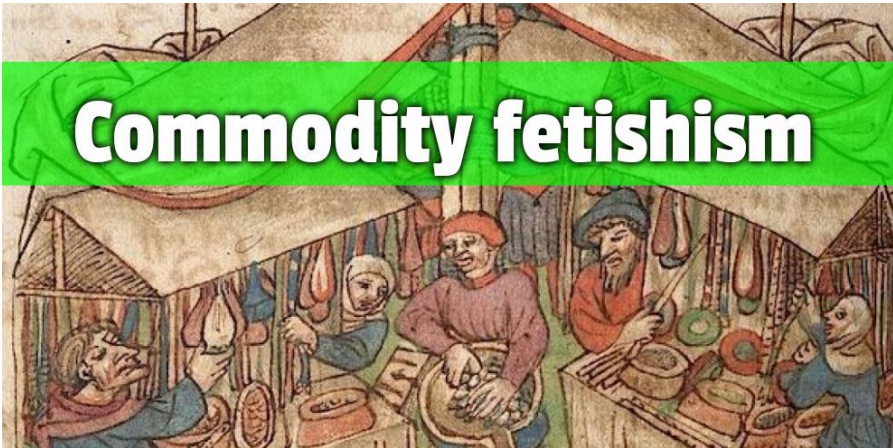
Not every product of human **labor** is a commodity. In fact, until very recently most production was not carried out for the market. Not even the first Neolithic exchanges can be considered commodity trade. As far as we know, the original experiences of exchange took the form of more or less symbolic and ritualized donations of reciprocal gifts between communities. The goods and services exchanged did not establish an exchange **value** between them, were not meant to be equivalent and were therefore not commodities.

During the development of slavery as a mode of production, commodity exchange expanded for the first time, without becoming the main aim of social production. After all, the main productive force, slave labor, was a commodity only in a very limited sense.

The feudalism that followed was not a commodity system either, and in fact the minting of coins was practically non-existent in Europe from the eighth to the tenth centuries and very scarce until the twelfth. Feudal serfs can be considered commodity producers only very marginally and belatedly: most of their labor produced useful objects for their own consumption or that of their lords, which were not intended for exchange nor measured by an exchange **value**. Not even the **labor power** of the peasant and the land he worked could be sold or exchanged for other commodities or for money.

Capitalism is the first mode of production that requires the **commodification** of all products and social relations. Its spread has turned the commodity into the universal form of labor and its products, and in doing so it has cloaked social relations in the false egalitarianism of exchange between equivalents, presenting relations between people as relations between things: the famous **commodity fetishism**.

Commodity fetishism



“Spontaneous” representation of the social relations of production, which bind people and classes, in the form of relations between equivalent commodities, i.e. relations between social objects equalized in their exchange value.

Origin of commodity fetishism

The exchange of **commodities** in the market is by definition an exchange of equivalents. Equivalents in exchange **value**, that is, in abstract social labor. **Value**, which is a social relationship between people organized in classes, then blurs its nature by representing itself as a social relationship between things, between goods -be they tangible or intangible- that are found in the market.

Where, then, does the enigmatic character of the product of labor come from, as soon as it assumes the form of a commodity? Obviously, from that very form. The equality of human labors takes the material form of the equal objectivity of value of the products of labor; the measure of the expenditure of human labor power by its duration takes the form of the magnitude of value of the products of labor; finally, the relations between the producers, in which the social determinations of their labors are made effective, take the form of a social relation between the products of labor.

The mysterious character of the commodity form consists, then, simply in the fact that it reflects back to men the social character of their own labor as objective characters inherent in the products of labor, as natural social properties of those things, and therefore also reflects the social relation between the producers and the total labor as a social relation between objects, existing apart from the producers. (...)

The commodity form, and the value relation between the products of labor in which that form is represented, have absolutely nothing to do with their physical nature or with the material relations arising from that nature. What here takes on, for men, the phantasmagoric form of a relation between things is only the definite social relation between men themselves.

Hence, in order to find a fitting analogy, we must take refuge in the misty realm of the religious world. There the products of the human mind appear as autonomous figures, endowed with a life of their own, entering into relations with one another and with men. So it is in the world of commodities with the products of

men's hands. This I call the fetishism that attaches itself to the products of labor as soon as they are produced as commodities, and which is inseparable from commodity production.

Karl Marx. **Capital**, 1867

Commodity fetishism as a specifically capitalist form of alienation

The fracture of the human community into classes with antagonistic interests marked the beginning of **alienation**: the human, the social, present themselves as alien to the human; they flee to the heavens of **ideology** in order to hold together in the fantasies of the intellect what is antagonistic in the material social world. **Alienation** is nothing more than the imaginary separation of the species from the very relations that define its social organization.

However, unlike the exploiting classes that preceded it, capitalist exploitation is completely “economic”. The feudal lord took a piece of production and of social labor “by right”, within the framework of a personal, concrete relationship with his serfs. There is no fetishism whatsoever in what is in reality nothing more than an extra-economic levy.

The natural form of labor, its particularity, and not, as on the basis of commodity production, its generality, is what here constitutes its directly social form. Servile corvée labor is measured by time, just like commodity-producing labor, but no serf is unaware that what is involved is a definite quantity of his own personal labor power, expended by him in the service of his lord. The tithe he hands over to the priest is more transparent than the priest's blessing.

Whatever judgment we may make of the masks that men wear here in playing their respective roles, the fact is that the social relations between persons in their labor appear as their own personal relations, and are not disguised as social relations between things, between the products of labor.

Karl Marx. *Capital*, 1867

The leap from concrete personal labor to abstract social labor in the relationship of exploitation makes commodity fetishism a qualitative leap in the process of abstraction proper to every form of *alienation*. It is its specifically capitalist and completely abstract form. While slave-owners and feudal lords had to found their exploitation on the *external* will of the gods, the commodity makes social relations appear *by themselves* as relations between things, between social objects alien to those who produced them, in the same way that *surplus value* appears as a *spontaneous* result of human *labor* when it is sold as a commodity in the form of *labor power*.

Communism



Mode of production of a decommodified society where abundance is a reality, the state does not exist and social production is oriented, as its direct objective, towards the satisfaction of needs. In it labor and its products have already lost the condition of commodities, social classes have disappeared and with them the difference between leisure time and work, country and city, the division of labor and in general all the social divisions that reflect the fracture of exploitative societies.

Communism as a society of abundance

In communism, consumption is determined by needs, and needs exclusively by each individual within the framework of a collective consciousness of the species.

When the enslaving subordination of individuals to the division of labor has disappeared, and with it the opposition between intellectual and manual labor; when labor is no longer merely a means of life but life's first need; when, with the all-round development of individuals, the productive forces have also grown and the springs of collective wealth flow in full stream, only then can the narrow horizon of bourgeois right be crossed in its entirety and society inscribe on its banners: From each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs!

Karl Marx. *Critique of the Gotha Program*, 1875

The progressive reduction of the working day during **socialism** has eliminated wage labor. Labor, instead, fuses the expression and development of one's own personality with the conscious and collective activity, as a species, of transforming our environment. The socialization of production thus reaches its culmination, not in the crude manner of **state capitalism** but in an organic form, like that *social worker* which can be glimpsed today, in the midst of capitalist contradictions, beneath *big data* or free software development communities.

In short, it goes without saying that immediate labor time cannot always stand opposed to free time, as is the case in the bourgeois economic system. (...) Free time -which is both leisure and higher activity- will naturally transform its possessor into a different subject, and it is as this new subject that he will enter the process of immediate production.

Karl Marx. *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*, 1857-1858

In communism, with the disappearance of wage labor, the division of labor and **alienation** also disappear.

The division of labor offers us the first example of how, as long as men live in primitive society, as long as, therefore, there is a separation between the particular interest and the common interest, as long as activities, consequently, are not divided voluntarily but naturally, man's own deeds become an alien and hostile power that stands opposed to him and subjugates him, instead of being controlled by him.

For as soon as labor begins to be divided, each person moves within a particular, exclusive sphere of activity which is imposed on him and from which he cannot escape; he is a hunter, a fisherman, a shepherd or a critic, and must remain so if he does not want to lose his means of livelihood;

In communism, by contrast, each individual does not have an exclusive sphere of activity marked out for him, but can develop his aptitudes in whatever branch he wishes; society regulates general production and thus makes it possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening and, after dinner, if I so please, devote myself to criticism, without ever becoming exclusively a hunter, fisherman, shepherd or critic, as the case may be.

Marx and Engels. **The German Ideology**, 1846

And with the division of labor, the artificial fracture between manual and intellectual labor.

The overpowering subjection of individuals to the division of labor will have disappeared, and with it also the opposition between intellectual and manual labor; labor will no longer be only a means of life, but will even have become the first vital need; (and) with the many-sided development of individuals their productive capacities will also have grown and all the springs of collective wealth will flow in abundance.

Karl Marx. *Critique of the Gotha Program*, 1875

The end of the division of labor is not a mere organizational fact; it transforms people's entire experience of life, freeing their capacities and socializing them.

The exclusive concentration of artistic talent in particular individuals, and its consequent suppression in the broad mass, is a consequence of the division of labor (...) in any case, in a communist organization of society there disappears the subordination of the artist to local and national narrowness, which arises entirely from the division of labor, and also the subordination of the individual to some definite art, so that there are exclusively painters, sculptors, etc.; the very name already expresses eloquently enough the narrowness of his professional development and his dependence on the division of labor.

In a communist society there are no painters, but at most men who, among other things, also paint.

Marx and Engels. *The German Ideology*, 1846

With all these divisions, the **alienation** characteristic of exploitative societies also disappears, vanishing at its root. In communism, a decommodified society, there is no **commodity fetishism**. The product

no longer appears mediated by money, nor even as an exchange, but as the materialization of social labor, of the common metabolism with Nature that socially organized human labor has become.

Within the collective society based on common ownership of the means of production, the producers do not exchange their products; just as little does the labor employed on the products appear here as the value of these products, as a material quality possessed by them, since now, in contrast to capitalist society, individual labor no longer exists in an indirect fashion but directly as a component part of total labor.

Karl Marx. *Critique of the Gotha Program*, 1875

Communism as a dynamic element of the present

Communism is not only, as the only possible alternative to capitalism, a necessity for Humanity and the “true beginning of human history”, as Marx pointed out, but a determining element of the present through the **proletariat**, whose struggles claim universal needs, making present the defining principle of the communist social metabolism to come: “to each according to his needs”.

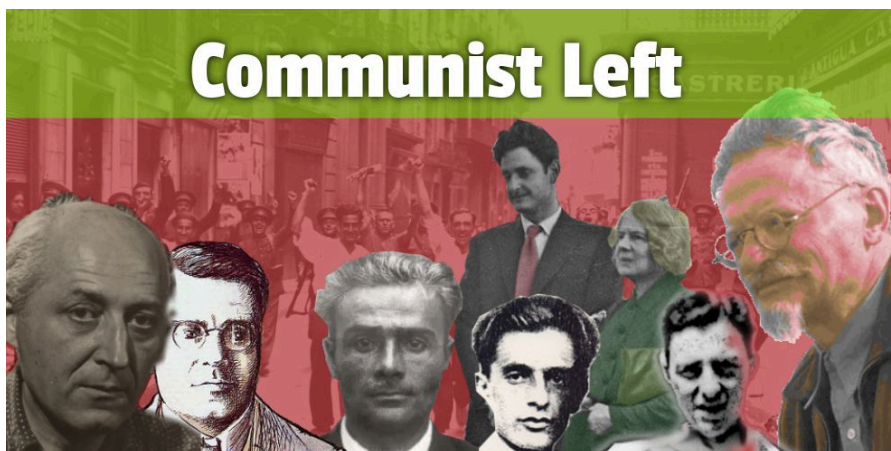
In every struggle in which the proletariat asserts itself, however modest its demands, the principle of human need is asserted over the logic of **accumulation**, and thus the communist program is already sketched out: the organization, on a universal scale -that of the class-of universal human needs.

This is what Marx and Engels were already referring to in 1846 when they defined Communism not as a state of affairs to be established but as a movement that already operates persistently in the present.

Communism is for us not a state of affairs which is to be established, an ideal to which reality will have to adjust itself. We call communism the real movement which abolishes the present state of things.

Marx and Engels. *The German Ideology*, 1846

Communist left



Movement of the internationalists in struggle against the Stalinist degeneration of the Third International and against the defensist degeneration of the Fourth International from 1942 onwards.

Origins of the communist left

The rise of **Stalinism** did not go unchallenged within the Russian Communist Party. From 1923 onwards, sometimes amid great confusion, the tendencies that resisted the hollowing out of the soviets in favor of the state apparatus, and the accompanying assertion of the interests of national capital over the world Revolution, gradually gathered around the Left Opposition, which saw in Trotsky and Rakovsky its most qualified spokesmen.

The struggle of the Left Opposition in the years 23-28 took place on different levels. We will not go into a detailed analysis. Let us briefly recall the main issues:

On the domestic level: struggle against the growing bureaucratization of the party and the State, struggle against the kulak danger [agrarian bourgeoisie] and, increasingly openly, against the “nepmen” [private petty bourgeoisie born in the heat of the state capitalism of the NEP].

The Opposition advocates a new course of anti-bureaucratic measures, a policy towards the peasantry relying on the poor peasants and directed against the kulaks, and a progressive collectivization of the countryside grounded in greater industrial development and economic planning.

On the international level: struggle against the Stalin-Bukharin course (Anglo-Russian Committee, alliance with Chiang Kai-shek in the Chinese revolution).

On the theoretical level, which guided the whole international policy: struggle against the theory of “socialism in one country”, and defense of the Bolshevik program, which Trotsky upholds in the theory of “permanent revolution”.

Jacques Roussel. “Les enfants du prophète”

From the proclamation of “socialism in one country” in 1928, various opposition groups took shape in the International. When Trotsky arrived in exile in Turkey, he became their natural point of reference.

Trotsky was expelled from the party in 1927 and then from Russia. Most members of the Left Opposition were forced to submit and “repent” after being expelled from the party. All of them alike would be sent to prisons and “socialist” deportation camps, where they would all end up murdered or executed as traitors and foreign agents. **The Russian opposition was physically liquidated.** Then came the turn of the Stalinists themselves who had known the October revolution. The Bolshevik party was also physically liquidated.

For the Revolution and for the International Opposition it was an immense loss. Nowhere else had there been a revolutionary party comparable to the Bolshevik party, tempered in the harsh privations of clandestinity, of revolution, of civil war, of power. With its extermination all the communist revolutionary traditions perished. The disappearance of the Russian left oppositionists was, in particular, an irreparable loss, for they were the bearers, to the very end, of the revolutionary, theoretical and organizational capital amassed over many years. Communist continuity was carried on practically by Trotsky alone.

Jacques Roussel. “Les enfants du prophète”

Between 1930 and 1931 Trotsky managed to lay a fragile basis for joint work among the various groups and tendencies that were springing up in each country. His battle was above all to define the “International Left Opposition” within a world political framework, breaking with the tendency of various groups, from Urbahns in Germany to the Bordigists in Italy, to form tendencies exclusively on the basis of a specific national experience or, at least, on the limited basis of a national organization.

I consider your conception of internationalism to be mistaken. In the last analysis, you conceive of the International as a sum of national sections or as the product of the mutual influence of national sections. This conception of the International is, at best, one-sided, undialectical and therefore wrong. If the communist left throughout the world consisted of only five individuals, they would nevertheless be obliged to build an international organization simultaneously with one or more national organizations.

It is wrong to regard the national organization as the foundation and the international as the roof. The relationship between the two is of an entirely different kind. Marx and Engels started the communist movement in 1847 with an international document and with the creation of an international organization. The same thing happened with the creation of the First International. The Zimmerwald Left followed the same path in preparing the Third International. It is far more imperative to follow this path today than in Marx's time. It is of course possible, in the epoch of imperialism, for a revolutionary proletarian tendency to arise in this or that country, but it cannot thrive and develop in an isolated country; on the day after its creation it must seek or establish international ties, an international platform, an international organization, because this is the only way that can guarantee the correctness of the national line. A tendency that shuts itself up within national limits for years condemns itself irretrievably to degeneration.

“To the editorial board of *Prometeo*”, Leon Trotsky, June 19, 1930

The “International Left Opposition” would group most of the communist lefts as an “opposition”, that is, still claiming to be part of the degenerating Third International and setting itself the goal of

rescuing it.

The Fourth International

When in 1933 the KPD and the International cleared Hitler's path to power and accepted that he should take over the leadership of the German state without an insurrectionary response, it became evident that the International and its parties were already a dead body from the standpoint of the class program. The "International Left Opposition" could no longer conceive of itself as a mere fraction of it, because the prospect of rescuing it had become utopian. Reality would be even worse. The International was not only a dying organization beyond any possible resuscitation. The Spanish Revolution would show that the Communist parties had gone from passive accomplices to organizers and vanguard of the counter-revolution.

Precisely when the revolution was reaching its peak in Spain, in 1936, the Stalinist counter-revolution was consolidating its power in Russia for many years to come, through the extermination of millions of people. Consequently, its Spanish branch deliberately behaved, from July 19 onwards, as the standard-bearer of the counter-revolution, covertly at first, brazenly from May 1937. With full premeditation and on strict orders from Moscow, it fell upon a proletariat that had just annihilated capitalism. That fact, attested by thousands of Stalinist documents of the time, represents a definitive reactionary mutation of Stalinism abroad, in keeping with the previous mutation of its matrix, Russian Stalinism.

A conditioned reflex of the various fragments of the Fourth International, and of others who look on it with disdain, assigns to Stalinism an opportunist and reformist role, of class collaboration, comparable to that of Kerensky or Noske. A grave error, for what Stalinism did was to lead the counter-revolution politically and to carry it out with its own weapons, its own henchmen and its own uniformed and secret police. It immediately stood out as the party of the reactionary extreme right in the red zone, indispensable for annihilating the revolution. As in Russia, and long before Eastern Europe, China, Vietnam, etc., the so-called Communist Party acted as owner of capital, monopolized by a State of its own. It is impossible to imagine a more thoroughly anti-communist policy. Far from collaborating with the bourgeois republican parties or with the Socialist party, which still retained a reformist bent, it was these that collaborated with it, and they soon appeared to its left, as traditional democrats. Both were at once astonished and fearful, watching the treacherous anti-revolutionary skill of a party they still regarded as communist. But they consented, for with their own devices they were faltering before the immense flood of workers.

“Reaffirmation”. G. Munis, 1977

The defeat of the Spanish Revolution by two hands - the Spanish Republic led by Stalinism, and fascism led by Franco - left the way open for a new imperialist world war. The Bolsheviks had judged that one of the causes of the lack of synchronization and the weaknesses at the start of the revolutionary wave against the first great imperialist war had been the absence of an international revolutionary political organization after the betrayal of social democracy. The answer would be the founding of the Fourth International in 1938... at the height of the counter-revolution, with the aim of preparing a worldwide agitation on the principle of **revolutionary defeatism** that could serve to turn the impending imperialist world war into a global communist revolution.

The skeptics ask: But has the moment come to create a new International? It is impossible, they say, to create an International “artificially”. Only great events can bring it into being, etc. All these expressions prove only that the skeptics are no good for creating a new International. Generally speaking, skeptics are no good for anything.

The Fourth International has already arisen out of great events: the greatest defeats of the proletariat in history. The cause of these defeats is the degeneration and betrayal of the old leadership. The class struggle does not tolerate interruptions. The Third International, following the Second, is dead for the revolution.

Long live the Fourth International!

But the skeptics do not keep quiet: But has the moment already come to proclaim it? The Fourth International, we reply, has no need to be “proclaimed”. It exists and it fights. Is it weak? Yes, its ranks are still few because it is still young. So far it consists mainly of leading cadres. But these cadres are the only hope of the revolutionary future; they are the only ones truly worthy of the name. If our International is still numerically weak, it is strong in its doctrine, its tradition and the incomparable temper of its leading cadres. That this is not visible today is of no great importance. Tomorrow it will be more evident.

The Fourth International already enjoys the well-deserved hatred of the Stalinists, the social democrats, the bourgeois liberals and the fascists. It has not and cannot have any place in any popular front. It irreconcilably fights all political groupings tied to the bourgeoisie. Its mission is to do away with the domination of capital; its aim is socialism; its method, the proletarian revolution. Without internal democracy there is no revolutionary education.

Without discipline there is no revolutionary action. The internal regime of the Fourth International is governed by the principles of democratic centralism: complete freedom in discussion, absolute unity in action.

The present crisis of human civilization is the crisis of the proletarian leadership. The revolutionary workers grouped around the Fourth International show their class the way out of the crisis. They offer it a program based on the international experience of the proletariat and of all the oppressed in general; they offer it a spotless banner.

Workers and working women of all countries, rally under the banner of the Fourth International.

It is the banner of your coming victory!

“Under the banner of the Fourth International”, Leon Trotsky, 1938

In theory, the formation of a new International closed the fractional stage and therefore the historical time for a “communist left”. Among other reasons because, although some tendencies inside and outside the Fourth International went on calling Stalinism “centrist”, there was no longer either a right or a center. The Third International had become the active organizer of the counter-revolution and was getting ready to be the main recruiting sergeant for a new imperialist war.

The communist left... of the Fourth International

The road to the collapse of the International began, while Trotsky was still alive, with the “Emergency Conference”. German troops had entered Paris and nothing seemed more prudent than to move the organs of the International to the US, then a neutral country that

would take another two years to enter the war. Doing so meant that the SWP would become the center of the organization, a center counterbalanced and supervised only from afar - at a time when travel and communications were little short of heroic - by a Trotsky who lived harassed and besieged in Mexico until his assassination by Stalinist agents in 1940.

Within a few weeks of Trotsky's death, the SWP began to adopt an increasingly "defensist" discourse, close to "anti-fascism". War on war, the transformation of the imperialist war into revolutionary civil war, turns into an ambiguous non-support and non-intervention. Cannon, the main leader of the SWP, offers to support the Roosevelt government, should it enter the war, if the military training of the workers before they go to the front, regimented in the regular army, is left in the hands of the unions. Even so, and although it is obvious that under this policy the SWP will pose no danger to the war effort of the American bourgeoisie, in 1941 the main leaders of the party are put on trial in Minneapolis. Their defense, unlike that of Luxemburg or Liebknecht, is shameful. At one point in the trial he goes so far as to say:

Both our members and the workers we influence have to go to war and do what the rulers of this country tell them. As long as we do not have a majority behind us, we are in no position to do anything but obey orders.

Instead of turning the trial into a trial of militarism and imperialism, they play with ambiguity, reducing the party's aspirations to a political opposition that Cannon sums up as continuing to write and speak for a different foreign policy for America.

Russia was still out of the war when the first symptoms of going astray appeared in the American party (Socialist Workers Party). Shortly afterwards, with the whole world now in the slaughter, the S.W.P. deliberately withdrew its revolutionary formulations against the imperialist war and refused to take any action of struggle against it. It justified itself by claiming to camouflage itself from the eye of the police and to adapt its tone to what the then patriotic ears of the proletariat could take in. But what is most despicable and at the same time tragic about opportunism is that, while cutting itself off from the revolutionary education and mobilization of the masses, it does not escape the blows of reaction unless it submits to it entirely. Thus the leaders of the S.W.P. found themselves sarcastically accused by their government of internationalism and revolutionary defeatism, the very things they were dodging, and went to prison for a year and a half or two for a crime they had the duty to commit, but which they always took good care not to commit. [...]

The American leaders of the S.W.P. had little of the fiber and mental consistency of a Liebknecht. Before their judges they proclaimed the need to transform the imperialist war not into civil war but into a genuine war against fascism. They clumsily accused the American government of being incapable of finishing off Berlin, and their press put forward splendid programs for defeating Hitler. The words “revolutionary defeatism” set their teeth on edge, and they vetoed them. All internationalist formulations were carefully struck out of magazine and newspaper, even the mere word “imperialism” unless it referred to the national enemy. Throughout the war - an overwhelming argument in itself - they did not organize a single action against it, nor hand out a single leaflet. Finally, comparing their policy with that of the centrist parties of the day, the British I.L.P. and the

Spanish P.O.U.M., the similarity between them went as far as identity of terminology. In a word, the S.W.P. replaced revolutionary policy with the bourgeois and Stalinist policy of anti-fascism, a mere imperialist recruiting trick, twin of the Hitlerite struggle against plutocracy.

All this was done in the name of tactics and educational efficiency. It is an old habit of opportunists to present their abandonment of principles as practicality or as making things easy for the masses, and at the same time, in moments of repression, as an unavoidable protective legalism. They claim to be deceiving the class enemy when in reality they are receiving its influence; they boast of educating and winning the masses, while softening the revolutionary content of their own militants. The masses cannot be drawn to revolutionary principles and action except by formulations and attitudes of the utmost clarity.

The example of the S.W.P. spread. Shortly after its opportunist turn, the British section of the Fourth International, which had achieved considerable growth by supporting the strikes that Labour and the Trade Unions patriotically condemned, was also put on trial. Its main leader and defendant chose to defend himself, also invoking practical reasons, with the miserable opportunist verbiage of the Socialist Workers Party.

The pernicious repercussions of these two examples cannot be properly understood without bearing in mind that the United States was then the seat of the world Executive Committee and that, owing to the war, the press of the American party - and to a lesser degree that of the British - was the only one able to reach all the sections and groups in the countries not occupied by Germany and Japan.

In spite of everything, cries of alarm and indignation were heard at once. The author of these lines, then a member of the world Executive Committee, raised the alarm as early as 1941, when the first warning symptoms of opportunism appeared, before the shameful brazenness to which the trial gave rise. After the trial, the Spanish Group in exile in Mexico, which included French militants and militants from other countries, publicly dissociated itself from the American majority and from the Executive Committee, following an independent policy from then on. At the same time, it drafted a vigorous document criticizing the majority and vindicating proletarian internationalism, submitting it for discussion in all the sections with a view to a future world congress. We shall see later what became of it. But that was not the only condemnation of opportunism. Others arose in China, in South America, within the S.W.P. itself. It was later learned that others also arose in France.

Thus, still in the midst of the world war and with the victory of either side still undecided, the policy of the Fourth International, set out mainly by the American party, appeared as a grave abandonment of internationalist principles and tasks. This failure, this capitulation, it must be said without mincing words, led those responsible for it to a contemptible subterfuge. Since it was plainly impossible for them to display fidelity to proletarian internationalism, they invented their own fidelity to principles in the defense of Russia as a degenerated workers' state, all the more comfortable since Russia, after its friendship with Hitler, had become the beloved ally of the opportunists' respective fatherlands.

In the Fourth International, the defense of Russia was never anything but a debatable opinion, subject to the test of experience. Within it there lived tendencies radically opposed to the notion of

the degenerated workers' state without anyone setting the dogs on them, as the S.W.P. and the executive committee did after their surrender to jingoistic anti-fascism. On the other hand, the lack of internationalism, and all the more so its abandonment during the war, was incompatible with membership of the organization, since those who have not remained unscathed by the immense pressures and snares of national defense evidently disqualify themselves from any decisive revolutionary action. In New York, the internationalism of the Fourth was beheaded, and the defense of Russia became the main criterion of membership. The consequences of that travesty were bound to be devastating.

G. Munis. "The Fourth International". 1959

The political response would come, as early as 1941, from Natalia Sedova - veteran militant and Trotsky's recent widow - who would be joined by the group of the Spanish section exiled in Mexico. Sedova, Munis and Péret try to force a debate, denouncing the attitude first of the SWP and then of the International Secretariat. They demand the holding of the second congress, which is mandatory under the statutes and which the Americans and their allies in France and Great Britain will manage to delay until 1948. Their criticisms gradually refine a set of positions that will end up producing a left fraction within the organization, starting from the critique of the betrayal of internationalism under way at the hands of the American leadership.

It is no coincidence that the internationalist fraction also draws on Spaniards, that is, on militants who lived through the Spanish revolution, with the section in exile - including the part of it in the camps in France - joining en bloc, as well as Greeks, Vietnamese, Italians... that is, militants from the countries where the proletariat is confronting the war in a revolutionary way: Italy in '43, Greece in '44, Vietnam in '46... The role of Stalinism as the head of the counter-

revolution, first seen in Spain, repeats itself country after country... and the International fails to place itself at the revolutionary vanguard. When in 1946 the IS published a Manifesto for the pre-conference with which it intended to tie up the 2nd Congress, downgrading it in passing to a Conference, the left responded with what, over the previous four years, had already become a practically complete programmatic alternative.

The Fourth International will not be able to fulfill its revolutionary mission unless it abandons without reservation the defense of the USSR in favor of a policy of relentless struggle against capitalism and its accomplice, Stalinism. To lead this struggle victoriously, the counter-revolutionary character of the Russian bureaucracy, which sets itself up at home as a class in the process of formation and which oppresses Eastern Europe and Asia, must be exposed at every step and in practice. The lie of its “nationalizations” and agrarian “reforms” must be unmasked, and fraternization between occupiers and occupied must be developed, declaring clearly that neither has anything to defend in Russia, but everything to destroy, just as in any capitalist State, as well as the agents of the Kremlin, whether or not they take part in the government. Fraternization between occupiers and occupied must be the central theme of our agitation in the occupied territories, whatever the occupying power. It is the only way to combat chauvinism among the vanquished as well as among the victors, and to prepare the international front of the exploited against the exploiters. At the same time, the evacuation of all occupied territories, including those occupied by the Russians, must be demanded with growing insistence.

In the rest of the world, we must show at every moment that Stalinism is only the national agent of the Kremlin’s foreign policy, whose interests are always opposed to those of the socialist revolution, which would be its final ruin; that the fate of the workers is a matter of total indifference to it; that it is the best defender of the national bourgeoisie, because it foresees no future other than one tied to the fate of the Russian counter-revolution.

Therefore, the slogan of a PS-PC-CGT government for France, and every similar slogan in any other country, must be abandoned, since it aims only at breaking the revolutionary drive of the

masses by handing the vanguard over to the GPU.

The policy of the united front from organization to organization must, at the present stage, be abandoned as far as the traditional “workers” parties are concerned. It must be replaced, from now on, by proposals of united front to minority workers’ organizations likely to give immediate results, such as the anarchists. However, the united front for precise and immediate tasks must be advocated tirelessly in the factory, in the locality and, if possible, in the region.

Our transitional program must be pruned in the same way. The demand for the Constituent Assembly must disappear for the moment, as must all the slogans resting on a gradualist conception of our program for the masses at the present stage. The world is going through an acute revolutionary crisis today, and our organization must prepare for the decisive struggles ahead, since no development of capitalism, peaceful or otherwise, can be expected. We must therefore tirelessly raise, popularize and explain the slogan of the formation of democratically elected workers’ councils in the workplaces, so that it can be applied at the first opportunity. To this slogan must be added all the consequences it implies: formation of workers’ militias obeying only the committees elected by the masses, disarming of the bourgeois forces, congress of workers’ committees, dissolution of the bourgeois State and creation of the workers’ State.

At the same time, on the economic level, agitation must insist above all on the sliding scale of wages, combined with the sliding scale of working hours without reduction of wages, in all its ramifications: restarting by the workers of factories closed by the capitalists, seizure of the capitalists’ assets by the workers starting

with war and black-market profits, and finally the confiscation of factories and land by workers' committees democratically elected in the workplaces.

Benjamin Péret. "The Exegetes' Manifesto", 1946

When the 2nd Congress of the Fourth International was finally held in 1948, the sections and groups that from 1943 onwards had been taking a position independent of the International Secretariat (IS) were a minority, depleted by repression and by the infamous maneuvers of the IS itself to reduce their representation. The leadership prevented even a discussion of the renunciation of internationalism by its reference groups during the past war. Denunciation and rupture were as inevitable as the drift of the majority, which would end up approving, at the third congress of the no-longer-International, that the main contradiction of capitalism was no longer the class struggle (bourgeoisie against proletariat) but the confrontation between the US and Stalinist Russia - an explicit renunciation of Marxist continuity, of communism, of internationalism... and even of decency.

the 1948 Congress refused to condemn participation in capitalist national defense under the guise of resistance, and approved a political resolution that raised the Russia-United States rivalry to the rank of the main world contradiction. In reality it turned its back on the irreducible opposition of proletariat and capitalism on a world scale, the sole guide of a revolutionary organization. On both counts, the Fourth International ceased to be one from that congress onwards. Henceforth it could deform revolutionaries, but in no way form them.

G. Munis. "Fifty Years After Trotskyism", 1982

The fact is that the renunciation of internationalism crumbles and sterilizes any evolution or position that does not start from the most radical rectification. It is not Trotsky's errors that produce the degeneration of the International, just as it was not Lenin's that led to those of the Third; it is the renunciation of internationalism that makes any programmatic correction impossible and leaves them room only as the left, democratist wing of the Stalinist counter-revolution.

Notwithstanding the irrefutable evidence of experience, the main Trotskyist parties, lightened of internationalism during the war and committed to national defense by way of the resistance, drew the opposite conclusion: Stalinism extends socialist property, however much it may grieve the proletariat itself. They simply had to cover up their grave revolutionary deficiencies with something. Hence their present position, which the League adopts, has much more of a Stalinist swindle about it than of a political or sociological error.

The errors of the masters often turn into a mortal wound for the disciples. Thus what in Trotsky was a mistake, at most a clouding of thought, reaches in present-day Trotskyism proportions of falsehood, of crass opportunism and even of capitulation. But it must be stressed that in this metamorphosis, too, existence precedes consciousness. Having turned its back, in the midst of the world conflict, on the principle “against imperialist war, civil war”, this Trotskyism stripped itself of what is essential and most life-giving in revolutionary thought, barring itself from the possibility of correcting errors and making the slightest theoretical progress. From its compromises with national defense (resistance) onwards, one no longer finds in it any theoretical knowledge, or even any attempt at it, but a string of sophistries and self-justifying attitudes, ever more base as one calls forth the next. And it has ended up in its present position. Formally and organically it has gone back to what the Left Opposition to the Third International was during the mid-twenties and the first two years of the thirties, despite the criminality and filth that has piled up in Stalinism since then; politically, it stands dazed and head bowed before the extension of that same Stalinism (feats, in its eyes) in Eastern

Europe, in China, Korea, Vietnam, Cuba and even in Egypt, where 15 or 20,000 Russian soldiers hold up the sacred standard of Islam against that of Israel.

In sum, the regression of Trotskyism was caused by its break with internationalism, not by Trotsky's error concerning the nature of the Russian system, as shallow critics claim. The practical and theoretical defense of internationalism demanded during the world war, and continues to demand today, an outright rectification of the idea of the degenerated workers' state and of all the presuppositions that engendered it. Conversely, neither the defense of Russia nor that of any Stalinist country can be practiced without giving internationalism the slip, that is, the world proletariat, in order to go and enlist under the orders of the enemies of that same proletariat.

G. Munis. "Analysis of a Void", 1971-72

The break-up of the International and the departure of its internationalist tendency coincide with the moment when, in its program, the phase opened with the formation of the International Communist Left in 1929-30 is culminating:

1. The transitional program has been pruned of everything deriving from the conception of state property as a socialist element or one tending towards socialism, a conception inherited from the Third and Second Internationals.
2. The nature of Stalinism and of the bureaucracy has gradually been clarified in the critique and overcoming of the concept of the degenerated workers' state, and Stalinist Russia is now regarded as an imperialist state capitalism.
3. The program of the Third International, for its part, has had workers' control pruned from it, and the immediate postwar

period has made necessary a critique of the tactic of the united front with social democrats and Stalinists, who are by now definitively integrated into the state.

4. The impossibility of a national liberation not opposed to the working class, both in the occupied and in the colonial countries, as had become clear first in China, then in Europe and in Vietnam at the end of the war.

The critique of the working-class nature of Stalinism and the affirmation, for the first time, of a program that takes as its basis what is distinctive of decadent capitalism, mark the culmination of the work of the Communist Left stage opened by Trotsky in 1929. There still remains, however, a very important element for the definition of communist tactics: the trade unions. But that debate, which already begins at the end of the war, will have to unfold in a new international framework that will only materialize after the definitive rupture, anticipated at the 2nd Congress. The denunciation is made formal at the 7th Plenum in April 1949. In September it is made public and definitive with the publication of the “Explanation and Appeal to the Militants, Groups and Sections of the Fourth International” by the Spanish section, renamed GCI (Internationalist Communist Group) and later FOR (Revolutionary Workers’ Ferment). The Appeal gathers around it militants from all over the world: Vietnamese who are taking refuge in France after the persecution and massacre at the hands of the Stalinists with the complicity of the French colonial government, such as Ngô Văn; French militants coming from the groups that had tried to practise revolutionary defeatism during the occupation and in Vichy France, such as Maximilien Rubel, and the Penner-Gallienne current of French Trotskyism, with well-known militants such as Sonia Gontarbert, Sophie Moen or Edgar Petsch. Counting Munis and Benjamin Péret - who have returned from Mexico - and the core of Spanish militants who lived through the

struggle during the Spanish revolution and are at that moment refugees in France - Esteban Bilbao, Jaime Fernández, Paco Gómez, Agustín Rodríguez - the grouping numbers more than fifty people in France alone. Soon the Communist Workers' Party of Italy (founded by Nicola di Bartolomeo, "Fosco") and revolutionary fractions from Mexico, Denmark, Yugoslavia, Greece and Germany will draw closer.

The end of the "communist left" stage

With the formal departure of the internationalists from the Fourth International and the defeat of the last revolutionary attempts of the proletariat at the close of the war (Greece, Vietnam), a new historical period opens.

On the programmatic level, the tasks and the historical phase as a "communist left", that is, as the left of a degenerating International, have come to an end. The essentials of the lessons of the counter-revolution have already been **refined** by the internationalists. But these are now reduced to a few groups whose impact on real struggles will be only occasional in the following decades.

Communist morality



Communist morality: the result, in forms of political and interpersonal relations and behavior; that living with the perspective and conviction that the abolition of scarcity, the commodity and wage labor through the action of the working class is as necessary as it is possible in the present time has for communists.

Origin of communist morality

Communist morality is the result of **class consciousness** on the behaviors and manners of the militant expressions of the **universal class**.

When Engels writes in **Anti-Dühring** (1878) that **proletarian morality represents the future in the transformation of the present**, what he is pointing out is that communist morality is grounded in that particular relationship of the class with the future. And that, by

putting universal human needs first, needs that can only be universally satisfied after capitalism has been overcome, communist morality seeks to set out and represent already today abundance -and therefore the freedom still to be achieved- in the behavior, attitudes and ways of acting of the most conscious elements of the class.

Communist morality is not a state of mind or a set of rules or “commandments”; it is a perspective of the future that it makes present in the forms of political and interpersonal relations and behavior.

Meaning of communist morality

Rebelling against the system of exploitation that universally articulates society can only give rise to a generalized opposition to all social inequality and power of domination. That is why the moral attitude of the communist has nothing to do with the condescension of the smug leftist, nor with the resentment and obsessive violence of the troll.

Humanity, seen from the communist perspective, is the result of a gigantic collective work, spurred on and accelerated in its march by conflict and **class struggle**, which has accumulated knowledge and capabilities so extensive and powerful that they make possible -today- a society of full abundance and freedom for each and every one: **communism**.

That potential, as much as its negation by capitalism in **decadence**, is present in and shapes every manifestation of our world and every expression of its contradictions. From it we draw strength and optimism. Not from necessity or from hatred, not from a thirst for

retribution or from charity, but from the capacity to discover in the present the immense potential for emancipation of our class and what it means: the self-liberation of our species.

Communist morality, the intimate link between the way of doing, speaking and fighting and the permanent perspective of the abolition of scarcity, the **commodity** and **wage labor**, is not an ornament, nor a mystical or moralizing drift; it is a material fact with material consequences, without whose conscious strengthening idealist fetishes, reactionary **utopias** of social automatons and dashboards, if not apocalyptic dreams that relieve communists of historical responsibility, will return again and again, disarming one by one the best efforts of our class.

Culture



A set of modes of behavior and of attribution of social meaning, including forms of representation and communication, which began to be understood as a unity with the birth of the national market.

Culture is an ideological phenomenon which, encouraged by the bourgeoisie, allows it to carry out the “nationalization” -that is, the absorption into its program and under its leadership- of social classes with local interests -petty bourgeoisie, peasantry, artisans- or with universal -and therefore non-national- interests, such as the proletariat, within the political subject called the “nation”.

To this end, the revolutionary bourgeoisie will not only create the concept of culture but will also homogenize languages, invent traditions out of feudal remnants and establish models of behavior

tailored to the needs of the national market. For this purpose it will equip itself with artistic expressions, means of communication and even modes of representation.

The invention of culture

The concept of culture began as an Enlightenment metaphor: a person “cultivated” himself through study and access to knowledge, and, like any field, the more work and fertilizer went into that cultivation (“culture”), the more fruit it would yield.

It is with Fichte, Herder and the birth of German Romanticism that culture takes on an adjective for the first time and begins to be “national”. It is no longer the reflection of individual exposure to knowledge, but a collective phenomenon: the reflection, common to all members of the national community, of a “popular spirit” (*Volksgeist*) that would travel through history, materializing the national essence over time.

The social process of education and that of nationalization become synonymous. It is a rigged argument: **Fichte was fighting precisely to create an educational system that would produce nationals...** so there would be none without state intervention.

But his strategy is that of a self-fulfilling prophecy: once the bourgeoisie takes political power, nationalization and education will be one and the same thing, a *second genesis of man*, in Herder’s famous phrase.

From then on, the Romantic arguments will seem *natural*: we humans will have a cultural, and *therefore* national, *second nature*.

But let us remain on earth and consider, in its broadest generality, what nature, which must know best the end and character of its creature, sets before our eyes as human formation itself: it is nothing other than the tradition of an education towards some form of human happiness and way of life.

Man remains among men: he therefore cannot escape this forming or deforming culture; tradition reaches him and forms his head and shapes his limbs. As that tradition is, and as these are formed, so will the man be, so is he configured.

Herder, *Ideas for the Philosophy of the History of Mankind*, 1791

The definition and exaltation of “national culture” was the “discovery” of the “DNA” of a new political subject capable of enveloping and involving all social classes: the **nation**.

National culture was the defining element of the nation, the mother of the essences of **nationalism**, the ideology of the rise of the bourgeoisie as a political class in Germany, the ideal greenhouse in which its social leadership germinated.

Culture and the petty bourgeoisie

Culture was fundamental to the nationalization of a petty bourgeoisie and a peasantry whose immediate economic interests remained, as was seen in the Spanish cantonal revolution, fundamentally local.

Thus, from its beginnings, “national culture” offered the petty bourgeoisie a leading role and funding through the arts, turning it into the plastic, architectural and literary interpreter of the national spirit, and therefore into the designer of the “popular” forms of national ideology and, to a certain extent, into the guardian of its essences.

State capitalism, “cultures” and “identities”

With the development of **state capitalism** during the 20th century, the state extended its policies of social control. And to do so it learned to think of those sociological categories that were useful to it as “political subjects”. For example, in the 1920s “youth” became a political concept, and with it the first “youth cultures” were born.

In the postwar period, the development of the culture industry and of advertising would combine with the development of social policies, fractalizing those identities.

As a consequence, at the end of the 1950s in the United States and in the 1960s in Europe, youth, student, urban, neighborhood, migrant, women’s... “subcultures” were “discovered”. “Cultural identities” multiply within the national mold as the state makes ever finer the grain of the images on the basis of which it designs its policies.

In the monopolistic logic of state capitalism, all these categories also represent an opportunity for organizational regimentation, and every regimentation offers an opportunity for collective “representation”: subsidies to the “social fabric”, specialized technicians, participatory processes for the design of “public policies”...

There is no lack of incentives to organize discontent into a thousand identities that demand “recognition” and a space for new “representative” elites.

It is no coincidence that Sociology and “Political Science” are conceived in state universities as offshoots of a common trunk.

Culture and “class identity”

Some academic and historiographical schools, from E. P. Thompson to American postmodern historians, have tried to redefine class consciousness as an “identity” defined by a “working-class culture”, shifting the “self-consciousness” of the class struggle -the existence of workers’ struggles as workers- onto the placid terrain of cultural sociology.

“Culture”, all that which makes it possible to recognize another as “someone of the same condition”, would be the foundation of the “historical identity” of the workers.

Class consciousness would thus be settled in the territory that stretches from the lyrics of popular songs to the way one crimps an empanada, from commonplaces to the community practices of everyday resistance.

What the working class is capable of in political terms would be delimited by the projection of the values reflected in these practices and customs. Practices and customs which, like all culture under capitalism, are fundamentally national.

In this way the very idea of **class consciousness** is twisted and subverted in order, through the concept of culture, to nationalize the workers and bind them to national capital -even if this is usually done under the cloak of a rejection of the national bourgeoisie. We are at the antipodes of revolutionary thought, of course.

For Marx, the “historical identity” of the class, that in which its **class consciousness** consists, is nothing other than the program to which it is historically driven by the place it occupies in capitalist society. A program that is universal, identical in every country, like the wage-earning condition itself.

“Global culture” and imperialism

As an ideological expression of national capital, the independent development of national culture is born with an expiration date: it will only be possible as long as that of national capital is possible.

With the development of **imperialism**, the emergence of an “international culture” linked to the language and the “culture industries” of whichever imperialist powers are hegemonic at the time will call into question the supposedly “essential” and “national” character of the arts and customs.

However, this will in turn be reinterpreted and reused by nationalism as yet another “aggression” in the face of which to call for “unity” around the state and national capital in defense of “its culture”.

Decadence



A mode of production enters a phase of historical decadence when the relations of production that characterize it cease to be forms of development of the productive forces and become obstacles to the free development of those same forces. Consequently, development and economic growth become dissociated.

The bases of the decadence of capitalism

From the Manifesto of 1848 itself, the communist movement was clear that the expansive tendency of capitalism would reach an objective limit and that by that time the working class would already be a practically universal social and productive force.

The development of Modern Industry, therefore, cuts from under its feet the very foundation on which the bourgeoisie produces and appropriates products. What the bourgeoisie therefore produces, above all, are its own grave-diggers. Its fall and the victory of the proletariat are equally inevitable.

But what were the objective limits of the *progressive* development of capitalism? When would the system enter decadence, making its overcoming an immediate program for the workers? To find out, Marx began an investigation lasting years, which would remain largely unfinished, but which uncovers the essentials beneath the ideological cloud of bourgeois Economic Theory: “Capital”.

His first discovery is that capitalism is a commodity system, centered on the production of commodities. Not every product is a commodity; the commodity is produced not to be consumed but to be sold, and therefore presupposes private property. There are, however, various commodity economies different from capitalism. What defines capitalism is a new social relationship: the capital-labor relationship.

Labor, labor power in fact, is in capitalism just one more commodity. A commodity that has a market price, the wage. And that has a unique property: it generates the increase in value of products over the cost of their components, including labor (whose cost is the wage). It is that increase in value (surplus value) which, when realized (when the commodity is sold at a price higher than that of its components added together), produces profit, gain... a profit that is accumulated in a new form: capital.

Capital that in turn will have to be “made profitable” by applying it (investing it) in new cycles of production that generate new surplus value and therefore new profits, **swelling capital once again.**

Marx then studies the dynamics of the evolution of capital under the assumption of an ideal 100% capitalist economy, where there is only one capitalist and production is sold in its entirety. This makes it possible to unmask the origin of the growth of value in unpaid labor without having to go into the analysis of the capital market and of how profit is shared out among the capitalists.

In the model of the first book of “Capital”, surplus value and profit are equal because there is only one company. This reduction also allows him to isolate the most important tendencies, among them the **tendency of the rate of profit to fall**, which entails the increase in the mass of products manufactured and in the relative weight of dead labor (capital invested in machines, buildings, etc.) over living labor (labor performed by people, bought by the capitalist).

All this is extremely important because it explains how and why, by its own internal logic, capitalism pushes humanity, brings it closer, towards abundance, developing its productive capacities and knowledge amid the convulsions and miseries proper to a system that in each cycle tends to pauperize more and more workers, until it reaches the absurdity of capitalist overproduction in times of crisis.

But this does not deny that Marx is fully aware that between one crisis and the next there is something more, and that this something more is precisely related to the non-capitalist sector of the world *commodity* economy: all those independent peasants who do not exploit workers, the artisans, etc., who produce commodities without producing surplus value. The productive sectors that had been the majority until the arrival of capitalism, and on which capitalism feeds parasitically.

Why does it feed on them? Because, since surplus value is unpaid labor, by definition the workers cannot pay for the whole of production. Giving them credit to do so only postpones the problem. If

the bourgeoisie itself “consumed” the total surplus value produced, the accumulation of capital would become impossible. Nor could surpluses be moved from more capitalized sectors to others except at the cost of destroying capital.

Because of the “restricted bases” of the capitalist sector there can only be “overproduction”, that is, wages are not enough to buy everything produced... capitalism **needs** to expand from the very first moment. First towards its internal non-capitalist markets. Second towards external ones. That was the material driving force of the worldwide expansion of capitalism.

Since the aim of capital is not the satisfaction of needs but the production of profit, and since it achieves this aim only by methods that regulate the volume of production according to the scale of production, and not the other way round, **there must constantly be a rift between the restricted dimensions of consumption on a capitalist basis and a production that constantly tends to overcome this barrier immanent to it.**

Moreover, capital consists of commodities, and therefore the overproduction of capital implies the overproduction of commodities. Hence the curious phenomenon that the same economists who deny the overproduction of commodities admit that of capital.

If it is said that within the various branches of production there is not a general overproduction but a disproportion, this means nothing other than that, within capitalist production, proportionality between the various branches of production is established as a constant process out of disproportionality, because here the interconnection of production as a whole imposes itself on the agents of production as a blind law, and not as a law grasped by their associated intellect and thereby brought under their collective control.

Furthermore, in this way **it is demanded that countries in which the capitalist mode of production is not developed should consume and produce to a degree suited to the countries of the capitalist mode of production.**

If it is said that overproduction is only relative, this is quite correct; but the whole capitalist mode of production is only a relative mode of production, whose limits are not absolute, but are absolute for it, on its own basis. How else could there be a lack of

demand for the very commodities that the mass of the people lack, and how would it be possible **to have to seek this demand abroad, in more distant markets, in order to be able to pay the workers at home the average of the indispensable means of subsistence?**

Because only in this specific, capitalist context does the surplus product acquire a form in which its owner can make it available for consumption only insofar as it is reconverted into capital for him. Finally, if it is said that in the last instance the capitalists only have to exchange their commodities among themselves and eat them up, the whole character of capitalist production is forgotten, and so is the fact that what is at stake is the valorization of capital, not its consumption.

In short, all the objections to the palpable manifestations of overproduction (manifestations that pay no heed to such objections) amount to saying that the limits of capitalist production are not limits of production in general, and therefore not limits of this specific mode of production, the capitalist one either.

But the contradiction of this capitalist mode of production lies precisely in its tendency towards the absolute development of the productive forces, which comes permanently into conflict with the specific conditions of production within which capital moves, and which are the only ones within which it can move.

Karl Marx. Chapter XV of Book III of “Capital”, 1894.

It follows that there is a limit to the *progressive* development of capitalism, a frontier beyond which we can say that the system has entered decadence. As in all previous modes of production, there comes a moment from which the relations of production...

From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. Then begins an era of social revolution.

Karl Marx. **Preface to “A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy”**, January 1859

Imperialism and decadence

The chronic lack of markets of capitalism could only lead it to reach that limit and give way to decadence. A moment that would express itself “in winds of catastrophe” of war.

The existence of non-capitalist buyers of surplus value is a direct vital condition for capital and its accumulation. In this sense such buyers are the decisive element in the problem of the accumulation of capital. But one way or another, in fact, the accumulation of capital as a historical process depends in many respects on non-capitalist social strata and forms. (...) Capitalism needs, for its existence and development, to be surrounded by non-capitalist forms of production. (...) The second fundamental precondition, both for the acquisition of means of production and for the realization of surplus value, is the extension of the action of capitalism to societies with a natural economy. (...)

Imperialism is the political expression of the process of accumulation of capital in its struggle to conquer the non-capitalist environments that are not yet exhausted. Geographically, these environments still cover today the widest territories of the Earth.

But compared with the powerful mass of capital already accumulated in the old capitalist countries, which struggles to find markets for its surplus product and possibilities of capitalization for its surplus value; compared with the speed with which territories belonging to pre-capitalist cultures are today being turned into capitalist ones, or in other words: compared with the high degree of the productive forces of capital, the field still seems small for its expansion. This determines the international game of capital on the world stage.

Given the great development and the increasingly violent competition among the capitalist countries to conquer non-capitalist territories, imperialism increases its aggressiveness against the non-capitalist world, sharpening the contradictions between the contending capitalist countries. But the more

violently and energetically capitalism brings about the total collapse of non-capitalist civilizations, the more rapidly it will cut the ground from under the accumulation of capital.

Imperialism is as much a historical method for prolonging the existence of capital as a sure means of objectively putting an end to its existence. This is not to say that this end must be cheerfully reached. The very tendency of capitalist development towards it already manifests itself in winds of catastrophe.

Rosa Luxemburg. "The Accumulation of Capital", 1913.

The *catastrophe* that would certify the system's entry into decadence came in the form of a world war that also opened the era of proletarian revolutions.

Capitalism is the first economic form with the capacity for worldwide development. A form that tends to spread over the whole surface of the Earth and to eliminate all other economic forms; that tolerates the coexistence of no other.

But it is also the first that cannot exist alone, without other economic forms to feed on, and which, at the same time as it tends to become the only form, fails because of the internal incapacity of its development. It is a living historical contradiction in itself. Its movement of accumulation is the expression, the constant resolution and, at the same time, the intensification of the contradiction.

At a certain stage of development, **this contradiction can only be resolved by the application of the principles of socialism**; of that economic form which is at the same time, by its very nature, a world form and a harmonious system, because it will be directed not towards accumulation but towards the satisfaction of the vital needs of working humanity itself and towards the expansion of all the productive forces of the planet.

Rosa Luxemburg. "The Accumulation of Capital", 1913.

Imperialist world war and decadence

The symptom that capitalism could no longer expand without cataclysmic consequences was an unprecedented phenomenon, an imperialist war that was also a *world* war because the expansion of the system was already worldwide. It is the moment when the contradictions expressed by **imperialism** become evident and unsolvable on a world scale. The moment when it can be said that capitalism, as a whole, has entered decadence.

Friedrich Engels once said: “Capitalist society faces a dilemma: advance to socialism or regression into barbarism”. What does “regression into barbarism” mean at the present stage of European civilization?

We have read and quoted these words lightly, without being able to conceive their terrible meaning. At this moment it is enough to look around us to understand what regression into barbarism means in capitalist society. This world war is a regression into barbarism. The triumph of imperialism leads to the destruction of culture, sporadically during a modern war, and forever if the period of world wars that has just begun is allowed to run its damnable course to its final consequences.

Thus we stand today, just as Engels prophesied a generation ago, before the terrible choice: either imperialism triumphs and brings about the destruction of all culture and, as in ancient Rome, depopulation, desolation, degeneration, an immense cemetery; or socialism triumphs, that is, the conscious struggle of the international proletariat against imperialism, its methods, its wars.

This is the dilemma of world history, its iron alternative, its scales trembling at the point of balance, awaiting the decision of the proletariat. On it depends the future of culture and of humanity. In this war imperialism has triumphed. Its brutal, murderous sword has tipped the scales, with overwhelming brutality, down into the depths of the abyss of shame and misery. If the proletariat learns from this war and in this war to exert itself, to shake off the yoke of the ruling classes, to become master of its own destiny, the shame and misery will not have been in vain.

Rosa Luxemburg. *The Crisis of German Social Democracy*, 1915.

Does decadence mean permanent crisis?

As we have seen, the tendency to crisis is present in the very logic of the accumulation of capital. Once the periods of reconstruction that follow the great generalized imperialist wars are over, the tendency to crisis acts in a sustained and permanent way in decadence.

But a tendency does not mean that accumulation ceases or that capital devalues itself, or even that production continuously declines. What is transformed is the meaning of accumulation, and what emerges is **the inability of the decadent system to develop its main productive force: the proletariat.**

Contrary to what the majority of today's revolutionary vanguard believes (and by that I mean only those groups and individuals who point to counter-revolution and state capitalism in Russia), not all development of the instruments of production is positive, however much it may show rising indices of commodities, turn out engineers and increase the number of workers.

It is time to put an end to a materialism of such a simple-minded kind, the begetter of theoretical blunders and proletarian defeats. To be progressive, the development of the means of production must be accompanied by an increase in the consumption of the laboring population, in its culture and its freedom. The bourgeoisie itself achieved this in a relatively straight line up to the moment of its decisive crisis.

G. Munis. *The Ancient China of Mao Tse-tung*, 1959

The result is, first of all, a permanent crisis as a *civilization*, as a **mode of production** capable of generating human development. In decadence, in fact, and this is decisive, **“economic” development**,

that is, the advances of capital accumulation, are increasingly at odds with human development.

A society or type of civilization is developing as long as the structural and superstructural factors contained in its original impulse go on expanding and spreading, those that constituted its reason for being, its historical necessity, its human justification. Because a type of civilization -that is to say, a class- has never been formed and raised to the rank of ruling class except as a positive representation, however incomplete, of all classes, even those that bear the worst lot. Its system must grant everyone a better material, cultural and moral condition, even a shred of freedom, relative to the previous situation. That content is the only thing that can be called social development.

We saw this very clearly during the rise of capitalist society. More than any other civilization since the appearance of classes and the State, it increased general culture, political freedom, nutritional possibilities and everything that concerns the production and reproduction of human life, not to mention the multitude of good consequences those three factors brought with them. The greater mastery of Nature characteristic of capitalist civilization, even though it was mainly by and for the bourgeoisie, had more or less of an effect on the poor and exploited classes.

The same can no longer be said of present-day capitalism. Its mastery of Nature, from physics and chemistry to genetics and psychoanalysis, keeps increasing. But in general it only results in worse conditions for the great mass of the poor classes.

Metals are manufactured today so resistant that they allow space capsules to pass through the dense layers of the atmosphere, but, from the saucepan to the automobile, the products offered on the market are of a poor quality calculated to force their early replacement; we know how to make fabrics that would last more than a lifetime, but the suits or stockings sold by the tens or

hundreds of millions are made to turn soon into rags; we know how to produce food of the highest quality and purity, but it has become impossible to find, a delicacy for potentates, for the great mass, starting with simple bread;

adulterated products, when not toxic ones, wrapped in plastics that alter their chemical composition; we know how to select the best-yielding animal species for the butcher's and the stable, but steak, chicken, pork, etc. contain the hormones with which the animals have been artificially fattened, while milk is a watery brew depleted of the substances most indispensable to child nutrition; we can build residential buildings more resistant than a cathedral, but the house or apartment of the ordinary man falls into ruin before it has been paid off.

An inseparable complement of the above, radio and television, extremely powerful instruments of information and cultural education, deliberately deceive and brutalize billions of people on every continent, always seconded by the daily press; in the technical schools and universities, youth is channeled and shaped according to state-capitalist plans, while the quality of teaching degrades year after year; psychoanalysis itself serves, in factories, guidance centers, advertising agencies and police departments, repugnant operations that debase the individual and collective mind.

There would be no end to listing all the respects in which capitalism (more precisely, so that the reader does not exclude any country: the society based on wage labor) is perverting everyday life, corrupting everything it itself created. The quick sketch above must nevertheless be completed by pointing out two even more serious aspects.

The first is the **present condition of the working class**, a slave to work and to sleep, with no time for leisure in this age of automation, without any freedom in the factory, disciplined as in a barracks and watched over by the trio of capital, trade unions and State, which moreover subject it to piecework, the vilest form of exploitation; forced, in order to avoid destitution, to subject the wife as well as the husband to the whirlwind of that same exploitation; deprived of a trade by fragmented work [= precarious work, Ed.]; always at the mercy of dirigiste planning; ever more dispossessed relative to what it produces and to the total amount of wealth usurped by capital.

Never have the instruments of its labor and the products of its labor been so alien and oppressive to it. The very automobile in which many workers drive ties several more knots in the bonds that hold them captive, miseries that have turned the whole of society into a concentration camp plundered daily by its organizers, by way of commerce and the tax authorities.

The second and more conclusive of the two aspects mentioned is **political totalitarianism**, at once **police and militarist**, which has been invading the whole world, including the countries where a worm-eaten bourgeois democracy survives.

By itself, the ever more overwhelming weight of armies, war production and police represents a degenerative factor of the first order in present-day civilization. It is not only a question of the expenditure, a total loss, that their existence entails, far greater than what the official budgets state, which is already enormous; nor of the useless, parasitic, harmful or criminal labor assigned to tens of millions of people; the worst of all is the function that the war industries and the military and police activities have acquired, without distinction of blocs or political regimes.

Indeed, if the industrialization fostered by capitalism was never for consumption except through the sale of commodities and bourgeois enrichment, with the enormous volume of war production -not to mention that of shoddy goods- it becomes industrialization for industrialization's sake, whose relationship with necessary consumption is ever more tenuous and false.

And for their part, police and armies embody power for power's sake of an anonymous capital, overtaken by technology and by human needs, which outlives itself as a form of social organization. In ancient Egypt there came a time when the cult of death consumed more than half of the population's labor. In present-day capitalism it is not a cult, but an industrial and physical practice of death that approaches the same balance and is already capable of murdering the entire human species in a few minutes.

G. Munis. *The Impossibility of Capitalist Development*, 1972

This **contradiction between the development of capital and human development** -the canonical definition of decadence- is expressed in the tension towards everything that prepares war in the everyday life of decadent capitalism: a malformed "growth" in times of prosperity, with a monstrous development of the state and the bureaucracy, *state capitalism*, which responds to the growing structural difficulty of keeping cohesive a society organized around a civilization that tends to decompose under the forces it has itself created.

For more than forty years capitalism, its progressive stage completed, has run counter to humanity's needs for economic and political freedom.

Great imperialist slaughters, lesser wars, military, Stalinist and fascist dictatorships, the shrinking and corruption of freedom in the old countries of bourgeois democracy, intensified exploitation of the proletariat, lengthening of the working day, reintroduction of piecework, monstrous growth of state and private bureaucracy, of foremen, supervisors and timekeepers in industry, of the police, standing armies and war production, conversion of the trade unions into regulators of exploitation: all manifestations of the reactionary corruption of capitalism, whether one considers any country in isolation or all of them together, the backward as well as the advanced, Eastern and Western blocs alike.

Capitalism is destroying civilization and degrading man. The most glaring sign of this degradation is that Moscow and Washington can annihilate the whole of humanity with a single gesture, while trying to make the world believe that the Russian armies are preferable to the American ones, or the American to the Russian. The atomic threat alone would more than justify an uprising that would do away, at the same time as with the nuclear bombs, with the whole war apparatus and the economic system that needs them.

G. Munis. **Appeal and exhortation to the new generation**, 1966

Defensism



Invocation of the “right to national defense” to support the recruitment and slaughter of workers in defense of one national state - or aspiring state - against another.

Historical context of defensism

The 1914 war, the first imperialist world war, marks a point of no return in the development of **imperialism** and the system’s entry into its **historical decadence**.

Every national capital sells the war as the ultimate solution to the **pending tasks of the bourgeois revolution of the previous century**. Germany takes up the banner of putting an end to tsarism, the last bastion of feudal reaction in Europe; France and Britain claim to represent democracy against the barbaric Prussian system and,

together with the US, will defend the *right to self-determination* as a tool for *national liberation* in Central and Eastern Europe. Without the slightest shame, the war is labelled *the war to end all wars*.

But the reality is that the gigantic organization of capitalist production has become a machine of annihilation. Millions of workers die en masse in the fields of Europe in a war organized in the Taylorist way, by battle plan and stopwatch. The defensist discourse, the invocation of the right to national defense against a foreign invasion, is the ultimate imperialist argument: every bourgeoisie defending itself against its neighbors amounts to nothing but total slaughter.

The main figures of the Second International and the leadership of its parties and unions will turn defensism, once the war has begun, into a way of encouraging the workers to go on sacrificing themselves en masse and killing each other until “a democratic peace without annexations or indemnities” is achieved.

The Marxist critique of defensism by Rosa Luxemburg and Lenin

Inevitably, the invocation of the “right to national defense” will go hand in hand with a whole lot of empty verbiage invoking a non-existent “International Law” and endless discussions about who is the “aggressor” or the “guilty party”. But...

Whatever the truth about the direct responsibility for the outbreak of the war, one thing is certain: the war that has produced this chaos is the outcome of imperialism, of the attempt by the capitalist classes of every country to satisfy their greed for profit through the exploitation of human labor and of the natural resources of the entire world.

Zimmerwald Manifesto against the war. L. D. Trotsky, 1915

Or in the words of Rosa Luxemburg:

In the discussion about the general causes of the war and its significance, it is not a question of solving the problem of who is “guilty”. Germany certainly does not have the slightest right to speak of a war of defense, but France and England have no greater justification. They too are protecting not their national existence, but their world political existence, their old colonial possessions, from the attacks of the German upstart.

Rosa Luxemburg. The Crisis of Social Democracy (Junius Pamphlet), 1916

Rosa Luxemburg’s underlying argument is that **imperialism** is a stage of capitalism as a whole. Even if, for some time, some countries might have remained relatively on the margins, the entry into a stage of **world wars** would express by itself the **impossibility of a development of national capital independent of the conditions of imperialism** during the new phase of **decadence** into which the system was sinking.

If the term “national” has remained, its real content and its function have turned into their opposite; it serves only as a miserable cover for imperialist aspirations and as the battle cry of their rivalries, as the only and last ideological means of securing the adherence of the popular masses and their playing the role of cannon fodder in imperialist wars.

Rosa Luxemburg. The Crisis of Social Democracy (Junius Pamphlet), 1916

As she would insist in another pamphlet that same year:

In this era of unleashed imperialism there can be no more national wars. National interests serve only as a pretext for putting the popular masses at the service of their mortal enemy: imperialism.

Rosa Luxemburg. The Tasks of Social Democracy, 1916

The same thing that makes the overcoming of capitalism an immediate necessity - **capitalism's entry into decadence** - makes it reactionary to **create new national states or to defend existing ones in one way or another**. Only **revolutionary defeatism** now represents the interests of the workers in inter-bourgeois conflicts.

The result of the great war is that it is impossible for the capitalist classes to get out of their difficulties as long as they remain in power. We now understand the truth contained in the phrase first formulated by Marx and Engels as the scientific basis of socialism, in the great charter of our movement, the Communist Manifesto. Socialism, they said, will become a historical necessity.

Speech at the Founding Congress of the Communist Party of Germany. Rosa Luxemburg, 1919

Revolutionary defeatism means nothing other than turning the imperialist war into civil war between classes.

In order to dupe the proletariat and divert its attention from the only truly emancipatory war, that is, the civil war against the bourgeoisie, both of its “own” country and of “foreign” ones, the bourgeoisie of each country strives, with lying phrases about patriotism, to extol the significance of “its” national war and to assure us that it aims at defeating the adversary not for the sake of plunder and territorial conquest, but for the sake of the “liberation” of all other peoples except its own. (...)

The transformation of the present imperialist war into a civil war is the only correct proletarian slogan, indicated by the experience of the Commune, outlined in the Basel resolution (1912) and derived from all the conditions of an imperialist war among highly developed bourgeois countries. However great the difficulties of such a transformation may seem at one time or another, socialists will never renounce systematic, persistent and unremitting preparatory work in this direction, now that the war has become a fact.

Only by following this path will the proletariat be able to free itself from its dependence on the chauvinist bourgeoisie and take, in one form or another and more or less rapidly, decisive steps towards genuine freedom for the nations and towards socialism.

“The War and Russian Social-Democracy”. Lenin, 1914

Democracy



Form of organization of the political apparatus of the bourgeois state that legitimizes itself by representing social conflict as a market -Parliament- in which the major currents of opinion -embodied in the parties- exchange interests under a set of rules that guarantees the survival and development of the state itself and of the nation it constitutes.

Democracy and representation under the bourgeoisie

In order to assert its leadership over society as a whole, that is, to impose through the state the needs of the accumulation of national capital in a given territory/market that it makes its own, the **bourgeoisie** did not need to give the political apparatus of the state any specific form. Its first experiences of political power took forms as

different as an oligarchic republic in Venice, a corporate state in Florence, the assemblies of the Comuneros in Castile or Cromwell's dictatorship in England.

All of them, however, had one element in common: they fostered different forms of *representation* of the subordinate classes in the state and its rituals. This representation generally went little further than the ceremonial: in Venice the minor guilds and the wage earners saw themselves included in the state and fought for recognition by battling to occupy better positions in public processions.

The meaning of representation in this framework is closer to theatrical representation than to the idea of political representation that liberalism would later adopt. But it shows how, from the very beginning, the bourgeoisie was aware of the need for a political apparatus that would exercise the **dictatorship** of its interests by involving the other classes.

On the other hand, processions, mass choreographies and ceremonial performances never disappeared as a way of trying to represent the workers in the bourgeois state, reaching their paroxysm in Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy, Stalinist Russia and Maoist China.

Only when it reached maturity and set itself the task of *constituting the social body into a **nation***, that is, of taking the leadership of a class structure already driven by industrial production, would it raise the liberal myths to a principle of government, ceding spaces of political power to the **people**, that is, accepting a specific political space in the state for the aspirations of the **petty bourgeoisie** and, indirectly, of the nascent **proletariat**. *Modern democracy* began to be defined as a system of *representation* based on the universal suffrage of property-owning individuals.

The proletariat and democracy in rising capitalism

It was the emergence of the proletariat as a political subject from the revolution of 1848 onwards that led the bourgeoisie and the ruling classes to grant the workers a space for self-organization... though only after virulent struggles that were repressed, almost always bloodily, by the liberal and democratic states of the time.

Rising capitalism then accepted the proletariat, in part of Europe, as a recognized political subject within bourgeois society. It accepted that the workers be *represented* within its institutions of government, aware that there was a margin, within its own domination, for the workers to win legal reforms useful to their own organization and constitution as a class (legalization of parties and organizations, legal recognition of strikes, universal suffrage, etc.).

At that moment, even though it fed **reformist** and **revisionist** tendencies, the effort to obtain this recognition was part of the process of the political constitution of the class and of the development of its organization as such (**centralism**).

The result of this whole period was the appearance of a space of *workers' democracy*, on the margins of and parallel to state democracy, in the mass organizational fabric that grew up around the party premises, the trade unions, the cooperatives and the numerous workers' cultural organizations.

Democracy, fascism and Stalinism against workers' democracy

The entry into the **imperialist phase** would transform the organization of the bourgeoisie and its relationship with the state, pushing it towards the forms characteristic of **decadence**: those of **state**

capitalism.

State capitalism is no longer a capitalism of free competition but a monopoly capitalism, and the political apparatus of the state is transformed to reflect it. Imperialist war and the participation of parliaments in the administration of the war economy drove the big political parties to go from being expressions of competing interests seeking representation vis-à-vis the state to being *state parties*: specialized representatives of the state vis-à-vis particular social sectors, monopolists specialized in the management of large social groups and currents of opinion.

The counter-revolution would play a central role in this global reorganization of the bourgeoisie *and* the state, which overlaps with the reorganization of the bourgeoisie *in* the state. The two specific vanguard forms of the counter-revolution, **fascism** and **Stalinism**, applied themselves to destroying the space of workers' democracy built up over decades by the Second and Third Internationals and, in Spain, also by the CNT.

Fascism is not merely a system of reprisals, of brutal force, and of police terror. Fascism is a particular governmental system based on the uprooting of all elements of proletarian democracy within bourgeois society. The task of fascism lies not only in destroying the Communist vanguard but in holding the entire class in a state of forced disunity.

To this end the physical annihilation of the most revolutionary section of the workers does not suffice. It is also necessary to smash all independent and voluntary organizations, to demolish all the defensive bulwarks of the proletariat, and to uproot whatever has been achieved during three-quarters of a century by the Social Democracy and the trade unions. For, in the last analysis, the Communist Party also bases itself on these achievements.

Leon Trotsky, “**What Next? Vital Questions for the German Proletariat**”, January 25, 1932.

The destruction of the space of workers’ democracy and the integration of the trade unions into the wartime regimentation of the workers accelerated in the 1930s and were carried to their ultimate consequences under the **anti-fascist** banner during the counter-revolution in Spain and, after it, during the second imperialist world war. Almost always under the leadership on the ground of the Stalinist and socialist parties.

Thus, by mowing down the mass base from which the political organization of the class emerged, the counter-revolution -in all its forms- cleared the way for the most totalitarian tendencies of state capitalism.

A paradox: it would be these totalitarian forms that served the *democratic* powers to construct the fascism-democracy opposition... and later, during the Cold War, the democracy-communism opposition. But by then there was as little left of workers' democracy under the democratic states as under Stalinist state capitalism.

Democracy today

Today nothing remains of the mass workers' democracy that the counter-revolution tore out by the roots. The trade union is no longer a mere intermediary, but a monopolist of labor power, on a par with other industrial monopolies. And, more importantly, **it cannot be anything else**. But this does not mean that we have to abandon the goal of building a space of class democracy. In fact, it is essential. But it cannot start from the forms characteristic of a rising capitalism that will not return.

The difficulties are obviously immense. We live universally under different forms of **state capitalism**. The omnipresent logic of the market and competition of **rising capitalism** gave way to the merging, through the financial system and the state, of individual capitals into large monopoly groups.

As a whole, the state became a sort of organic whole, a monopoly of monopolies that, through more or less formal systems, regulates the whole of social life from top to bottom: from wages, through the coordination and agreements of employers' associations and trade unions, to the *energy mix*, by way of the information distributed through the media monopolies.

In such a framework, in which *opinion* is the product of one more monopoly industry, Parliament ceases to be the place where the various class fractions and interests meet and negotiate. The

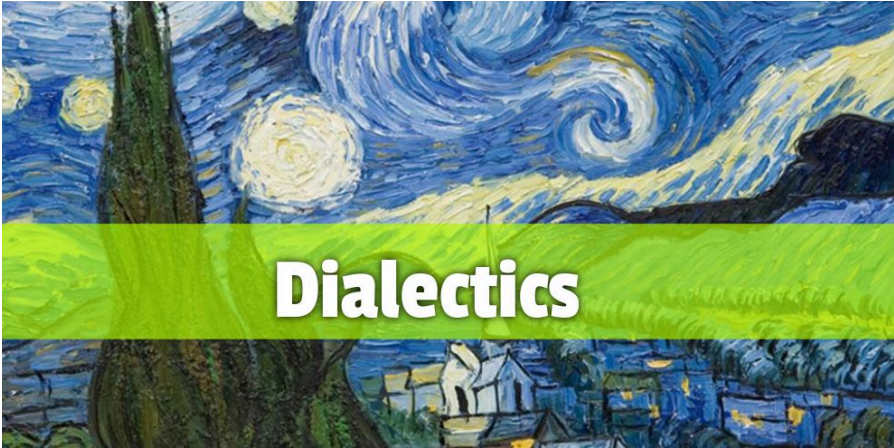
bourgeoisie no longer organizes itself through a *market of ideas and interests* but as an organic whole that secretes opinions for mass consumption through a thousand channels. Channels that distribute the same product in different flavors.

Elections become a mere gymnastic exercise of the state bourgeoisie's capacity to generate opinion. Of course, without ever ceasing to sell us the sacredness of elections as the expression of a non-existent *popular will* or an illusory *power of the citizenry*.

This does not mean that the bourgeoisie controls everything unchallenged from a perfect *control panel*. Although it captains the state and the big financial and capital groups, it is neither monolithic nor alone in society. A pack of hyenas is hardly a model of harmony, however coordinated it may be, and like every dictatorship of an exploiting class, its rule requires the active complicity of the intermediate layers.

There is no lack of examples, of varying significance, of revolts of the **petty bourgeoisie** in the daily news all over the world. In them, one side and the other will call on us again and again to *defend democracy*. They know that on that terrain we cannot, under any circumstances, assert ourselves as a politically independent class, but they do not give up hope of regimenting us around the democratic state as cannon fodder for their internal and external disputes.

Dialectics



Conception of reality as a dynamic and complex system of densely interrelated parts.

Dialectics vs Metaphysics

The dialectical conception of reality is present from Heraclitus and the Epicureans (Lucretius' "De Rerum Natura") to Spinoza among the materialist thinkers, and from Aristotle to Hegel among the idealists.

Modern philosophy, on the other hand, although it too had brilliant representatives of dialectics (for example, Descartes and Spinoza), had increasingly crystallized, through English influence, into the so-called metaphysical way of thinking, which also dominated almost exclusively the French of the eighteenth century, at least in their specifically philosophical works. [...]

For the metaphysician, things and their mental images, concepts, are objects of investigation given once and for all, isolated, to be considered one after the other and apart from each other, firm, fixed and rigid. The metaphysician thinks in crude, unmediated antitheses: his language is yea, yea, and nay, nay, for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.

For him, a thing either exists or does not exist: a thing cannot at the same time be itself and something else. Positive and negative absolutely exclude one another; cause and effect likewise stand in rigid antithesis to one another. At first sight this way of thinking seems very plausible to us, because it is that of so-called sound common sense.

But sound common sense, however respectable a companion it may be in the homely realm of its own four walls, has very wonderful adventures as soon as it ventures out into the wide world of research; and the metaphysical way of thinking, although justified and even necessary in those wide territories, whose extent varies according to the nature of the object, sooner or later always comes up against a barrier beyond which it becomes one-sided, limited, abstract, and loses itself in insoluble contradictions, because, attending to things, it loses sight of their connection; attending to their being, it loses sight of their coming into being and passing away; attending to their rest, it forgets their movement: because it cannot see the wood for the trees. [...]

[And then] we discover that cause and effect are representations which hold good as such only in their application to each particular case, but which merge as soon as we consider the particular case in its general connection with the world as a whole, and dissolve in the conception of universal change, in which causes and effects are constantly changing places, so that what is effect here or now is cause there or then, and vice versa.

None of these facts and methods of thought fit into the framework of metaphysical thinking. For dialectics, on the other hand, which grasps things and their conceptual reflections essentially in their connection, their concatenation, their movement, their origin and their passing away, facts such as those mentioned are so many confirmations of its own method. [...]

Dialectics, on the other hand, grasps things and their conceptual reflections essentially in their connection, their concatenation, their movement, their origin and their passing away. [...] Only by the dialectical method, therefore, with constant attention to the general interaction of coming into being and passing away, of progressive and regressive changes, can an exact representation of the universe, of its evolution and of the evolution of mankind be obtained, as well as of the reflection of this evolution in the minds of men.

“Anti-Dühring”. Frederick Engels 1878

Dialectics in Marxist critique

Dialectics appears in Marxist thought as a set of implicit conceptions about reality. Among them:

- Reality, any reality, forms a single whole in continuous transformation.
- The totality determines and gives meaning to its parts; the mere sum or aggregation of the parts does not allow a coherent description of the whole; if it cannot be integrated into a global framework of knowledge about the whole, it will become mere casuistry, knowledge **alienated** from its own object.
- The categories commonly used to explain change in **empiricism**, such as cause and effect, the distinction between the genitive (that which gives origin) and the substantive (that which is produced by it), quantity and quality, the antagonistic character of opposites... are in reality arbitrary, the product of a fragmenting and alienating gaze. Causes and effects intertwine and merge in the total vision (what is determinant is the whole, not linear causal chains); the accumulation of quantitative changes produces nothing other than qualitative changes; etc. etc.
- The compartmentalization of knowledge into different sciences, disciplines, fields, etc. does not correspond to the structure of reality but to the limitations of **empiricism** and the metaphysics that accompanies it. They are one more result of **ideology**.

Dictatorship



Rule of a particular interest over the whole political apparatus and through it over the social whole.

All ruling classes exercise their dictatorship through the state

All class societies have organized themselves politically as dictatorships of the interest of their ruling class, regardless of the concrete form of their political organization. Greek democracy was nonetheless a dictatorship of the slave-owning class over society as a whole, just as the aristocratic government of its rivals was. They are in fact forms of government of the same dictatorship, all designed to defend, in different ways and in different contexts, one and the same class interest and to impose it as the objective of the whole of society.

That is why, in any class dictatorship, asserting an opposing interest will never seem sensible and sometimes not even legitimate. On the other hand, the preponderance of the interest of the exploiting class over the universal needs of the species, not to mention those of the working class of that society, will seem the most “sensible” thing.

We see it every day. The trade unionist who tells us that we cannot demand “what the company’s accounts cannot sustain without losses”, or the politician who tells us that medical treatments or pensions must be subordinated to the “deficit target”, are in fact saying that the most basic, universal, generic human needs -well-being, health, etc.- can only be satisfied once the need of capital has been satisfied: **to accumulate profits in each cycle so as not to be devalued.**

When an environmentalist argues that we must get used to living with less, he is also saying the same thing. He is taking it for granted that capital cannot be devalued, not even to reduce its most destructive practices. And from that perspective, that of the sustainability of **capital**, the only way to reduce the ecological impact is to reduce our consumption, the social form that access to everything we need to satisfy our needs takes under capitalism.

And the fact is that capitalism, under any of its political forms -from its original liberal forms to **stalinist state capitalism**- has been and will be, for as long as it exists, a dictatorship of the **bourgeoisie** in and from the **state**, centred on ensuring the **accumulation** of **capital**.

The dictatorship of the proletariat

The passage from the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie to the dictatorship of the proletariat would mean that, for the first time, the exploited class, the most numerous in society, would exercise its dictatorship. A dictatorship that by its very nature would not have

radically different forms and contents. The **proletariat is the universal class**; the interest it defends and the guiding principle that moves it is that of generic, universal human needs.

This, since its first revolutionary experience, the Paris Commune of 1871, has conditioned its relationship with the **state**. To begin with, it cannot simply appropriate an apparatus designed for **oppression** and the reinforcement of **exploitation**; it has to destroy them and raise its own forms.

But the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery, and wield it for its own purposes. [...]

The multiplicity of interpretations to which the Commune has been subjected, and the multiplicity of interests which construed it in their favor, show that it was a thoroughly expansive political form, while all previous forms of government had been emphatically repressive. Its true secret was this. It was essentially a working-class government, the produce of the struggle of the producing against the appropriating class, the political form at last discovered under which to work out the economical emancipation of labor.

Karl Marx. **The Civil War in France**, 1871.

Its aims are in fact none other than the reorganization of production and of the whole of society on the criterion of human need; that is, the dictatorship of the proletariat is the phase of transition between what the workers' struggles implicitly pose (in themselves) and the conscious and universal realization of that logic: **communism**.

The Commune first and the **soviet** later are nothing more than the forms in which this dictatorship is imposed from the base of production upon the different aspects of social life. And unlike the

dictatorship of an exploiting class, which is all the more repressive the more democratic it wishes to appear, the dictatorship of the proletariat shows itself openly, while it leads the broadest strata of the workers and of society to take directly into their own hands the organization and transformation of production and of all social relations.

We, the workers, shall organize large-scale production on the basis of what capitalism has already created, relying on our own experience as workers, establishing strict, iron discipline backed up by the state power of the armed workers;

we shall reduce the role of state officials to that of simply carrying out our instructions as responsible, revocable, modestly paid “foremen and accountants” (of course, with the aid of technicians of all sorts, types and degrees):

this is our proletarian task, this is what we can and must start with in accomplishing the proletarian revolution.

Such a beginning, on the basis of large-scale production, will of itself lead to the gradual “withering away” of all bureaucracy, to the gradual creation of an order -an order without inverted commas, an order bearing no similarity to wage slavery- an order under which the functions of control and accounting, becoming more and more simple, will be performed by each in turn, will then become a habit and will finally die out as the special functions of a special section of the population.

“The State and Revolution”. Lenin, 1918

Dictatorship of the proletariat and social revolution

The main objective of the dictatorship of the working class is none other, and from the very first moment, than the destruction of the capital-labor relationship, wage labor, the fundamental and defining institution of capitalism. That is why all the coming proletarian revolutions will be social revolutions from day one.

The revolution will be a social revolution in the very place where it arises and not simply a political one (the seizure of power by the proletariat). A workers' state, let us stress, cannot be maintained in any case if the international revolution does not break out, and therefore socialism cannot be established in a single country.

Let us add to this that the suppression of capitalist relations is in no way equivalent to socialism (or to communism!!) but only -and in all this we take it for granted that it is a destruction carried out by the working class itself- a step towards socialism.

But this step, we assert, must be taken as quickly as possible through the immediate attack on and suppression of wage labor, even before the proletariat takes power on an almost global scale. Without this, however proletarian the power may be, it will turn into its opposite, since the devastation of the revolution is not a clean and immediately perceptible cut.

“Letter to the Third International Conference of ‘Communist Left’ Groups”, FOR, 1980

In other words, the *real movement which abolishes the present state of things*, the movement of the proletariat as a class, is not a two-stroke engine; it knows no mechanical break between the political and the

social. It is a movement against wage labor in all its phases and moments. And when it reaches the form of a political revolution, even on a local scale, it cannot but attack its main objective.

Even if it takes place only in a single industrial district, a social revolution adopts the standpoint of the totality, because it is a protest of man against dehumanized life, because it starts from the standpoint of each real individual, because the community from which the individual strives not to remain separated is the true community of man, human nature.

On the contrary, the political spirit of a revolution consists in the tendency of the classes without political power to put an end to their isolation from the being of the state and from power. Its standpoint is that of the state, an abstract totality that exists only through its separation from real life, and that would be unthinkable without the organized contradiction between the general idea and the individual existence of man.

In accordance with its limited and ambiguous nature, a revolution with a political spirit therefore creates a ruling sphere in society at the expense of society itself... Every revolution dissolves the old society: in this sense it is social. Every revolution overthrows the old power: in this sense it is political.

Marx in *The King of Prussia and Social Reform*. By a Prussian

The dictatorship of the proletariat is the opposite of the stalinist dictatorship

Stalinism, the expression of the **state capitalist** counter-revolution in Russia, could emerge and assert itself because the organs of the class dictatorship, the **soviets**, were already greatly weakened by the civil

war and by the NEP, the policy of building a state capitalism under the supervision of the soviets as a desperate way of trying to maintain the bases of the dictatorship during the stagnation of the first wave of the world revolution in the 1920s. The Russian Revolution, a **permanent revolution**, thus abruptly cut short the attack on capitalist relations of production that was the guide of its socialist phase. The **bureaucracy**, which is in charge of the reconstruction of national capital, will gradually reimpose its dictatorship.

By 1936, the soviets, already completely subordinated to the new managing class by a thousand procedures and through brutal repression, will be legally replaced in the new state constitution by bodies made up exclusively of bureaucrats. For obvious political reasons, the new organs through which the state controls the workers retain the name of those through which the workers exercised their dictatorship. But one needed only to look at any of their most basic expressions or practices to discover that they were not organs of the dictatorship of the proletariat, but of a dictatorship over the proletariat.

Dictatorship of the proletariat, [is, in its] thuggish acceptance, [a] police, militarist and bureaucratic despotism, directed against the proletarian revolution at home and abroad. A supremely centralized party-state of capital in which power is exercised, without control or responsibility, by a handful of all-terrorist and all-powerful leaders. Historically, its origin is the destruction of the 1917 revolution and the extermination of its protagonists. It is a dictatorship over the proletariat.

[In its] revolutionary acceptance, [on the other hand, it is the] government of the proletariat based on its own armament, after the dismantling of the capitalist repressive bodies, on the workers' management of the economy and of the distribution of the social product of labor. It thus carries out the suppression of wage labor, and as a result of it the disappearance of classes and of the state.

It is, therefore, the most complete democracy, not merely in law, but in fact. With the dictatorship of the proletariat the first and most important of the Rights of Man will begin to rule: the right of every person to live and fulfil themselves without having to sell their capacity for work and creation, nor to buy or sell the products of either. The second right to be guaranteed: the right of insurrection against any attempt to go back. Through the proletariat humanity takes possession of itself, inaugurating an entirely new civilization.

“Lexicon of Contemporary Political Thuggery, Compared with the Revolutionary Lexicon”, 1970

Discrimination



Exclusion or differential treatment suffered by a person for displaying a set of arbitrary characteristics that are unrelated to whatever they are excluded from or which, when they are not, are attributed to them by association with a demographic profile as arbitrary as any other.

Incentives at the root of discrimination

Despite all the hymns to the virtues of “free competition”, capitalism has never known competition like the one taught in economics classes. As we see every day in trade wars, commercial laws, taxes... capitalist competition is a total war that takes place only partially in the “language of prices”.

Creating monopolies to blackmail millions to death, imposing commercial advantages through military force, subjecting the weakest capital to heavier burdens... these are the day-to-day realities of

competition between capitalists. Even the most wretched petty bourgeois knows that “good margins” and “big business” are born from positions of strength, normally backed by the state or sustained by the ownership of large masses of capital; not from competition in price and quality, but from the possibility of using the market to impose exactions rigged outside it.

So however much “equal opportunity” is sold to us as the very essence of the system, **it is the system itself that constantly recreates the incentives for discrimination.**

When the left tells us that this or that discrimination must be confronted and prosecuted with all the force of the state, it is taking the point of view of big capital. What big capital, which runs **state capitalism**, is interested in is homogenizing the conditions of exploitation as far as possible, in order to guarantee the mobility of big capitals among their possible placements.

But capital in competition, gigantic social parasite that it is, does not hesitate to use any means at its disposal to survive and reproduce. If there is a possibility of discriminating, there is a possibility of increasing exploitation and, with it, profit.

What is more, from the point of view of individual capitals it is often the only way to do so. The equalizing tendency of big capital will clash again and again with the needs of real competition, above all for the **petty bourgeoisie**, but also among big capitals. If one discrimination ceases to be useful, an old one will resurface or a new one will appear.

For capital there is nothing essential about the supposed “identities” upon which, at a given moment, it brings to bear the full force of discrimination; there are only demographic profiles that it may be useful to discriminate against. The existence of any pre-capitalist remnant or prejudice and of any situation of marginality -prisoners,

undocumented migrants, etc.- will then be encouraged and taken up again and again by the new competitors who aspire to accelerated accumulation by scraping together margins. And if there are no prejudices at hand, others will be invented.

That is real competition. So brutal that the **state** itself has to moderate it because of its subversive potential for the bourgeoisie itself and its state. **Discrimination under capitalism is systematic, necessary and universal.** Not even the state can go beyond prosecuting excesses without eliminating the play of incentives created by the competition of capitals.

The inculturation of discrimination

When a discrimination is practiced over time in a way that is not harmful to the system as a whole, its **ideological** justification ends up becoming part of **culture**.

Thus, for example, the social values that condemned women of all social classes to a subordinate place within their own class were, in principle, an inheritance for **capitalism**. **Capitalism** did not need a sexual division of labor, nor is it in its logic to establish a differentiated and separate mode of exploitation for men and women.

It nevertheless took it up and reproduced it from the very first moment as a way of directly increasing the exploitation of women workers. The temporary incorporation of even larger numbers of women into industrial production during the two great imperialist wars removed a good part of the legal restrictions still placed on women in the countries of the capitalist center, although it was not enough to change the culture.

For culture to change to the point of socially condemning a given form of discrimination, a change in the needs of **accumulation** is required, one that permeates the state and moves it, first, to free **accumulation** from the obstacles that the structures arising from a general discrimination materially place in its way and, second, to undertake the transformation of **culture**.

Culture is by definition “national”, and when the values and prejudices underlying a certain discrimination become counterproductive or harmful to **accumulation**, to the **state** or simply to social peace, the state will try to “reform the culture”, to “purify” it or “modernize” it. A certain **ideological** contradiction is then established which will inevitably generate supporters and detractors in all social classes. Veritable fireworks, these conflicts can drag on indefinitely in the form of “culture wars”, reinforcing around themselves the regimenting capacity of the state.

The example of Spanish machismo

If the world wars did not permanently change the role of women in the productive apparatus, one of their consequences did: the development of **state capitalism**.

With the proliferation of bureaucratic structures in states and enterprises all over the world, the early 1960s saw a generation of petty-bourgeois women enter wage labor. The development of the service sector that accompanied the process during the second post-war period -an expression of increasingly insufficient markets- and the falling share of wages in national income resulting from the development of **accumulation** extended the process during the 1970s until it affected the working class as a whole.

Families were transformed from more or less extended families, in which adult men and only some women worked to bring in “supplementary income”, into “nuclear families” in which, in order to maintain their consumption capacity, father and mother both had to hold full-time jobs.

Let us look at an example from Spain. Between 1978 and 2017 the female labor force grew by 177% and the female activity rate rose from 27.75% to 53.13%. Over the same period, the male activity rate fell from 74.63% to 65.04%. The bulk of this transformation of the labor market took place in the eighties, the period in which the Spanish bourgeoisie undertook its “modernizing” project, which included industrial restructuring and the predominance of services.

The working women of that time thus entered an economy that demanded qualified workers. It would find them in the new graduating classes of the universities, where the change had already begun in the 1960s. When the Constitution was approved in 1978, almost 40% of students were women. By the mid-1980s there were already more women than men in higher education. In other words, the women who lived first-hand through the structural change of the Spanish labor market, those who had to fight “for real” against sexist bosses and vile hiring processes, are the ones who are 60 years old or more today.

The economic change was accompanied by a series of cultural changes driven by legal change. In 1981 the Suárez government introduced and managed to pass the divorce law, and in 1985 the Felipe González government passed the first abortion law. From the 1979 municipal elections onwards, which produced a majority of PSOE-PCE town councils, “family planning” centers spread basic sex education and made contraceptives accessible to a new generation.

Values linked to sex changed, they were “modernized”, and in general personal, family and work relations became -not without friction- more egalitarian with respect to each person’s sex. This tendency went hand in hand with the collapse of the Catholic Church as a reference point and a creator of models in Spanish society. Spain went from almost 70% practicing Catholics to 12%. The change in sexual morality and customs continued.

When the Zapatero government approved same-sex marriage in 2004, 56% of the population was already in favor and only a little over 20% against. Of course machismo went on, goes on and will go on as long as social relations as a whole are based on violence and exclusion, but the unbearable, crude Spanish machismo that had been hegemonic until the end of the 1980s had by then become a subculture of the most diehard right, a reprehensible *tic* in politicians, an argument for why the “trash television” that had taken off with the arrival of Berlusconi and his “Tele5” was unbearable.

The cultural change, surprisingly fast in historical terms, also generated its resistances and its victims. But it is significant that the first government to acknowledge it, mobilizing friendly media to establish the problem and passing the first law on violence against women, was Aznar’s in 2001, the year the euro was introduced.

That is to say, the bulk of the cultural change -the generation that made sure at home that the brothers washed the dishes and not just the daughters, the women who normalized for themselves the same sexual practices and emotional relationships as men, those who lived through the shift in the perception of gender violence from intimate shame to social scourge- belongs to the women who are over 45 today. Or, put another way, to the generation before the consecration of **feminism** as state ideology.

The end of machismo as a defining and characteristic element of Spanish culture was driven by the shift of capital investment towards the tertiary sector from the 1960s onwards. It was accompanied from the beginning by the state, which provided higher education to more and more women and, from 1978 onwards, transformed the legal apparatus that had enshrined discrimination.

The absence of a feminist movement with the capacity to mobilize throughout this whole process is significant. Only from 2015, a decade after the socio-economic transformation had been completed, would **feminism** appear as a form of mass political regimentation. It would do so directly from the state or with the state's strong support.

Of course, it would rewrite the social history of the 60s, 70s and 80s as if the material transformations had been pushed forward by a non-existent feminist mobilization. The new **feminism**, a state ideology, was in fact the product -and neither the cause nor the motor- of a cultural change that had already taken place and that the state now claimed as a defining element of the country's social culture.

The class position against discrimination

The movement of the proletariat represents, in its very process of constitution as a class, the overcoming of all discrimination. Not, of course, in the manner of a *cultural movement*, but as the expression and result of the **centralism** it needs in order to move forward.

The proletariat can only fight effectively by overcoming the divisions artificially imposed within it. Even at the most elementary level of its struggle, that of a local strike, it either overcomes the fractures imposed by the various systems of discrimination -by type of contract, age, race, sex, language, origin, etc.- or the struggle will remain

isolated and powerless. To go further, to become a class struggle and, once posed as such, to prosper, it will need to call into question all oppressions and discriminations.

It is important to understand that, at every stage of the struggle, at every moment, this overcoming is the result of a collective practice and of a need of the concrete struggle. The overcoming of discrimination is not the result of an ideological illumination that affects individuals one by one. Struggles are not Pentecostal magic that generates sudden, deep moral convictions transforming slaves, one by one, into enlightened saints.

We are at the opposite pole from the famous puritan-feminist slogan *the personal is political*. The political, the class struggle, transforms human relations as the expression of a material need. It is true that in doing so it asserts in practice a **moral perspective**. But that perspective is none other than that of a **society neither fractured into classes nor enslaved by scarcity**, manifesting itself in the struggle as the negation of all oppression and discrimination. That is to say, the general principle of communism as *the real movement which abolishes and overcomes the present state of things*.

The duty of the class party of the proletariat to protest and resist national oppression arises not from any special “right of nations,” just as, for example, its striving for the social and political equality of sexes does not at all result from any special “rights of women” which the movement of bourgeois emancipationists refers to.

This duty arises solely from the general opposition to the class regime and to every form of social inequality and social domination, in a word, from the basic position of socialism.

Rosa Luxemburg. **The National Question and Autonomy**, 1908

Consequences for class organizations

Centralism is the organizational expression of the idea of the unity of the class as a **universal political subject**. When this is carried over to the organization of the most clear-sighted workers, the **class party**, it becomes evident that the organization that seeks to drive forward the development of class consciousness has to centralize all efforts and unite everyone without distinction of national or religious origin, sex, age or language. This is what Rosa Luxemburg recalls, precisely when discussing the organization of Russian social democracy.

A pronounced centralist spirit exists throughout social democracy. Having grown up on the economic soil of capitalism, which tends to be centralist, and being obliged to wage its battle within the political framework of the great bourgeois centralized state, social democracy is, from birth, a determined enemy of all particularism and all federalism. Since social democracy has to defend the general interests of the proletariat as a class in the framework of a concrete state, against the partial and group interests of the proletariat, it shows the logical tendency **to merge all the national, religious and professional groups of the working class into a single unitary party**. (...) Social-democratic centralism has to be of an essentially different character from the Blanquist one; it cannot be anything else but the impetuous concentration of the will of the conscious and militant vanguard of the working class in front of its isolated groups and individuals; it is, so to speak, the “self-centralism” of the leading sector of the proletariat.

Rosa Luxemburg. **Organizational Questions of the Russian Social Democracy**, 1904

That is to say, the party, the organization of militants, cannot be organized as a federation of *particularisms*, of “partial interests”, of religious origins, as if the proletariat were the sum of a series of identity fronts, of subjects fighting against distinct, differentiated oppressions. The centralism of the party means asserting the centrality of the struggle against wage labor.

Discrimination and the scope of *specialized groups*

The debates within Russian social democracy that gave rise to the pamphlet from which the above quotation is taken are very illustrative of how Marxists understood centralism.

Lenin had been campaigning since 1903 to bring the **Bund**, the majority socialist party among the Jewish working-class concentrations of the Russian empire, into full integration within the RSDLP. At that time Jews in the Russian empire could only live inside a **confinement area**, their political, educational and economic rights were legally restricted, and they regularly suffered “**pogroms**” stirred up by the repressive apparatus itself, which thereby released social tensions.

With antisemitism turned into state ideology, if there were archetypal victims of tsarist discrimination and oppression, they were the Jews. The Bund demanded autonomy within the party in the name of its differentiated identity, based on that specific oppression. The party, with Lenin -and not a few leaders of Jewish origin- at its head, held that this autonomy should not go beyond the logical autonomy of a working group specialized in contributing to the development of class consciousness within a specific sector of the proletariat: the Yiddish-speaking one. For the Bundists, on the contrary, it meant a de facto “federation”. Problems would not be long in coming.

“Autonomy” under the Rules adopted in 1898 provides the Jewish working-class movement with all it needs: propaganda and agitation in Yiddish, its own literature and congresses, the right to advance separate demands to supplement a **single general Social-Democratic programme** and to satisfy local needs and requirements arising out of the special features of Jewish life. In everything else there must be **complete fusion with the Russian proletariat**, in the interests of the struggle waged by the entire proletariat of Russia. As for the fear of being “steam-rollered” in the event of such fusion, the very nature of the case makes it groundless, since it is autonomy that is a guarantee against all “steam-rolling” in matters pertaining specifically to the Jewish movement, while in matters pertaining to the struggle against the autocracy, the struggle against the bourgeoisie of Russia as a whole, we must act as a single and centralized militant organization, have behind us **the whole of the proletariat, without distinction of language or nationality, a proletariat whose unity is cemented by the continual joint solution of problems of theory and practice, of tactics and organization;** and we must not set up organizations that would march separately, each along its own track; we must not weaken the force of our offensive by breaking up into numerous independent political parties; we must not introduce estrangement and isolation and then have to heal an artificially implanted disease with the aid of these notorious “federation” plasters.

Lenin. “**Does the Jewish Proletariat Need an ‘Independent Political Party’?**”, 1903

Although they did not go by that name at the time, we can already see all the ingredients of the debates with identitarianism and its traps. By defining one part of the proletariat as “Jewish”, the rest begins to be

defined as “gentile” (*goyim*) or “Christian”, and it begins to be insinuated that they are “beneficiaries” of the discrimination suffered by others. Lenin replies angrily in a note:

It is this task of “organising impotence” that the Bund serves when, for example, it uses such a phrase as “our comrades of the ‘Christian working-class organisation.’” The phrase is as preposterous as is the whole attack on the Ekaterinoslav Committee. We have no knowledge of any “Christian” working-class organisations. Organisations belonging to the R.S.D.L.P. have never distinguished their members according to religion, never asked them about their religion and never will—even when the Bund will in actual fact “have formed itself into an independent political party.”

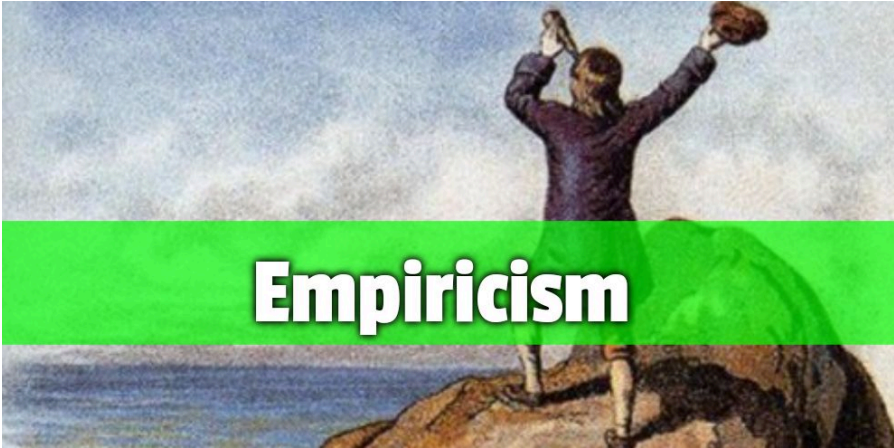
Lenin. “**Does the Jewish Proletariat Need an ‘Independent Political Party’?**”, 1903

The danger of this kind of rhetorical trap, which in reality only seeks to fragment the class in order to consolidate a small *sectoral bureaucracy* by exploiting people’s exhaustion with an aberrant discrimination, was very much present from the first moments of the Third International. It was not only that the communist women’s, youth or cooperative movements limited their activity to specific propaganda; organizationally **they did not stand *alongside* the International and its parties, but *within* them**, as sectoral groups.

There is only one movement, only one organization of communist women -formerly socialist- within the communist party together with communist men. The aims of communist men are our aims, our tasks.

Clara Zetkin

Empiricism



Theory that bases scientific knowledge on the separation between “objective” facts - supposedly external to thought - and “subjective” analysis, supposedly proper to the individual mind. As the subjective is individual, the universalization of results requires either a metaphysical confusion between the facts themselves and the concepts or categories with which they are described or in which they are grouped, or else accepting the impossibility of a theoretical universalization of empirical results without a prior approach to the totality.

Marxist critique of empiricism

By starting from a fracture of reality between the objective - supposedly natural - and the subjective - supposedly individual - empiricism creates its own dead end.

When one gets used to assigning a certain kind of reality, outside our mind, to $\sqrt{-1}$ or to the fourth dimension, it no longer matters much if one goes a step further and also accepts the spirit world of the mediums.

Frederick Engels. *Natural Science in the Spirit World*, 1878

The “exteriority” of one part of reality with respect to another makes it impossible to affirm a reality, and therefore a theory capable of explaining it in all its interrelations simultaneously. This is the basis of the impossibility of developing a “complexity theory”, or even a more modest “systems theory”, from the empiricist epistemology.

However great the contempt for all theoretical thought may be, without it one cannot relate two natural facts to each other or penetrate the connection that exists between them. The only question is whether the thinking is correct or not, and there is no doubt that disdain for theory is the surest way to think naturalistically and, therefore, falsely.

Frederick Engels. *Natural Science in the Spirit World*, 1878

The initial dualism of empiricism translates into its own historical dichotomy: either it has to start from abstractions and concepts *ex ante*, which it can only link arbitrarily to the very experience supposedly “analyzed” *a posteriori*...

It is the old story. First all sensory things are turned into abstractions, and then one wants to know them by means of the senses, to see time and smell space. The empiricist becomes so steeped in the habit of empirical experience that he believes he is still in the field of sensory experience when he is working with abstractions.

Frederick Engels. *Dialectics of Nature*.

...Or else it becomes a casuistry that has to give up any claim to universal knowledge, paralyzed by the *empirical possibility* of its refutation.

We have seen that the starting point and fundamental premise of the philosophy of empirio-criticism is subjective idealism. The world is our sensation: such is the fundamental premise, veiled, but in no way modified by the little word “element” and by the theories of the “independent series”, of “coordination” and of “introjection”. The absurdity of this philosophy is that it leads to solipsism, to the recognition that only the philosophizing individual exists.

Lenin. *Materialism and Empirio-criticism*, 1908.

The final form of empiricism ends up twisting into a world where “methodological solipsism” goes from being a scientific premise to reigning over an increasingly divided society.

As long as **each one** of the alleged miracles has not been explained, they still have enough room to carry on.

Frederick Engels. *Natural Science in the Spirit World*, 1878

That is to say, empiricism can only overcome the artificial fracture it presupposes in reality through metaphysics, or else turn into the most brutal relativism. That is why the opposition “modernity-postmodernity” is not really one, but a consequence, present from its very origins, of the **bourgeoisie**’s approach to knowledge.

Environmentalism



Ideology that considers the main historical contradiction to be Humanity-Nature, or in certain versions, capitalism-Nature, proposing as an alternative a range of “reforms” that go from “green capitalism” to “degrowth”.

Environmentalism as the ideology of green technological change

On one side of the environmentalist spectrum we would have all the tendencies that present the overcoming of the contradiction between the natural environment and capitalism as the product of a *technological change* that can be carried out within the system. The problem is that there is no technological change outside social relations, and therefore none that does not unequally affect the situation of the classes that define society. By making the centrality of

the **class struggle** invisible in order to put environmental damage in its place, environmentalism forgets the necessarily reactionary meaning of every *ecological reform* under capitalism.

The change of model in energy, transport and agricultural production implies setting in motion a technological change. But it is important to understand that it is not technology that would magically give new impetus to **accumulation**, but the transfer of income from labor to capital. Technology is purely instrumental and is developed not by the genius of solitary researchers but by the demand and investment of interested capital. That is why the new, supposedly more “sustainable” technologies are required to be, above all, more productive. This does not refer to physical productivity, to the quantity of product obtained per hour of average labor, but to productivity for capital: the amount of profit produced by each hour of labor hired. That is why global state regulation is central to the “ecological transition”: taxes and rules do not change physical productive capacity, but they do change the expected profit per hour of exploited social labor.

That is the logic of every “technological revolution” in capitalism. It is not that capitalism “adapts to new technologies”; it is that technologies are not considered viable unless they increase productivity from the perspective of profit, that is, unless they serve to increase the share of capital’s income in total production.

Capitalism is a system of exploitation of one class by another. Its aim is not to produce cars, much less to safeguard the climate. Its only aim is to produce and to increase exploitation with each cycle, increasing capital. Beneath the promise of green and utopian digitally modeled urban landscapes, of silent non-polluting electric cars, lies, as always, the sharp reality of the class struggle. All that global renewal of energy, transport and industrial production infrastructures which they imagine capable of *restarting* the global cycle of capital is nothing but the greatest transfer of income from labor to capital since the Second World War.

“Against the Climate Sacred Union”, communiqué by Emancipación.

Degrowth environmentalism as a contemporary form of Malthusianism

Another wing of environmentalism, the so-called *extinctionist*, *degrowth* or *deep ecology* wing, heir to the *Club of Rome* and to neo-Malthusianism, with recognized stars such as Hardin and his very famous *tragedy of the commons* (originally written as a racist pamphlet), will insist again and again on the finite character of natural resources in order to assert a contradiction between them and the current volume of world population. Humanity would be nothing more than an uncontrollable predatory species, a plague to be contained or eradicated, as in the simplistic models of ecology classes.

The only alternative for this environmentalism would be catastrophe or *degrowth*, the latter implying a reduction that its own spokespeople estimate at 7/8 of the population. Unlike Malthus, they will try to explain their “sustainability” ratios, and in doing so they will fall into all kinds of fallacies. The best known: repeatedly forecasting an energy collapse for lack of sufficient oil on at least two occasions in the 2000s, and projecting from global warming data an extinction of the species in 2050.

But the main fallacy of this increasingly numerous and media-promoted wing of environmentalism is that it equates industrialization with capitalism in order to reaffirm bourgeois morality in its crudest terms, those used by Malthus.

Malthus and bourgeois morality

The United Kingdom of the late 18th century was not the most favorable place for industrial enterprise. From the landed and mercantile aristocracy to the peasants, whose communal morality had not yet been shattered by the most wretched poverty, they were an obstacle for the industrial bourgeoisie and the liberal luminaries. At the end of the century the Elizabethan “Poor Laws” were still in force; they imposed forced labor, but also provided food and basic support to the great masses of poor people driven off the land by the mercantilist greed of primitive accumulation.

Riots over the price of bread broke out periodically, and the situation in France caused great concern among the British elites. Following in the footsteps of Adam Smith and closing the Smithian moral treatise from below, Thomas Malthus proposed, at the most opportune moment, a new moral order that broke with everything before it. Where Smith points out that free-trade *laissez faire* leads to the best of results thanks to accumulation, Malthus orders the setting in motion of what he himself calls the social “machine”, cutting off the Speenhamland system of relief and forcing the poor to work at any price in order to survive.

Life is activity, and this activity can only be guaranteed by the threat of the evil of scarcity. All of Malthus’ statistical work on the need to control population, whose famous ratios he never demonstrates, serves as a justification for the moral argument that takes up the last two chapters of the treatise.

Malthus began his theodicy with a critical analysis of human nature. As in the Aristotelian theory of motion, the natural state of mankind was rest. Men were “inert, sluggish and averse to labor”; it was motion that needed explaining. Some push was needed “to awaken inert and chaotic matter into spirit, to sublimate the dust of the earth into soul; to elicit an ethereal spark from the lump of clay”. This push was the physical and moral evils caused by the law of population. To avoid pain, men went into activity.

To avoid evil, and to pursue good, seems to be the great duty and business of man; and this world seems peculiarly calculated to afford opportunities for the greatest exertions of this kind; and it is by this exercise, by these stimulants, that mind is formed.

Men were by nature passive; the discomforts of life caused motion. Evil was the driving force of the human realm. It was therefore the force behind civilization. Malthus confronted this potentially embarrassing problem by turning it into a theory of incentives. At the lowest level, hunger or cold forced men to seek food and to form a society of cultivators; at the highest levels, *some of the noblest exertions of the human mind have been set in motion by the necessity of satisfying human wants.*

D. L. LeMahieu, “Malthus and the Theology of Scarcity”

To the horror of some of his contemporaries -and the delight of others-, Malthus not only tolerates but celebrates evil and scarcity as creative forces. Scarcity, as a guarantee of hunger and torment for the workers, must be artificially maintained to ensure the functioning of the great hydraulic machine of accumulation: **capitalism**.

And thus it appears, that a society constituted according to the most beautiful form that imagination can conceive, with benevolence for its moving principle, instead of self-love, and with every evil disposition in all its members corrected by reason and not force, would, from the inevitable laws of nature, and not from any original depravity of man, in a very short period degenerate into a society constructed upon a plan not essentially different from that which prevails in every known state at present; I mean, a society divided into a class of proprietors, and a class of labourers, and with self-love the main-spring of the great machine.

Thomas R. Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population* 1798

Malthus would succeed in getting extensions of poor relief rejected and would become a major figure of his time, influencing politicians in the British Isles and training the officials of the Indies who would apply his principles of population control to the British colonies. The morality of Malthus and Bentham would underpin all the discussions on the poor laws and on the formation of the new independent proletariat, “free to sell its labor power”:

The Poor Law Report of 1834, which summed up the findings of the Royal Commission, was replete with Malthusian language: *We have seen that one of the objects attempted by the present administration of the Poor Laws is to repeal pro tanto that law of nature by which the effects of each man's improvidence or misconduct are borne by himself and his family. The effect of that attempt has been to repeal pro tanto the law by which each man and his family enjoy the benefit of his own prudence and virtue.*

One of the main objects of the new regime, the report stated, was “the diminution of improvident and wretched marriages, thereby checking the increase of population”. By abolishing relief to able-bodied men and their families, the *New Poor Law*, Dean states, revealed its Malthusian aim of *making the... independent laborer solely responsible for the welfare of his wife and children.*

James P. Huzel, “The Popularization of Malthus in Early Nineteenth Century England”

Blaming the workers and millenarianism

In the degrowth and extinctionist discourse that predominates in environmentalism, *individual improvidence* has been replaced by *collective improvidence*. The development bequeathed by **rising capitalism**, from mass vaccination to the growth of agricultural production, not to mention industrialization, would supposedly have fed a population growth *beyond our means, unsustainable*. The only possible horizon would be to *degrow*, that is, the mass destruction of **productive forces** with the consequent misery and genocide. They generously offer us, mind you, to do it *little by little*, through *transition economies*, so that the responsibility of each family prevails and, in the face of scarcity, the birth rate falls drastically.

As in Malthus, the line of argument of environmentalism always begins with the prospect of an inescapable catastrophe produced by the growth of consumption. Consumption that would supposedly have grown wildly *in response* to the permanent dissatisfaction of the great social majorities. It is a technique of shock and sectarian guilt-tripping applied to social communication.

In reality, consumption is the form that the satisfaction of the workers' needs takes in a commodity society. By attacking their *consumerism*, today's Malthusianism puts the focus on the same place as its predecessors: the voracity and the growth of the working classes are the main enemy of the social order.

And if Malthus set out to channel -by means of liberalism- that drive to growth towards **proletarianization** under the harshest conditions, the neo-Malthusian environmentalists simply propose *self-restraint* and an even greater restriction of consumption in order to save a few in a pre-industrial **utopia à la Morris**... which we would have to start building right now.

What is characteristic of environmentalism and of the original Malthusianism is the absurdity of their premises. Malthus, a parson after all, was flatly opposed to contraception, and for him the fertility of the species was not, but rather *had to be*, a constant without historical change.

For environmentalism too. The fact is that what is known as the *demographic transition*, a marked fall in fertility with the economic development of territories, does not fit any of the premises of environmentalism. Humanity does not reproduce like rabbits in the mating season. A large part of the population *boom* in the **semi-colonial countries** is due to a fall in infant mortality thanks to a basic medical improvement that is not yet coupled with a fall in the birth

rate... because families still live in poverty and need as many working hands as possible (as well as because of restrictions on access to contraceptives).

We humans do not maximize the number of our children regardless of the state of our society. The supposed problem of *overpopulation* is the problem that a large part of Humanity lives in the most wretched poverty and scarcity because of capitalism, not because of some supposed natural tendency to fill the planet with children.

For Malthus this was an inevitable result of his reasoning, since his economic model foresaw that wages would not rise with **accumulation** (an error for which he ended up apologizing at the end of his life), so that, according to him, the workers would always suffer great scarcity and would try to reproduce as much as possible. Today the position according to which the workers' consumption -itself the cause of all evils- must be restricted is simply indefensible.

In reality the discourse of environmentalism comes down to three moves: the threat of catastrophe (*peak* oil, climate change, extinction, etc.), blaming the workers for making the use of resources *unsustainable* by consuming *too much*, and the exaltation of **pauperization**, which should be embraced voluntarily and as soon as possible. Few arguments could better represent what the **decadence** of a **mode of production** means.

Because the fact is that every mode of production has generated similar movements in its decadence. In Rome we find a growing popularity of eschatology from the crisis of the Republic onwards: in the mystery cults of Isis, the esoteric -and literally castrating- cults of Ceres and Apis, and even in a Hellenized Jewish sect with strong apocalyptic tendencies known as Christianity, which, once it had

become the official and compulsory religion, would still provide the mythological framework for the last sectarian movements of the decomposition of slavery, from the Gnostics to the Priscillianists.

In the crisis of feudalism from the 12th century onwards there would be no shortage of flagellants, Adamites, Joachimites... an endless list of pauperizing, chaste, penitential and increasingly violent sects that already herald the millenarianism of the Valencian Germanías or the English Puritans.

Today environmentalism calls the Apocalypse extinction and renames the *City of God* as the eco-village, a productive model that, according to its own promoters, could feed no more than a seventh, perhaps an eighth, of the current world population. The bourgeois classes, bound to a system that no longer produces human development, are incapable of imagining a capitalist future with room for the whole species. So they fantasize about an impossible *going back* for the chosen few, imposed by a catastrophe that would make it compulsory.

Environmentalism is right about one thing: there is no longer a future in which the development of Humanity is compatible with capitalism. The road to abundance lies elsewhere: communism.

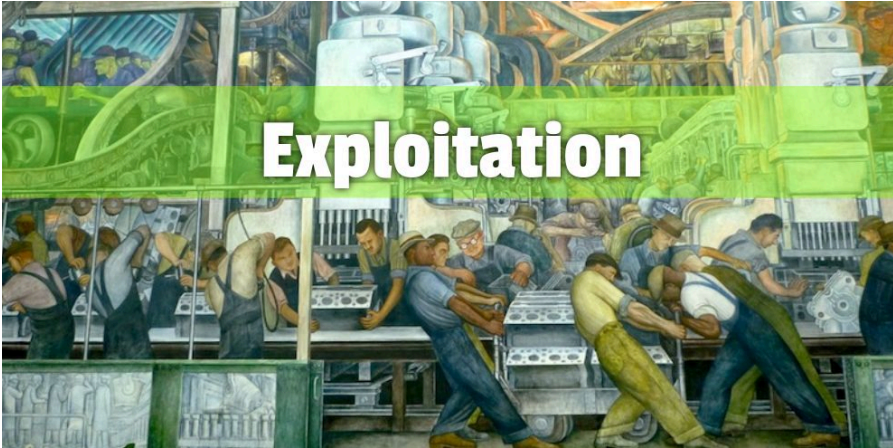
Environmentalism as a moral problem

In all forms of environmentalism, including the so-called *eco-socialism* in all its variants, two characteristics coincide: the denial that the capitalism-proletariat contradiction is central, or even points towards the overcoming of capitalist social relations, and the inability to imagine an abundant, de-commodified society.

That is to say, environmentalism directly attacks the two pillars of **communist morality**. That is why the result of any **opportunist** approach -accepting, for example, that the prospect of the extinction of the species through an environmental disaster looms over the coming decades, however much capitalism is blamed for it- besides not being true, can only be demoralizing.

There is no possible *common ground* between class interests and environmentalism in any of its forms, which does not mean setting aside the environmental problems caused by capitalism.

Exploitation



Appropriation of the product of the labor of one social class by another.

Historically, exploitation has mainly taken extra-economic forms. The ancient slave-owner, the feudal lord or the Chinese mandarin organized social labor and took a share of the product of the classes they exploited by means of exaction and the threat of the use of violence.

Capitalism is the first **mode of production** in which exploitation takes place by exclusively economic means, in the form of a generalized “free” exchange of **commodities**, apparently equal in value, on the market. However, the use of one particular **commodity, labor power**, by its buyers, the owners of **capital**, would produce -no one knows how- an increase in **value**, a **surplus value**. Wealth, that is, the product

of labor, would grow magically as a result of an endless, ascending cycle of exchanges capable of mobilizing labor power for the production of what is exchanged.

However, what this appearance actually hides is that **capital** is nothing but a right to exploit labor power. And that the system as a whole is nothing more than a more or less “automatic” way of generating new rights of exploitation for the owners of capital. The successful **accumulation** of capital presents itself as a necessity for the members of the exploiting class, who, in order to remain in it, must make their capital grow. The system thus rewards with more rights of exploitation whoever made the most efficient use of the capital they started out with.

It is not circulation that produces **value**. Nor is it that labor adds value to objects, as it seemed to the classical economists. **It is that the value of the commodities produced by an economy is nothing but the labor socially necessary to produce them.** And if capital is needed to produce each of them, it is because in every class society a prior “right” is required in order to organize a certain amount of labor power, devote it to the production of something and exploit it legitimately.

Fascism



Revolutionarist movement of the petty bourgeoisie that acts as the spearhead of the counterrevolution and whose historical mission is the destruction of the fabric of class organizations inherited from the Second International, replacing them with the forced regimentation of the workers in state capitalism through trade unions and institutions derived from or integrated into the political apparatus of the state.

Origin of fascism

Fascism arises in Italy in the **nationalist** atmosphere clamoring for participation in the First World War in order to “complete” Italian reunification, that is, the territorial program of the bourgeois revolution.

It dates back to 1914-15, that is, to the period preceding Italy's entry into the world war; the groups that called for this intervention and that, from the political point of view, were made up of representatives of various tendencies, constituted the first manifestation of fascism. There was a right-wing group with Salandra, that is, the big industrialists interested in the war who, before calling for intervention on the side of the Entente, had advocated war against it. There were also, on the other hand, bourgeois tendencies of the left: the Italian radicals, that is, the left democrats and the republicans, traditional supporters of the liberation of Trento and Trieste. In third place there were some elements of the proletarian movement, revolutionary syndicalists and anarchists. To these groups also belonged (it is, by the way, an individual case but one of particular importance) the leader of the left wing of the Socialist Party, editor of "Avanti": Mussolini.

Amadeo Bordiga. **Report on fascism. Fourth Congress of the Communist International.**

These "leftist" tendencies are the ones that will coalesce around d'Annunzio, Rossoni and Mussolini into a **revolutionarism of the petty bourgeoisie**. Like all petty-bourgeois revolutionarism **up to then**, it will be above all **nationalist** and **popular** (=interclassist).

But in 1919-20 there are two elements that mark a **change of historical epoch** and that will give it its specific form as fascism: the workers' revolution and the **integration of the trade unions into state capitalism**.

What gives fascism the opportunity to become the hope of the big bourgeoisie will be the hesitations and weaknesses of the revolutionary movement in Italy. After the inability of the socialist party to lead the mass movements of the workers, the factory

occupations and the movements of the rural proletariat, the petty bourgeoisie turns en masse and the bourgeoisie sees the opportunity to use it as a battering ram against the ongoing revolution.

The proletariat was disoriented and demoralized. As soon as it saw victory slipping away, its state of mind underwent a profound transformation. It can be said that in 1919 and in the first half of 1920 the Italian bourgeoisie had in a certain way resigned itself to witnessing the victory of the revolution. The middle class and the petty bourgeoisie tended to play a passive role, in tow not of the big bourgeoisie but of the proletariat, which they believed to be on the threshold of victory. This state of mind subsequently changed radically. Instead of witnessing the victory of the proletariat, one saw the bourgeoisie successfully organize its defense. When the middle class realized that the Socialist Party was not capable of taking the lead, it gradually lost confidence in the possibilities of the proletariat and turned towards the opposite class. It is at this moment that the capitalist and bourgeois offensive began. It essentially took advantage of the new state of mind in which the middle class found itself. Thanks to its extremely heterogeneous composition, fascism represented the solution to the problem of mobilizing the middle classes in favor of the capitalist offensive.

Amadeo Bordiga. **Report on fascism. Fourth Congress of the Communist International.**

Despite the inevitable ideological incongruities of a movement of this kind, fascism is not only a nationalist and revolutionarist ideology that mobilizes a frustrated petty bourgeoisie against the proletariat. It builds a specific, socializing form of **state capitalism** around the trade unions: the corporate state.

First arising in Italy in 1920, with an ideological conception based on Sorel's theories of violence and its systematic application, it took from the syndicalist nuclei that supported it (Rossoni) the corporative conception of the State, and from the nationalist camp, the State itself as a supra-temporal and individual entity. (*Everything in the State; nothing against the State; nothing outside the State*, Mussolini). The Fascist Party represents and embodies the State; the Grand Council, run by the party, is the central institution of government, and the trade unions the instrument of connection between the people and the State. (Although such trade unions perform no function other than peacefully subjecting the proletariat to the bosses.) Originally it presented itself as socialist, to the point that in 1919 it upheld a program of that kind, supporting the peasant demands for the socialization of the land and supporting the occupation of the factories in Lombardy, so that it seemed it would end up as a socialist faction. Relying on the discontent of the rural and petty-bourgeois masses, of the ex-servicemen and of the liberal professionals, who saw themselves threatened with replacement, and replaced, by those who had not gone to war, agitating a socializing program and taking advantage above all of the failure of the occupation of the factories and of the general strike of the proletariat due to the treachery of the reformists, and abundantly subsidized by capitalism, it came to power, where it swept away all the organizations of the working class and even all bourgeois opposition, likewise abjuring its original anti-capitalist demagogy.

From all this it can be seen that it is not only a phenomenon of capitalist reaction but, to a certain degree, a new political method of capitalism, whose analysis and understanding are of the utmost importance to the proletariat. Today it constitutes a special state

power, which has abolished all democratic forms, replacing them with the rule of a militarized and bureaucratic party that keeps the whole population in a state of absolute oppression.

Antonio Gallo. **On the September movement**, 1932

The rise of Nazism in Germany

In Germany the crash of '29 translates into a spectacular rise of the Nazi party in the 1930 elections. The Comintern makes a show of triumphalism, ignoring the results and interpreting the KPD's results as a victory. Trotsky responds as soon as he has the results, proposing to "evaluate the parliamentary victory of the communist party in the light of the revolutionary tasks".

The result, obviously, is not triumphalist but alarming... and at its root lies the more than justified inability of the German proletariat to trust the KPD. An inability that alienates the petty bourgeoisie from the party of revolutionary hope (communism), throwing it into the arms of the party of counterrevolutionary despair (fascism).

The gigantic growth of National Socialism reflects two essential facts: a profound social crisis, which tears the petty-bourgeois masses from their equilibrium, and the absence of a revolutionary party which, from this moment on, plays in the eyes of the masses the role of recognized revolutionary leader. **If the communist party is the party of revolutionary hope, fascism, as a mass movement, is the party of counterrevolutionary despair.** When revolutionary hope takes hold of the whole mass of the proletariat, the latter inevitably draws behind it, along the road of revolution, important and ever wider layers of the petty bourgeoisie. In this domain, however, the elections offer precisely the opposite picture: counterrevolutionary despair has taken hold of the petty-bourgeois mass with such force that it has drawn important layers of the proletariat behind it.

What explanation can there be for this? In the past we have seen an abrupt strengthening of fascism (Italy, Germany), victorious or at least threatening, after a revolutionary situation exhausted or squandered, at the end of a revolutionary crisis in the course of which the proletarian vanguard had shown its inability to place itself at the head of the nation, to transform the fate of all classes, including that of the petty bourgeoisie. It is precisely this that gave Italian fascism its enormous strength. But today, in Germany, it is not a question of the end of a revolutionary crisis, but of its approach. The leading officials of the party, optimists by profession, draw the conclusion that fascism, having arrived “too late”, is condemned to a rapid and inevitable defeat (Die Rote Fahne). These people do not want to learn anything. Fascism arrives “too late” if we refer to past revolutionary crises. But it appears “too early” -at dawn- in relation to the new revolutionary crisis. **That it has been able to occupy such a strong starting position on the eve of a revolutionary period, and not at its**

end, is not a weakness of fascism, but a weakness of communism. The petty bourgeoisie, consequently, has no need of new disappointments regarding the inability of the communist party to improve its lot; it bases itself on past experience, it remembers the elections of 1923, the capricious leaps of the ultra-left course of Maslow-Thälmann, the opportunist impotence of the same Thälmann, the bluster of the “third period”, etc. Finally, and this is the essential point, **its mistrust of the proletarian revolution is nourished by the mistrust that millions of social-democratic workers feel towards the communist party.** The petty bourgeoisie, even though events have thrown it completely out of its conservative routine, can only take the side of the social revolution if the latter has the sympathy of the majority of the workers. This very important condition is lacking precisely in Germany, and not by chance.

Leon Trotsky, “**The Turn in the Communist International and the Situation in Germany**”, 26 September 1930.

But fascism, in its German version too, is not only the expression of a counterrevolution riding on the back of petty-bourgeois revolutionarism. It has a clear objective: to destroy the base that makes the continuity of the class movement possible.

Between democracy and fascism there are no “class differences”. This must mean, obviously, that both democracy and fascism have a bourgeois character. We did not wait until January 1932 to guess that. But the ruling class does not live in a sealed vessel. It maintains definite relations with the other classes. In the “democratic” regime of developed capitalist society, the bourgeoisie leans first of all on the working class tamed by the reformists. It is in England that this system finds its most finished expression, under Labour governments as well as under Conservative ones. In the fascist regime, at least in its first stage, capital leans on the petty bourgeoisie to destroy the organizations of the proletariat. Italy, for example! Is there a difference in the “class content” of the two regimes? If the question is posed only with regard to the ruling class, there is no difference. But if one takes the situation and the reciprocal relations of all classes from the standpoint of the proletariat, the difference is very great.

In the course of many decades, the workers have built up within the bourgeois democracy, by utilizing it, by fighting against it, their strongholds, their bases, their **nuclei of proletarian democracy**: the trade unions, the parties, the educational clubs, the sports organizations, the cooperatives, etc. The proletariat can come to power not within the formal framework of bourgeois democracy, but by the revolutionary road: this is proven by theory as well as by experience. But it is precisely for this revolutionary road that the proletariat needs bases of support of proletarian democracy within the bourgeois state. The work of the Second International came down to the creation of such bases of support, in the period when it still played a progressive role.

The main and only function of fascism is to destroy all the bastions of proletarian democracy down to their very foundations. Does this have a “class significance” for the

proletariat or not? Let the great theoreticians ponder this problem. Having described the regime as bourgeois -which is indisputable- Hirsch, like his masters, forgets one detail: the place of the proletariat in that regime. They replace the historical process with a sterile sociological abstraction. But the class struggle takes place on the ground of history and not in the stratosphere of sociology. The starting point of the struggle against fascism is not the abstraction of the democratic state, but the living organizations of the proletariat, in which all its experience is concentrated and which prepare the future.

“What Next? Vital Questions for the German Proletariat”. Leon Trotsky. January 1932

This will be the achievement and the historical legacy that fascism will leave, hand in hand with **Stalinism**, the political expression of the Russian counterrevolution. And not only in the countries that had lived through revolutions and mass class movements (Russia, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Spain...).

Fascism in Spain and Argentina

The Spanish bourgeoisie, which in the 1920s was strongly living out its fusion with the landowning oligarchy and the **bureaucracy** distilled by it, laying the foundations of the first Spanish **state capitalism**, was surely the first to realize the usefulness of the new ideology for breaking a workers' movement that had already put it on the ropes in the “Bolshevik Triennium” and that, for all its weaknesses, it could not consider defeated, quite the contrary. The dictatorship of General Primo de Rivera, raised up by the Catalan bourgeoisie, which regarded him as a hero after his time in Barcelona, will try to copy the party and union structures of Italian fascism. The experiment, openly tutored by the two pillars of the “gloomy Spanish reaction” (the army

and the Catholic Church), will not succeed in turning the petty bourgeoisie into a shock force for the state. The political expression of the Spanish petty bourgeoisie, left republicanism, was still too weak and faint-hearted, after a century of state battering, to produce a credible radicalization, even less so at the hands of priests and generals. The dictatorship will only find attentive partners in socialist trade unionism. Even today, the statue of Largo Caballero still welcomes visitors to the “Nuevos Ministerios” built by Primo according to the standards -architectural and bureaucratic- of Italian fascist rationalism.

The dictatorship prolonged its life for seven years. Not because it had effective national support, apart from the officers' messes, the sacristies, the circles of the nobility and the big bourgeoisie, but because it coincided with the best world financial period after the war of 1914-1918. This allowed it to win over the big bourgeoisie, neutralize the petty bourgeoisie and secure the accommodation of the strongest workers' organization in Spain, the Socialist Party. It has already been shown under another heading to what extent the latter served as a crutch to the dictatorship, providing it with councillors of State and national assemblymen. But the monarchy was doomed. In the depths of the masses enormous energies were accumulating. The dictatorship had postponed, not prevented, the opening of the revolutionary period.

G. Munis. *Jalones de derrota, promesa de victoria*, 1947

Francoism as a political movement represented, in its relationship with the inane Spanish fascist grouplets, an updating of the same model as Primo's dictatorship. The insurgent army gave the Falangists and National Syndicalists free rein as death squads and recruiters of the petty bourgeoisie without ceding them the slightest space in the direction of the war. They were ornament and animal violence, a

façade useful to the military for showing alignment with the Axis powers, and political commissars of the state. After the war, they were encouraged to organize a defeated and massacred proletariat, they were handed the unions and housing, they were given room in ideological “elaboration” -not without first being forced to merge with the last feudalizing party in Europe, Carlism- and they were always subjected to the counterweight of the most rancid clericalism and the barracks-style militarization of the state. Francoism had taken from fascism its make-up and rhetoric, its gunmen and cadres, but it never let itself be guided by petty-bourgeois “revolutionarism”. The Spanish fascist was nothing but a civilian henchman of an authoritarian military regime, with strong roots in the most reactionary component of the Spanish state bourgeoisie, a bloodthirsty and opportunistic hanger-on. That is why its drift in the sixties and seventies, when the regime began to “modernize”, led it back to “social democracy” (Ridruejo) or to the clerical far right (the “bunker”), but not to syndicalism or to leftist guerrillaism, as was happening with its Argentine equivalents at the same time.

In Argentina, the relationship of the bourgeoisie with fascism followed a different course. The 1930 coup d'état and the subsequent dictatorship of Uriburu exposed a fracture within the Argentine bourgeoisie:

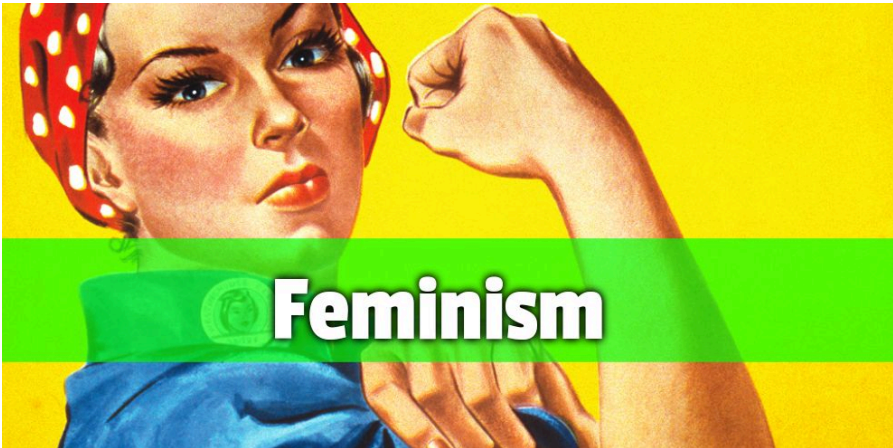
The civilian, democratic sector judged it expedient to get rid of radicalism and go no further. The fascist sector, a minority, but bolder and more determined by virtue of the force at its disposal, judged the opposite. And the subsequent unfolding of the coup d'état is entirely shaped by this difference, which was to end with the triumph of the democratic sector.

Antonio Gallo. *On the September movement*, 1932

A fracture that will determine all of Argentine politics until the military coup of 1943, from within which Perón will emerge, finally raised up in 1945 by the trade unions after serving as Secretary of Labor and Welfare. Perón will not try to dress up a military dictatorship to the taste of the big agrarian bourgeoisie with fascist elements; instead he will confront it, giving free rein to the “revolutionarist” element of petty-bourgeois nationalism and, above all, to the statist aspiration of the trade union structure, turning class conciliation (the “social justice” that gives the movement its name) and the rhetoric of **national liberation** into the basis of a state whose primary objective is no longer counterrevolution (which had triumphed globally) but the affirmation of a **state capitalism -five-year plans and planning utopia included-** with its own imperialist interests.

It was this rupture, a continuation of the aspirations of the original fascism, that made the Peronism of the seventies, in its far-right drift, the matrix of a revolutionarist bourgeois left (“Montoneros”) that would feed the “national and popular left” of Kirchnerism in the 2000s and the now famous “populism” of Laclau and Mouffe championed by the European “populist left”.

Feminism



Ideology that defends the existence of an interclassist historical and political subject, “women”, which transcends social classes, with its own differentiated interests standing above the class struggle.

Origins and history of feminism

Feminism was born as an organized political current out of the evolution of the British abolitionist circles, heirs of the puritanism of the Cromwellian era. Its first political expression, “suffragism”, would defend the extension of the right to vote to women of the propertied classes, a demand it would finally obtain from the British government after its enthusiastic participation in recruitment and in the war effort during the First **Imperialist** World War.

Made irrelevant by the world revolutionary wave, feminism would return in the depths of the counter-revolution in the USA. Far from breaking its ties with **imperialism**, it would base its narrative on the incorporation of women into the war effort and their participation in the US military industry during the slaughter. Its most widely used icon even today is still a **war propaganda poster whose aim was to recruit working women into the war industry**.

Coinciding with the collapse of the wave of workers' struggles that overlaps with and marks the end of the post-war reconstruction (1962-89), feminism mutates. The new evolution (self-styled "third wave") feeds on the power struggles of the petty bourgeoisie in American universities. There, already in the eighties, postmodernism and relativism had begun to become hegemonic, turned into a tool for generational change within the university power groups.

The rise into the university elite and the corporate bourgeoisie of elements coming from the black petty bourgeoisie threatens to relegate feminism to a single, necessarily shared niche. The theory then mutates, taking up the most relativistic and subjectivist elements of postmodernism, to promote a fractalization (the discourse of "transversalities") that turns feminism into an ideology of the categorization and affirmation of "identities"... each one with its quota ensured by the existence of its own "perspective", equally opposed to the perspective of the "white heterosexual male".

The result becomes even more aggressively divisive in relation to a working class that to many already seems "dead" or "vanished". The working class is identified with the "uneducated white male" and is routinely denigrated as the archetype of "privilege" and of "feminicidal" and "patriarchal" reaction.

On its arrival in Europe and its spread through the Americas, the discourse of “identities” linked to feminism would become, slightly softened, an **ideology** of the **state**, generating a **bureaucracy** and a technical body specialized in “gender equality” and feeding divisive strategies organized by the state itself, such as the Spanish “feminist strike” of 2018 or the proposal of differentiated collective agreements and labor contracts for each sex.

Marxism against feminism

Tied from its first manifestations to the **petty bourgeoisie**, feminism would apply to the political subject it defines, “women”, the interclassist and **nationalist** political logic of the concept of “**people**”. In their battle to make room in the boards of companies and in government for women of the petty bourgeoisie and the upper classes, the suffragettes soon tried to win over the working women’s organizations, much larger in number and above all much better organized.

The feminists proposed an interclassist front of “women” whose goal would be to get bourgeois women deputies elected within the property-qualified (censitary) suffrage system. They promised to represent the “common interest as women” that supposedly united working women with the bourgeois women of English radical liberalism.

The left of the Second International, with Rosa Luxemburg and Clara Zetkin at its head, radically opposed this, waging a powerful ideological battle between 1887 and 1917. A year before the formation of the first suffragist group in England, Zetkin had presented at Gotha, the true founding congress of the German socialist party, a report on “The Question of Women and the Tasks of Social Democracy”, which was approved unanimously.

From then on the German socialists had devoted themselves to organizing and educating thousands of working-class women, promoting mobilizations for universal suffrage for both sexes. From the Stuttgart Congress of the International onwards, the left, with Zetkin and Luxemburg at its head, takes the battle to the global level. Not against a supposed machismo of the leadership, but against the concessions to feminism of some parties, such as the Belgian one, which had approved at its congress support for the extension of property-qualified suffrage to upper-class women.

The Congress of the Second International held in Stuttgart committed the social democratic parties of all countries to begin the struggle for universal female suffrage as an essential and inalienable part of the general struggle of the proletariat for the right to vote and for power, in clear opposition to feminist aspirations.

Clara Zetkin

The ideological battle grows more and more intense over the years. Rosa Luxemburg shares in her correspondence her intimate rejection of the “moral and spiritual” arguments of feminism and of the appeals to the “development of one’s own personality”, when what the feminists were really demanding was equality between the men and women of the strata in power within that power.

She is clear that “woman” is not a historical subject above or outside social classes, and that is why she deeply rejects the claim of a supposed “women’s right” that would benefit working women independently of the development of the workers’ movement in general and of the struggle against capitalism. For Luxemburg, the feminists are trying to turn the **proletariat’s** rejection of the oppression of women into a way of diverting the struggle and

consolidating a system that was then ending its **historically progressive phase**, in the same way as nationalism did by manipulating resistance to cultural-national oppression:

The duty to protest against and combat national oppression, which falls to the class party of the proletariat, finds its basis not in any particular “right of nations”, just as the political and social equality of the sexes does not emanate from any “right of women” to which the bourgeois movement for the emancipation of women refers. These duties can only be deduced from a generalized opposition to the class system, to all forms of social inequality and to all power of domination. In a word, they are deduced from the fundamental principle of socialism.

Rosa Luxemburg. **The National Question and Autonomy**, 1908

Contrary to what feminist propaganda tells us today, Rosa Luxemburg not only was not a feminist but fought against feminism all her life. She even doubted the usefulness of the specific organizations of working women within the socialist movement that her friend Clara Zetkin had begun to organize.

She did so for the same reasons for which she had fought against the formation of specific organizations of Jewish workers within the Polish socialism that she herself had founded: a rejection of the very bases of what they now call “identity”, which defines each person, from a very individualistic viewpoint, as an “intersection” of identities. For Luxemburg it is not conflicting “identities” that define the political struggle, but a historical framework in which a universal class, indivisible in its interests, can free the whole of society from all exploitation and, consequently, from all oppression.

The advocates of bourgeois women's rights wish to acquire political rights in order to take part in political life. Proletarian women can only follow the path of the workers' struggles, the opposite of setting foot in real power by means of basically juridical statutes.

“Die Gleichheit”, the newspaper edited by Zetkin, makes it clear that the power of the women who would benefit from property-qualified suffrage arose from their social position in the bourgeoisie and the petty bourgeoisie, and that the legal reform of the right to vote they proposed would entrench that power; working women, on the other hand, could only assert themselves through the workers' struggles, hand in hand with their class comrades.

One might think that the entire female sex, deprived of political rights, should fight as a phalanx for the achievement of universal female suffrage. But this is not so. (...) The battle for universal female suffrage, too, is dominated by class contrast and by the class struggle; there cannot be a unitary struggle of the whole female sex, and much less so when what is at stake is not an empty principle but a concrete, vital content, such as that of universal female suffrage.

We cannot demand of bourgeois women that they go beyond their own nature. Proletarian women must not count, therefore, on the support of bourgeois women in the struggle for their civil rights; class contradictions prevent proletarian women from allying themselves with the feminist movement. (...) Proletarian women must be perfectly aware that the right to vote cannot be conquered through a struggle of the female sex, without class distinctions, against the male sex, but only through the class struggle of all the exploited, without distinction of sex, against all the exploiters, likewise without any distinction of sex.

Clara Zetkin. Speech explaining the resolution of the International Congress of Stuttgart, 22 August 1907

The creation of 8 March as a day of struggle, of strike, in 1910, under the name of “Day of International Solidarity among Proletarian Women”, on Zetkin’s proposal, is part of the same thing. It is a matter of affirming the socialist and working-class character of the movement for truly universal suffrage, that is, including the winning of the vote by women. In other words, the creation of 8 March was part of the struggle of the women of the Left of the Second International for the democratic rights of all workers and against the feminist idea of the “union of women”, “against which I have fought all my life”, as Rosa Luxemburg would write.

Feminism and the imperialist war

The moment of truth that would demonstrate the substance and the reason of the battle of the left of the Second International against feminism would come with the world war. The suffragettes literally “demanded” of the governments the incorporation of women into the war effort and the carnage of war. As a reward, in 1918 the British government gave the vote to the 8 million women from the wealthiest families, still far from universal suffrage. This is what the press now celebrates as “the winning of the vote by women”, forgetting to say that only a few of them got it.

Zetkin and the groups of working women, on the other hand, would convene the first international conference against the war in the midst of the most savage repression of the internationalists by all governments. It is the first political act organized by a group of the Second International against the war, at a time when Luxemburg, Rühle or Liebknecht are already in prison.

To lead the proletarians to free themselves from nationalism and the socialist parties to regain their full freedom for the class struggle. The end of the war can only be achieved by the clear and unbreakable will of the popular masses of the belligerent countries. In favour of such action, the Conference calls on socialist women and socialist parties in all countries: War on war!

Declaration of the International Conference of Socialist Women against the War

On 8 March 1917, the 8 March demonstration in Petrograd which, as was traditional, the groups of socialist working women organized, calling on all workers regardless of sex and asserting demands for the class as a whole, would become the trigger of the Russian Revolution.

Separate organizations of working women?

Rosa Luxemburg denounced any organization “of women” and any “front of women’s organizations”, because she realized that organizing in a deceitful interclassist space only served to swell the power of the petty-bourgeois (and, as we shall see, patriotic) layers that sustained feminism and to divide the class movement.

Luxemburg is so clear that the organization of women-only groups must not open the door either to interclassism or to separation from the class that, when Clara Zetkin invites her to the first congress of socialist women, she makes fun of it in a letter to Luise Kautsky: “Are we feminists now?”, she writes. Of course, there was not a trace of feminism in what Luxemburg and Zetkin would do.

The “women’s organizations”, like the youth organization created by Karl Liebknecht, another of the pillars of the party’s left, had the same function that Lenin proposed for the Bund -the organization of Jewish workers- within the Russian party: to serve socialist education and the dissemination of the party’s program in a specific milieu of women, most of whom were still in waged domestic work, in small workshops or devoted exclusively to caring for the family.

This approach would be taken even further by the Third International at its First and Second Congresses. The logic was the same as was applied to linguistic minorities, youth and cooperativists.

In a document of guidelines drafted for the International by Zetkin herself to clarify its positions, she makes it quite clear that there will be no “separate organizations” or differentiated programs, but “specific organs” of the International at all levels -from the factory to the Secretariat- devoted to promoting the education, participation and

training of women cadres, given the “historical backwardness and the particular position that, owing to her domestic activity, she often assumes”, the working woman of the time.

There is only one movement, only one organization of communist women -formerly socialist- within the communist party together with communist men. The aims of communist men are our aims, our tasks [...] The women members of the communist party of a given country must not gather in particular associations, but must be enrolled as members with equal rights and duties in the local organizations of the party, and must be called upon to collaborate in all the organs and at all levels of the party. The communist party, however, adopts particular regulations and creates special organs to take charge of the agitation, organization and education of women

Clara Zetkin. Guidelines for the Communist Women’s Movement, 1920.

The Second and Third Internationals would not create ethnic, gender or generational organizations, but would promote the full, real equality of all militants within the **party**. The universal character of the **proletariat** is translated in organizational terms into **centralism**.

Oppressions and “identities”

Throughout the work of Luxemburg or Zetkin there is one idea that is clear at every moment and in every period: there is no “oppression in the abstract”, nor are “the nation”, “youth” or “woman” historical subjects. All of them exist within the framework of a given mode of production and are therefore cut across, broken by class conflict. Rosa

Luxemburg is very clear when she lays the foundations from which to discuss the **national question**, and what she says about the “**nation**” and the “**people**” applies literally to “woman” as well.

The concept of nation is used as a whole, as a homogeneous social and political unit. But that concept of “nation” is precisely one of the categories of bourgeois ideology that Marxist theory has subjected to a radical revision, showing that behind the mysterious veil of the concepts of “bourgeois freedom”, “equality before the law”, etc., there always lies a concrete historical content.

In class society the nation does not exist as a homogeneous socio-political entity; rather, within each nation there are classes with antagonistic interests and “rights”.

There is absolutely no social terrain, from the most primary material conditions to the subtlest moral ones, in which the possessing classes and the conscious proletariat adopt the same attitude and appear as an undifferentiated “people”.

In the sphere of economic conditions, the bourgeois classes defend the interests of exploitation, and the proletariat those of labor. In the sphere of legal conditions, private property is the cornerstone of bourgeois society; the interests of the proletariat demand that those who have nothing be emancipated from the domination of property. In the sphere of the administration of justice, bourgeois society represents “class justice”, the justice of the well-to-do and the rulers; the proletariat defends humanity and the principle of taking into account the social influences on the individual.

In international relations, the bourgeoisie pursues a policy of war and annexations, that is, in the present phase of the system, a policy of restrictive tariffs and trade war; the proletariat, on the other hand, a policy of general peace and free exchange. In the

sphere of sociology and philosophy, the bourgeois schools and the school that represents the proletariat stand in open contradiction (...)

Even in the sphere of so-called human relations, of ethics, of opinions on art, edification, etc., the interests, the world view and the ideals of the bourgeoisie, on the one hand, and those of the conscious proletariat, on the other, constitute two camps separated from each other by a deep abyss. In those respects in which the formal aspirations and interests of the proletariat and of the bourgeoisie as a whole, or of its progressive sector, seem identical or common, as, for example, in democratic aspirations, the identity of forms and slogans conceals a total rupture of content and of practical policy.

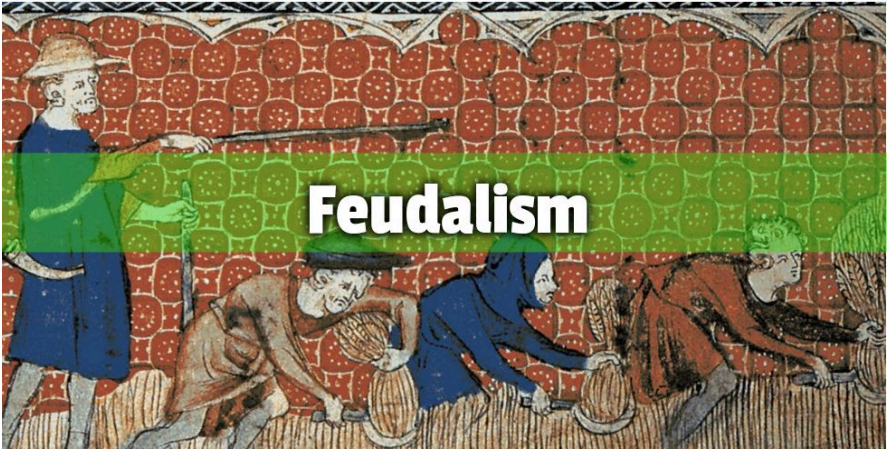
In a society of this kind there can be no collective and unitary will, there can be no self-determination of the “nation”.

When “national” struggles and movements have developed in the history of modern societies, they have generally been class movements of the leading bourgeois layer, which, at best, may to a certain extent represent the interests of other popular layers insofar as it defends, as “national interests”, progressive forms of historical development, in which the working class has not yet separated itself from the mass of the “people” led by the bourgeoisie to constitute itself as a politically conscious and independent class. (...) For social democracy, the question of nationalities is, above all, like all other social and political questions, a question of class interests.

Rosa Luxemburg. **The National Question and Autonomy**, 1908

For Marxism, there is no “identity” outside the class struggle. There are no historical subjects other than the main classes into which bourgeois society is polarized, and therefore no revolutionary possibility other than that of **the universal class**. That “universality” is not only geographical, it is above all one of interests: **the abolition of capital and wage labor** has been, for more than a century, the only **progressive** future to which Humanity as a whole can aspire. It is also the end of all exploitation... and, by destroying its material bases and giving rise to a new morality, of all discrimination. Something that is anticipated as a tendency in the very forms of the workers’ struggle (**centralism**).

Feudalism



Feudalism or seigneurial regime: mode of production based on the “seigneurial relation”. The ruling class takes charge, on a family basis, of the exploitation of a territory and its inhabitants by virtue of a vow or pledge of vassalage which also orders and ranks the relations between the different layers and groups of the exploiting class.

General features



During feudalism neither the labor power of peasants nor the land they worked on could be sold on the market. They both were not commodities.

Spread at different historical moments across Asia, large parts of Africa and Europe, and projected towards America by the conquest of the Iberian monarchies, feudalism is not a universally homogeneous **mode of production**. In fact the diversity and particularity of customs and “privileges” in small territorial portions is a fundamental element of its stability, as it blocks or at least hinders commodification and trade.

However, there are a number of common features:

- Exploitation takes place by fundamentally extra-economic means and takes the form of exactions of produce and/or hours

of labor.

- The exploiting class (the nobility) has no legal ownership over the exploited class, even though the peasants are bound to the territory to which they “belong.”
- Practically the entirety of both labor power and the principal means of production, land, are not commodities.
- Class differences are extremely marked and, in urban space, minutely regulated and demarcated.

Classes under feudalism

The fundamental classes of feudal society were the nobility (exploiting class) and the peasantry (exploited class).

In a system with very low land productivity and a very marked difference in the capacity to satisfy the most basic needs, the size of the ruling class tended to increase much more rapidly than that of those it exploited. That is why, in practically every expression of the feudal mode of production, the ruling class developed a clergy and monastic systems - from Christianity to Buddhism by way of Islam - which served as ideological factory, colonizing agent and repository of the ruling class.

The peasantry will prove, despite the continuous revolts that will proliferate during feudal decadence, incapable of asserting a historical alternative, a role reserved for the bourgeoisie. Its program in all cases, up to the establishment of capitalism, was reduced to the defense of communal lands under various banners, nearly always with apocalyptic overtones, from the German peasants in the 16th century to the Taiping and Donghak rebellions in the 19th.



Extremely regulated and repressed in Asia, only in Europe and from the 11th century onwards was the bourgeoisie able to develop sufficiently to assert itself as a revolutionary class. And even so, between its first attempts at political revolution (Castile in 1520, Flanders in 1568, England 1642) and its first lasting successes (US independence 1776, French Revolution 1789) more than two and a half centuries went by.

Alongside these three main classes there coexisted, in different contexts, both wage laborers and slaves. Either could become numerically and economically relevant at a local level without ever amounting to a historical alternative or threatening feudalism as such.

The feudal state



Louis XIV. Ceremony of the “awakening” of the King. The development and concentration of powers in the King and his apparatus worked to contain the conflict between bourgeoisie and nobility within the framework of the old statutory legal relations.

Until the decadence of the system, the nobility exercised state and governmental functions locally and directly. The nobles were “lords of lives and estates”. Hence the *decentralized* character of feudalism is usually emphasized. Although, once again, this decentralization was

not homogeneous even within Europe, still less in the Arabic-speaking world, and both the monarchy and the clergy would at different times try to reorganize and centralize the ruling class.

In reality, it was not until feudalism entered its decadence that the main European monarchies (Castile, England, France) and the Ottoman sultanate laid the foundations of a true “state feudalism”, later known as the “Ancien Régime”.

It is then that feudalism develops a state that is relatively voluminous and autonomous from the individual nobles. The “private wars” between noble families die out. The first systems of criminal investigation (the Inquisition) and the first centralized judicial and police bodies (royal commanders and bailiffs) appear. And a whole **bureaucracy** flourishes around the court and gradually takes on functions across the territory.

In the course of feudal decadence, and especially from the 16th century onwards in Europe, this state will become a battleground and a point of fusion between the nobility and the rising bourgeoisie. The equilibrium will come in the terminal phases of the Ancien Régime, preparing and foreshadowing the seizure of the state apparatus by the bourgeoisie.

By way of exception, there are periods in which the warring classes are so evenly balanced that the power of the State, as apparent mediator, acquires for the moment a certain independence from both. Such is the case of the absolute monarchy of the 17th and 18th centuries, which held the balance between the nobility and the bourgeoisie.

The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State, Engels, 1884

Fictitious capital



Money capital that is not applied to production (of surplus value) but is reproduced parasitically in the form of a bet on the results of productive capital, a bet that will only give a positive overall result as long as the flow of fictitious capital towards speculative markets keeps growing.

The first fictitious capital

In **rising capitalism** fictitious capital already appears as an outlet for the surplus capital that regularly fails to find direct productive application. It is the first speculative capital: the one that “takes refuge” in public debt and on the Stock Exchange -speculating on the value of companies without any real increase in the capital with which they operate. It is separated from the real production of **surplus value**, being in reality nothing other than money capital *wagered* on

the capacity of the state to collect a part of the surplus value produced (public debt) or on the rise of future expectations about a company (stock market speculation).

[This] fictitious money capital is enormously reduced in crises, and with it the ability of its owners to obtain money for it on the market. However, the fall in the nominal price of these securities on the stock lists has nothing to do with the real capital they represent, but a great deal to do with the solvency of their owners.

Karl Marx. Capital. Section V. Chapter 30. Money capital and real capital.

Fictitious capital already then proves tremendously fragile in the face of crises, since in order to reproduce itself with good results it depends on the growing arrival of new fictitious capital on the market, but that growth occurs as a symptom that accumulation has exceeded the limits within which it can be reinvested in the direct exploitation of labor. In other words, the more it grows and prospers, the weaker its foundations and the less likely the overall bet on which it is staked. That is why the great collapses of speculative markets are always abrupt and follow long periods of self-accelerating growth, the famous “bubbles”.

The development of fictitious capital in capitalist decadence

What in **rising capitalism** is an important, though relatively marginal, phenomenon, showing the permanent tendency of capital towards over-**accumulation** that accelerates in the moments preceding the spasms in which the world market grows, with the entry into

decadence becomes a central element of the financial system and the tool through which the “war capitalism” of the period 1914-18 turned into today’s **state capitalism**.

The normal development of the industrial cycle was interrupted by the war, which became the most powerful economic factor. The war created for the basic sectors of industry an almost unlimited market, completely sheltered from all competition. The great buyer was never satisfied with what he was supplied.

The manufacture of means of production was transformed into the manufacture of means of destruction. Articles of personal consumption were bought at ever higher prices by millions of individuals who produced nothing, who did nothing but destroy. This was the very process of destruction. But, by virtue of the monstrous contradictions of capitalist society, this ruin took the form of enrichment. The State floated loan after loan, issue after issue, and budgets that used to be reckoned in millions came to be reckoned in billions.

Machines and buildings wore out and were not replaced. The land was poorly cultivated. Essential construction in the cities and on the railways came to a standstill. At the same time, the number of state securities, of credit and Treasury bonds and of funds increased incessantly. **Fictitious capital grew to the same extent that productive capital was destroyed.** The credit system, a means of circulation of commodities, was transformed into a means of mobilizing national wealth, including that which future generations will have to create.

For fear of a crisis that would have been catastrophic, the capitalist State acted after the war in the same way as during it: new issues, new loans, regulation of the purchase and sale prices of the most important articles, guaranteed profits, products at reduced prices, multiple allowances added to salaries and wages... and, with all this, military censorship and the dictatorship of the gold braid.

Theses on the world situation and the tasks of the CI. Third Congress of the Communist International, June 1921.

After each imperialist world war, fictitious capital will undergo an exponential increase in the form of speculative and futures markets. Once reconstruction is over, capital finds it ever harder to find where to sell all its production and therefore where to invest what it has accumulated in new profitable applications. If there is hardly a market any more for everything it produces, how can there be one for producing exponentially more?

A part of capital gives up looking for productive applications and places itself as a bet on the results of already existing productive businesses, on the future demand for certain goods, on the payment of debt packages, etc. A gigantic mass of fictitious capital thus appears, separated from the real exploitation of labor and therefore with feet of clay, which exceeds productive capital several times over and is the trigger and the cause of the sudden and cataclysmic character of financial crises.

Finance capital



Fusion of banking and industrial capital.

Finance capital and imperialism

With its entry into its **imperialist phase**, capitalism transforms the structure of each national capital. The result of the extraordinary concentration and centralization of capital is light-years away from the free-competition capitalism that had operated during **rising capitalism**. Increasingly dependent on the banks, individual capitalists will exchange the shares of their companies for shares in the banks themselves, which thus become poolers of the risk of capital as a whole.

The result, the fusion of industrial and banking capital, makes up contemporary finance capital. The bourgeoisie of employers and captains of industry is transformed into a financial oligarchy and

merges more and more with the state **bureaucracy**. The ruling class thus rehearses what will be its characteristic form in **decadence** and the first forms of **state capitalism**.

At the same time there develops, so to speak, the personal union of the banks with the largest industrial and commercial enterprises, the fusion of the one with the other through the ownership of shares, through the entry of bank directors into the supervisory boards (or boards of directors) of industrial and commercial enterprises, and vice versa. (...)

The “personal union” of the banks and industry is completed by the “personal union” of both with the government. “Seats on the supervisory boards,” writes Jeidels, “are voluntarily entrusted to persons of renown, as well as to former state officials, who can facilitate to a considerable degree (!!) relations with the authorities.” (...)

The result is, on the one hand, an ever-growing fusion, or, to use N. I. Bukharin’s apt expression, the coalescence of banking and industrial capital and, on the other, the transformation of the banks into institutions of a truly “universal character”. (...)

In commercial and industrial circles one often hears complaints about the “terrorism” of the banks (...) At bottom, these are the same complaints of small capital against the yoke of big capital, only in this case the category of “small” capital corresponds to a whole consortium! The old struggle between small and big capital is reproduced at a new and immeasurably higher stage of development. (...)

Concentration of production; the monopolies arising from it; the fusion or coalescence of the banks with industry: such is the history of the rise of finance capital and what that concept contains. (...)

The management of capitalist monopolies inevitably becomes, under the general conditions of commodity production and private property, the domination of a financial oligarchy (...)

[Meanwhile] the apologists of imperialism and finance capital do not expose but conceal and embellish the mechanism” of the formation of oligarchies, their methods, the size of their “licit and illicit” incomes, their relations with parliaments, etc., etc.

Lenin. Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism, 1916

Financialization



Cyclical metastasis of fictitious capital that multiplies capitalist chaos in the allocation of productive resources, exponentially scales up “financial bubbles” and precedes the bursting of “crashes”.

Meaning of financialization

Beyond certain volumes, the development of **fictitious capital** is not limited to the stock exchanges and the “classic” speculative markets for raw materials. From a certain point onwards, over-accumulated capital, lacking sufficient profitable productive outlets, begins to bet on its own results. This movement does not take the form of classic insurance mechanisms but is part of the creation of “bundles” of assets that offset high speculative risks with the lower risks of investments that have shown relatively stable statistical behavior.

But by betting on its own result, under the appearance of a homogenization and reduction of risks, liabilities (debts) are being converted into assets (shares in funds dedicated to the bet). The apparent reduction in risk mobilizes gigantic masses of capital, raising in the process the average expected return on assets. The bubble begins. The direct consequences form a distinct phenomenon, which is what goes by the name of financialization:

1. The contrast between speculative returns and the profitability of productive companies (which exploit labor) transforms the latter internally. The objective becomes to raise cash as soon as possible in order to obtain funds to invest. Airlines, travel agencies, bookstores, supermarket chains, etc. etc. will be the first to charge in advance and delay payments to suppliers so as to maximize the time during which they can speculate with their own liquidity.

From a certain point onwards it will become profitable for them to sell at prices below their production cost in order to increase the volume of sales and therefore the volume of cash with which to speculate.

Quite simply, since the expected speculative margins are higher than those from exploitation, the most “rational” thing from the point of view of the individual company’s profit is to increase the mass of cash available for as long as possible, even if it generates an operating loss in the core business. This means, for example, cutting shelf times for a supermarket by selling for less than it costs to make a can of preserves or, for a travel agency, selling holidays for less than the cost of the plane’s fuel if the purchase is made more than four months in advance.

The problem is that the price structure is corrupted, and with it competition on the capital market and the distribution of capital resources among companies are distorted. Capitalist chaos multiplies in the distribution of resources, and with it the inefficiencies and fragilities of the whole system.

2. From a certain point onwards, the amount of capital bet on the results of the capital actually used in exploitation exceeds it several times over. Risk multiplies as the material basis of the system becomes smaller and smaller in relation to the bets on its outcome. Meanwhile, incentives lead investors to take more and more risks, even if their indices do not necessarily reflect it. In fact, the main risk is that from a certain point onwards the least risky option is to bet on a general collapse. These are the moments before a generalized financial crash.

Formal and real subsumption of labor under capital



Phases through which capital first comes to direct and then to transform the labor process when it absorbs a pre-capitalist productive structure, moving from centring its growth on the increase of absolute surplus value to centring it on the growth of relative surplus value, revolutionizing the labor processes and the means of production to that end.

Formal subsumption of labor under capital

When capital absorbs a pre-existing production, characteristic of an earlier **mode of production** and carried on under its characteristic relations, at first it simply subordinates it, subsumes it, placing itself

in between what is a basically intact productive process and the market in which **capital realizes surplus value in order to accumulate**. This subordination, this subsumption, is still “formal”.

The labor process becomes the instrument of the valorization process, of the process of the self-valorization of capital: of the creation of surplus value. The labor process is subsumed under capital (it is its own process) and the capitalist takes his place in it as director, manager; for him it is at the same time, directly, a process of exploitation of the labor of others. This is what I call the formal subsumption of labor under capital. It is the general form of every capitalist process of production, but it is at the same time a particular form alongside the specifically capitalist, developed mode of production, since the latter includes the former, but the former does not necessarily include the latter.

The process of production has become the process of capital itself, a process carried out with the factors of the labor process into which the capitalist's money has been converted, and which takes place, under his direction, with the aim of making more money out of money.

When the peasant who was formerly independent and produced for himself becomes a day-labourer working for a farmer; when the hierarchical structure characteristic of the guild mode of production fades away before the simple antithesis of a capitalist who makes the artisans, turned into wage earners, work for him; when the former slave-owner employs his ex-slaves as wage earners, etc., we have production processes socially determined in other ways transformed into the production process of capital. [...]

The formerly independent peasant falls, as a factor of the production process, under the subjection of the capitalist who directs it, and his very employment depends on a contract which he, as a commodity owner (owner of labor power), has previously concluded with the capitalist as a money owner. The slave ceases to be an instrument of production belonging to his employer. The

relation between master and journeyman disappears. The master, who used to stand apart from the journeyman by his knowledge of the craft, now confronts him merely as the owner of capital, just as the other confronts him purely as a seller of labor.

Before the production process they all confronted one another as commodity owners and maintained only a monetary relationship with one another; within the production process they face each other as personified agents of the factors involved in that process: the capitalist as “capital”, the direct producer as “labor”, and their relationship is determined by labor as a mere factor of self-valorizing capital.

The capitalist also sees to it that labor attains the normal degree of quality and intensity, and prolongs the labor process as much as possible in order to increase the surplus value produced by it. The continuity of labor increases when, instead of the old producers, dependent on particular customers, the new producers, who no longer have commodities to sell, find in the capitalist a permanent paymaster.

The mystification inherent in the capitalist relation also makes its appearance. The power of labor to preserve value appears as the self-preserving power of capital; the power of labor to create value, as the self-valorizing power of capital; and as a whole, and by definition, objectified labor appears as if it employed living labor.

Despite all this, with that change (change) **no essential alteration has taken place a priori in the real form and manner of the labor process, of the real process of production.** On the contrary, it lies in the nature of the case that the subsumption of the labor process under capital takes place on the basis of a pre-

existing labor process, prior to this subsumption under capital and shaped on the basis of various earlier production processes and other conditions of production; capital subsumes a given existing labor process, such as, for example, handicraft labor or the type of agriculture corresponding to the small independent peasant economy. [...]

That labor becomes more intense or that the duration of the labor process is prolonged; that labor becomes more continuous and, under the interested eye of the capitalist, more orderly, etc., does not in and of itself alter the character of the real labor process, of the real mode of labor.

Here, then, there arises a great contrast with the specifically capitalist mode of production (large-scale labor, etc.), which, as we have indicated, develops in the course of capitalist production and revolutionizes not only the relations between the various agents of production, but at the same time the nature of that labor and the real mode of the labor process as a whole.

It is in contrast to the latter (to a mode of labor already developed before the capitalist relation arose) that we call the subsumption of the labor process under capital considered so far the **formal subsumption of labor under capital**. The capitalist relation as a relation of compulsion aimed at extracting more surplus labor by prolonging labor time - a relation of compulsion that is not based on personal relations of domination and dependence, but springs simply from different economic functions- is common to both modes, but the specifically capitalist mode of production nevertheless knows other ways of extorting surplus value. On the basis of a pre-existing mode of labor, on the other hand, that is, of a given development of the productive power of labor and of the mode of labor corresponding to that productive power, surplus

value can only be produced by resorting to the prolongation of labor time, that is, in the form of absolute surplus value. **To this mode, as the sole way of producing surplus value, corresponds, then, the formal subsumption of labor under capital.**

“Chapter VI (unpublished) of **Book I of Capital**”, Karl Marx, 1863-1864

In other words, with the formal subsumption of the labor process by capital, the peasant and the artisan are **proletarianized**, but the way in which they work and confront capital is not yet that of the **proletariat**. Capital has not yet transformed the organization of labor, and the increases in its profitability are obtained exclusively by increasing **absolute surplus value**. That is, for the first day-labourers and worker-artisans subjected to capital, capitalism presents itself as a worsening of their situation, not as a new situation. This explains the birth, which has left deep scars, of movements such as Lassalleanism or craft unionism in the Germany of early industrialization or in the USA.

Lassalleanism represented the last artisan strata in the process of settling out between the petty bourgeoisie and the proletariat, between the conversion of the feudal privilege of the skilled worker into an “independent” petty bourgeois and his proletarianization as a deskilled worker within a chain whose aim is to reproduce money as capital through surplus value.

It thus expressed ambiguous, if not openly reactionary, aspirations, such as that the bourgeois state should take “socialist measures” by creating cooperatives or by being handed the education of children, ideas that the Marxists in the German party would have to confront from the moment of the merger and for a long time afterwards, as can be seen in Marx’s “Critique of the Gotha Programme” and Engels’s critique of the Erfurt programme.

Transplanted to the conditions of the southern USA, that attachment to the feudal and identitarian distinction of the artisan, that faded aspiration to a democratic petty bourgeoisie, turned into racism and the defense at all costs of small property hand in hand with the state. The Lassallean leadership went so far as to declare that it would collaborate with the state authorities to prevent damage to property. Instead of helping to build the strength and disciplined organization of the workers, the Lassalleans ended up dividing and paralyzing the workers in order to uphold the arm of legality and the state.

“The Birth of Socialism in the USA”

Real subsumption

It will be, however, the search for an increase in exploitation in relative terms, for **relative surplus value**, that will give shape to a specifically capitalist organization of production. This radical

transformation of the place and organization of the workers in the productive process will be characteristic of **rising capitalism**, and it is what will shape the **proletariat as a universal class**.

We have set out in detail how, with the production of relative surplus value (for the individual capitalist, insofar as he takes the initiative spurred by the circumstance that value = the socially necessary labor time objectified in the product; stimulated by the fact that consequently the individual value of his product is below its social value and that, therefore, it can be sold above its individual value), the whole real form of the mode of production is altered and a specifically capitalist mode of production arises (even from the technological point of view), on whose basis, and at the same time as it, the relations of production -corresponding to the capitalist production process- develop between the various agents of production and in particular between the capitalist and the wage earners.

The social productive forces of labor, or the productive forces of directly social labor, socialized (collectivized) by means of cooperation, of the division of labor within the workshop, of the application of machinery and in general of the transformation of the production process into a conscious application of the natural sciences, mechanics, chemistry, etc., and of technology, etc., for specific purposes, as well as the large-scale labor corresponding to all this (only such socialized labor is in a position to employ in the direct process of production the general products of human development, such as mathematics, etc., just as, on the other hand, the development of these sciences presupposes a certain level of the material process of production); this development of the productive force of objectified labor, as opposed to the more or less isolated labor activity of scattered individuals, etc., and with it the application of science -that general product of social development- to the immediate process of production: all this presents itself as a productive force of capital, not as a productive force of labor, or only as a productive force of labor insofar as the

latter is identical with capital, and in any case not as a productive force either of the individual worker or of the workers combined in the production process. The mystification implicit in the capitalist relation in general now develops much further than it had developed, or could have developed, in the case of the purely formal subsumption of labor under capital. Moreover, it is here that the historical significance of capitalist production first emerges plainly (in a specific way), precisely thanks to the transformation of the immediate process of production and the development of the social productive forces of labor.

We have shown that not only “conceptually” but “in fact”, the “social” character, etc., of his labor confronts the worker not merely as something alien, but as something hostile and antagonistic, and as something objectified and personified in capital.

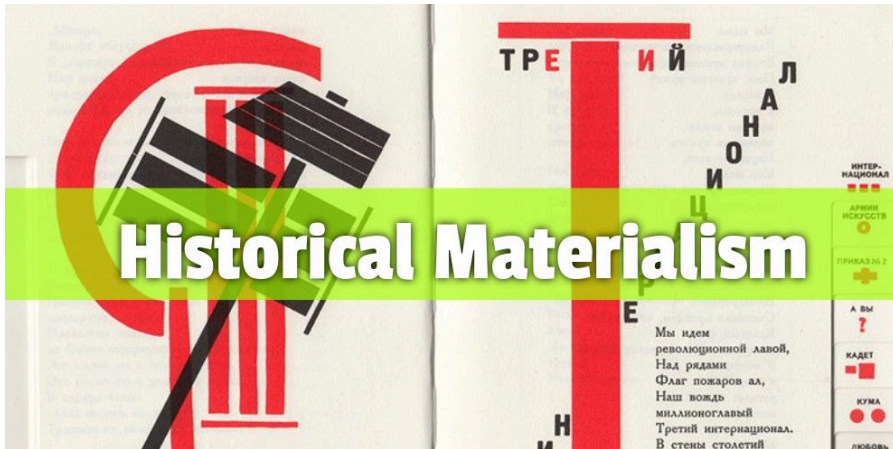
Just as the production of absolute surplus value can be regarded as the material expression of the formal subsumption of labor under capital, the production of relative surplus value can be regarded as that of the real subsumption of labor under capital.

Be that as it may, the two forms of surplus value, absolute and relative -if one wishes to consider each of them by itself, as separate existences (and absolute surplus value always precedes relative)- correspond to two separate forms of the subsumption of labor under capital, or two separate forms of capitalist production, of which the first is always the precursor of the second, although the more developed one, the second, may in turn constitute the basis for the introduction of the first into new branches of production.

“Chapter VI (unpublished) of **Book I of Capital**”, Karl Marx, 1863-1864

It is interesting to note how the preponderance of **absolute surplus value**, which returns temporarily during the brief crises of rising capitalism, regains prominence throughout **decadence** until it manifests itself as a permanent and generalized tendency towards **precarization** and **pauperization**.

Historical materialism



Historical materialism is a set of premises for the analysis of social reality that explains historical phenomena on the basis of the social, material structure, of the social organization of production and the social relations that derive from it, that is, the mode of production in which they unfold. These modes of production are defined by certain social relations which, in turn, reflect and drive a certain development of the productive forces of society. This development and these conflicting relations materialize in struggles between the social classes they define, in the form of ideologies, parties and political clashes that express those contradictory interests and which, in turn, once a certain development of the productive forces of society has been reached, transform the whole social structure.

Origins

The first work I undertook was a critical revision of Hegel's *Rechtsphilosophie*, a work whose preliminaries appeared in the "Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher" published in Paris in 1844. My investigations led to this result: that legal relations, like forms of State, cannot be explained by themselves, nor by the so-called general development of the human mind, but rather have their origin in the material conditions of existence which Hegel, following the example of the English and French of the 18th century, grouped together under the name of "civil society"; and that the anatomy of civil society is to be sought in political economy. I had begun studying it in Paris and continued it in Brussels, where I had settled as a result of an expulsion order issued against me by M. Guizot. The general result at which I arrived and which, once reached, served as a guide for my studies, can be briefly formulated as follows:

In the social production of their existence, men enter into definite, necessary relations, independent of their will; these relations of production correspond to a definite stage of development of their material productive forces.

The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite social forms of consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the process of social, political and intellectual life in general. It is not the consciousness of men that determines reality; on the contrary, it is social reality that determines their consciousness.

In the course of their development, the productive forces of society come into contradiction with the existing relations of production or - what is but a legal expression of the same thing - with the property relations within which they had moved until then. From forms of development of the productive forces, these relations turn into fetters on those forces. Then begins an era of social revolution. The change that has taken place in the economic foundation more or less slowly or rapidly transforms the whole immense superstructure. In considering such transformations it is always necessary to distinguish between the material transformation of the economic conditions of production - which must be faithfully ascertained with the help of the physical and natural sciences - and the legal, political, religious, artistic or philosophical forms, in short, the ideological forms in which men become conscious of this conflict and resolve it. Just as one does not judge an individual by the idea he has of himself, so one cannot judge such an epoch by its own consciousness; on the contrary, this consciousness must be explained from the contradictions of material life, from the conflict existing between the social productive forces and the relations of production.

No society ever disappears before all the productive forces it can contain have developed, and new, higher relations of production never appear in it before the material conditions of their existence have matured within the very womb of the old society. Therefore mankind only ever sets itself such problems as it can solve, since, looking at the matter more closely, it will always be found that the problem itself arises only when the material conditions for its solution already exist or are at least in the process of formation.

In broad outline, the Asiatic, ancient, feudal and modern bourgeois modes of production may be designated as so many progressive epochs in the economic formation of society. The

bourgeois relations of production are the last antagonistic form of the social process of production - antagonistic not in the sense of individual antagonism, but of an antagonism arising from the social conditions of existence of individuals; the productive forces developing within bourgeois society create at the same time the material conditions for the resolution of this antagonism. With this social formation, therefore, the prehistory of human society comes to an end.

Karl Marx. **Preface to “A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy”**, January 1859.

Historical materialism and the proletariat

Historical materialism enabled the **proletariat** to understand itself as a class in the historical process and to give its **communist perspective** a scientific basis. It was a fundamental element in the development of a consciousness which, while still a class consciousness, already responds to universal interests because it is that of a universal class, and is therefore not **ideology**. The **class consciousness** of the proletariat, by arming itself with and merging with historical materialism, becomes the first universal conception of society and history, and therefore the antechamber of a truly human consciousness, neither biased nor limited.

Revolutionary theory pursues a social transformation that will abolish the working class too (...) That transformation, however, will not abolish theory; on the contrary, it will give it a generalized human dimension, opening up to it vast, unsuspected, infinite domains. The communist validity of revolutionary theory today, and its absorption by the social whole tomorrow, allow it to correct and broaden itself ceaselessly. It is the clearest expression of the human being in possession of itself. Proletariat and revolutionary theory are, respectively, the key to economic emancipation and to intellectual emancipation; together, the key to disalienation.

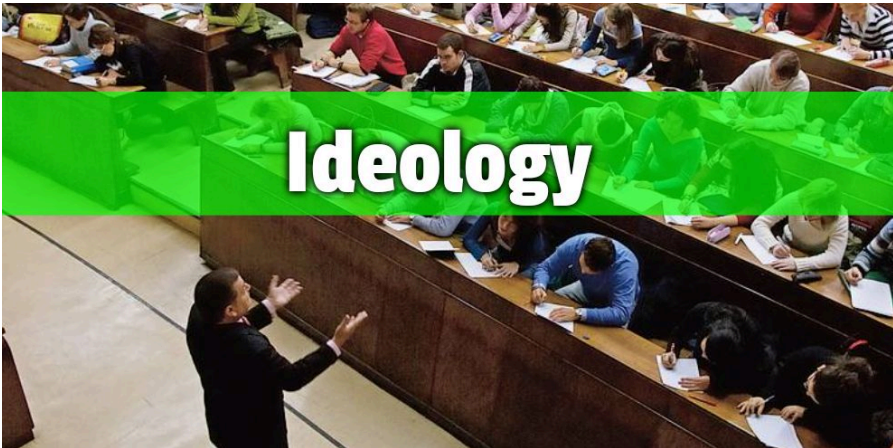
G. Munis. *Acendremos camaradas*, 1975

The Communist Manifesto of 1848 marks the moment when the materialist conception of history is incorporated into and merges with the communist program.

The basic thought running through the whole “Manifesto” - namely, that economic production and the structure of society that necessarily follows from it in every historical epoch constitute the foundation on which the political and intellectual history of that epoch rests; that consequently (ever since the dissolution of the primeval communal ownership of land) all history has been a history of class struggles, of struggles between exploited and exploiting, between dominated and dominating classes at various stages of social development; that this struggle, however, has now reached a stage where the exploited and oppressed class (the proletariat) can no longer emancipate itself from the class which exploits and oppresses it (the bourgeoisie), without at the same time forever freeing the whole of society from exploitation, oppression and class struggles.

Frederick Engels. Preface to the German edition of the Communist Manifesto, 1883

Ideology



Consciousness of social and historical reality, falsified and constrained by class interest. It has therefore existed since the split of society into classes. Only the appearance of a universal, exploited and revolutionary class generates the conditions that make possible its theoretical demolition -in its political expressions- and its practical demolition, in its revolutionary practice.

Ideology and the ruling class

All ruling classes until now have needed, in order to maintain the system that gave them meaning, to present exploitation as an inevitable and “natural” fact. The sets of ideas and prejudices, “common sense”, **culture**, art and common beliefs reflect this. Since the production of ideas is part of the productive apparatus of society

itself, the ideological production of an era disseminates the interests and points of view of the ruling class as universal values, reproducing and consolidating the values with which it justifies its rule.

The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e. the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it.

The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships, the dominant material relationships grasped as ideas; hence of the relationships which make the one class the ruling one, therefore, the ideas of its dominance.

The individuals composing the ruling class possess among other things consciousness, and therefore think. Insofar, therefore, as they rule as a class and determine the extent and compass of an epoch, it is self-evident that they do this in its whole range, hence among other things rule also as thinkers, as producers of ideas, and regulate the production and distribution of the ideas of their age: thus their ideas are the ruling ideas of the epoch.

Marx and Engels. **The German Ideology**, 1845

All ruling classes need to present their programs and needs as universal advances, as goals of society as a whole. And they need to do so, first of all, before themselves. We have no reason to think that the bourgeoisie is not sincere when it identifies the “interest of all” with

the interest of the **nation** -that is, that of national capital- demanding that we willingly accept worse living and working conditions or that we massacre each other in a war.

But the bourgeoisie cannot conceive of any form of social organization other than its own, the one that gives it meaning as a class. If it could, it would be calling itself into question. The ideology of the ruling class is not just a mask: it limits its conception of society and the world insofar as it cannot conceive that its interests clash with those of society as a whole. Ideology is an interested and false consciousness of reality, limited and limiting.

Ideology under state capitalism

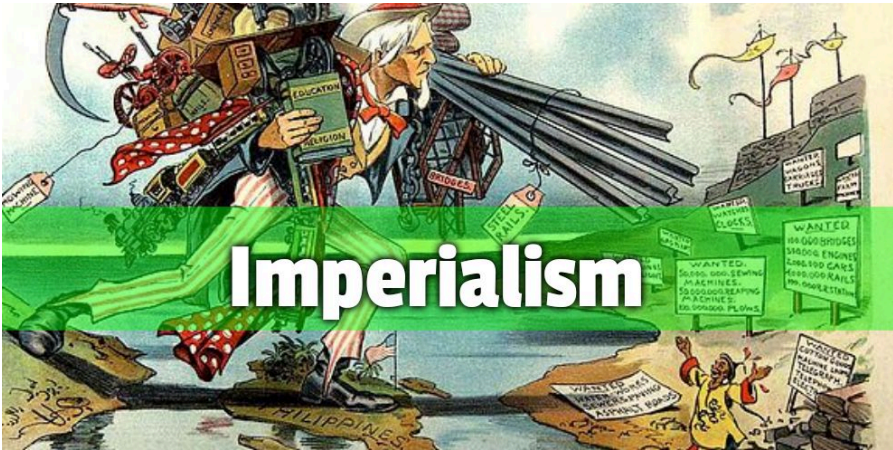
Under **state capitalism** it is not individuals from the upper bourgeoisie, directly and personally, as was relatively common in its **centuries of ascent**, who elaborate the ideological forms that “oil” the system and serve as its guide in exercising its rule. Ideology is not a Machiavellian product emerging from a state or corporate cabinet that thinks openly in terms of **class struggle**. It is a social product, produced organically within the specialized apparatuses of capital.

There are organs of the state, such as the university, political parties, the media, trade unions, *think-tanks* and all kinds of groupings, specifically dedicated to creating ideology by absorbing “trends”, weighing up their consequences and promoting new “causes” and worldviews.

These professional ideologues generally belong to the petty bourgeoisie, and much of what they produce bears its stamp, from **populism** to **feminism**. Given the nature of this intermediate class and its reactionary expectations, nothing it can create is really a real danger to capitalism as such, although it may occasionally put a spoke in the wheel of the interests of national capital or its leading factions.

The “protest” ideologies of the petty bourgeoisie throw sand in the eyes of discontent and anger. Of course, this may well be unconscious on the part of those who put them forward, which is why it is ideology, but it takes on materiality as it is socially produced, that is, as it elicits the consensus of different sectors of power, building itself up as a “social truth” through the media and the action of the political apparatuses dedicated to regimenting the population under the state and the interests of national capital.

Imperialism



Stage of capitalism as a global system that culminates its progressive development and plunges it into its historical phase of decadence, from which point capitalism goes from being a spur to being a fetter on the free development of the productive forces it has itself created.

Origin of imperialism

Imperialism is produced by the absence of sufficient extra-capitalist markets to realize the whole of the surplus value produced and to make the **accumulated capital** profitable. Extra-capitalist markets are those formed by artisans, independent peasants and, in general, by producers of commodity value who do not take part in the expanded reproduction of capital, whether they are inside or outside the borders of a given national state.

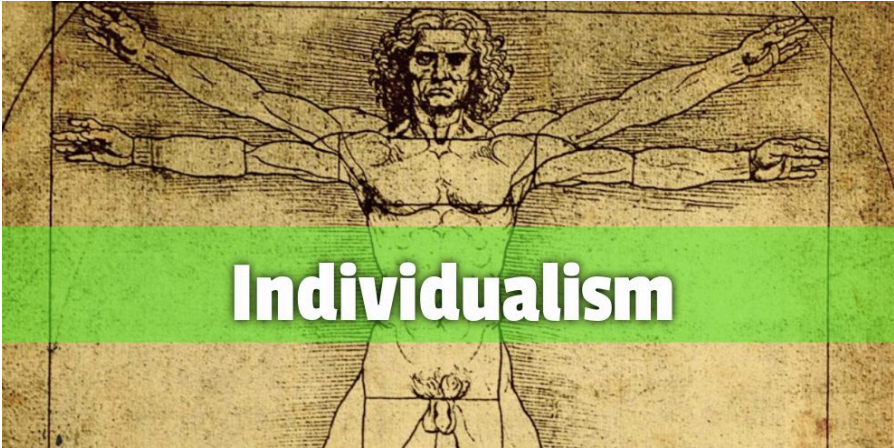
The extra-capitalist markets outside the bourgeois national states begin to be insufficient in volume to absorb the surplus value these states generate. As a result, the relations between the constituted states, between these and their colonies, and the organization of capital in each of them begin to change. This transformation means the entry into a new historical stage of the development of capital: imperialism.

In the internal organization of capital, imperialism means a development of the concentration and centralization of capital. Industrial and banking capital merge into finance capital, which becomes ever more tied to the state and the monopolies. **Militarism** appears for the first time as a global tendency, and the struggle to find outlets for over-accumulated capital becomes a struggle to export capital.

Imperialism gives shape to the final stage of **rising capitalism**. The extension and deepening of its conditions leads -through world wars and counter-revolution- to the phase of **decadence** of the system, whose main features it shapes, radically transforming with them the conditions of the class struggle.

The concentration and centralization of capital around finance capital and the state will turn into the generalization of **state capitalism** and the absorption of the **trade union** into the state; the chronic saturation of the world market into a globalization of **militarism**, together with the impossibility of an independent development of national capital - and therefore the impossibility of a **national liberation** of a progressive character; and, in general, the difficulties of capital in freely developing the productive forces into a definitive split between growth and development.

Individualism



Individualism: ideology that affirms that people, considered one by one, have a large degree of sovereignty that allows them to determine their own future and shape their social reality through their relationship with other individuals. The individual would therefore be ultimately responsible for his or her social situation and society would be explained as the result of the aggregation of individual behaviors, not of contradictions between social classes.

The origins of individualism

Christianity and individualism

Even if we take the most complacent definition of individualism, there is nothing *natural* in the conception that people, considered one by one, have a broad space of sovereignty that allows them to determine

their own future and to shape social reality. Neither is it self-evident that society is the result of interactions, disputes, and agreements of various kinds between individuals. In fact, the idea of the *individual* is quite recent in historical terms.

The remote origin of individualism is in the religious sphere. For centuries the only great monotheism of the time, Judaism, lacked a *personal god*. God related to the people of Israel, not to the Jews one on one. His *communication* with *the people* was through specialized characters with a particular gift, the prophets. Having a divinely charted destiny was a characteristic of the Israelites as a whole vis-à-vis the rest of the peoples. Individualism, none.

That is why they were the *chosen people*, not a collection of *chosen ones*. That the particular favor of a tribal god who ends up asserting himself as the only real god, implied certain opportunities and responsibilities for their chiefs and kings, did not deny but rather reaffirmed the collective nature of that relationship.

However, the physical expansion of Judaism throughout the Roman empire and the logic of its proselytizing began to be increasingly contradictory to the idea of a tribal god. How to redefine the *chosen people* when an increasing proportion of the faithful came from other groups and lived in other kingdoms?

The *overcoming* of this contradiction will be at the center of the reflections of the Judeo-Hellenistic currents (Philo of Alexandria) but will above all mark a sect, at once irrationalist and universalist, that appeared a few decades later: Christianity. The final answer, that of St. Paul, will be to convert the *people chosen by Yahweh* into *the people formed by those who chose Yahweh*.

The personal relationship of the members with the divinity comes to the forefront. It is so important that it makes the rituals of belonging to the people of Israel, such as circumcision, unnecessary. From now on one is not part of the people of God by being born a Jew. One is part of the *people of those who chose* because one chooses oneself. What defines Christianity is the relationship of each Christian with God. The believer becomes an *individual in relation to god* and the people a *community of faith* mystically united among themselves by the communion of each one with Christ.

Christianity is also, in its first century, an apocalyptic religion. The people of God live in the immediate and permanent expectation of a *second coming*. Faced with its imminence, social and class divisions are blurred. All believers are equal in the eyes of God and this equality, born of the devaluation of all that is material and social at the gates of the end of the world, allows for a *fraternity of brothers in Christ*.

That is to say, the primitive Christian community is not a community in the strict sense. It is not a concrete whole. It is not a set of interpersonal relationships that **does** things in common and **shapes** the life of its members. Christendom, on the contrary, is the *mystical body of Christ*, the aggregation of relationships between individual believers and God. This is the backbone of the first theoretical conception of individualism... and the mold in which capitalist individualism, centuries later, will take shape as the core of bourgeois ideology.

But all this has hardly any consequences for Christianity as the social ideology of the new **mode of production** then taking shape: feudalism. As the years go by, and with them the eschatological fury, the institutional element, the church -material, hierarchical- will gradually take the central place in Christianity.

The *people of God*, Christendom, will be defined more and more as a collective beneficiary of the mediation of the Church. The feudal serf, as well as the nobleman and the ecclesiastic, were far from possessing an individualistic conception of themselves or of promoting individualism as an ideology.

The *individual* would survive only in theological argumentation - a product for the internal consumption of the ecclesiastical elites - and in the most mystical and sectarian forms, considered heretical, on the margins of Christianity. Most of these had been roundly persecuted since the conversion of Christianity into a state religion, and few traces of their existence remain.

But not all of them would disappear. One of them would in fact be harnessed by the church itself to become a pillar of European feudalism, a parallel and separate world in which the *individual for god* would live and which, unexpectedly, would be the incubator of some of the practices and ideological bases that would later be used by the bourgeoisie in its ascendance.

Monastic individualism

Monasticism was born in the second century as an attempt to redirect the eremitical movement. The hermits, extolling the personal relationship of the Christian with his god, abandoned the material community to retire to the moors and deserts. Some of them, the Stylites, even ended up on the top of the columns of the classical temples destroyed by Christian fanaticism. The goal of such solitude would be to focus on cultivating their relationship with the divinity without *distractions*.

Because for the *radical* Christian, society is nothing more than a distraction, a test or a sacrifice that separates him from the only relationship in which he is an individual in his own right, the only

one that is oriented towards the future and can give meaning to his life. The life of the hermit is individualism *in god*.

From the beginning eremitism will be a problem both for the church and for the hermits themselves. For the church it was not at all comfortable to have a cloud of more or less wandering mystics and without strict ideological control, receiving the treatment of *saints* by not a few of its faithful and preaching inconvenient prophecies too often. That is, when they were not mere madmen or bandits. For the hermits, on the other hand, solitude could be highly desirable but extreme seclusion in the wilderness tended to require a more than considerable effort to obtain basic vital provisions and was accompanied by the permanent threat of assault.

The solution, which would soon appear, would be the construction of hermitages and monasteries. The interesting thing is that the monastery would be *only* a community in the terms of Christian theology, that is, it would not be a community at all. The purpose of the monastery is none other than to create the conditions so that the individualism of the hermit can be lived by many in a single space.

Its very name *monastery*, from the Greek *monajós* (solitary, unique), reveals that the aim of monastic communities is to provide and organize solitude, the isolation of the individual in his relationship to god. The monastic community is a group of individuals united not by their relationships or a collective action, but by the superimposition of individual actions that only make sense in the relationship of each one with God. The Christian society that is projected under the monastic ideal is not a society, it is a mass of individuals bound by a centralizing relationship.

In order to develop this antisocial principle, which is the foundation of individualism, time itself was separated from Nature. The further that the *rules* advance, from the Visigothic to those of St. Isidore or the Celtic and from these to that of St. Benedict, the more regulated monastic time would become. The **alienation** of human life with respect to Nature rehearses in the medieval monastery a completely new level: the radical separation of human time from both solar time and the seasons.

Factory time, marked by shifts and arbitrary hours rather than by sunlight or the cycle of harvests, was being foreshadowed. It is no coincidence that **the first mechanical clocks**, so important **for the birth of capitalist morality** and the normalization of individualism, were developed in monasteries. Precisely because individualism is a way of denying society to the people who live in it, it cannot be affirmed without also denying Nature of which human society is a part.

The *rule of St. Benedict* makes the monk's *hours* independent of those of the sun; it makes the time he devotes to work independent of the needs of his community; and it teaches him that his true *realization* does not exist in his productive and collective activity but in the contemplative isolation he carries out together with the other monks and at the same time, but not with them, because in reality it is his time alone with god.

Individual and time under capitalism

Cradle of the *individual* and individualism, the monastery will be the first model, the first sketch of the **great social automaton that the bourgeoisie will take as the ideal form -antithesis in reality- of human society**. Because, if we think about it, life under capitalism is not so different from life *under the rule*. We live in an abstract time - that is

arbitrary and abstracted from natural time - focused on producing according to a system whose objective is not the satisfaction of human needs.

And for the vast majority, **work** -reduced to **wage labor**- is conceived as a mere instrument, as a way of gaining means and time to *realize ourselves*, that is, to develop our *individuality* and *be ourselves*, generally by consuming in solitude something that *moves us elsewhere, transcends* us, that is, alienates and isolates us even more. **Individualism is at the very core of bourgeois religion.**

The whole ideological framework of the system is based on the assumption that *voluntary* exchanges are free and that, by definition, when two people exchange something, that exchange is between equals in **value**. Abstracted from all the conditioning factors of real persons, the abstract *individual* who exchanges his **labor power** does so freely.

Moreover, if we let the market *balance itself* through competition, the individual will receive a **wage** equal to its **value**, a *fair* wage. As a result, wealth would be created magically, simply by the succession of exchange cycles. We are constantly told that the faster these cycles are, the greater the wealth that is created. Who creates wealth? Those who have **capital** and use it to buy **labor power** with the aim of then selling their product, because the more exchanges and products there are, the more *dynamic* the circulation of **commodities**.

This narrative thus makes invisible the reason why the **proletariat**, which makes up the majority of society, can only exchange its labor power in the market. Nor does it reveal that for such a class to exist, the majority of society had to be dispossessed of the means of production. But, **thanks to that abstraction called the individual, the reality that the growth of wealth is nothing other than the**

growth of **unpaid labor** is completely erased from the story. Individualism and the very concept of the individual is the foundation of the argument that denies exploitation.

The necessity for capitalism to promote individualism

So the system wants us not only to accept the existence of the individual, but to consider ourselves individuals and to accept individualism as the *natural* form of human behavior.

Let us exchange the monastic god for *economics* - i.e. for **accumulation**- and we will see what individualism really means. The *individual* is the perfect form for the shredder. Just as the medieval monk turned into guilt the disasters he did not understand why his god allowed and ended up thinking that his own sins were the origin of all evils, we will hold ourselves responsible for the disasters the system produces: from the environmental wreckage to the rapacity of past centuries, from the infinite forms of **discrimination** it continually creates and recreates to our own unemployment.

Moreover, we will be as incapable as the monk is of being part of the truly communal and collective, thus renouncing both the power to resist and the power to transform anything. Like the monk, it will be unimaginable to us that work might not be a curse and that it is possible for concrete and universal human needs to take precedence over abstractions. And our own life will become, like his, individualism: the experience of being *individual*, a meaningless *passage* to nothingness.

Internationalism



Affirmation of the proletariat as a single world class in the face of global capitalism, with a single set of interests, tactics and strategy and with a project, socialism, which can only be realized globally.

The world market as the foundation of the universal class

From their first approach to the **proletariat** as a universal class, Marx and Engels realized that the world market which capitalism was developing was a fundamental element of the very nature of the class, which is not revolutionary only because it is universal in the sense of not fighting for a particular privilege that would shape it into a new exploiting class, but because in itself it is born out of one and the same historical and world situation: the universalization of capitalist

exploitation. The proletariat is called upon to become a universal historical subject, not a national or local one. It is called upon to follow internationalism.

The mass of mere workers (...) and therefore the no longer merely temporary loss of that very work as a secure source of life presupposes, through competition, the world market. The proletariat can thus only exist world-historically, just as communism, its activity, can only have a **“world-historical” existence**. World-historical existence of individuals means existence of individuals which is directly linked up with world history.

Marx and Engels. **The German Ideology**, 1845-1846

This idea will come back again and again, starting with the Manifesto of 1848: the creation of the world market shapes a world unified into a single, interconnected mode of production that creates a single world revolutionary class.

Through the exploitation of the world market, the bourgeoisie has given a cosmopolitan character to the production and consumption of every country. To the great chagrin of the reactionaries, it has taken away from industry its national basis. The old national industries have been destroyed and are being continually destroyed. They are supplanted by new industries, whose introduction becomes a vital question for all civilized nations, by industries that no longer work up indigenous raw materials, but raw materials brought from the most remote regions of the world, and whose products are consumed not only in the country itself, but in every part of the globe.

In place of the old isolation and self-sufficiency of regions and nations, there is established a universal intercourse, a universal interdependence of nations. And this applies to material as well as to intellectual production. The intellectual production of one nation becomes the common property of all. National narrowness and exclusiveness become more and more impossible every day; out of the numerous national and local literatures a world literature is formed.

Marx and Engels. **Manifesto of the Communist Party**, 1848

That is why its project, not only **communism** but **socialism**, only has meaning and viability as a global mode of production, driven by a single world class.

Empirically, communism is only possible as the act of the dominant peoples “all at once” and simultaneously, which presupposes the universal development of productive forces and the world intercourse bound up with them

Marx and Engels. **The German Ideology**, 1845-1846

The proletariat is not part of the nation

This statement and this perspective are all the more valuable in that they occur in the midst of **rising capitalism**, when the bourgeoisie was still struggling to constitute itself as a **nation** in countries that were to become central to the system. Nevertheless, Marx and Engels are careful to emphasize that all the **national/democratic tasks** the proletariat can take up amount to helping the bourgeoisie to seize power as soon as possible, not to defining itself as, or deluding itself into seeing itself as, part of the nation.

In Germany the decisive struggle between the bourgeoisie and the absolute monarchy still lies ahead. But since the Communists cannot count on a decisive struggle with the bourgeoisie before the latter comes to power, it is in the interest of the Communists to help it to win dominance as soon as possible, in order to overthrow it, in its turn, as soon as possible. Therefore, in the struggle of the liberal bourgeoisie against the [absolutist] governments, the Communists must always be on the side of the former, guarding themselves, however, against the self-deception into which the bourgeoisie falls and not trusting its seductive assurances about the beneficial consequences which, according to it, the victory of the bourgeoisie will bring to the proletariat.

The only advantages that the victory of the bourgeoisie will offer the Communists will be: 1) various concessions which will make it easier for the Communists to defend, discuss and propagate their principles and, therefore, make it easier for the proletariat to unite into an organized class, closely knit and ready for struggle, and 2) the certainty that on the day the absolutist governments fall, the hour of the struggle between bourgeois and proletarians will come. From that day on, the policy of the party of the Communists will be the same here as in the countries where the bourgeoisie already rules.

Frederick Engels. *Principles of Communism*, 1847

In other words, even at the moment when the proletariat must fight alongside the bourgeoisie to sweep away the absolutist state, the last bastion of feudal power, the communists bring in the unity of the class perspective and fight against the illusions with which the bourgeoisie seeks to beguile them, illusions which in the end are summed up in the illusion of the “*national community*”.

In its form, though not in its content, the struggle of the proletariat against the bourgeoisie is at first a national struggle. The proletariat of each country must, naturally, first of all settle matters with its own bourgeoisie. (...)

The workers have no country. We cannot take from them what they do not have. But since the proletariat must first of all conquer political power, raise itself to the condition of a national class, constitute itself as the nation, it is still national, although by no means in the bourgeois sense.

Marx and Engels. *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, 1848.

What does it mean “to constitute itself as the nation”? Precisely the opposite of accepting the “national community” and being regimented into it. It is obvious that in 1848, everywhere, the “organization of the proletarians into a class, and consequently into a political party” would take place first of all within national borders, in the space of the national state. But this is a form, a geographical container, not a content. Because the proletariat cannot assert itself within or as part of the nation, under the bourgeois “national community”, since that would be the same as proclaiming that there is a community of interests, if not with the bourgeoisie, at least with national capital.

On the contrary, the proletariat constitutes itself as the nation by destroying it: it leads the rest of the non-exploiting classes, which understand that in order to defend their interests effectively they must join it in the destruction of the national state, and it immediately proclaims the “world Republic”, as happened in the Paris of the Commune or in the Russia of 1917. The constitution as a “national class”, as a political subject capable of contesting power with the national state, is not aimed at creating or shutting itself up in a national state, neither “its own” nor, even less, in partnership with the

bourgeoisie. Each revolution itself will be “national only in form, not in content”, and in any case it can only remain at that stage for a very short period.

XIX. Will it be possible for this revolution to take place in one country alone?

No. By creating the world market, big industry has already brought all the peoples of the earth, and especially the civilized peoples, into such close relation with one another that each depends on what happens in the land of the other. Moreover, it has so levelled social development in all civilized countries that in all of them the bourgeoisie and the proletariat have become the two decisive classes of society, and the struggle between them has become the main struggle of our day. Consequently, the communist revolution will not be a merely national revolution, but will take place simultaneously in all civilized countries, that is, at least in England, America, France and Germany.

It will develop in each of these countries more rapidly or more slowly, according to the degree to which industry is more developed in each of them, in which more wealth has been accumulated and greater productive forces are available. That is why it will be slower and more difficult in Germany and quicker and easier in England. It will likewise exert a considerable influence on the other countries of the world, and will radically alter and greatly accelerate their previous course of development. It is a universal revolution and will, accordingly, have a universal range.

Engels. *Principles of Communism*, 1847

Internationalism as a class boundary

Communism, the future and program that forms the class in the present, is a permanent affirmation, in strategy and in tactics, of the internationalist principle. In fact, it is its defining element.

The Communists are distinguished from the other working-class parties by this only: 1. In the national struggles of the proletarians of the different countries, they point out and **bring to the front the common interests of the entire proletariat, independently of all nationality**. 2. In the various stages of development which the struggle of the working class against the bourgeoisie has to pass through, they **always and everywhere represent the interests of the movement as a whole**.

Marx and Engels. **Manifesto of the Communist Party**, 1848.

The direct consequence is **revolutionary defeatism**: in the face of **imperialist** war -and in **decadence** all “national” wars are imperialist- communists affirm that **the main enemy is always at home, in one’s own country**. The basic position of Marxism since 1914, when the first great imperialist war broke out, the internationalist position, is “**the conversion of the imperialist war into class war**”. That is what happened in Russia in 1917 and in Germany in 1919. The first great slaughter of imperialist capitalism did not simply “end”: it was stopped by the class struggle.

The conversion of the present imperialist war into a civil war is the only correct proletarian slogan, one that follows from the experience of the Commune, and outlined in the Basle resolution (1912); it has been dictated by all the conditions of an imperialist war between highly developed bourgeois countries. However difficult that transformation may seem at any given moment, socialists will never relinquish systematic, insistent and unswerving preparatory work in this direction now that war has become a fact.

Lenin. *The War and Russian Social-Democracy*, 1914

Internationalism is the political expression of the nature of the proletariat as a universal class. Every notion of class collaboration during war, of “national defense”, of “national liberation”, of “sacred union”, makes possible and props up imperialist war and the tendencies towards its extension. It only serves to regiment the workers for their own slaughter at the hands of other workers equally derailed from their own class interest. It is the ultimate and most evident negation of internationalism.

Internationalism does not consist in defending one and the same imperialist in different countries, even across the front lines of the war, but in **confronting, as a single universal class, each and every one of the bourgeoisies in contention**, all of them imperialist. It means understanding that “the proletariat has no country” and acting accordingly, as a single global political subject with its own program and objectives: **communism**.

Internationalism [means] solidarity of the world proletariat as a unity against international capitalism. Solidarity both in ideas and in deeds, directed against the nation and patriotism in the first place, colonial countries included. There can be no interest higher than that of the world proletariat, not even that of a country where the revolution had triumphed.

Internationalists fight with equal fury against both contending sides in local imperialist wars as much as in wars of a world character, and they denounce their respective partisans and propagandists as traffickers in human flesh. They propose and strive to organize the action of the exploited, at the front and in the rear, against their respective governments and military commands. All national defense -even in its degree of resistance- conceals exploitation and oppression. The immediate enemy, for each proletariat, is in its own country; harassing it to the utmost is the condition for unleashing the struggle of the proletariat in other countries and undertaking, united, the destruction of capitalism throughout the world.

G. Munis. **Lexicon of Contemporary Political Thuggery, Compared with the Revolutionary Lexicon**, 1970.

That is why internationalism is a **class boundary**. When a tendency or organization abandons it, regimenting the proletariat for war, it crosses a limit that objectively places it on the other side of the class line and reveals a previous mortal degeneration that cannot be treated as a mere one-off error. That is why the abandonment of internationalism by the majority of the Second International when the first imperialist world war broke out was answered by the formation of the communist parties and a Third International. And when the latter subordinated the world revolution to the needs of the

Russian state (“**socialism in one country**”), a new rupture took place which led the internationalists to form a Fourth International out of the **Communist Left**.

In 1939, when the Second World War broke out, the Fourth International immediately published a revolutionary defeatist manifesto, directly inspired by Lenin’s a quarter of a century earlier. But behind this excellent declaration of principles, there were only a few genuinely communist groups (in France, Mexico, Greece...) capable of defending proletarian internationalism tooth and nail. Held together with chewing gum and wire (the gum of the American SWP, the wire of La Vérité in France, for example), the Fourth International quickly fell into the national Resistance, where it became fatally inferior to stalinism. It could no longer remain a revolutionary force.

Old Nations, New Struggles, Same Old Song, 1990

The omnipresence of internationalism in decadence

When a tendency betrays internationalism it is condemning itself to sterility. A consistent internationalism is vital because it defines the only possibility of political development of the class. That is why internationalism is the touchstone for being able to contribute to **class consciousness** in our time.

All [the guidelines of any form of political unity] are encompassed in internationalism. Its abandonment, in 1914, by the Second International for the sake of patriotic defense (capitalist, it can be nothing else) was a great disaster for the proletariat. Set in motion again **internationalism** by the Russian revolution, it gave rise to the first world revolutionary wave, which was contained in one country after another until it was defeated in Spain. The direct cause of that elimination of the proletariat as a class in struggle was the betrayal of internationalism by the Third International, a betrayal that stemmed from the interests of the state capitalism erected in Russia and hypocritically labelled socialist.

Internationalism thus gives us the key to understanding all the problems and to adopting, in conclusion, the theoretical notions necessary for the next offensive of the proletariat. It allows us to distinguish the merits and errors of the Russian revolution, to understand its backward march to the stalinist counter-revolution, its reactionary world role through its parties, the defeat of the Spanish revolution, Franco's victory and his duration in power, the war of 1939-45, the national-imperialist resistances and all the subsequent national wars or movements of the same nature, the conversion of the former communist parties into anti-communist parties, the degenerative industrial growth in the West as well as in Russia, China and the backward countries, the long stagnation of the proletariat since the war up to now and the growing reactionary importance of the trade unions; it equally allows us to understand the present retrograde stupidity of Trotskyism, and even the primitivisms, charlatanry, theoretical errors or indigence of numerous groups more showy than plainly revolutionary.

On the other hand, going far beyond the situation of generalized or regionalized imperialist war, internationalism also gives us the key to the tactics and strategy to be adopted in the struggle of the proletariat against capitalism, a struggle that scorns frontiers and that can only be worldwide, wherever it may begin. Worldwide geographically, worldwide in its concrete content, in its demands. We will thus be led to confront each and every one of the political regimes of capital (that of Spain, that of the United States, that of Russia or that of any Angola) with the solutions that the communist revolution holds ready for the various aspects of the exploitation of man by man.

G. Munis. *Let Us Cupellate, Comrades*, 1975

It is certainly not a “theoretical” question; it is a question of basic class perspective that manifests itself from the workplaces to the **mass struggles**, because the subject of the class struggle today, more than ever, is the world **proletariat**.

Proletarian internationalism, which outside of theoretical analysis and the formation of the revolutionary's consciousness found in former times hardly any practical application except during war, today becomes indispensable in the midst of peace, every day and in many ways. The immediate struggle of the proletariat against its nearest enemy, be it bourgeois or stalinist, can only be waged illusorily unless it is imbued with internationalism.

The very economic demands necessary today are indefensible, even impossible to formulate, unless they are based directly on the world proletariat as their subject and object, and above all as the annihilator of national barriers, armies, war production, the economy of capital and wages. Revolutionary internationalism, with all its consequences, must make its appearance in the factory, where the paramilitary drill-masters of the two blocs force upon the proletariat, like a straitjacket, their respective uniforms.

G. Munis. "The Fourth International", 1959

Juvenalism



Juvenalism is an ideology which claims that, in a situation of crisis and historical “emergency”, young people are the best suited to provide direction because their ideas are “new” and are neither marked nor constrained by the weight of immediate interests. Young people would thus speak “in the name of the future”.

Historical origin of juvenalism

In 1896 the first nucleus of the Wandervogel appeared. At first they were an expression of the discontent of the German petty bourgeoisie in the midst of the expansion of imperialism. They revived German romanticism with a “back to nature” ideology and an ambiguous discourse of “emancipation” that served equally to give an anti-capitalist veneer and to criticize the family and educational models of the time.

The rejection of urban life and its “artificiality” was set against the “simplicity” of the hiking life, and the discovery of the landscape was equated with that of Nature. The Wandervogel soon introduced the mountaineering *uniform* -shorts, neckerchief, hobnailed boots, raincoat, hat or cap- and the love of the “campfire”, creating a songbook for guitar and lute that is considered the beginning of German folk music.

As the movement developed, juvenalist ideas began to appear: young people, “clean” of the old world, are the ones called upon to bring “the new ideas” that are to emancipate society, overcoming the tensions, violence and crises of a world that is already old.

The combination of romantic essentialism, aesthetic anti-capitalism and exaltation of the landscape led “spontaneously” to the exaltation of leadership and **nationalism**. The Wandervogel soon became hierarchical and turned into a sort of unarmed, **populist** paramilitary groups.

Not only did they exclude women, they did not accept Jewish or foreign boys either. Little by little their **naturalism turned paganizing**, generating a Germanist mythology of its own.

Yes, it is what it looks like: the Nazi ideological pastiche was already there, in outline, before the first imperialist world war, shaping the imagination of thousands of petty-bourgeois boys.

So much so that **in 1912** one of the most influential groups of the movement, “Vortrupp” (Vanguard), took up eugenics as its banner and began a discourse of “racial hygiene”, banning tobacco -another later obsession of Hitler’s-, beer, etc. When the Nazis came to power in 1933 and dissolved the independent youth organizations, most of the groups joined the Hitler Youth of their own free will.

Those that did not become “Edelweiss Pirates”, roving bands of young people given to street fighting with their former Hitlerite comrades, who vented their rage without ever finding a political direction or serving as anything other than solvents of the struggles in the factories.

But these were not the only offshoots. After Baden-Powell used the model in the English-speaking world as a guide for creating future conquerors and soldiers for the British Empire, there was no irredentist European nationalism that did not create uniformed hiking youth groups to indoctrinate militants from puberty, if not from childhood. In the adoption of the form, drops of juvenalism always slipped in, which would end up distilling and merging into the cult of youth of Italian and Spanish fascism.

But despite the importance of those offshoots, the original juvenalism did not disappear either. In 1920, young Christians formed the first **Bruderhof** community, a **movement that lives in community of goods and still survives today**. Persecuted by the state under the Nazi government, they ended up in exile in Great Britain, Paraguay, the USA... and tried to join the **Hutterites**, old Anabaptist communalists from the time of the German peasant revolutions (16th century). A curious outcome -which also went wrong- of their original Christian juvenalism.

And something similar happened with the **Jewish youth movements**, also created in the image of the Wandervogel. They went from the “search for meaning” to the discovery and rejection of the kibbutz first, and from there to its ultranationalist “reinvention” later.

In fact, the discourse of **Hashomer Hatzair**, the most influential and numerous group among the youth movements that organized migrations to Palestine in the 1920s and 1930s, bordered on anti-

Semitism: according to them, only the new youth, emancipated from their families and from the age-old culture of submission and oppression that Jewish culture was, could create a new moral and even physical type and lead the working masses of colonial Palestine.

By the mid-forties they were already fully integrated into Stalinism, which during the two previous decades had massacred the heart of the Bolshevik party. It was they who, via Czechoslovakia, armed the first Israeli army in 1948 with the rifles sent by Stalin.

Juvenalism and decadence

The dates and contexts of juvenalism, as well as its current revival, encouraged by the states as a propaganda pillar of the “Green Deal”, show that juvenalism accompanies the **decadence** of the system in its development. Actually part of the **“revolution in manners” that the petty bourgeoisie would drive forward from 1870 onwards**, it can be considered one of the first ideological symptoms of decadence.

It is no coincidence that the few antecedents of juvenalism appeared in the final phases of both **slavery** and **feudalism**. The idea that those who symbolically represent the future -the young- are the only ones who can represent a better future in the present reveals the system’s renunciation of any claim to represent and materialize the general interests of Humanity.

They are thus an evident symptom of the moral collapse characteristic of the phases of decadence of all **modes of production**. And for the same reason, these movements reveal a furiously reactionary character in denying the revolutionary class already present.

Labor



Conscious and deliberate activity by which the species transforms its environment.

Labor and the human species

Ever since the philosophers of Antiquity, the social nature of our species had been discussed in essentialist and metaphysical terms. But in 1859 science took a giant leap with the publication of “The Origin of Species”. The theory of evolution provided for the first time a material basis for the famous “what are we and where do we come from”, pawed over by all the idealisms and religions up to the present day.

For the young revolutionary workers’ movement, that advance was an especially valuable scientific conquest that reinforced and propelled its own vision of the species and its future. It had nothing to do, of course, with the crude and unscientific “social Darwinism” later

developed by the British bourgeoisie, which twisted the Darwinian metaphor to justify the concentration of capital and the pauperization of the great masses of workers.

The reading Engels makes at that time is **materialist** and **dialectical**. Materialist because the form of adaptation of the ancestors of our species, the transformation of the environment through the use of tools -that is, labor- has no other origin or driving force than the pure material needs of survival; and its consequences will be material too: the particular and characteristic development of the human brain. Dialectical because that development will take place in a complex relationship with the environment, manifesting itself as the interaction and mutual feeding between language, thought, the capacity of perception and the very capacity to transform Nature: labor.

Labor is the basic and fundamental condition of all human life. And it is so to such an extent that, in a sense, we must say that labor created man himself. (...) First labor, then and along with it articulate speech, were the two main stimuli under whose influence the brain of the ape gradually changed into the human brain (...) And as the brain developed, so did its most immediate instruments: the sense organs. (...)

The development of the brain and of the senses serving it, the growing clarity of consciousness, the ever greater capacity for abstraction and reasoning, reacted in turn on labor and speech, stimulating their development more and more; and when man finally separates from the ape, this development by no means ceases (...) advancing as a whole by great strides, considerably driven forward and at the same time guided in a more definite direction by a new element that arises with the appearance of fully-fledged man: society.

Frederick Engels. “**The Part Played by Labour in the Transition from Ape to Man**”, 1876

That relationship, that social “metabolism” between the species and nature mediated by labor, had already been pointed out in “Capital”:

Labor is, first of all, a process between man and nature, a process in which man mediates, regulates and controls his metabolism with nature. Man confronts the materials of nature as a force of nature. He sets in motion the natural forces that belong to his own body, his arms and legs, head and hands, in order to appropriate the materials of nature in a form useful for his own life. By acting through this movement on external nature and transforming it, he at the same time transforms his own nature. He develops the potentialities slumbering within it and subjects the play of its forces to his own sovereign power.

Karl Marx. *Capital*, 1867

The historical and social forms and meanings of labor

Our species, “in the social production of its existence”, enters into social relations “independent of its will”, relations of production “which correspond to a definite stage of development of its material productive forces”. These relations, which “constitute the economic structure of society”, give meaning to labor and frame it within the class structure of each mode of production.

That is why the social meaning of labor has varied historically from one mode of production to another. Slave labor under slavery, serf labor under feudalism and wage labor under capitalism represent an evolution of the forms of exploitation and extraction of the wealth created by the working class, running parallel to the *progress* of the *productive forces*.

In the next revolution now possible for humanity, *socialism*, the transitional phase towards *communism*, labor will be progressively freed not only from the exaction and the compulsory character it has had in all class societies, but from the very division between manual

and intellectual labor. With this, the boundary between free time and productive time tends to disappear, and with it the **alienation** characteristic of all systems of exploitation.

The enslaving subordination of individuals to the division of labor will have disappeared, and with it also the antithesis between intellectual and manual labor; labor will no longer be merely a means of life but will itself have become the prime necessity of life, (and) with the all-round development of individuals their productive capacities will also have grown, and all the springs of collective wealth will flow in abundance.

Karl Marx. **Critique of the Gotha Program**, 1875

Labor power



Set of physical and intellectual capacities that a person applies when generating use values in a productive process. Its sale for a certain time in the market as a commodity by those who cannot produce by themselves and have no other commodity to sell is the basic condition and institution of capitalism.

Meaning of labor power

By labor power or capacity for labor we understand the set of physical and mental faculties that exist in the corporeality, in the living personality of a human being, and which he sets in motion whenever he produces use values of any kind.

Karl Marx. **Capital**, 1867.

Lumpenproletariat



A mass of declassed people, excluded and set apart from the proletariat, which lives economically on illegal trafficking, the criminal economy, begging, state or private patronage, or a combination of all these.

Proletariat vs. lumpen

The *lumpen* are not the pre-proletarian “vagrants and rogues” torn from the fields and the common lands; they are an uprooted product of the decomposition of bourgeois society.

The “dangerous class”, **lumpenproletariat** the social scum, that passively rotting mass thrown off by the lowest layers of the old society, may, here and there, be swept into the movement by a proletarian revolution; its conditions of life, however, prepare it far more for the part of a bribed tool of reactionary intrigue.

Karl Marx and Frederick Engels. **Communist Manifesto**, 1848

Because of their economic activity, often linked to organized crime, and their individualism, they are closer to the petty bourgeoisie than to the **proletariat**. Marx ironizes about the mirror-like relationship between the speculating bourgeoisie and the lumpen, given the parasitic and nihilistic character of both classes.

While the financial aristocracy made the laws, ran the administration of the state, disposed of all the organized public powers and dominated public opinion through the actual state of affairs and through the press, the same prostitution, the same shameless fraud, the same mania to get rich, not through production, but by pocketing the already created wealth of others, was repeated in every sphere, from the court to the café borgne.

And notably, at the top of bourgeois society, there spread an unbridled pursuit of the satisfaction of the most unhealthy and dissolute appetites, which at every step clashed with the very laws of the bourgeoisie; an unbridled licence in which, by natural law, the wealth derived from gambling seeks its satisfaction, in which pleasure turns into debauchery and in which money, filth and blood flow together. The financial aristocracy, in its methods of acquisition as much as in its pleasures, is nothing but the rebirth of the lumpenproletariat at the top of bourgeois society.

Karl Marx. **The Class Struggles in France, 1848 to 1850**, 1850.

Politically they form a dangerous group, opposed to the class movements of the workers and often used as an instrument against them. The mere association with the lumpen, or attempts to organize it into “gangs” under the authoritarian leadership of some workers’ leader, are regarded as treason from the very first moments of the political affirmation of the workers.

The lumpenproletariat, that scum made up of the demoralized elements of all social strata and concentrated mainly in the big cities, is the worst of all possible allies.

That rabble is absolutely venal and utterly brazen. When the French workers wrote on the walls of the houses during each of the revolutions: “Mort aux voleurs!” Death to thieves!, and indeed shot more than one, they did not do so in a fit of enthusiasm for property, but in the full awareness that it was necessary above all to get rid of that gang. Every workers’ leader who uses elements of the lumpenproletariat as his personal guard and relies on them proves by that fact alone that he is a traitor to the movement.

Frederick Engels. **Preface to The Peasant War in Germany.**

Mass strike



A form of workers' struggle characteristic of decadent capitalism. It resolves the organization and massive self-affirmation of the workers by spreading spontaneously across the length and breadth of a territory, incorporating all workers regardless of trade, nationality, sex or any other division imposed by the organization of production or by the state.

Origins of the mass strike

With the development of **imperialism**, in the last decade of **rising capitalism**, the class struggle intensifies and begins to show new forms all over the world. The first great “mass strike” breaks out in Russia in 1905.

From one end of the country to the other ran a grandiose wave of strikes that shook the body of the nation. According to a rough estimate, the strike spread to 122 cities and towns, to several mines of the Donets and to ten railway companies. The proletarian masses were stirred to their foundations. The movement swept along a million souls. Without any definite plan, often even without formulating any demands, breaking off and starting again, guided only by the instinct of solidarity, the strike reigned over the country for about two months. [...]

After January 9, the revolution will know no rest. It no longer confines itself to underground work hidden from view, ceaselessly rousing new strata; it has begun openly and hastily to call up its companies, its battalions, its regiments and its army corps. The main force of this immense host is the proletariat; that is why the revolution calls up its soldiers by means of the strike. [...]

One after another, trades, factories and cities stop work. The railwaymen are the initiators of the movement; the railways serve as the conductor of this epidemic. Economic demands are formulated and satisfied almost immediately, in whole or in part. But neither the beginning of the strike nor its end depends exclusively on the demands presented or on the satisfaction obtained.

The strike begins not because the economic struggle has arrived at definite demands but, on the contrary, demands are selected and formulated because the strike is needed. There is a need to show oneself, the proletariat of other places and finally the whole people, the forces that have been accumulated, the solidarity of the class, its fighting ardor; a general review of the revolution has to be held.

The strikers themselves, and those who support them, and those who sympathize with them, and those who fear them, and those who hate them, all understand or vaguely feel that this curious strike, which runs from place to place, regains its impetus and passes by like a whirlwind; all understand or feel that it does not act of its own accord, that it merely carries out the will of the revolution that sends it. Over the field of operations of the strike, that is, over the whole expanse of the country, hangs a menacing, sinister force, charged with insolent daring.

Leon Trotsky. 1905: Results and Prospects, 1906

When Rosa Luxemburg brought the discussion on the model of the “mass strike” to Germany, at a time when class tension was strong, the party reluctantly accepted its “use”, subject only to an eventual abolition of the workers’ right to vote. The **trade unions** then refused point-blank. Rosa Luxemburg intervened in the debate, trying to clarify first of all that the mass strike is not the general strike - not in the sense of universality, quite the opposite, but in the sense that it cannot be reduced to a tool, that it cannot simply be “called”.

The first thing that the experience of Russia leads us to revise is the general conception of the problem. Today, when all has been said and done, we find that the position of the most fervent advocates of “trying out the mass strike” in Germany, such as Bernstein, Eisner, etc., and that of the most bitter opponents of this idea, such as Bömelburg in the trade union camp, turn out in practice to be the same, that is, the anarchist conception.

For the anarchist way of thinking is direct speculation on the “great Kladderadatsch”, on the social revolution merely as an external and inessential characteristic. What is essential to anarchism is the abstract, unhistorical conception of the mass strike and of the conditions under which the proletarian struggle is generally waged.

This capricious way of reasoning led sixty years ago to the conception of the mass strike as the shortest, safest and easiest way to leap into a better social future. The same way of reasoning recently gave rise to the idea that the trade union struggle was the only true “direct action of the masses”, and also the only true revolutionary struggle. This, as we know, is the latest position of the French and Italian “syndicalists” [revolutionary syndicalism, which would later mutate into the anarcho-syndicalism of the CNT].

What was always fatal for anarchism is that methods of struggle improvised in the air are like invitations to a house whose owner is absent, that is, they are purely utopian. Moreover, these speculations, which at one time were on the whole revolutionary, by failing to reckon with despicable, vile reality, are in fact transformed by it into instruments of reaction.

Those who today fix a day on the calendar for the mass strike in Germany, as if it were an appointment noted in an executive's diary; those who, like the participants in the trade union congress of Cologne, seek to eliminate the problem of the mass strike from the face of the earth by means of a "propaganda" ban, are guided by these same abstract and unhistorical methods of observation.

Both tendencies rest on the purely anarchist assumption that the mass strike is a purely technical means of struggle that can be "decided" at will and in a strictly conscious way, or that can be "forbidden"; a kind of pocket knife kept closed in one's pocket "ready for any emergency", which can be opened and used whenever one decides. (...)

Therefore, if the Russian Revolution teaches us anything, it is above all that the mass strike is not artificially "made", not "decided" at random, not "propagated"; it is a historical phenomenon which, at a given moment, arises out of social conditions as an inevitable historical necessity. The problem therefore cannot be understood or discussed on the basis of abstract speculation about the possibility or impossibility, the usefulness or harmfulness of the mass strike. One must examine the social factors and conditions that give rise to the mass strike in the present stage of the class struggle.

In other words, it is not a matter of a subjective criticism of the mass strike from the standpoint of what would be desirable, but of an objective investigation of the causes of the mass strike from the standpoint of what is historically inevitable.

Rosa Luxemburg. *The Mass Strike, the Political Party and the Trade Unions*, 1906

But there are elements we should not forget either in the rejection that the mass strike provokes in the social democratic leadership: the 1905 strike has gone beyond the trade union bureaucracy and its fantasy of organizing the proletariat as a pyramidal army. The Russian proletariat has not created trade union confederations; it has created a new type of organ: the workers' council, the **soviet**. And this organ has gone beyond the unions and placed them under its natural command, without consulting popes or bureaucrats. The worst nightmare for the **trade union** leadership at a time when the unions are beginning to be integrated into **state capitalism**.

As the October strike unfolded, the soviet naturally became the center that attracted the general attention of political men. Its importance grew literally from hour to hour. The industrial proletariat had been the first to close ranks around it. The Union of Unions, which had joined the strike from October 14, almost immediately had to recognize the protectorate of the soviet. Numerous strike committees - those of engineers, lawyers, government officials - regulated their actions by the decisions of the soviet. By subordinating the independent organizations, the soviet unified the revolution around itself.

Leon Trotsky. 1905: Results and Prospects, 1906

The mass strike in the 20th century

The mass strike is not a phenomenon confined in time or space. Immediately after the Russian revolution of 1905, we will see it appear in South America, in the famous 1907 Saltpeter Strike*, return to Russia in February 1917 and merge with the world revolutionary wave until 1937, from Spain to China. It will break out again in Italy, Germany, Greece and Vietnam as the basic form of the proletariat's attempts to transform war into revolution.

In 1953 in Germany, it will for the first time put the new Stalinist regimes of Eastern Europe in check. From 1962 (the Asturias miners' strike) the mass strike once again holds sway across the world, from Paris to Córdoba and Rosario, from South Africa to Vitoria and from there to the Donbass by way of Poland, respecting neither oceans nor "iron curtains". In the second half of the eighties, the long wave of struggles opened then will be exhausted. However, the revival of the class struggle will again bring the specter of the mass strike to Iran (2017-19), Morocco (2018) and Mexico (2019).

Maximalism



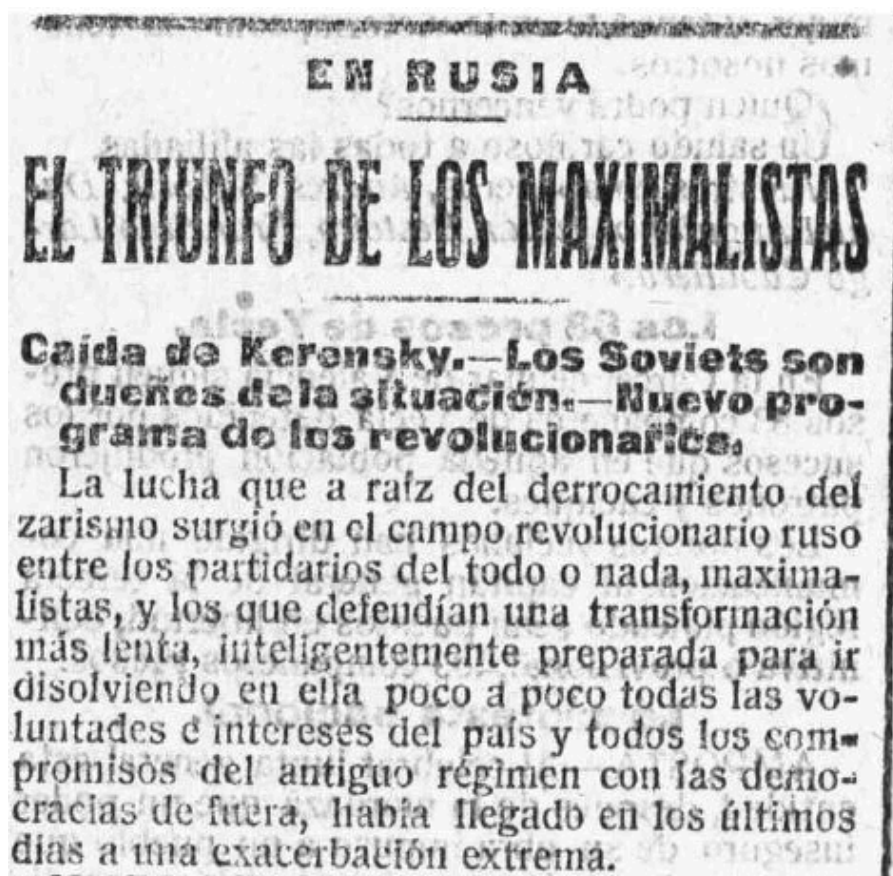
A set of tendencies of different origins that identify with and give priority to what the Second International called the “maximum program”: the abolition of the state and wage labor.

Origin of maximalism

During the 19th century both Marxists and collectivist anarchists were usually described as *maximalists*... and not only by the **reformist** tendencies.

In **Russia**, the revolutionary faction of the *Socialist Revolutionaries*, the party of the peasant revolution, would call itself *socialist-maximalist* and would end up merging with the Bolsheviks, the Inter-District Organization (Mezhraiontsy) and other groups in the process of formation of the *Communist Party of Russia (Bolshevik)* in 1917.

Unaware of the divisions within Russian socialism, the Belgian, French, Spanish, Portuguese and Italian press, including the socialist press, routinely identified the Bolsheviks as *maximalists* throughout the Russian revolutionary process and the first years after the revolution. The headline with which *El Socialista*, the official daily of the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party, reported the October insurrection was none other than: *The Triumph of the Maximalists*.



News of the October Revolution in “El Socialista”, the official newspaper of the Spanish Socialist Workers’ Party, in November 1917.

The identification between the term *maximalist* and the Russian revolution was such in the early period of the Third International that its first organization in **Portugal**, the first Portuguese communist party, founded in 1919, was officially called *Federação Maximalista Portuguesa* (FMP).

Something similar happened in **Italy**, where Bordiga and Gramsci referred to the Bolsheviks as *maximalists* at least until 1920. The pro-Third International current then emerging in the Italian Socialist Party began to be called, and to recognize itself, as *maximalist*. That is why the *abstentionist fraction* within this current -led by Bordiga and the origin of the later *Italian communist left*- declared its *maximalist orientation* and regularly spoke of the *maximalist proletariat* and of *maximalist socialism*.

In Italy, however, the name went down in history associated with the *centrist electoralist fraction* headed by Serrati. Partly because in 1921 the *left maximalists* led the founding of the *Italian Communist Party*, and partly because Lenin would criticize Serrati and his followers as the *electoral maximalists*, and the following generations, who no longer kept in mind that both right and left were known as maximalists at the time, began to abbreviate and call the centrist current and Serrati simply *maximalists*.

From 1924 onwards the term ceased to be used by communists to refer to themselves and its use became increasingly restricted. Generally, and always in the mouths of others, it designates sectoral movements more or less organized by the International.

It appears, for example, in references to the *communist co-operators* and other fractions promoted by the *United Front* policy. In Spain it would reappear in the 1930s, used by the parties of the republican petty bourgeoisie to refer to a confused array that would include insurrectionist elements of anarcho-syndicalism and the *Spanish communist left*, and in 1937 to the forces that took part in the revolutionary movement, defending it from the attacks of Stalinism and the republican government (basically, the CNT rank and file, the *Friends of Durruti* and the Spanish *Bolshevik-Leninist Group*). After 1937 the term dropped out of political language and was used less and less.

Militarism



Tendency towards the subordination of production and of the organization of the state to the needs of war; whether present or future. It therefore manifests itself as an increase in military spending running parallel to the development of the authoritarian character of the state and the militarization of social life.

Origin

Militarism is a product of the extreme and simultaneous development of the internal contradictions -class struggle- and the external contradictions of a society; it appears in the **decadence** of **modes of production**. In capitalism it already emerges with **imperialism** and becomes universal with the system's entry into **decadence**. It marks social life in every state, but especially in those that, because their

political apparatus came out of the counterrevolution -Stalinism, fascism, etc.- or because they had weaker national capitals, took on extremely centralized forms of state capitalism.

External and internal functions of militarism and its

relation to the workers

The proletariat knows that [Germany's] international policy essentially aims at fighting and suppressing, by violent and crude means, the social and political difficulties facing the ruling classes; in a word, it is a policy of Bonapartist confusion and deception.

It knows that the enemies of the workers keep the fire of chauvinism burning in order to safeguard their own interests; [...]

It also knows that the wars the ruling classes provoke in the service of their own interests demand of the proletariat the most terrible sacrifices, both in material goods and in human lives. In exchange for which, once the job is done, they are offered miserable invalidity pensions, veterans' welfare, barrel organs to beg with, and kicks of every kind.

The proletariat knows that after every war a volcano of mud, brutality and coarseness spreads over the peoples that took part in it and sets civilization back many years.

It likewise knows that the fatherland for which it is supposed to fight is not its fatherland; that for the proletariat of all countries there is only one real enemy: the capitalist class, which oppresses and exploits the proletariat; that the proletariat of each country is firmly bound, by its interests, to the proletariat of all other countries; that before the common interests of the international proletariat all national interests diminish in importance; and that the international coalition of exploitation and slavery must be met by the international coalition of the exploited and the enslaved.

It knows that the proletariat, insofar as it is used in a war, is led to fight against its own brothers and class comrades, and therefore against its own interests.

That is why the position taken by the class-conscious proletariat towards this international function of the army, as towards every policy of capitalist expansion, is not merely cold but deeply and consciously hostile. The fundamental task of the proletariat is to wage a struggle to the death against militarism; and every day it becomes more aware of this. [...]

But militarism does not only have the function of defense and attack against the external enemy; it also plays an internal role, owing to the ever more intense class struggle and the growth of proletarian class consciousness. This shapes, day by day, both the formal aspect of militarism and its essence: namely, the protection of the ruling social order, the support of capitalism and of all reaction against the liberation struggle of the working class.

Here it shows itself as a pure instrument of class struggle, an instrument in the hands of the ruling classes, intended, with the collaboration of the police and the courts, of the school and the church, to halt the development of class consciousness; and thereby to secure, whatever the cost and even against the will of the majority of the people, the power of a minority in the state and the freedom to exploit.

This is how militarism appears before our eyes: it claims to be nothing less than the squaring of the circle; it arms the people against itself; it dares, by trying by every means to artificially introduce a generational division into our social structure, to turn the worker into the exploiter, enemy and murderer of his own class comrades and friends, of his parents, his brothers and his children, of his own past and future; it wants to be democratic and despotic, enlightened and mechanical, popular and an enemy of the people, all at the same time.

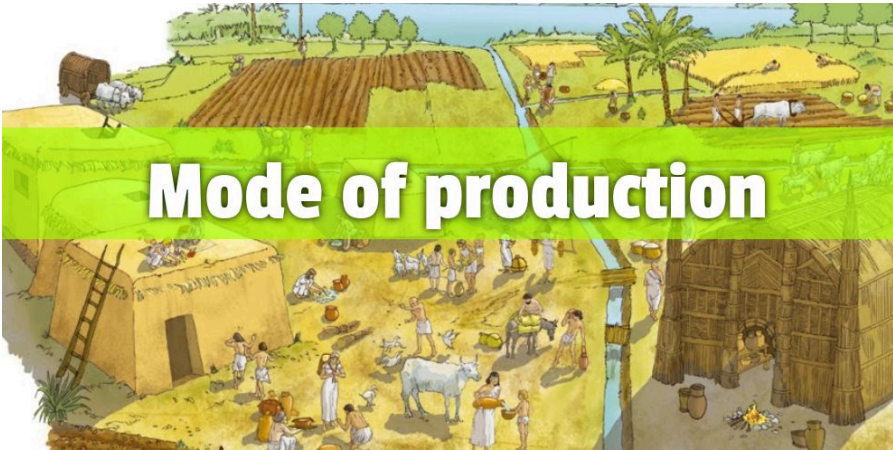
Militarism and accumulation

In any case, in all the central countries the defense of militarism, in the form of a defense of the strategic character of military production and of its weight within total state expenditure, must also be considered from the standpoint of the logic of **accumulation**. The military industry was the first sector which, being entirely dependent on the state, made it possible to create a “productive” outlet for capital that would act as a “locomotive” for the **rate of profit** of national capital.

In practice, militarism, on the basis of indirect taxation, works in both directions: at the expense of the normal living conditions of the working class, it ensures both the maintenance of the organ of capitalist rule (the standing army) and the creation of a magnificent field of accumulation for capital.

Rosa Luxemburg. **The Accumulation of Capital**, 1913.

Mode of production



Set of social relations that shape production, make up the economic structure of society and correspond to a definite stage of development of the productive forces.

Mode of production and historical transformation

The discovery of the concept of “mode of production” lies at the very origin of **historical materialism**. The “mode of production of material life” is a structure of social relations that:

1. defines a society in accordance with the development of its **productive forces**,
2. limits its **forms of self-consciousness** and
3. shapes its possibilities of evolution and of revolutionary supersession by the new mode of production latent in the objectives of its revolutionary class.

In the social production of their existence, men enter into definite, necessary relations, independent of their will; these relations of production correspond to a definite stage of development of their material productive forces.

The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite social forms of consciousness. The **mode of production of material life** conditions the process of social, political and intellectual life in general. It is not the consciousness of men that determines reality; on the contrary, it is social reality that determines their consciousness.

In the course of their development, the productive forces of society come into contradiction with the existing relations of production or - what is but a legal expression of the same thing - with the property relations within which they had moved until then. From forms of development of the productive forces, these relations turn into fetters on those forces. Then begins an era of social revolution. The change that has taken place in the economic foundation more or less slowly or rapidly transforms the whole immense superstructure. [...]

No society ever disappears before all the productive forces it can contain have developed, and new, higher relations of production never appear in it before the material conditions of their existence have matured within the very womb of the old society. Therefore mankind only ever sets itself such problems as it can solve, since, looking at the matter more closely, it will always be found that the problem itself arises only when the material conditions for its solution already exist or are at least in the process of formation.

In broad outline, the Asiatic, ancient, feudal and modern bourgeois modes of production may be designated as so many progressive epochs in the economic formation of society. The bourgeois relations of production are the last antagonistic form of the social process of production - antagonistic not in the sense of individual antagonism, but of an antagonism arising from the social conditions of existence of individuals; the productive forces developing within bourgeois society create at the same time the material conditions for the resolution of this antagonism. With this social formation, therefore, the prehistory of human society comes to an end.

Karl Marx. Preface to “A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy”, January 1859.

Modes of production

- Primitive communism
- Asiatic mode of production
- Slave-owning mode of production or ancient
- Feudalism
- Capitalism
- Communism

Nation



Name of the social body generated by the bourgeoisie when it effectively leads the whole of society in a given territory. From a materialist point of view the nation emerges in parallel to the constitution of a national market and is oriented towards the consolidation of the power of the bourgeoisie through a national state.

The birth of the nation

Before the bourgeois revolution, and contrary to the glowing hagiography the bourgeoisie makes of itself, the nation as a social body forming a united **people** was incomprehensible.

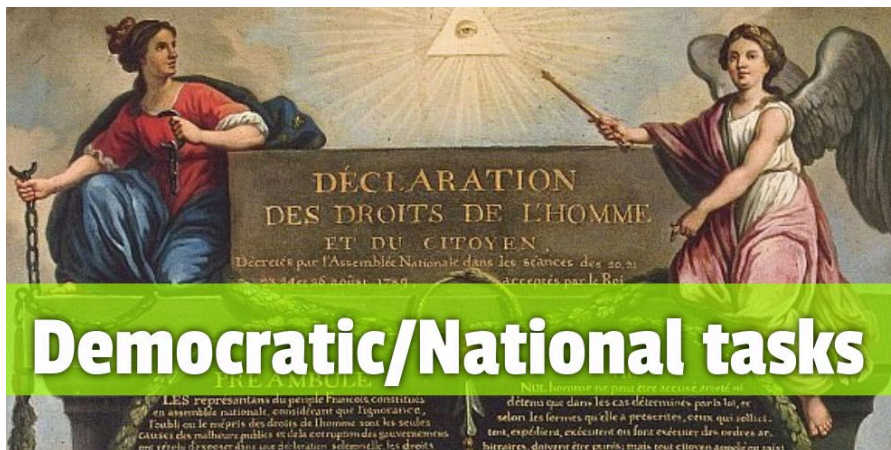
Absolutist kings had been adding regions to their domains through the comings and goings of the seemingly endless European dynastic conflicts, regions which for the most part still retained their charters (*fueros*) and were strictly divided into classes and groups on the basis

of legal privileges. These conflicts followed no national logic; rather, they responded to the infighting between the dynastic houses scattered throughout Europe. Sumptuary laws (restricting the type of clothing each class could wear and the activities in which it could take part), linguistic variation and feudalizing festivals continually insisted on the local particularities of the division of power in each society.

When the death of the old feudal mode by material and productive suffocation, as well as the outlines of a new mode of production arising from agrarian “improvement” and mercantilism, became evident, the bourgeoisie and the thriving agrarian petty bourgeoisie applied themselves to the idea of “constituting” the nation out of the “third estate” on the ruins of the old fractured and hierarchical society. The first European constitutions do not only establish the state, they establish the nation. Maps change, a more or less explicit “civil religion” is created, cults of the flag and the fatherland are instituted, and the military career is opened to the bourgeoisie and, to a lesser degree, to the petty bourgeoisie and sections of the artisans.

The detachments of national guards from the various regions which between 1789 and 1790 declared their loyalty to the French nation did not do so out of divine illumination, but because the cult of the nation turned into its priests a mass of civil servants, soldiers and concession-holders from the non-noble classes such as had never existed before. The new liberal state would be the main avenue of social advancement for the petty bourgeoisie and the main tool for accelerating the accumulation of the brand-new national bourgeoisie. The national “spirit”, which from Herder onwards would claim to be eternal and ancestral, was beginning to emanate forcefully from its material reality: the new bourgeois state.

National and democratic tasks of the bourgeois revolution



Basic milestones of the bourgeois revolutions that enable the development of national capital and the consolidation of its dominance through a national state of its own.

Among the national tasks of the bourgeois revolutions, the most important is the achievement of the unity of the national market that enables the **bourgeoisie** to undertake mass production. This implies the abolition of the legal obstacles to the **commodification** of social relations (the conversion of land and labor power into commodities) and of the obstacles to trade (internal customs, language barriers, etc.), as well as the replacement of feudal state structures based on seigniorial rights and privileges by a **state** apparatus centered on the defense of the interests of national capital both within and beyond its borders.

The “democratic” dimension of the national tasks

In carrying out its revolutionary, national tasks, the bourgeoisie needs to constitute the **nation**, to lead the social whole against the classes and the estate-based state that had dominated until then. Where, besides an autonomous peasantry, there existed a petty bourgeoisie and an incipient proletariat, it included concessions to these classes in its program, offering them legal possibilities of representation in the state and of self-organization in pursuit of their interests.

These programmatic elements, which form part of what the bourgeoisie needs in order to constitute a nation, are what are known as the “democratic tasks of the bourgeois revolution”. They will later be taken up by the **petty bourgeoisie** in its always fruitless attempts to reinvent the nation from the **people**, that is, in its attempt to lead the non-exploiting classes as a whole in their own resistance to the consequences of capitalist concentration.

Did the proletariat have “national” or “democratic” tasks?

The **proletariat**, during **rising capitalism**, supported the rise of the bourgeoisie to the position of ruling class as a phase of its own extension and development as a world class. But as early as 1847, on the eve of the revolution of '48, the communists warned the workers of the danger of believing that the tasks of the bourgeoisie were their own, or of harboring illusions about the content of the concessions wrested from the class that was destined to become the new ruling class.

In Germany the decisive struggle between the bourgeoisie and the absolute monarchy still lies ahead. But since the Communists cannot count on a decisive struggle with the bourgeoisie before the latter comes to power, it is in the interest of the Communists to help it conquer domination as soon as possible, in order to overthrow it, in turn, as soon as possible.

Therefore, in the struggle of the liberal bourgeoisie against the [absolutist] governments, the Communists must always be on the side of the former, guarding themselves, however, against the self-deception into which the bourgeoisie falls and not trusting its seductive assurances about the beneficial consequences which, according to it, the victory of the bourgeoisie will bring to the proletariat.

The only advantages that the victory of the bourgeoisie will offer the Communists will be: 1) various concessions that will make it easier for the Communists to defend, discuss and spread their principles and, therefore, will make easier the cohesion of the proletariat into an organized class, closely united and ready for struggle; and 2) the certainty that on the day the absolutist governments fall, the hour of struggle between bourgeois and proletarians will come. From that day on, the policy of the Communist party here will be the same as in the countries where the bourgeoisie already rules.

Frederick Engels. **Principles of Communism**, 1847

Does the proletariat have “national” or “democratic” tasks today?

No. After capitalism entered its imperialist phase, the proletariat ceased to support any bourgeois faction, even one whose banner is the achievement of the national or democratic tasks.

Imperialism arises from the chronic lack of sufficient extra-capitalist markets in which to realize the whole of the surplus value produced. Extra-capitalist markets are those formed by artisans, independent peasants and, in general, by producers of commodity value who do not take part in the expanded reproduction of capital. Imperialism therefore means the passage to a stage in which an independent development of national capital is impossible: from the very moment it comes to power, national capital is bound to behave as an imperialist capital, with over-accumulation, over-concentration around finance capital and the state, speculative development, militarism, expansionism, etc.

This was already seen in the process of Turkish **national liberation** before the First World War, and from that moment on there is not a single historical case to the contrary. On the contrary, the balance sheet of national liberation since the world wars is the appearance of monstrous state capitalisms, caught up in the imperialist battle from the very first moment, when the “wars of national liberation” immediately turn into inter-imperialist wars. These wars culminated not in real national independence in the terms in which it had been understood until then, but in the formation of states enrolled in blocs ordered by the great powers of the moment.

In other words, the passage to the imperialist stage, after a twenty-year transition culminating in the First World War, turns the national state into a universally reactionary social form. It is the consequence

of the passage of capitalism, and of the bourgeoisie as a whole, into its historical **decadence**. This historical leap eliminates the possibility of any “democratic task” or any “national task” of the proletariat in the struggles for state power of any bourgeois faction, however “anti-imperialist” or “democratic” it may claim to be.

Nationalism



Political ideology that defines the nation as a historical and political subject above the social classes, which would be reduced to components of the nation with specific national interests and tasks, that is, with their own interests and duties in the “common goal” of the prosperity of national capital.

The meaning of nationalism

Nationalism defines the **nation** as a historical and political subject above the social classes, which would be reduced to components of the nation with specific national interests and tasks, that is, with their own interests and duties in the “common goal” of the prosperity of national capital. Duties which of course include different forms of “loyalty” towards state power.

Every nationalism will include, with greater or lesser intensity, the demand for a “national culture” and for the **national and democratic tasks of the bourgeois revolution** in the form of a permanent demand for “national sovereignty”.

The critique of the concept of the nation as a historical subject, that is, the critique of nationalism, involves denying the existence of any “national program”. The nation is not that unity with a destiny beneath which the **bourgeoisie’s** leadership of society as a whole is concealed. It is, on the contrary, a set of classes in conflict, in which the **proletariat** represents a program antagonistic to everything the nation implies.

When one speaks of the “right of nations to self-determination”, one uses the concept of the nation as a whole, as a homogeneous social and political unit. But that concept of “nation” is precisely one of the categories of bourgeois ideology that Marxist theory has subjected to a radical revision, showing that behind the mysterious veil of the concepts of “bourgeois freedom”, “equality before the law”, etc., a concrete historical content is always concealed.

In class society the nation does not exist as a homogeneous socio-political entity; rather, in each nation there are classes with antagonistic interests and “rights”.

There is absolutely no social terrain, from the most basic material conditions to the subtlest moral conditions, on which the possessing classes and the conscious proletariat adopt the same attitude and appear as an undifferentiated “people”.

In the sphere of economic conditions, the bourgeois classes defend the interests of exploitation, and the proletariat those of labor. In the sphere of legal conditions, private property is the cornerstone of bourgeois society; the interests of the proletariat demand that the propertyless be emancipated from the domination of property. In the sphere of the administration of justice, bourgeois society represents “class justice”, the justice of the well-fed and the rulers; the proletariat defends humanity and the principle of taking into account the social influences on the individual.

In international relations, the bourgeoisie pursues a policy of war and annexation, that is, in the present phase of the system, a policy of restrictive tariffs and commercial war; the proletariat, by contrast, a policy of general peace and free exchange. In the

sphere of sociology and philosophy, the bourgeois schools and the school that represents the proletariat stand in open contradiction (...)

Even in the sphere of so-called human relations, of ethics, of views on art, education, etc., the interests, the world outlook and the ideals of the bourgeoisie on the one hand, and those of the conscious proletariat on the other, constitute two camps separated from each other by a deep abyss. In those respects in which the formal aspirations and interests of the proletariat and of the bourgeoisie as a whole, or of its progressive section, seem identical or common, as for example in democratic aspirations, the identity of forms and slogans conceals a complete break in content and in practical policy.

In a society of this kind there can be no collective and unitary will, there can be no self-determination of the “nation”. Whenever “national” struggles and movements have developed in the history of modern societies, they have generally been class movements of the leading bourgeois layer, which, at best, can represent to a certain extent the interests of other popular layers insofar as it defends, as “national interests”, progressive forms of historical development, in which the working class has not yet separated itself from the mass of the “people” led by the bourgeoisie to constitute itself as a politically conscious and independent class. (...)

All these facts are enough to show that the “right of nations” cannot be determining, from the point of view of a socialist party, for the national question. The very existence of such a party is proof that the bourgeoisie has ceased to be the representative of the whole people, that the proletarian class no longer shelters

under the protective mantle of the bourgeoisie, but has separated from it to become an independent class with its own social and political aims.

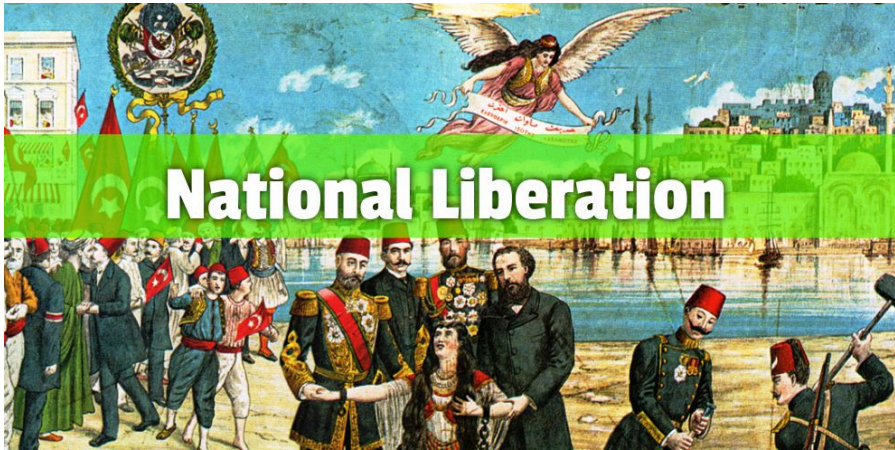
Since the conception of the “people”, of “rights” and of the “will of the people” as a homogeneous whole is a relic of the epoch of latent and unconscious antagonism between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, it would be a flagrant contradiction for the conscious and organized proletariat to make use of it; a contradiction not in the realm of scholastic logic, but a historical contradiction. (...)

For social democracy, the question of nationalities is, above all, like all other social and political questions, a question of class interests. (...)

To sum up: capitalist development and the interests of the bourgeoisie require the creation of an independent national state, which later becomes an instrument of imperialist conquest. The interests of the proletariat tend only towards the democratic and cultural aims of the national movement, that is, towards the establishment of political institutions that guarantee, by peaceful means, the free development of the culture of all the nationalities living together in the same state. The working class firmly demands equal rights for all people of all nationalities. The national program of the working class is essentially different from the nationalism of the bourgeoisie.

Rosa Luxemburg. **The National Question and Autonomy**, 1908

National liberation



Bourgeois revolution that takes the form of state separation (secession). Historically it occurred as the secession of regions with a distinctive bourgeois development from empires and feudal states, or as a bourgeois reaction against the domination of their territory by an occupier or colonizer.

The meaning of national liberation

Rising capitalism sees the expansion and rise of the bourgeoisie as the leading class. With the bourgeois revolutions the **nation** appears as the expression of the bourgeoisie's project of articulating society as a whole.

In the great empires in which regional bourgeoisies appear that can articulate an alternative for the whole territory of the estate-based state, the bourgeois revolution can take the form of national

liberation, that is, of the separation of a territory from the dynastic state in order to become a national market under a national state of its own.

As long as there is no proletariat with a capacity to lead -as will be the case in the Russian empire and its most industrialized provinces, such as Poland or Finland, from 1900 onwards- these movements will be historically progressive. Progressive because they point towards the expansion of the world market, the development of a mass working class within the new borders and, therefore, the formation of the **proletariat** as a universal class.

The goal of national liberation is the emancipation of the bourgeoisie from a political and legal framework that constrains the development of capital. It therefore has no historically progressive meaning *per se*, but only when there is the possibility of an independent development of national capital which in turn makes possible the extension and development of the proletariat in a new territory.

The bourgeoisie's need to control the internal market is not the only material basis of national movements. There are other factors: militarism, which guarantees the sovereignty of the country while helping to open a passage to the world market; customs protectionism; a jurisprudence, an education system and new means of communication. Capitalism needs to secure the economic conditions of its growth and to set up in full the apparatus of a modern state. The bourgeoisie, in order to expand, needs both to develop its means of production and to strengthen its class power.

Thus the independent state constitutes the historically indispensable form of government that allows the bourgeoisie to pass from the defensive to the offensive, from the struggle for centralization to imperialist policy.

Rosa Luxemburg. **The National Question and Autonomy**, 1908

These conditions gradually disappear under **imperialism**, and definitively with the entry of capitalism into **decadence**.

The development towards the Great State that characterizes the modern epoch, and which gains in importance with the progress of capitalism, condemns from the outset the whole mass of mini- and micro-nationalities to political weakness. Alongside a few very powerful nations, which are the real managers of capitalist development because they possess the material and intellectual means indispensable to preserve their economic and political independence, “self-determination”, the autonomous existence of the mini- and micro-nations, is ever more illusory.

This return to autonomous existence of all, or at least of the great majority, of the presently oppressed nations would only be possible if the existence of small states had possibilities and prospects for the future in the capitalist epoch. For now, the economic and political conditions proper to a great state are so necessary in the struggle for existence of the capitalist nations that even the politically independent small states, formally equal in rights, that exist in Europe play only a symbolic role and are most of the time puppets of other states.

Can one speak formally of “self-determination” for the formally independent Montenegrins, Bulgarians, Romanians, Serbs or Greeks, or even, in a certain way, for the Swiss? (...)

The second fundamental aspect of recent development that makes this slogan utopian is capitalist imperialism. (...) The result of this tendency is the permanent liquidation of the independence of an ever greater number of countries, peoples and entire continents.

Taking into account this development and the need of the great capitalist states for the struggle for existence on the international market, for world politics and for colonial possessions, “the most suitable for carrying out their functions under present

conditions”, that is, what best corresponds to the needs of capitalist exploitation, is not the “national state” -as Kautsky supposes- but the imperialist state. (...)

As socialists understand it, this right [self-determination] must, by its very nature, have a universal character, and the mere fact of recognizing it as such is enough to show that the hope of realizing this “right” under the existing system is a utopia in direct contradiction with the tendency of capitalist development, on the basis of which social democracy was constituted. To return to the goal of dividing all existing states into national units and delimiting them from one another on the model of the national states and small states is a desperate and, from a historical point of view, reactionary undertaking.

Rosa Luxemburg. *The National Question and Autonomy*, 1908

The impossibility of an independent capitalist development would become evident to the revolutionaries who were organizing the **communist left** in the semi-colonial countries, such as Antonio Gallo.

So what does the struggle for national liberation mean? Does the proletariat as such not represent the historical interests of the nation, in the sense that it tends to liberate all social classes through its action and to overcome them through their disappearance? But to do so it **needs precisely not to be confused with the national interests** (which are those of the bourgeoisie, since it is the ruling class), which are sharply contradictory both internally and externally. So that slogan is utterly false. (...)

Argentina's characteristics only confirm the need to apply the general laws of revolution and of historical dynamics that fundamentally hold for all the countries of the planet. One of the most characteristic features of capitalism is that **its economy has ceased to coincide with national borders**. If in the past -in relation to feudalism- these were a step forward, at the present time they are one of the greatest defects of humanity, along with nationalism, which is partly their consequence.

Economics, like politics, is nonetheless international. By creating world productive forces, dividing labor on a universal scale and forming a world market, capitalism prepares the necessary conditions for political forms to acquire an international character. This means that the backward country can, under external pressure, assimilate the historical stages of the advanced countries in every field. This dynamic conception of present-day society as a whole **removes any real value from the distinction between countries ripe or unripe for socialism**.

“Where is Argentina going? Popular Front or struggle for Socialism?” Antonio Gallo, 1935

In his debate with Mariátegui, Gallo denounces the Peruvian writer's "anti-imperialist agrarian revolution", because either it "means an alliance with a non-existent revolutionary and anti-imperialist bourgeoisie" or...

...it is a matter of resolving the democratic problems of the socialist revolution, that is to say, the expropriation of imperialist properties, the abolition of national, provincial and municipal debts, the national ownership of the land, to hand it over to the small farmers in possession for cultivation, the abolition of Church properties, in other words, all the problems not yet solved by the bourgeois-democratic revolution, [and] this is not an anti-imperialist agrarian revolution.

Because the proletariat, once raised to power, will not stop at an intermediate stage or government but, after solving those problems, will go further, towards the socialization of the means of production and exchange, the collectivization of the land, etc. This revolution can only be made by the proletariat, winning over or neutralizing, for its own ends, the urban and rural middle classes, not in alliance with the bourgeoisie but against it.

This is what we Marxists call socialist revolution, and to this resolution of the contradiction between the not yet fully unfolded stage of the bourgeois-democratic revolution and the socialist revolution we give a character of continuity that we formulate, more concretely and clearly, as permanent revolution, in accordance with Marx's definition. That is the process of the October Revolution. This is the solution of Marx and Lenin. The other is that of Stalin and the Apristas, or what amounts to the same thing, a new edition of the Kuomintang, **the alliance of all classes, national liberation.**

“Where is Argentina going? Popular Front or struggle for Socialism?” Antonio Gallo, 1935

Not only is an independent development of national capital no longer possible; in general human terms, even if there is growth over more or less long periods, there is no genuine social development. The system long ago ceased to be progressive as a whole, and with it its most characteristic political form: the nation itself. From then on:

Revolutionaries must strip themselves of every national attribute, shake off the taints of patriotism like rubbish, in order to be in a position to organize the rebellion of wage earners wherever they may be, whatever uniform they are enlisted in.

G. Munis

Opportunism



A slide within the working class political camp toward positions that, while in their formulation and literalness do not call into question the communist program, in practice weaken it in the name of short-term needs or opportunities, of tactical opportunities, of the difficulty of the program to be understood or of potential contingent advances.

Nature of opportunism

Opportunism is part of the class movement; it should not be mistaken for petty-bourgeois socialism. On the contrary, opportunism is the part of the class movement that expresses the weakness of the **proletariat** as an exploited class, its permanent difficulties in affirming its own programme, the tendency to blur, to smudge in daily practice the class border with **petty-bourgeois** socialism and **nationalism**.

Those who so often consider this word a “simple insult”, without trying to reflect on its meaning, are not right. The opportunist does not betray his party, is not disloyal to it, does not withdraw from it. He continues to serve it, sincerely and zealously. But his typical and characteristic feature is that he gives in to the mood of the moment, it is his **inability to oppose what is in vogue**, it is his political short-sightedness and apathy. Opportunism means sacrificing the long-lasting and essential interests of the Party for the sake of its momentary, transitional and secondary interests. (...)

Where such moods, typical of the intelligentsia, prevail, it is impossible to adopt a firm policy, worthy of the genuinely revolutionary class, that leads resolutely through all the small deviations and hesitations to the preparation of the decisive and self-sacrificing battle against the enemy. This is why the conscious proletariat must know how to maintain a critical attitude toward the intellectuals who pass by its side, it must learn to wage a relentless struggle against opportunism in politics.

Lenin. **The Russian Radical Is Wise After the Event!**, 1906.

Opportunism is sensitive to political fads, to falling into debates of opinion and false dichotomies fabricated over and over again, especially under **state capitalism**. Pretending to “be in the world,” it paves the way for the loss of class ground, shifting the communist programme towards a future, towards an opportunity that will never come.

The programme is not renounced; all that is done is to postpone its realization... indefinitely. You accept the programme, but this acceptance is not really for yourself, to follow during your life, but only to leave it to your children and grandchildren as an inheritance. And meanwhile, “all the forces and all the energies” are devoted to endless pointless feats and a miserable patchwork of the capitalist regime, to give the impression that something is being done, without at the same time frightening the bourgeoisie.

Marx and Engels. *From the Circular Letter to A. Bebel, W. Liebknecht, W. Bracke and Others*, 1879

Opportunism empties class action from the inside out, paralyzes the development of **consciousness** by turning the meaning of **communism** and its invocation into an empty shell, into a fetish, keeping symbols, terms and flags but calling for action which increasingly becomes indistinguishable from that of petty-bourgeois socialism which will progressively become the great justifier of **state capitalism**.

Opportunism in the Internationals

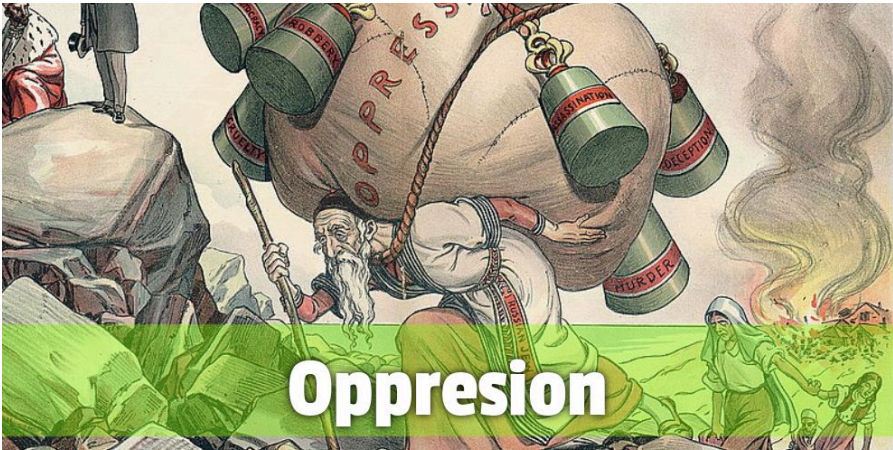
Opportunism is a permanent tendency throughout the whole process of class constitution of the proletariat that expresses the weaknesses that the class itself has to overcome.

- During the first phases of **rising capitalism**, it will manifest itself as a tendency to place itself under the “**popular**” **banners of the petty bourgeoisie**. For example, Bakuninism during the Spanish Cantonal Revolution. Under their critique of workers’ **centralism**, the Bakuninists will lead to the dissolution of the class in the exaltation of the **national and democratic tasks of the bourgeois revolution**, aborting the political affirmation of the workers.

- With the development of the parliamentarist tactics of the Second International, opportunism will appear, in the first place, as a “relaxation” of the program towards the peasantry (petty bourgeoisie), which will remain a merely theoretical affirmation, while the future unity of interests of the peasantry -that is, once it is proletarianized- is presented -without openly denying the theory- as a present identity of objectives and interests. With the entry into the **imperialist phase of capitalism**, especially encouraged by the **trade unions**, and the errors of the parties of the Second International, opportunism will take shape in a peculiar and intense way that will be crucial through two converging tendencies, **reformism** and **revisionism**, which prepare the way for the “sacred union” with the bourgeoisie in the First Imperialist World War, a blatant negation of **internationalism**, a **class boundary** that could only be affirmed through **revolutionary defeatism**.
- After the first defeats of the revolutionary wave opened up by the Russian revolution in 1917, the Third International adopted the tactic of the “**united front**”. This is the same tactic that the Bolsheviks had used in Russia, and in principle an impeccable technique of producing transitional slogans, but in some sections, such as the French, it slides towards the goal of shoring up the electoral victories of the left to curb the tendency towards an imperialist invasion of Soviet Russia. Parliamentarist and trade union opportunism thus paved the way for the International’s acceptance of the doctrine of “**socialism in one country**”.
- Within the Fourth International the opportunist tendencies, represented above all by the American SWP, will manifest themselves in the second great imperialist war as a “triumphism” that avoids affirming **revolutionary defeatism**

without denying it. The slide could only end in the surrender of **internationalism** with the endorsement of recruitment in the “national resistances”, the support to the Russian occupiers in the face of workers uprisings and the subsequent call for an electoral “united front” in Western Europe with the same **stalinism** and social democracy that had led and organized the repression of the insurrectional movements at the end of the war.

Oppression



Pressure, force or violence exercised to prevent the political expression of a collective subject.

Political nature of oppression

Oppression is a political fact. It is not individuals, but collective subjects who suffer oppression... however much such a situation ends up taking the form of discrimination against the individuals who supposedly form them. To oppress implies using political power to prevent the organization and affirmation of a collective subject as such, that is, as a political subject.

Not just anyone can oppress; in fact, only those who have state tools at their disposal can. Roma patriarchs, Catholic priests or the leaders of a sports club can discriminate against young people or women in the decision-making of their organizations, but they cannot create laws or use the state apparatus -from the media to the judges- against them.

Their power in this society is communitarian or associative, not political; it affects only those who have previously decided to accept it, not society as a whole. It is not in itself worrying that a religion is against abortion or divorce and expels its members if they have an abortion or get divorced. What is worrying is that they can change the laws.

On the other hand, an individual can be discriminated against without the group to which he or she supposedly belongs suffering any oppression at all. Moreover, a huge group may suffer widespread discrimination... without there being any oppression.

For example, employment statistics and studies on job interviews show that the dominant values and aesthetics are reproduced over and over again in the form of a massive and invisible discrimination. Dark-skinned people with curly hair, fat and ugly people, are systematically and repeatedly marginalized in any job selection process and even when they try to rent a home. This example, although banal, should make us ask ourselves what conditions a social group must meet in order to be considered an oppressed political subject in bourgeois society.

Which social groups are oppressed?

It is obvious that the **proletariat**, like all exploited classes before it, is a necessarily oppressed class: otherwise **exploitation** could not be sustained. Everything in society denies it, starting with the very essence of capitalism, which **presents every exchange, including that of labor power for wages, as an exchange between equal values, and therefore a “fair” exchange.**

Not to mention the democratic logic and the discourses on the nature of society and the state: everything concurs in denying the existence of **exploitation**, presenting its mechanisms as natural and preventing

the constitution of the workers as a political subject. Their own spontaneous organization, the one that appears in mass strikes, is considered a violation of social peace, and the very strike assemblies in the workplace an attack on sacrosanct property.

On the other hand, we have the **petty bourgeoisie**. It is neither socially revolutionary -it can only offer variants of capitalism- nor is it exploited; on the contrary, it participates in exploitation when it does not exercise it directly. But it is undoubtedly oppressed: from anarcho-liberalism to Stalinism, by way of Proudhon and popular nationalism, all its ideological creations tell us that, if it were up to it, the power of the state would be used to counteract and even eliminate the overwhelming competition that big capital and its companies represent for it. But obviously, that is not what the capitalist state is for.

The oppression of the petty bourgeoisie, which the bourgeoisie, through the state, contains and subordinates to its own needs, makes it a tremendously active and restless class, especially in periods of crisis.

It will then take up the struggle against the most diverse oppressions: that of the nation, that of women, that of racial or linguistic minorities... even that of Nature or of animals, as a way of partially confronting its own oppression (that is why they are called “partial struggles”). But in order to justify each of them, it has to build a political subject that the state would supposedly be preventing from expressing itself, constituting itself and determining itself. That is to say, it has to convince us that “the **nation**” or “the **people**”, “women”, or the “community” of race or language, form a homogeneous political subject with characteristic and distinct interests and a historical horizon of its own.

In accepting or not accepting the existence of such collective political subjects lies the difference between fighting against linguistic discrimination and being a **nationalist**, between fighting against discrimination against women and being a **feminist**, fighting against racism, etc.

Discrimination is not oppression

Accepting the idea that demographic profiles that suffer more or less systematic discrimination form political subjects means **denying that they are divided by antagonistic class interests**. Because when those class antagonisms assert themselves, the famous political subjects so eagerly constructed by petty-bourgeois ideologies are blown apart.

How can it be in the interest of the workers to march under popular banners to give a national state of its own to a petty bourgeoisie complaining of linguistic or cultural discrimination? Do the bourgeois woman and the working woman have the same interest? Is it worth dividing platforms and demands with our fellow workers in order to support the eagerness of petty-bourgeois women to find an equal place alongside the men of their class on boards of directors, in company management and in the top posts of the state?

Attempts to build Frankenstein political subjects out of pieces of different social classes fall apart at the first shock of the antagonisms that pit those classes against each other.

Moreover, there is no shortage of historical examples of oppressed classes that build power out of the generalization of discrimination. A regional petty bourgeoisie with national aspirations can exercise discrimination and generalize it if it controls cultural and religious

institutions... but it will be oppressed if the state does not let it advance in its aspirations to statehood. Contemporary history is full of examples.

Who are the oppressed classes?

Although discrimination is widespread, the only material oppressed political subjects are the various subaltern classes of capitalist society. And each one suffers class oppression in a very different way. As different as their interests are contradictory to one another.

The call center operator, the migrant day laborer and the Andalusian worker in Llobregat may suffer discrimination, in the first case for being a woman, in the second for being a migrant and in the last for not speaking the language of their bosses and of the politicians who claim to represent them. But the oppression they suffer is that of the proletariat. Their interest lies in confronting exploitation, that is, in their class acting and asserting itself politically. Their political interest in no way lies in the female or migrant sectors of the petty bourgeoisie gaining a place in the state, nor in Spanish nationalism prevailing over the pro-independence petty bourgeoisie.

The fact that the petty bourgeoisie fights to assert itself politically by trying to turn its factions into the head of interclassist political subjects does not make these subjects any way out or opportunity for the workers. On the contrary, their success depends first of all on the capacity of their narrative and their practice to divide the workers into so many inert masses ready to trail behind each of the petty-bourgeois factions they represent. That is to say, every advance of the partial movements of the petty bourgeoisie is a setback for the necessarily unitary movement of our class.

Organic composition of capital



Organic Composition of Capital

Relationship between constant and variable capital advanced by the capitalists. It measures the relative weight of what the capitalists advance in machinery with respect to what they advance in wages.

Organic composition of capital and the tendency of the rate of profit to fall

The tendency of the **rate of profit** to fall, and the parallel increase in the mass of product, come about because, in order to improve their profit, capitalists need to invest in technologies that increase their productivity. In doing so, the organic composition of capital will increase, that is, the percentage of what they advance in machinery, and the percentage of what they advance in wages will be reduced. The inevitable result is that their **rate of profit** (the surplus value per unit of investment) will be lower.

To compensate for the reduction in surplus value per unit produced and to obtain more surplus value, the capitalist will produce more units, that is, will increase the mass of product.

Organic composition of capital = c_a / v_a

Pacifism



An ideology that defines “peace” as a totalizing social objective above the interests of the classes that make up society.

The meaning of pacifism

Pacifism conceals the fact that “peace”, like all the other issues at stake in a class society, does not stand apart from or above the interests of the classes that make it up. This was true even when capitalism was still in its **phase of historical ascent**, when it was a progressive **mode of production** that pushed human development forward.

There is absolutely no social terrain, from the most primary material conditions to the most subtle moral conditions, on which the possessing classes and the conscious proletariat adopt the same attitude and appear as an undifferentiated “people” [...] In those respects in which the formal aspirations and interests of the proletariat and of the bourgeoisie as a whole, or of its progressive sector, seem identical or common, as for example in democratic aspirations, the identity of forms and slogans conceals a complete divergence of content and of practical policy.

Rosa Luxemburg. *The National Question and Autonomy*, 1908

Peace is one of those cases where the same term covers antagonistic objectives and needs. For the *bourgeoisie* all over the world in capitalist *decadence*, *imperialism* has become what water is to a fish, a medium so universal and omnipresent that it is incapable of conceiving a peace that is not imperialist, that is, one that does not reflect and reproduce the conditions of imperialism. Its own form of organization in this historical stage, *state capitalism*, is born of the exacerbation of the tendencies characteristic of *imperialism* towards concentration and centralization in the state, under the conditions of world wars.

Blind to the difference in class interests regarding war and to the material, economic base that drives them, pacifism tells us that in the face of the threat of war we have to “defend peace”, “communicate for peace”, “educate for peace”, learn “nonviolent conflict resolution”, practice “nonviolence”... But the tendencies that lead us to war do not originate in a supposed “congenital violence” of our species, nor in bad upbringing or difficulties in communicating.

And they are certainly not remedied by turning the other cheek in our daily disputes, still less by expressing an abstract dislike of the **militarism** and warmongering of states, as if they were mere “bad choices” of the ruling class and not an expression of the needs of national capital, of each and every national capital.

The tendency towards war is embedded in the very logic of capitalist **decadence**. To pretend otherwise, to play at giving cultural or ethical answers to a problem that is not played out on that terrain, only serves to divert attention and to blame the very workers who suffer its most direct consequences. That is why the same politicians and media that prepare the war also encourage political pacifism. Pacifism, with its ethical, individualistic, cultural approach... is an ideological inhibitor of the danger, ever present for the bourgeoisie, that the war against the “external enemy” may turn into an internal class war.

The history of the 20th and 21st centuries has shown that only the **class struggle** has effectively confronted war, and only when it was led by slogans and practices expressing the **revolutionary defeatism** of the workers.

Party



The most conscious and politically organized fraction of the working class, which exercises over it an effective task of political guidance and direction.

The class as a party in capitalist society

In the first meaning of the term, party means an **independent political subject**: the proletariat “constitutes itself as a class and, therefore, as a political party”, in the words of the “Communist Manifesto”, when its own struggles, independent of any faction of the bourgeoisie, turn it into an autonomous political subject within capitalist society. This is the fundamental moment in the process of the constitution of the **proletariat** as a class.

Party “in the broad historical sense”

The “party in the broad historical sense” is one more result of **capitalism** and of the nature of the **proletariat**, and for that very reason it appears permanently, continuously, throughout its history, without necessarily implying a formal organization. By “party” we then mean the set of networks and milieus that express positions expressing the interests of the workers as a **universal class**.

Since 1852, then, I have known nothing of ‘party’ in the sense implied in your letter. Whereas you are a poet, I am a critic and for me the experiences of 1849-52 were quite enough. The ‘League’, like the société des saisons in Paris and a hundred other societies, was simply an episode in the history of a party that is everywhere springing up naturally out of the soil of modern society. [...]

I have frankly stated my views, with which I trust you are largely in agreement. Moreover, I have tried to dispel the misunderstanding arising out of the impression that by ‘party’ I meant a ‘League’ that expired eight years ago, or an editorial board that was disbanded twelve years ago. By party, I meant the party in the broad historical sense.

Marx to Ferdinand Freiligrath, 29 February 1860

The networks of individuals and groups that sustain such conversations continue to exist even in times when class struggle and affirmation are at a low ebb, because within them appear individuals, communists, who “learn lessons” from previous struggles and take part in the critique of the **ideology** that the system oozes.

When the proletariat does not react, it is only the force through which capitalism reproduces itself, taking advantage of the general apathy of its historical enemy. The working class is then only an amorphous conglomerate of people who manage as best they can to survive in an unbearable society, reproducing the atmosphere of competition and enmity, the unhealthy spirit of capitalism. In a word, it does not act as a class with common interests against the capitalist vermin.

At other times, however, the proletariat acts united as a class bearing the only possible human future: communism. Then two types of society can confront each other, one reactionary and the other revolutionary. Between these two states of affairs and these very facts there are individuals who are revolutionaries regardless of the momentary state in which the class as a whole finds itself; only their number varies according to the social situation. They are revolutionaries because they are aware that their goal, and that of the class as a whole, is communism.

These revolutionary individuals tend to organize themselves by affinity of ideas, ideas that do not fall from the sky but come from a particular interpretation of the history of the class struggle. Lessons are learned from every confrontation between capital and the proletariat, and from them revolutionary theory is born and what makes it evolve.

“Revolutionary organization and activity”, 1979

Class party

The development of that “party in the broad historical sense” in the course of struggles comes to form a relatively broad and organized minority of the class. On its ability to centralize itself around a

program and a structure, however minimal, will depend the possibility of exercising, to a growing extent, an **effective** task of political orientation and guidance for the workers as a whole.

Let us be clear: the party does not “lead” in the manner of a company manager or a football coach; it does not give instructions that the workers “must follow”. The class party is that most conscious part of the class which leads because it provides orientation, because it shows the movement as a whole a direction to follow.

The emergence of the class party as a fraction capable of providing direction precedes, and is necessary for, the constitution of the class as the leading party of society. The emergence of the “class party” is therefore linked to the development of the revolutionary process.

In general, it can be expected to take shape around the communist groups that have arisen as part of the “party in the broad historical sense”. Although, as the Paris Commune showed and the Russian Revolution confirmed in different ways, what characterizes the class party and what is useful for centralization is not so much the particularities of the groups that converge, but the capacity to recognize the ultimate needs and possibilities of the struggle in its own development.

Pauperization



Tendency towards the mass impoverishment of the non-bourgeois layers of society, and in particular of the workers, through the increase of exploitation in absolute terms, unemployment, the general precarization of living and working conditions, and war.

Origin of pauperization

The cause of pauperization lies in the very nature of the accumulation process. When the market does not grow at the pace that capital **accumulation** would require, only the increase of exploitation in absolute terms offers relief to the profitability of productive capital. However, in doing so it restricts demand even further, feeding a vicious circle in which unemployment inevitably grows.

The fall in the purchasing power of wages, the reduction or disappearance of basic services, precarization and unemployment are the three main vectors of pauperization, because they are the necessary paths or accompaniments of the bourgeoisie's attempts to increase **exploitation in absolute terms**.

Historical development of the tendency

Under **rising capitalism**, pauperization appears only at the end of the economic cycle, when large masses of unemployed form, working hours lengthen and wages fall across the board. However, in each case the expansion of the world market reverses the tendency, and a new cycle of accumulation begins free of that burden.

From the entry of capitalism into its phase of historical **decadence**, pauperization becomes a permanent and global tendency. It is evident in war and throughout the long phase of crisis that follows the post-war reconstructions, but it is present even during reconstruction in the weakest and most peripheral countries.

It is no longer the result of a moment in the expansion of the system but of a phase in which the lack of extra-capitalist markets can no longer be overcome by a new expansion of the world market. This "confinement" of capital in a finite world that cannot absorb the whole of production with what capitalism hands over to the workers as wages triggers flights into credit, the formation of speculative **fictitious capital** and the falling tendency of the **rate of profit**. The permanent tendency to crisis is also a permanent tendency to the pauperization of the workers.

People



The name given to the social body formed by the oppressed classes of bourgeois society when it is effectively led by the petty bourgeoisie.

Origins of the “people”

The new possessing classes of the end of the feudal regime, which accumulate economic power based on private property and not on the monopoly of political force, organize themselves as a political body opposed to the absolutist power of the Ancien Régime. In England they will form “Civil Society” in the 17th century under the leadership of the embourgeoisied landowning nobility, and in France - inspired by the English model - the “Third Estate” in the 18th, directly under the leadership of the bourgeoisie. They constitute themselves as a **nation**

and as such claim power over the state from the clergy and the nobility. The nation shifts from recognizing the Sovereign to demanding “sovereignty” for itself.

In the development of the **national and democratic tasks of the bourgeois revolution**, frictions and conflicts will soon arise between the **bourgeoisie** proper - given to agreeing on smooth transitions with the hitherto ruling classes - and the **petty bourgeoisie**. The latter, frightened by the consequences of **accumulation** for its own situation - the prospect of **proletarianization** - will denounce the bourgeoisie as a new “aristocracy of money”, reviving the utopia of the egalitarianism of “civil society”, the undifferentiated magma of the “oppressed classes”, at a time when artisans are still the largest segment of the **proletariat**.

The “people” is then born, as the supposed subject of political life within the bourgeois system and the materialization of the bourgeois program, not in opposition to it but, as could not be otherwise, as a *radicalization* of the program actually carried out by the bourgeoisie. That is why the people will become, almost immediately, the point of development of **nationalism**: a reinforcement of the bourgeois **state** and market which at the same time claims an impossible leading role in a “sovereignty” that would shelter the intermediate classes from the advance of **capitalist accumulation**.

In this eagerness to develop its own organizational spaces in the bourgeois state, the petty bourgeoisie will find common ground with the **proletariat** in the first bourgeois revolutions, precisely because the proletariat is **conscious** that the clearer and more radical the triumph of the bourgeoisie over the feudal classes, the sooner **the moment of its own open confrontation with the bourgeoisie** will come.

In Germany the decisive struggle between the bourgeoisie and the absolute monarchy is still to come. But since the Communists cannot count on a decisive struggle with the bourgeoisie before the latter comes to power, it is in the interest of the Communists to help it win its rule as soon as possible, in order to overthrow it, in turn, as soon as possible.

Therefore, in the struggle of the liberal bourgeoisie against the [absolutist] governments, the Communists must always be on the side of the former, while guarding against the self-deception into which the bourgeoisie falls and not trusting its seductive assurances about the beneficial consequences that, according to it, the victory of the bourgeoisie will bring to the proletariat.

The only advantages that the victory of the bourgeoisie will offer the Communists will be: 1) various concessions that will make it easier for the Communists to defend, discuss and spread their principles and, therefore, will facilitate the unification of the proletariat into an organized, closely united class ready for struggle, and 2) the certainty that on the day the absolutist governments fall, the hour of the struggle between bourgeois and proletarians will come. From that day on, the policy of the Communist party here will be the same as in the countries where the bourgeoisie already rules.

Frederick Engels. Principles of Communism, 1847

Permanent revolution



Revolution in which the proletariat comes to political power under the program of the bourgeois-democratic revolution, setting its own objectives from then on and transforming the bourgeois-democratic revolution into a socialist one.

Origins

The term “Permanent revolution” was first used by Marx in 1850 in an address of the Central Committee of the Communist League to its members, scattered across Germany. The framework is that of the bourgeois revolution in Germany, a revolution whose **primary objectives** are the creation of a national market, state centralization and the laying of the foundations for the spread of big industry and the emergence of a mass proletariat. But the bourgeoisie, the origin of the movement, has formed a bloc with the reactionary forces (the

Prussian king and the Prussian landowners, the “junkers”), and the petty bourgeoisie, the democrats, display the political impotence characteristic of a class without a historical program of its own.

Marx proposes that the German communists act as the left wing of the democratic movement and push its proposals to the limit with the aim of making the revolution “permanent”, that is, so that the revolutionary process itself takes on a socialist objective.

We have seen that the democrats will come to power in the first phase of the movement, and that they will be obliged to propose measures of a more or less socialist nature. (...)

It will be asked what counter-measures should be proposed by the workers. Naturally, at the beginning they will not be able to propose actual communist measures; but they can compel the democrats to attack the old social order on as many fronts as possible, to disrupt its regular procedures, to compromise themselves, and to concentrate in the hands of the state, as far as possible, the productive forces, the means of transport, factories, railways, etc. etc.

The proposals of the democrats, who are in no case revolutionary but merely reformist, must be pushed to the point where they turn into direct attacks on private property; thus, for example, if the petty bourgeoisie proposes the purchase of the railways and factories, the workers must say that, since these railways and factories are the property of the reactionaries, they must simply be confiscated by the state without compensation.

If the democrats propose proportional taxes, the workers must demand progressive taxes; if the democrats declare themselves in favour of a moderate progressive tax, the workers must insist on a tax which, step by step, gradually, means the ruin of big capital; if the democrats propose the regulation of the state debt, the workers must demand the bankruptcy of the state.

The demands of the workers will depend on the aims and measures of the democrats. If the German workers are only to come to power and achieve their class interests after a prolonged revolutionary development, they can at least be sure that the first

act of this revolutionary drama will coincide with the victory of their class in France, and this will certainly accelerate the movement of their own emancipation.

But they themselves must do the greater part of the work; they must become conscious of their class interests and take up the position of an independent party. They must not let themselves be diverted from their line of proletarian independence by the hypocrisy of the democratic petty bourgeoisie. Their battle cry must be: “The Permanent Revolution”.

“Address of the Central Committee to the Communist League”. Karl Marx, March 1850.

The model served as a reference for revolutionaries in countries like Russia. At the beginning of the 20th century the bourgeoisie had created a proletariat of 25 million people, highly concentrated in a few regions and surrounded by a veritable ocean of almost 100 million petty-bourgeois peasants. All this under an autocratic, feudal state, propped up, however, by the bourgeoisie itself. The Russian bourgeoisie will not merely be inconsistent in the bourgeois-democratic revolution, as the German one had been in 1848, but reluctant, if not openly hostile.

The revolution of 1905 would show that only the proletariat could set in motion and lead the bourgeois-democratic revolution, but only by mobilizing behind it a massive peasantry mobilized on its own agrarian program. The slogan of the “Democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry” and Lenin’s theorization of the “Permanent revolution” will in reality represent the same approach, which anticipates the revolution of 1917: archetype and successful case of a permanent revolution.

The agrarian problem, and with it the national problem, assign to the peasants, who constitute the overwhelming majority of the population of the backward countries, an exceptional place in the democratic revolution. Without the alliance of the proletariat with the peasants, the aims of the democratic revolution not only cannot be realized, but cannot even be seriously posed. However, the alliance of these two classes can only be achieved through an irreconcilable struggle against the influence of the liberal-national bourgeoisie.

Whatever the first episodic stages of the revolution in the various countries may be, the realization of the revolutionary alliance of the proletariat with the peasant masses is conceivable only under the political leadership of the proletarian vanguard organized in the Communist Party. This in turn means that the democratic revolution can triumph only through the dictatorship of the proletariat, resting on the alliance with the peasantry and aimed in the first place at realizing the objectives of the democratic revolution.

Assessed historically, the Bolshevik slogan “democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry” meant nothing other than the relations characterized above between the proletariat, the peasantry and the liberal bourgeoisie. This has been proved by the experience of October. But Lenin’s old formula did not settle in advance what the mutual political relations between the proletariat and the peasantry within the revolutionary bloc would be.

In other words, the formula was consciously given a certain algebraic character, which had to make way for more concrete arithmetical quantities in the process of historical experience. However, the latter has shown, under conditions that exclude any

distorted interpretation, that, however great the revolutionary role of the peasantry may be, it can never be autonomous, and still less a leading one. The peasant follows either the worker or the bourgeois. This means that the “democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry” is conceivable only as a dictatorship of the proletariat leading the peasant masses behind it.

“What is the Permanent Revolution? Basic Postulates”. Leon Trotsky, 1930

Trotsky’s clarifications, obvious to anyone who has studied the Russian revolution, were of fundamental importance at the time. The International, taken over by **stalinism**, had ordered the Chinese communists to dissolve the **soviets** and to avoid the formation of independent class organs. In fact, it had ordered the Chinese Communist Party to dissolve itself into the Kuomintang, presented by stalinism as a tool for building a “democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry” distinct from a dictatorship of the proletariat.

Such a historical and political aberration was sustained by falsifying Lenin’s formulation in order to set it against Marx’s and Trotsky’s idea of the permanent revolution. The policy of the stalinist Comintern led, as is well known, to the massacre of the Chinese proletariat in 1926-27 and to the ignominious persecution of the communist leaders, who would join the **communist left**. It was the last battle of the left opposition within the Russian communist party before its savage repression.

The democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry, as a regime distinct in its class content from the dictatorship of the proletariat, would be realizable only if an independent revolutionary party were possible that expressed the interests of the peasant and petty-bourgeois democracy in general, a party capable, with the support of the proletariat, of conquering power and implementing its revolutionary program from it.

As the experience of all modern history, and above all that of Russia over the last quarter of a century, testifies, an insurmountable obstacle on the road to the creation of a peasant party is the lack of economic and political independence of the petty bourgeoisie and its deep internal differentiation, as a result of which the upper layers of the petty bourgeoisie (of the peasantry) go with the big bourgeoisie in all decisive cases, above all in war and revolution, and the lower layers with the proletariat, thus forcing the intermediate layer to choose between the extreme poles.

Between Kerenskyism and the Bolshevik power, between the Kuomintang and the dictatorship of the proletariat, there is not and cannot be any intermediate possibility, that is, any democratic dictatorship of the workers and peasants.

The tendency of the Communist International to impose today on the peoples of the East the slogan of the democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry, long since definitively outlived by history, can only have a reactionary character.

Insofar as this slogan is opposed to the dictatorship of the proletariat, it contributes politically to the dissolution of the latter in the petty-bourgeois masses and thus creates the most favorable conditions for the hegemony of the national bourgeoisie, and

consequently for the failure of the democratic revolution. The inclusion of this slogan in the Program of the Communist International is in itself a direct betrayal of Marxism and of the Bolshevik traditions of October.

“What is the Permanent Revolution? Basic Postulates”. Leon Trotsky, 1930

Are permanent revolutions possible today?

The Chinese Revolution of 1926-27 was possibly the last historical window for a permanent revolution like the Russian one had been. Capitalism was entering **decadence**, and the transformation this meant was felt rapidly and definitively in the social structure and political conditions all over the world. The national and agrarian program of the petty bourgeoisie shows itself to be openly reactionary, being opposed from the outset to the socialist revolution - the only one on the historical agenda.

The next great revolution, the Spanish one, will already be a socialist revolution from the first moment, not a permanent one. Its agrarian policy will be collectivization. In day-labourer districts like Llerena, production is immediately socialized on the basis of the workers' cooperative that had emerged from the struggles of previous years, and begins to produce and distribute according to the needs of each family in the very days following 19 July.

In Aragon it is the workers' militias who bring the “collectives” to the villages of small property based on subsistence agriculture and to those of tenant farmers, who, instead of simply taking over the properties, concentrate them in the collective.

Since then, under the conditions of the system's **decadence**, the independent peasantry has practically disappeared all over the world and, where it exists, has no prospect in an impossible capitalist development of the countryside. The agrarian **petty bourgeoisie** has shrunk and become concentrated, exacerbating its antagonism with the agrarian **proletariat**, which it can only exploit mercilessly in order to survive.

In countries such as the USA the small family farmer with a highly mechanized holding still exists, under permanent threat of ruin. But today he has become an appendage of the big agri-food industry and the big capital funds. They set his inputs, his prices, his margins, what he will reinvest them in and even the financial costs he will bear. Today he is a functionary of capital who keeps a nominal ownership of the land but cannot decide what to do with it. His own demands do not even amount to a program: debt forgiveness or moratorium and state guarantees for the purchase of crops.

And what is more important, there are no **“democratic tasks”** or bourgeois revolutions pending. There are no feudal regimes left, and even if there were “remnants” somewhere, they are so deeply interwoven with world capitalism that they have no way beyond them but the communist one.

To the scale of capitalist social development corresponds the scale of the proletariat's capacity to impose communism and thus to drive forward a new mode of social development. However, the limits of this capitalist development were made evident by the possibility and the reality of a First World War, indicating that the domination of capital over the planet had been achieved. This complete domination means that even if we find survivors of earlier modes of exploitation, they are connected, integrated, totally absorbed into the global circuits of capitalist exploitation.

From then on, global social development is not possible under the aegis of capital; the capitalist system is obsolete, decadent; growth and development, until then concomitant, become disconnected and even opposed to each other. **To this stage of development corresponds the capacity of the proletariat to affirm immediately, for the whole world, the revolutionary communist project.**

This capacity means that even if one comes across exploited people of a kind different from proletarians, they can no longer have the slightest independence with respect to the objectives of the proletariat. In fact, they are connected to and subject to the same general mode of exploitation and oppression; they must be considered part of the world proletariat. **Struggles that do not directly and exclusively concern the working class not only do not benefit it, but are now irreducibly opposed to it.**

“Old Nations, New Struggles, Same Old Song”, 1990

Petty bourgeoisie



An intermediate stratum of capitalist society that participates in the exploitation of labor but permanently faces the effects of the concentration of capital, trying to avoid its own proletarianization.

The precarious nature of the petty bourgeoisie

The role of small capitals within the great framework of capitalist **accumulation** is subtler and more complex than is usually thought, but no less precarious or unsustainable in the medium term for that. With each technological change, small and medium-sized capitals will take advantage of the reduction in scale brought about by the increase in the productivity of labor to establish themselves. In doing so they will open up a new branch, a new world of investment outlets for big capital, which will end up displacing or absorbing the small pioneering capitals.

According to Marx, the mission of small capitals in the general march of capitalist development is to be the pioneers of technical progress, and this in two senses: by introducing new methods of production into already well-established branches of production, and by creating new branches not yet exploited by big capital. It is completely false to believe that the history of the medium-sized capitalist enterprise is a straight line towards its gradual disappearance. On the contrary, the real course of its development is purely dialectical and moves constantly among contradictions. The capitalist middle strata, like the working class, are under the influence of two opposing tendencies, one tending to raise them and the other tending to sink them.

The downward tendency is the continuous increase in the scale of production, which periodically exceeds the dimensions of medium-sized capitals, repeatedly expelling them from the arena of world competition. The upward tendency is the periodic depreciation of existing capitals, which for a certain time lowers the scale of production, in proportion to the value of the minimum amount of capital necessary, and also temporarily halts the penetration of capitalist production into new spheres.

The struggle between medium-sized enterprise and big capital should not be imagined as a periodic battle in which the weaker side sees the number of its troops directly dwindle more and more, but rather as a **periodic mowing down of small enterprises, which rapidly spring up again only to be mown down once more by the scythe of big industry**. The two tendencies play ball with the capitalist middle strata, but in the end it is the downward tendency that triumphs, unlike what happens with the proletariat.

Rosa Luxemburg. **Reform or Revolution**, 1899

The more precarious the situation of small and medium-sized capitals in their competition against the capacities of large-scale production, the greater the force with which the petty bourgeoisie must offset the advantage of big capital in the only possible way: by increasing **absolute surplus value**.

The reactionary aspirations of the petty bourgeoisie

The “dual” confrontation of the petty bourgeoisie, at once against big capital (“those at the top”, the “financial aristocracy”, the “1%”, etc.) and to regiment the workers into the “**people**” and increase their exploitation, is part of the everyday reality of social conflict. Shopkeepers fight against the opening of supermarkets and large stores, and against the existing ones being allowed to open at weekends, because the concentration of capital in them pushes them out of price competition.

They fight against their **proletarianization** while denying their employees the basic conditions of the proletariat of any chain store. Just as the owners of taxi licences demand protection against Uber while paying their wage earners by the piece, or the farmer demands guaranteed prices and protests against his dependence on the seed and fertilizer companies while exploiting immigrant workers, with and without papers, in the worst conditions.

It is that dual relationship, confronting at the same time “*its*” **proletariat** and big capital, that leads it again and again to look backwards and demand the return of previous conditions, that the **accumulation** of capital respect and preserve its status, and a return to a supposed class harmony within the undifferentiated magma of the **people**.

It is a phenomenon present in capitalism since its dawn. While from the artisans, today practically non-existent, one could hope that they would defend “not their present, but their future interests”, that “they desert their own standpoint to place themselves at that of the proletariat”, what politically defines the industrial, commercial or peasant petty bourgeoisie is that its panic at **proletarianization** ends up translating into a necessarily reactionary position even under **rising capitalism**.

The lower middle class, the small manufacturer, the shopkeeper, the artisan, the peasant, all these fight against the bourgeoisie, to save from extinction their existence as fractions of the middle class. They are therefore not revolutionary, but conservative. Nay more, they are reactionary, for they try to roll back the wheel of history.

Manifesto of the Communist Party. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, 1848.

The petty bourgeoisie under state capitalism

When extra-capitalist markets begin to be insufficient for the realization of all the **surplus value** produced, capitalism enters its **imperialist phase**, which among other things brutally accelerates the **tendency of the rate of profit to fall**, proportionally accelerating the concentration of capital until the individual capitalist is *socialized*... it is a real Armageddon for the petty bourgeoisie, which finds itself expelled from fields of production and sectors that until then had constituted an apparently unquestionable base for it.

The triumph of the downward tendency will not necessarily appear as an absolute numerical decrease of medium-sized enterprises. It must appear, first, as a progressive increase in the minimum capital indispensable for the functioning of enterprises in the old branches of production; secondly, as the constant shortening of the interval of time during which small capitalists have the opportunity of exploiting the new branches of production.

The result, as far as the small capitalist is concerned, is an ever shorter duration of his stay in the new industry and an ever more rapid change in the methods of production as a field for investment. For the medium-sized capitalist strata as a whole there is an ever more rapid process of social assimilation and dissimulation.

Rosa Luxemburg. **Reform or Revolution**, 1899

The socialization of the figure of the capitalist that begins with the joint-stock company and becomes a reality under **imperialism** reaches its paroxysm with the universalization of **state capitalism**, a true socialization of the bourgeoisie as a whole around the state. This concentration, which begins with the century, also transforms a good part of the petty bourgeoisie. A not insignificant part will be absorbed by the big companies, organizing workshops or administration. Another will have to reconvert itself into a “managing class”, a “professional” class... and a civil service, taking advantage of the next step forward in that socialization of the capitalist as a class which is state capitalism.

But even this part has suffered and still suffers brutally from proletarianization with each advance in the concentration of capitals and the kind of technological innovation they feed. Legions of

“managers” are not needed to run a robotized factory. The irruption of financial businesses like Uber into sectors as marginal in volume as the taxi scratches at and threatens the apparently most solid strongholds of the petty bourgeoisie.

Even in its street-level version, the petty bourgeoisie will be torn from its most characteristic grounds -such as neighbourhood retail- with ferocity by over-accumulated capitals in need of profitable outlets, even if only in “niches”.

Although it will be reborn again and again with each technological innovation... it will be irremediably mown down like grass by the scythe of big capital. And what is more important: this will happen ever earlier, ever closer to the start. That is the meaning of the institutionalization of “venture capital” and of the “start-up” creation industry. The point at which the “entrepreneur” turns from owner-producer of his own company into functionary-manager of an investment outlet for surplus financial capital, ready to speculate with the company as a whole, is now located at what the “entrepreneurship” manuals call the step “from business idea to reality”.

In other words, the passage from “captain of industry” to “manager”, from proud owner to “small shareholder”, from small rural property to the civil servant’s or university professor’s “tenured post”, from captain of industry to “startupper”, does not offer permanent protection either -especially across generations- against **proletarianization**. So the fear, and with it petty-bourgeois discourse, do not change in substance.

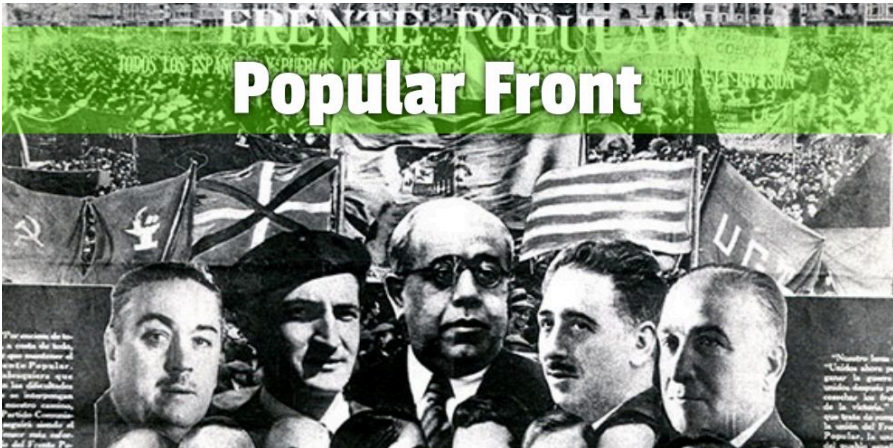
The petty bourgeoisie will become an ever more active centrifugal element within the state. That is why the reactionary character of its ideologies soars under capitalist **decadence** to the point of becoming

dysfunctional even for the bourgeoisie as a whole. Let us not forget that beyond shopkeepers and small industrialists, the petty bourgeoisie is the “intellectual class” par excellence, manufacturer of **ideologies** à la carte, the sauce and spirit of all cultural movements.

The images it makes of itself as a class express its resistance, but also its inability to go beyond capitalism. The petty bourgeoisie expresses itself in forms as sophisticated as they are, at times, eccentric. In all of them the idea of the impossible step backwards appears again and again, the “return” to an impossible conciliation of classes -under a more or less **popular nationalism** or the imagining of a **commodified** world in which **accumulation** had never existed.

In other words, it will oscillate between the thousand flavours of a **national liberation** that can now only be reactionary, and proposing that we “degrow” towards a society that, instead of unleashing the gigantic **productive forces** and knowledge that capitalism has bequeathed to us, pacifies them... through immense sacrifices by the immense majority.

Popular front



Stalinist tactic proclaimed at the 7th Congress of the Comintern. It presented the formation of electoral alliances with the democratic parties and, eventually, the formation of a government by them, as the way to defeat the counter-revolution in its fascist form.

Origin and meaning of the popular front

The Popular Front was first tried out in France as a coalition with the socialists and the radical-socialists, while the theory of the Sixth Congress on the “third period” -the idea that social democracy had become an “appendage of fascism” and “the main enemy”- formally remained in force.

The Popular Front is a direct consequence of the fusion of “**socialism in one country**” and the slogan of **anti-fascism**. In the first place, because it definitively separates the Comintern from the goal of a

proletarian revolution, associating it with republicanism and social democracy in the defense of the democratic state. In the second place, because in doing so it confesses the definitive divorce of the Russian **bureaucracy** from the world revolution, first announced with “**socialism in one country**”. The point was to install “friendly” governments, with the participation of the parties controlled by Moscow. As an inevitable coda, the Popular Front will gradually change the dominant social background in the **Stalinist** parties.

Whether the debates are substantial or empty, the congress represents a stage in the evolution of a certain sector of the working class. It is important, if only because, by legalizing the opportunist turn in France, it immediately transplants it to the rest of the world. We are faced with a curious specimen of bureaucratic thought: while it grants, at least on paper, a certain liberal autonomy to the sections, even ordering them to think for themselves and adapt to their respective national circumstances, its congress proclaims at the same time that all the countries of the world, from fascist Germany to democratic Norway, from Great Britain to India, from Greece to China, have the same need for a “Popular Front” and, where possible, a Popular Front government. The congress is important because it marks the definitive entry of the Comintern -after a series of hesitations and false steps- into its “fourth period”, whose slogan is “all power to Daladier” [French republican minister], whose flag is the tricolor, and whose anthem is the Marseillaise, which drowns out the strains of the Internationale. [...]

We would be making a fatal mistake if we believed that the “self-criticism” of the leaders was enough to liquidate the theory and practice of the “third period” totally and painlessly, and that the opportunist and patriotic turn is already assured of a future free of difficulties. Although the bureaucracy was able to throw into the flames, with scandalous ease, everything it had worshipped, the same does not happen with the masses. Their attitude towards slogans is more serious and genuine. The spirit of the “third period” is still alive in the consciousness of the workers who follow the Communist International. And this spirit became evident among the French communists in Toulon and Brest. The leaders were able to hold back the opposition of the rank and file only for a time, swearing to them “in secret” that this was a clever

maneuver designed to deceive the radicals and the socialists, to separate them from the masses, and then, “then we’ll show them what we really are”. On the other hand, the coalitionist and patriotic turn of the Communist Party wins it the sympathy of new layers quite far removed from the working class, very patriotic and very dissatisfied with the financial decrees, for whom the Communist Party is merely the most energetic wing of the Popular Front.

“The Stalinist Turn”. Leon Trotsky, 1935

During the Spanish Revolution, from July 1936 and, without any pretense, from 1937, the Popular Front will become the embryo from which the PCE will lead and organize the counter-revolution, disarming the militias, retaking control of the factories and reorganizing the government and its repressive bodies, dismantled by the proletarian insurrection of July 19. The Popular Front materializes the real meaning of **anti-fascism**. It is its clearest **nationalist** and patriotic expression, the battering ram of the counter-revolution, the last resort of the bourgeois state and the one truly responsible for Franco’s victory.

When the bourgeoisie, through the Popular Front, had succeeded in subjecting to its discipline the CNT, the FAI and the POUM, the organizations most likely to help the government-Committees seize political power, the march against the revolution began brazenly, starting with the destruction of the Committees. Stalinism played the role of conductor of the counter-revolutionary orchestra. As long as the proletariat was armed and the remnants of the bourgeois coercive bodies were in pieces, neither Stalinism nor social democracy dared open their mouths to say that the Committees had to be destroyed, the dying State strengthened, the expropriations halted and, in general, all the revolutionary measures that gave the lie to the theory of the “new type of democracy” combated.

The first concern of the “Government of Victory” had to be to procure the armed force necessary to disarm the workers. Goaded by Stalinism, Largo Caballero began new recruitment for the Civil Guard, the Assault Guard and the Carabineros, made up under the name of National Security Guard. When the Government believed itself strong enough, it began the offensive to disarm the proletarians and peasants and liquidate the socialist conquests. In reality, the Stalinist and socialist counter-revolutionaries were strong only in the certainty that anarchism and the POUM would take no measures to prevent their attempt. Had either of them, or both, after publicly denouncing what was being prepared, called on the masses to destroy the remnants of the State and the bourgeois institutions and take all political power, the encircling maneuver of the Government of Victory would have failed and the revolution would have followed the course that history set for it. But the Stalino-socialist maneuver succeeded thanks to the collaboration of anarchism and POUMism. The bourgeois State had weapons with which to defeat the workers and disarm them.

Then, at the end of 1936, it publicly showed its hand. Our war was not a civil war but a “war of national independence”; in our zone the aim was not social revolution but a “new type of democracy”, that is, bourgeois society. The Unified Socialist Youth gathered under the Stalinist aegis to assure the millionaires of Paris, London and Washington that they were neither a class party nor a party of social revolution. The vile Carrillo confirmed it: let it be known that we are not making a maneuver; while Comorera described the workers who had defeated the fascist insurrection as tribes, and the Committees that expropriated the bourgeoisie as thieves. Shortly afterwards the prisons were filling up with revolutionaries, and hundreds of them died murdered by Stalinism or by the GPU.

“Historical significance of July 19”. G. Munis, 1938

Interestingly, the PCE also transmutes in its social composition. As the PCE leader Fernando Claudín reports:

Numerous petty-bourgeois elements flock to the ranks of the PCE, attracted by the reputation the party acquires as defender of order, legality and small property. And above all there flows into the PCE -or places itself under its leadership through the JSI- a large contingent of youth not yet formed in the traditional trade unions and workers’ organizations.

José Díaz’s report to the Central Committee in May 1937 shows that, alongside the 150,000 wage earners the party regiments (who include, besides agricultural and industrial workers, civil servants and company managers), there are already more than 100,000 small proprietors (professionals and farmers), together with 20,000 women whose social background is not recorded. Outside witnesses, linked to the PCE at the time, reinforce these figures in their testimonies.

The CP is today, in the first place, the party of the administrative and military personnel, in the second place the party of the petty bourgeoisie and of certain well-off peasant groups, in the third place the party of the public employees, and only in the fourth place the party of the workers.

Franz Borkenau. *The Spanish Cockpit*, 1937.

The sociological analysis of the membership reflects the extent to which Popular Front politics and the transmission-belt party had succeeded in attracting social sectors whose aim was to save the democratic republican state from the workers' revolution under way.

Precarization



Precarization is the global tendency towards the development of exploitation in absolute terms through a reorganization and restructuring of the organization of labor that decouples the worker from stable workplaces and work teams, basic services, employment expectations and stable income.

Forms and elements of precarization

1. **Temporalization.** Reduction of the duration of employment contracts, which breaks with the organization of **labor power** in stable teams and workplaces.
2. **Partialization.** Reduction of the individual working day, usually below the minimum necessary income.
3. **Uberization.** End of the contractual bond between workers and capital, a return to the piecework system in which the boss pays only for the unit of work or service actually delivered. Now mediated by a computer application that makes the collective

character of labor, and the very existence of the boss, who claims merely to “match supply and demand”, even more invisible.

4. **Outsourcing.** Fracturing of the production chain into different contracts with different intermediaries in charge of managing the work in each task, with freedom to increase exploitation in **absolute terms** in each of them.
5. **Deskilling.** The fall of wages in absolute terms does not allow the reproduction of labor power at the worker’s original skill level.
6. **Loss of protection.** Reduction and degradation of social security, pension, unemployment, health and education-access coverage managed by the state and mutual societies, the non-monetary part of the wage received.

Consequences for the way of life of the class

- Workers no longer have a defined “job” or “workplace”, but several employers who hire them for specific tasks, for short periods or in any case of unpredictable duration, by the hour or by the piece. The relationship with a stable group of fellow workers and with an unchanging space (the factory, the workshop, the office) disappears from their experience.
- Nor are relations of exploitation any longer with one company, with a single boss. They are mediated by intermediaries who “send you” to different destinations, in a way that makes it evident that the “precarious” are exploited by the bourgeoisie and capitalism as a whole.
- The reproduction of labor power becomes precarious as well. Access to health services, accident benefits, housing, etc. is eroded until, in many cases, it disappears.
- The ways workers relate to each other, and the way in which collective conversations and reflections on their own situation

take place, change too. They no longer have a company or factory as a reference, nor, in any very strict sense, a geographical one. And yet support and solidarity networks form as often as before, or more.

Primitive communism



Mode of production prior to the splitting of society into classes, under which Humanity lived for more than half a million years. Although for most of this period human communities fed themselves by hunting, fishing and gathering, primitive communism discovered agriculture, brought about the first sedentarization and gave life to large cities for centuries.

Primitive communism covers a period of more than two hundred thousand years. In the form of a communal organization, Humanity spent most of that time living by hunting and gathering. About 9,000 years ago, the discovery and gradual development of agriculture and animal husbandry put this mode of production into crisis. In some places it would transform and evolve in the form of an agrarian communism based on ownership of the land for a few thousand more years. In others, society would split into classes, generally through conquest.

Primitive communism and the revision of the traditional narrative by contemporary archaeology



Göbekli Tepe. Remains of animist cults.

The archaeological discoveries of recent decades paint a picture of a world in which primitive communism developed agriculture and animal husbandry without splitting society into classes, produced large cities very different from those of the “Fertile Crescent” - although these too were probably “communist” in origin- and resisted the emergence of exploiting classes until relatively recent dates, even coexisting in time with the first Roman kings and the first Greek slave-owning democracy.

In the account we were taught at school, the discovery of agriculture led almost automatically to sedentarization, urbanization and class division. It did, however, have obvious flaws. The first great

productive revolution of our species, the end of half a million years of nomadic life that opened the door to the division into social classes, writing, developed religions, the first states... could not be explained as an improvement in productivity.

Farming required more resources and produced less than remaining nomadic hunters. For decades all kinds of explanatory models were tried, but none of them managed to reach really satisfactory results. It seemed that our ancestors had voluntarily endured hunger and hardship in order to learn to grow grain and raise livestock, even though these practices would take many generations to become more profitable than hunting and gathering.

Klaus Schmidt, the archaeologist who led the excavation of Göbekli Tepe, for many the most important archaeological discovery to date, was the first to work out a satisfactory theory from the new evidence. Göbekli Tepe, discovered in 1994 and built some 11,500 years ago, some three millennia before the founding of Uruk/Sumer, has become known in the media as “the first temple”, but above all it is the first material vestige of sedentarization and agricultural production discovered so far.

Schmidt argued that Göbekli Tepe had been the center from which cultivation and animal husbandry spread towards what we call “the Fertile Crescent”. But the builders of those structures were still nomads and hunters. It would have been the needs of maintaining the sanctuary’s own structures that generated the incentives to invest resources in the arduous task of cultivating wild cereals and domesticating some species.

It may have been uneconomical compared with hunting, but hunting required long journeys on a seasonal cycle; if one wanted to remain at Göbekli, more and more time had to be devoted to tending the wild

grains that surrounded it. All the more so if, as seems to be the case, the sanctuary regularly took in and housed the crippled and the sick, functioning as a kind of “base” for a group that remained nomadic.

Even so, one piece still had to be fitted: what was the point of maintaining such a costly and at the same time such a precarious structure? What did these sanctuaries provide that was important enough to organize all community life around them? The answer would again come from Göbekli Tepe. The discovery of large fermentation vats shed light on a new element. Meanwhile, parallel excavations in China gave rise to the first theories claiming that agriculture was a by-product of the need to produce alcoholic beverages for the periodic celebrations of those bands of nomadic hunters.

In 2004 the excavations at Jiahu, the oldest Neolithic Chinese village discovered so far, founded some 9,000 years ago, provided a new clue. The archaeologist Patrick McGovern discovered the remains of a drink, a kind of chicha, which must have had about ten degrees of alcohol. What is more interesting is that the making of this primitive “beer” would have been, according to McGovern, the cause of sedentarization. Sanctuaries such as Göbekli Tepe, or settlements such as Jiahu or those that would give rise to Sumer, would have been the product of the need of the communities and nomadic hunting bands to meet again in order to celebrate and redistribute the fruit of their labor.

As at Göbekli Tepe, Jiahu did not originally house the entire tribe. It quite possibly began as a settlement of only a few people who tended “fermentable” crops that allowed the drink to be made in each seasonal cycle. These were drinks whose function was to form part of

a sort of festival in which the nomadic community was reunited with its crippled members and with the less productive and self-sacrificing farmers. McGovern points out:

However we characterize these Neolithic drinks and the domestication of these plants, we will find that it is an egalitarian effort, with everyone working together.

In the economy of primitive communism, celebration is the main collective mechanism of social cohesion. By joining redistribution between farmers and hunters through ceremony, the community not divided into classes affirmed its egalitarianism without friction.

The fermentation of wild grains -the most primitive form of beer- begins to play an increasingly important role in these festivals because it naturally becomes everyone's "goal". Every celebration needs something special. In this way something apparently uneconomical, such as sowing and cultivating full time, becomes the object of a first division of labor that does not serve the exploitation of some by others.

There are still examples of this logic characteristic of primitive communism operating in living societies, for example the Enawene-Nawe, whose society combines hunting and farming and is articulated around a central cyclical festival. Each time the joint hunting and fishing parties return, a different house -the one in charge of a garden plot- organizes a community festival in which the results of hunting and cultivation are redistributed, maintaining the social organization. The houses are arranged radially, and the house that must organize the festival changes from radius to radius like the cyclical Amazonian calendar.

This redistributive logic also seems to have been the origin of the first “global” networks. In all probability, a non-commodity exchange more akin to the extensive Polynesian ritual exchange networks, or to those of the Kwakiutl up to the 20th century, than to the later trade of the Phoenicians or the Greeks. Recent research on the DNA of British flora led a team of scientists to conclude that the Neolithic communities of southern Europe shared seeds of cultivated grains with their more backward northern neighbors more than eight thousand years ago, two thousand years before the first known evidence of agriculture in the British Isles.

That is, the “sanctuaries” -originally the center of the hunting itineraries of a tribe’s bands- possibly also served for redistribution among tribes, spreading and equalizing advances across different geographical regions. The agrarian revolution created an interconnected world with long-distance exchanges long before the birth of the commodity.

The overall result is a picture of the Neolithic Revolution and of the birth of civilization very different from the one held during the 20th century. The primitive agrarian community did not have a social structure or a productive cycle essentially different from those of the nomadic tribe. The primitive communalism of hunter-gatherers that fascinated the first anthropologists was not immediately followed by the state, private property and the sexual and social division of labor, but by a long phase of agrarian communism that was still partly sustained by hunting, fishing and gathering.

This productive system occupied wide geographical areas, surely more connected to each other than we imagine. And what is more important: the great leap was not the discovery of agriculture itself, but the birth of the agrarian commune out of the ceremonial logic of celebration.

The city under primitive communism



Cucuteni, a city of primitive communism

In the 1970s came the first archaeological discoveries of what was later called the Trypillia-Cucuteni culture. In a vast region of present-day Ukraine, Romania and Moldova, dozens of “megasites”, Neolithic cities, have been discovered since then. Their heyday was between 4500 and 3000 BCE. The archaeologists’ problem is that the number of houses in each of them is overwhelming. In one of the most recently explored megasites, Nebelivka, during...

...more than six years of fieldwork since 2009, researchers have excavated and mapped structures located over more than one square kilometer. Aerial photos, satellite images and geomagnetic data, supplemented by excavations of 88 test pits, identified 1,445 residential houses and 24 communal structures called assembly houses.

But the interesting thing is that...

The researchers say there are no signs of a centralized government, a ruling dynasty or disparities of wealth or social class in the ancient settlement. The houses were largely similar in size and design. The excavations yielded few “prestige” goods, such as copper items and shell ornaments. Many examples of painted pottery and clay figurines typical of the Trypillia culture turned up, and more than 6,300 animal bones unearthed at the site suggest that the residents ate a lot of beef and lamb. These clues suggest that daily life was very much alike in the different neighborhoods of Nebelivka.

The population of these *megasites* of primitive communism had nothing to envy the Mesopotamian cities already formed under class division. The two largest megasites investigated, Talianki and Maidanets, housed 26,000 and 46,000 people respectively at their peak. That said, under an urbanism and priorities as radically different as their social order.

One of the things that has most caught the researchers’ attention has been the diversity and sophistication of the diet. The megasites grew wheat, oats, millet, rye and barley -as well as hemp, used for textiles- but they also had areas of vegetable gardens and orchards where remains of cultivated apricots, plums, cherries, grapes, peas and broad beans have been found.

Animal husbandry, essential to allow the productive inclusion of the physically weaker members, was highly developed, and the diet seems to have been rich in protein from domesticated pigs, goats and sheep, but also from hunting and fishing. And of course, fermented drinks were made from the grains -ancient beer- and possibly grape wine.

But besides the egalitarianism of the houses and the dietary diversity, where these cities of primitive communism differed from the Mesopotamian ones was in their low spatial density. While Ur, at the height of its splendor, occupied 89 hectares and had about 60,000 inhabitants, the 3,000 houses of Maidanets occupied about 270 hectares and the 2,700 of Talianki no less than 450 hectares.

The high density of the first class cities compared with those of primitive communism obviously reflects exploitation, but also the centralization of the newly born state power, there to “mediate” between the classes, yes, but above all to maintain the system of exploitation. A concentrated population is easier to control and to regiment with fewer resources.

The urban structure of the cities of primitive communism reflects not only an egalitarian distribution of space and of access to the products of collective labor -as we saw with the diet- but also the different nature of political power in a society without a state.

In Nebelivka, for example, the houses were grouped into 153 neighbourhoods, most of them with between three and seven houses, which in turn formed 14 districts, each with one or more assembly houses. These places for social coordination and decision-making needed, by their very nature, an open area. The community not divided into classes needs space.

Proto-class struggle overcoming primitive communism



Material culture of primitive communism. Remains discovered at Cucuteni.

Another thing that has caught the attention of the megalithic archaeologists is the appearance of burned houses at different periods. In many cases they were not rebuilt. Only the gap with the ruins was left. At first the researchers attributed it to some form of ritual. It was one of those archaeological “mysteries”. But actually... not so much.

All over Eastern Europe, at the same time as and after the Cucuteni “megaliths”, egalitarian cities appeared, of varying size but very similar. They are known by the Latin word “oppida”. And there is archaeological evidence that they flourished until 580 BCE and that some still remained a little over 2,000 years ago. As the framework for understanding this type of city of primitive communism has widened, other lines of interpretation have emerged, much more interesting than the ritual “deus ex machina”.

Okolište in Bosnia had been founded around 5200 BCE and contained family groups which apparently developed different economic and demographic potentials in the course of their development. The houses of the richest families, who held a growing position of power within the large village, were burned down around 4900 BCE.

After this moment, much changes in Okolište: the size of the village, which was originally very large for Neolithic conditions with approximately 3,500 inhabitants, is reduced to a “standard size for south-eastern Europe” of 100-200 inhabitants. Moreover, the differences between households cease to be recognizable, and the specific central functions of Okolište within the surrounding settlement area are likewise indiscernible. In this sense, in the case of Okolište we can assume that we are dealing with an internal rebellion against growing social differences and growing differences in the management of resources.

In the three examples mentioned, the certainties and uncertainties in handling and reconstructing internal social conflicts become evident. However, the processes in, for example, Heuneburg and Okolište can be compared. In both cases, the development of the growing economic potentials of a group of households within the total population leads to internal social conflicts.

While a concentration of activities and political power in certain households is recognizable in Neolithic Okolište, in Heuneburg there is an entire district -separated from the rest of the settlement- in which craft production and political control are concentrated. In both cases, the social conflicts lead to a more dispersed settlement pattern and to a reduction of social differences within society.

Johannes Müller. “**Rebellion and Inequality in Archaeology**”, 2017

In other words, differences in the demographic development of the different groups or tribes that converged in the city, and the unequal spread of certain activities within the community -put another way, the development of the **productive forces** under primitive communism- would have provoked conflicts tending towards the emergence of classes. Once that point was reached, agrarian primitive communism could only repress the process -weakening the fabric and the productive capacity of society as a whole- or transform itself into a class society.

The record of burned houses shows us that primitive communism had the capacity to defend itself against its own internal dynamics. But it is quite possible that in some places -such as Eastern Europe- the large concentrations broke up as a result of these internal conflicts. What we do know is that the communities under primitive communism dispersed or were subjugated by barbarian tribes.

This subjugation, tribal at first, becomes class domination as the state develops as an instrument for extracting tribute from the conquered, as we see at the dawn of both the Asiatic mode of production and slavery.

Productive forces



Set of material forces that allow the transformation of Nature by the human species within the framework of a given mode of production. The main productive forces are always human labor and knowledge embodied in means of production through technology.

Development of the productive forces

The development of the productive forces is measured by the potential capacity to transform the environment. That is, by the average physical productivity of labor, the amount of output that one hour of abstract social **labor** is capable of adding, that is, an average hour under the normal conditions of production prevailing in a society and with the average social degree of skill and intensity of labor.

Progress



Progress is everything that contributes on a historical level to the development of the productive forces, laying the foundations of the material possibility of overcoming class society through a society of abundance, without classes and therefore without a state, transforming the “economy” into a conscious and collective metabolism between Nature and the human species.

The historical-material character of progress

For **historical materialism**, progress is not a moral concept, but a material one. Affirming the progressive character of **rising capitalism** never concealed the fact that:

Capital comes dripping from head to foot, from every pore, with blood and dirt.

Karl Marx, **Capital**, Chapter XXIV, "The So-Called Primitive Accumulation", 1867

And indeed it is no secret to anyone that the most progressive achievement of **rising capitalism**, the formation of the world market, took from its very beginnings -the conquest of America-, not to mention the arrival of capitalism in Asia, the form of brutal and oppressive conquest. But that did not stop it from meaning progress for Humanity.

England, it is true, in causing a social revolution in Hindostan, was actuated only by the vilest interests, and was stupid in her manner of enforcing them. But that is not the question. The question is, can mankind fulfil its destiny without a fundamental revolution in the social state of Asia?

If not, whatever may have been the crimes of England she was the unconscious tool of history in bringing about that revolution. Then, whatever bitterness the spectacle of the crumbling of an ancient world may have for our personal feelings, we have the right, in point of history, to exclaim with Goethe:

Should this torture then torment us
Since it brings us greater pleasure?
Were not through the rule of Timur
Souls devoured without measure?

Karl Marx. **The British Rule in India**, 1853

In the same way, phenomena such as **national liberation**, which generally had a progressive meaning in **rising capitalism**, have a reactionary meaning in the **decadence** of capitalism, just as the emergence and defense of common lands, which had a progressive meaning during long periods of the feudal regime, became a brake on the development of the **productive forces** at the dawn of **capitalism**.

Is the concept of progress “teleological”?

A common criticism of the idea of progress from the anarchizing **petty bourgeoisie** has been that the materialists “told history backwards”, “in a religious way”, presenting it as a permanent and necessary ascent. It is true that if we look at the history of humanity as a whole, there has been a prodigious development of the **productive forces** and capacities of the species.

But the general phenomenon cannot deny that historical necessity has not always been realized. Revolutionary classes have failed more than once, and the phases of **decadence** of the societies in which they developed have ended, in those cases, in the collapse of the social whole and the “common ruin of the contending classes”.

Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another; carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended, either in a revolutionary reconstitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes.

Karl Marx and Frederick Engels. **Manifesto of the Communist Party**, 1848

Today it is in fact impossible to speak of “real” progress in the midst of a capitalism in **decadence** in which economic growth has become dissociated from human development. All its cultural and ideological forms ooze reaction from every pore. The perennial crisis, the degradation of human relations, of culture and even of food, the continuous drive towards war and practically every facet of daily life under the system make it clear that only that which is effectively and unambiguously oriented towards overcoming capitalism can be considered progressive.

Proletarianization



Originally this was the process of transforming independent producers into wage-earning producers of surplus value. It was later expanded to include the integration into the proletariat of the middle strata of bourgeois society.

The proletarianization of the independent peasant and the tenant farmer

The main obstacle to the formation of a commodified society in which the vast majority of workers would live in urban centers and work no land at all was the extremely low productivity of pre-capitalist agriculture. That is why the conditions that make capitalism possible - and different from previous modes of production- must be sought in the countryside, not in the city. The process begins in 16th and 17th century England.

The bourgeoisie and the bourgeoisified aristocracy imposed two fundamental changes: the nationalization, enclosure and auctioning of communal lands, and the burden of property taxes, which drove the great landowners to raise the rents paid by their tenants.

The rise in land rents meant that, in the medium term, productivity had to be increased in order to be able to pay them. Deprived of the traditional “insurance” of the communal lands, the tenants either increased output per person employed or were evicted by the landlords. The increase in production would lower food prices and help feed the expropriated peasants, who would be forced either to work in the fields of the new tenants or to flee to the cities to sell their labor power.

The process pushes the surviving tenants to become capitalist farmers and compete against other capitalists by hiring desperate labor for starvation wages, or else to be forced off their holdings and work as proletarians.

This is the first proletarianization, which takes the inevitable form of rural misery and mass migration. The two main classes of capitalist society are being created out of the transformation of the feudal countryside. By the end of the 18th century almost half of the English population was already living in the cities as proletarians, ready to enter the industrial phase of capitalism. A proportion that other European countries, such as Spain, would not reach until the mid-1940s.

This process was repeated through “disentailments” wherever the bourgeoisie took power, and through the colonial administrations wherever the capitalist powers arrived as conquerors. Only in this way could capital escape from the “narrow base” of the strictly capitalist sphere and realize **surplus value**.

In this first moment, the proletarianization of the independent producer, or of the producer integrated into a previous **mode of production** (the day laborer, the guild apprentice, etc.), is merely formal: capital absorbs and exploits his labor but can only increase its profits by increasing **absolute surplus value**. Later, capital will transform that production from the bottom up, developing above all through the increase of **relative surplus value**, the dominant form in **rising capitalism**. This two-movement evolution is what Marx called the **formal and real subsumption of labor under capital**.

The proletarianization of the petty bourgeoisie

But the pressure toward proletarianization does not let up after that first blow. With every technological change, small and medium-sized capitals take advantage of the reduction in scale brought about by the increase in labor productivity to assert themselves. In doing so they open up a new branch, a whole new world of investment outlets for big capital, which will end up displacing or absorbing the small pioneer capitals and proletarianizing the small capitalists.

According to Marx, the mission of small capitals in the general march of capitalist development is to be the pioneers of technical advance, and this in two senses: by introducing new methods of production into already established branches of production and by creating new branches not yet exploited by big capital. It is completely false to believe that the history of the medium-sized capitalist enterprise is a straight line towards its gradual disappearance. On the contrary, the actual course of its development is purely dialectical and moves constantly among contradictions.

The capitalist middle strata, like the working class, are under the influence of two opposing tendencies, one that tends to raise them and another that tends to sink them. The downward tendency is the continuous increase in the scale of production, which periodically exceeds the dimensions of medium-sized capitals, repeatedly expelling them from the arena of world competition. The upward tendency is the periodic devaluation of existing capitals, which for a certain time lowers the scale of production, in proportion to the value of the minimum amount of capital required, and furthermore temporarily paralyses the penetration of capitalist production into new spheres.

The struggle between medium-sized enterprise and big capital should not be imagined as a periodic battle in which the weaker party sees the number of its troops diminish directly and ever further, but rather as a **periodic mowing down of small enterprises, which rapidly spring up again only to be mown down once more by the scythe of big industry**. The two tendencies play ball with the capitalist middle strata, but in the end the downward tendency triumphs, unlike what happens with the proletariat.

A new kind of machine enters the scene: the computer

At the beginning of the 1970s, capitalism enters into crisis. The postwar economic “boom” is over. Besides a whole series of changes in finance capital, a change in the productive model takes shape: a restructuring of employment in the central countries. Heavy industry, once the vital landscape of the stereotyped workers of political propaganda, is shipped overseas, dismantled reactor by reactor, smokestack by smokestack. If the steam engine meant the end of the artisans, now a new kind of machine enters the scene that will revolutionize capitalist production: the computer.

The exponential growth of computing power and telecommunications produced from the very beginning a great expansion of the service sector in the central countries. Personal stories abound of former car industry workers retrained as office employees after a brief course at a technical school or university. As some of these “retrained” employees recounted, conditions in the new job are better, but there is no organization and no class consciousness, and they risk being fired if they sound even remotely communist.

But it is not only a matter of retrained workers from classical industry, as happened in the past with the independent artisans. The “intellectual” professions, which had occupied the place of a “**corporate petty bourgeoisie**” by taking charge of the organization of labor within companies, the state or hospitals, were also being proletarianized: engineers, scientists, doctors, architects, journalists and other professionals become redundant. New software calculates, models and plans faster and more reliably than any engineer can.

The journalist's newspaper archive is three mouse clicks away, the scientist is reduced to pushing buttons on a PCR machine following standardized procedures: a process identical to that of the factory machines of yesteryear!

Capitalism is destroying one of the main divisions that hindered the affirmation of the universal class: the differentiation between manual and intellectual labor. The anachronistic fetishization of the manual worker of the last century makes no sense, simply because the exclusive identification of the proletariat with manual labor has no basis in the productive structure of present-day capitalism. In fact, we can say that the reductive identification of the proletariat with manual workers contributes nowadays to the general confusion and hinders the development of consciousness in a class that is ever more precarious, that is no longer called upon to produce in large factories, and most of whose members have never set foot in one.

Proletariat



The proletariat is the characteristic working class of the capitalist mode of production. Because of its place in it - producing surplus value through its collective labor- it is at the same time an exploited, universal and revolutionary class.

The proletariat, universal class

The proletariat is a universal class in two senses:

1. It exists all over the world, as the product of a capitalism that long ago conquered the whole planet, and what defines it as such -being a product of the capital-labor relationship- is identical everywhere; that is why it has one single set of interests all over the planet.
2. When it fights as a class it does not claim any particular privilege that would prepare a new form of exploitation; it claims universal, human and generic needs, anticipating a

society, communism, in which production becomes a conscious and collective activity oriented not by capital and its logic of accumulation but by the satisfaction of those very needs.

The proletariat as a revolutionary class

Because it is a universal class, the communist perspective is present in each of its expressions of struggle, whether or not that perspective is developed. That is why it is the revolutionary class of the capitalist mode of production, regardless of the ebbs and flows of its class consciousness.

It is not a question of what this or that proletarian, or even the whole proletariat, at the moment regards as its aim. It is a question of what the proletariat is, and what, in accordance with this being, it will historically be compelled to do. Its aim and historical action is visibly and irrevocably foreshadowed in its own life situation as well as in the whole organisation of bourgeois society today.

Marx and Engels. **The Holy Family**, 1844

The process of constitution as a class

Historically the class appeared as a class “in relation to capital”, that is, as an exploited mass producing surplus value. It was the first struggles that went beyond the factory or the local demand -the 8-hour day, for example- that for the first time made the proletariat leap to a class *for itself*, a class capable of understanding itself, expressing itself and fighting as such above the divisions imposed by production or by the ideological apparatus of the system. The proletariat then constitutes itself “into a class, and consequently into a political party”,

as the Communist Manifesto would describe it, insofar as its struggle turns it into a political subject of its own, independent of any faction of the bourgeoisie.

This movement of affirmation through class struggle took place in parallel with the emergence of the first political and programmatic expressions of the workers. Minorities such as the “Icarian communists” in France or the “League of the Just” in Germany, which evolved from 1847 onwards to distill a communist perspective on **materialist foundations** and a systematic demolition of **ideology: Marxism**.

From that moment it became clear that the proletariat needs to constitute itself as the ruling class of society by seizing political power, in order to put an end to the capital-labor relationship and de-commodify society.

In other words, the process of constitution of the proletariat begins with its sociological existence as a class for capital, develops with its appearance as a political subject and culminates, after the revolution, with its conversion into the ruling class of society as a whole, which undertakes the worldwide destruction of the **wage system** and the affirmation of a productive metabolism directed by human needs, fed from each according to their abilities and giving to each according to their needs.

Class consciousness

This process of constitution as a class until it becomes the ruling class, in order to put an end to the very material basis of the existence of social divisions, is in reality a process of gaining consciousness. The **class consciousness** of the proletariat is nothing other than the consciousness of the necessity and the possibility of **communism**.

As an exploited class, the proletariat is deprived of the means of production, including the means of intellectual production. So this class consciousness is not expressed as a “state of opinion”, but as the affirmation of the needs that arise in and for the development of struggles. The process is resolved by the constitution of the class as the leading party of society and its attack, from the very first moment, on capitalist relations, thus becoming a process of negation of capitalism and affirmation of a society directed by and for the universal satisfaction of human needs.

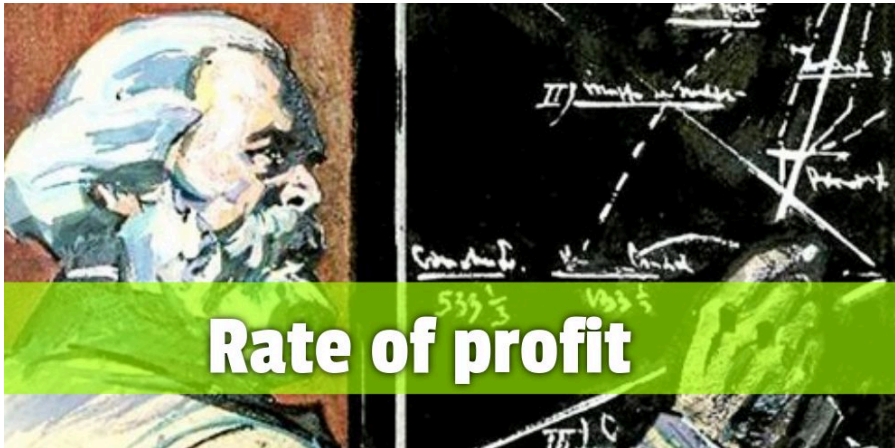
The class is defined by its relationship to the future

What defines the class at each moment of its development, then, is its relationship to the future, **Communism**, in the present.

Communism is for us not a state of affairs which is to be established, an ideal to which reality [will] have to adjust itself. We call communism the real movement which abolishes the present state of things. The conditions of this movement result from the premises now in existence.

Marx and Engels. **The German Ideology**, 1846

Rate of profit



Relationship between the surplus value produced and the total capital advanced by the capitalist.

Rate of Profit = surplus value / (constant capital advanced + variable capital advanced)

$$P' = s / (ca + va)$$

Falling trend of the rate of profit

In the development of competition, capital is pushed either to reduce hourly wages, increasing **absolute surplus value**, or to invest in new machines, to increase **relative surplus value** and thus the **rate of surplus value**. If this is the dominant case, as in **rising capitalism**, the trend will be towards permanent technological development. Then the rate of profit tends to fall, as the **organic composition of capital** increases, that is, investment in constant capital in relation to wages.

Following the formula, even if gross profit increases, the value created in each cycle will tend to grow less than investment grows. In order to maintain its absolute profits -or increase them- capital will increase total production -the mass of product- and the units of product will become cheaper and cheaper. The result is a trend towards increasingly productive labor -with a higher **rate of surplus value**, that is, more exploited in relative terms- with increasingly concentrated capitals and lower rates of profit.

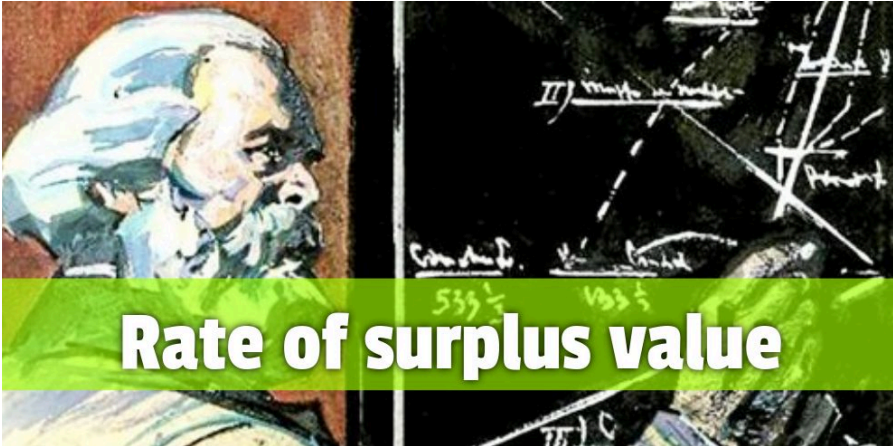
In other words: to improve its profit, capital needs to invest in technologies that increase its productivity. In doing so it will increase the **organic composition of its capital** (it will increase the weight of what it advances in machinery over what it advances in wages). The inevitable result is that its rate of profit (the surplus value per unit of investment) will be lower. How will it compensate for this? **By increasing the mass of product**, producing a greater quantity of product so that the absolute profit, the total surplus value obtained, is greater. If there is a sufficient market for the new mass of cheaper products, it will even be accompanied by an increase in the number of workers and therefore in the total scale of the company.

The development of capitalist production and accumulation conditions labor processes on an ever-increasing scale, and thus of constantly growing dimensions, and correspondingly increasing advances of capital for each individual establishment. Therefore, a growing concentration of capitals (accompanied at the same time, although to a lesser extent, by a growing number of capitalists) is both one of its material conditions and one of the results it produces. At the same time, and in interaction with this, a progressive expropriation of the more or less direct producers advances.

It is thus understandable that the various individual capitalists command armies of workers of increasing magnitude (even though for them too variable capital decreases in relation to constant capital), and that the mass of surplus value, and hence of profit, which they appropriate increases simultaneously with the fall in the rate of profit and in spite of it. For the same causes that concentrate masses of armies of workers under the command of various individual capitalists are precisely those that make the mass of fixed capital employed, as well as that of raw and auxiliary materials, increase in growing proportion to the mass of living labor employed.

Karl Marx. **Capital. Book III**, Chapter XIII, 1894

Rate of surplus value



Ratio between the surplus value obtained and the variable capital used in the production process.

The rate of surplus value is the measure of the **relative surplus value** obtained by capital.

Rate of surplus value = surplus value / variable capital

$$S' = s / v$$

Reformism



An opportunist current that developed within the Second International, which held that through the struggle for lasting improvements and reforms -which were still possible- socialism could be achieved without going through a revolution.

Origin of reformism

The context of the Second International is still that of **rising capitalism**. In that historical period it is possible to achieve lasting improvements and legal reforms that serve the affirmation of the class within a bourgeois society that can still give it a political space of its own. It is a period in which both **parliamentarism** and the **trade union** can be tools for the constitution of the class as a political subject, and in which the struggle for “reforms” such as the eight-hour day or universal suffrage...

awakens understanding and socialist consciousness in the proletariat and helps it to organize as a class

Rosa Luxemburg. **Reform or Revolution**, 1899

In such a context the parliamentary groups, and above all the trade union leaderships, will almost inevitably gain prestige and weight in the class, despite following increasingly **opportunist** drifts. These drifts become more and more open as the monopolistic and totalitarian tendencies of the state take hold under **imperialism**. The foundations are being laid for what will later be the **state capitalism** characteristic of **decadence**.

Reformism was in reality nothing but a symptom that the trade unions and the social democratic parties themselves were being absorbed into the new organization of national capital in the state. In its most *honest* form, reformism will acknowledge its break with Marxism and present itself openly as **revisionism**, that is, as the result of the supposed overcoming of the contradictions of capitalism by capitalism itself.

Does reformism exist today?

What is commonly called “reformism” today, the policies of the parliamentary left, has nothing to do with what the classics of the Second International called by that name:

- The reformism of the Second International was an **opportunist** tendency within the workers’ movement; the socialist parties, **the various descendants of Stalinism** or leftism of any color are the result of tendencies that crossed the most basic class boundary long ago, renouncing **internationalism** and taking part in the worst massacres of workers in history.

- That is, they are not expressions of errors or weaknesses in the development of **class consciousness**, but political elaborations of structures well integrated into the political apparatus of **state capitalism** in its various forms; in other words, they are designed to defend the national state and wage labor.
- Reformism was the product of an era in which “reforms” meant real and lasting advances for the class, among other things because these were possible; the “reforms” we are told about today do not mean “advances” towards the decommodification of capitalist society but, at best, “improvements” in its functioning that make it possible to avoid even more drastic worsening of the conditions of exploitation.
- And for the same reason, whereas reformism claimed to be able to reach **socialism** through reforms, that is, claimed to be able to begin effectively decommodifying society, what is called reformism today sells us, at best, an impossible “sensitive”, “compassionate” or “humane” capitalism, not reforms as a way of overcoming it.

Relative surplus value



Amount of surplus value extracted from labor power per unit of time. The increase in surplus value in relative terms, that is, in the rate of surplus value, comes about through the increase in labor productivity associated with technical improvements and the increase in invested capital.

The **rate of surplus value** is the measure of relative surplus value. **Rate of surplus value** = surplus value / variable capital

Definition in “Capital”

In “Capital”, Marx defines surplus value on the basis of the relationship between the two parts of the working day: the one in which **labor power** generates the value equivalent to its own reproduction and the one in which it generates surplus value.

The surplus-value produced by prolongation of the working-day, I call absolute surplus-value. On the other hand, the surplus-value arising from the curtailment of the necessary labour-time, and from the corresponding alteration in the respective lengths of the two components of the working-day, I call relative surplus-value.

Karl Marx. *Capital*, Book I, chapter X, 1867.

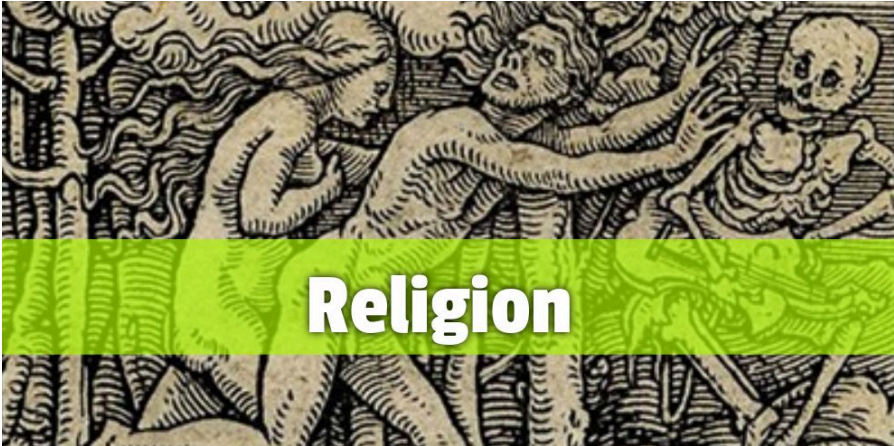
Relative surplus value in capitalist development

The development of exploitation in relative terms was the most important element of **progress** of the **productive forces** in **rising capitalism**.

By incorporating technologies that made it possible to produce more with fewer hours of work, that is, to increase relative exploitation, capitalism could raise wages and increase profits at the same time... although only on condition that the market grew as well.

That was the driving force behind the expansion of capitalism all over the world during the 19th century. For a century now there have been no “virgin” markets left; the system has entered its historical **decadence**. The inevitable consequence is that technological improvement tends to increase unemployment and **precarization**.

Religion



A set of beliefs, rites and ceremonies that, through the promotion of a series of values, asserts and maintains the morality characteristic of a given social organization.

Religions have historically been the great **ideological** containers that tried to give coherence and unity to the set of values and beliefs useful for sustaining a given **mode of production** and the social domination of its ruling class.

In themselves they need not include belief in supernatural beings, but common usage tends to limit the term to the churches and cults that are heirs, in one form or another, of feudality. This is not innocent.

Why does the bourgeoisie embrace “Reason” and claim to be a-religious?

The break between ancient religion and Christianity

Being the first class to carry out the extraction of the product of labor by fundamentally economic means, **apparently spontaneous and “natural”**, it did not necessarily need to bind itself to a supernatural narrative, still less to choose one among them, in order to legitimize its power.

The Latin word “religio”, from which “religion” derives, resembles the original only in its pronunciation: in the classical world the “religio” was not a set of beliefs or doctrines, but a set of public administrative rituals.

There were no dogmas or sacred texts such as the revealed religions have, and most of the “priests” were elected public officials. Taking part in the rituals was a public obligation, but there was no need whatsoever to “believe” in the gods. One could even be mocked for doing so; the work of several philosophical circles was to make sure that “superstitio” -irrational belief- did not get out of control and call social relations and the state into question, even while formally maintaining the *religio*.

When Christianity reaches Rome, it is denounced as atheism by the authorities. The “religio” uses in its representations the ancestral cults and rituals of groups within the Roman Empire, whereas the Christians are a new group with no history at all, which moreover refuses to follow the administrative rites.

For the Christians belief took precedence over rites, exactly the reverse of the rest of the world. In order to try to escape Roman persecution, Christianity will have to invent a past for itself. Since there is no ritual past before Christ, everything will have to center on doctrine.

This will lead the Church Fathers to announce that in reality all religions follow the same original Christian doctrine, but in corrupted form. They thus invent the Christian “universal history” with a common beginning, the coming of Christ to “settle the matter” and set off a historical march towards salvation. By the time Christianity triumphs over Rome, the meaning of “religion” will have been almost completely inverted with respect to the original. And so it remained for more than a thousand years.

The bourgeoisie and the reform of medieval religion

When the wars of religion return to Europe in the 16th-17th centuries, during the great crisis of the agrarian world that formed part of the decadence of **feudalism**, these questions are reopened. Is belief not more important than liturgy and ritual? Protestantism gives rise to religious groups that are ever less liturgical, with an ever more abstract god, returning to the concern with “natural religion”. In the midst of the wave of rationalization of the 18th century, the switch between an abstract god and universal reason begins to be made.

From here it is only half a step to throwing Christ out of the window while keeping all the Christian presuppositions, now converted into “universal reason”. “Religion” had been redefined several centuries earlier as belief, and therefore as irrational, so the moderns claim to have no religion at all.

For the Enlightenment, religion is superstitious belief; it will be enough to eliminate belief and sift the good from the bad through the filter of reason.

But the cult of reason will soon prove not to be an especially useful tool for governing the social masses. If state religion was the characteristic ideological form of the rule of the feudal classes, the

combination of political ideology and **nationalism** will be that of the bourgeoisie.

Its effort of “secularization” was immense: it wrested education from the greedy hands of the churches, instituted national cults of the flag and of the fallen, temples to its own art and its science (the “museums”, dedicated to the forgotten Greek muses), let the muezzin sing at his hours while it built communication networks -media-capable of carrying its message into every living room...

But in spite of everything, especially while it had -or where it still has- large peasant masses, it could not do without the old ecclesiastical tomes inherited from feudalism (Roman Catholicism and Orthodoxy, Anglicanism, Maliki Islam, Buddhism...) nor without its own first ideological affirmations (the “Protestant Reformation”). It did, however, “modernize” them, purged them of feudality with the necessarily watered-down castor oil of “church-state separation” and, after a good many clashes and battles, put them to work in its service.

The three levels of religion under capitalism

1. The ideological apparatuses inherited from previous modes of production

What the bourgeoisie calls religions, that is, the religions prior to the establishment of capitalism. Religions which the bourgeoisie, at first, could not but fight. In the first place, as part of its assault on the state. In the second place, because it needed a morality functional to the new order.

That battle was called “secularization”, and if it was never complete it was not -as the “laicists” would have it- because feudal remnants were left to be destroyed. Churches and cults are today no more a feudal

remnant than the university, another feudal institution converted a thousand times over according to the needs of the present ruling class.

2. The political religio: nationalism

Political religion, the bourgeois equivalent of the Roman “religio”: the set of ceremonies, rituals and beliefs that make up “the political community”.

Its fundamental expression, the political religion of the bourgeoisie par excellence, is **nationalism**. Why? Because the **wage** and **capital** are capitalist social relations, but capitalism is a complex, scale-dependent system. There can be no “capitalism in a single enterprise” nor “in a single district”.

Shoots of the wage-capital relation appear from Roman times onwards, and the Florence of the 14th and 15th centuries will have foreshadowings of the capitalist utopia and program with Savonarola, and even a proletarian insurrection, that of the Ciompi; but until the bourgeoisie manages to articulate a sufficiently broad national market, turning land into a commodity, subjugating the peasantry and raising agricultural productivity, it will not be able to establish the “double circuit” -circulation of commodities and circulation of capital- that allows the systematic and relatively “automatic” **accumulation** of capital, which is what we call capitalism.

That is why the history of the struggle of the **bourgeoisie** for the establishment of **capitalism** is the history of the **nation**, which in turn is nothing other than the effective leadership of the bourgeoisie over the social whole it is creating. If **nationalism** sprouts again and again, it is because it is the ideological glue that reflects that social whole and that leadership.

The rituals, the ceremonies, the anthems, the “irrational belief” in the peculiarity of the national **culture**, in the originality of its institutions, in the uniqueness of everything national... reveal the immediate mold in which the patriotic religio was formed.

“Secularization” was also the absorption and transposition by the state of a good many celebrations of feudal religion. The Basque “Aberri Eguna” superimposed on Catholic Easter Sunday, the Mexican Guadalupe, the Spanish Covadonga and Santiago -only half laicized with October 12- among many others, from Poland to Argentina, bear witness to the extent to which secularization, from a certain point on, was not so much a battle as the negotiation of a symbiosis.

A symbiosis that is not always complete. Especially when the “political religio” blurs into the local. The old “confraternities” are still converting themselves to provide social services complementary to those of the state; and football, which reproduces feelings of belonging towards the state in a way equivalent to that of the guild structure with the Catholic Church, has not managed -although it tried in its origins- to tie itself to the workplace.

On a smaller scale, social and family ceremonies such as Christmas or Halloween also form part of the capitalist political religio: conversions, sometimes slightly problematic, of old pre-capitalist traditions into messages characteristic of commodity society.

3. The religion of the commodity

The religion of the commodity is the deepest and most abstract level of capitalist religion. When Marx speaks of “**commodity fetishism**” he is not playing an obscure semiotic game or making a metaphor: he is exposing the fetish character of money, its character as a “magical object” in the religio that serves as the ideological basis of the whole system.

What other name can be given to money in a society in which its mere circulation seems to be what creates **value**?

The mysterious character of the commodity-form consists therefore simply in the fact that it reflects back to men the social characteristics of their own labor as objective characteristics inherent in the products of labor themselves, as the socio-natural properties of these things, and hence that it also reflects the social relation of the producers to the sum total of labor as a social relation between objects, existing apart from the producers. (...)

The commodity-form, and the value-relation of the products of labor within which it appears, have absolutely nothing to do with the physical nature of the commodity and the material relations arising out of this. It is nothing but the definite social relation between men themselves which assumes here, for them, the fantastic form of a relation between things.

In order, therefore, to find an analogy we must take flight into the misty realm of religion. There the products of the human brain appear as autonomous figures endowed with a life of their own, which enter into relations both with each other and with men. So it is in the world of commodities with the products of men's hands. I call this the fetishism which attaches itself to the products of labor as soon as they are produced as commodities, and is therefore inseparable from the production of commodities.

Karl Marx. **Capital**, 1867

Like all fetishes, the “magic” is nothing but a way of concealing relations of exploitation and subjugation. Obviously, it is not money that creates value as the exchanges between equals multiply; it is the

exploitation of the labor of one class by another. A class, the **bourgeoisie**, which keeps part of what is produced and attributes it to the magic of exchange.

This fetishistic character of money, generally invisible to us, was nevertheless obvious to the pre-capitalist societies that ran headlong into the European imperialisms in Asia and Africa.

It was said of the Bakweri of Cameroon that they were apathetic, squandered the land and had no interest whatsoever in increasing their profits. If they accumulated some property, it was only to destroy it in potlatch ceremonies. The few who associated themselves with the colonial plantations and improved their economic status had the reputation of belonging to a new association devoted to witchcraft. They supposedly killed their relatives and even their children, turning them into zombies to put them to work on a distant mountain, driving trucks, where the witches supposedly had a modern city.

The word “sombi” means pledge/pawn; it was thus believed that under the new colonial plantation economy relatives were turned into serfs so that a few could gain wealth. [...] The elders warned that no coins or money should be picked up from the ground, because it was being scattered to lure the men to the riverbank, where the “French” would use them as zombies to build the new port.

Michael Taussig, *The Devil and Commodity Fetishism in South America*

The religion of the commodity has its great fetish -money-, its rituals -collecting one's paycheck, paying for the shopping, etc.- and even its little icons -coins. Ceremonies and objects that dress up supposed

“individual decisions” as relevant social facts, and the commodification of the satisfaction of our needs as sovereign economic acts.

But it also has its superstitious element: the idea that the exchange of equals (every commodity is exchanged for another of equal value) would, by mere repetitive magic, produce an increase in global wealth.

The religion of the commodity and capitalist morality

The morality of “free exchange”

The whole religion of the commodity is geared towards fostering the belief in the self-sovereignty of the isolated person (=individualism) and towards representing complex capitalist social relations as the “natural” product of the “spontaneous aggregation” of millions of sovereign individual decisions.

The result is the morality of commodity exchange, according to which **“free” exchange would by definition be “fair” and “egalitarian”**.

By making the social structure invisible and letting us see only the isolated person (the individual), the individual expression of universal human needs turns, without explanation, into acts of freedom aimed at maximizing individual pleasure (utility).

In that **abstract and alienated world**, everything that is not the fruit of direct coercion is considered “free” and “egalitarian”. The coercion of the ruling class through social conditions does not exist. Those who have been dispossessed of the means of production and can only sell their labor power sell it *freely*. Since *in freedom* only things of equal value are exchanged, every market wage becomes by definition “fair”.

The social morality of the religion of the commodity

But make no mistake: it also has a *social message*. Adam Smith's famous "invisible hand" was only one of its primitive formulations, but the Salamanca scholastics had already arrived, a century earlier, at something resembling the *quantity theory of money*. Today, in its simplest form, it is part of economic and media discourse and is repeated to us continually: "the increase in the number of *free* and *egalitarian* commodity exchanges increases social wealth".

But can the mere repetition of an exchange between equals in value increase the total value of what is exchanged? Magic!

The trick is none other than this: the perspective of looking at social production and distribution exclusively through individual exchanges reduces the relations of production, and the social structure they produce, to a magma of equal consumers. Value, seen from the individual, becomes *subjective*, and the very concept of value dissolves as a social reality. This conceals the fact that *value is nothing but social labor expropriated by the exploiting class*.

So the magic of exchange creating value is not innocent. Every religion -and that of the commodity is a religion- has in the end a little "irrational" and incongruous heart, which is nothing but the shadow zone that allows the exploiting class to appropriate the results of social labor.

The result of this whole complex operation is to lead us to the idea that "the more free exchanges there are, the richer a society will be", which actually means that the greater and more widespread commodification and the exploitation of labor are, the better for society as a whole. No other moral message could be expected from an exploiting class: its aims are dressed up, contradictorily, as social aims.

This morality is multiplied through a thousand cultural expressions, from music to television programs, and in the end it always leads to the same place: the individuation of universal needs and the universalization of the commodity through the **commodification of human relations**.

Liberty, equality, fraternity: free exchange between equal values, and nation (=leadership of society as a whole by the bourgeoisie)

Restricting the idea of what religion is socially to the superstitious cults and ceremonies involving supernatural beings, souls, etc., is a serious error. They are a mere atavism. They are reborn and reappear now to cover the black holes of despair that the system itself creates, but they are no more than a superficial layer of the **alienating** moral edifice of capitalism.

Capitalist religion is much more convoluted and, above all, complete. Its mechanism, were it not so cynical, would even be beautiful in its sophistication, especially when we compare it with early **feudality**, when exploitation was not disguised as an economic mechanism but appeared openly as exaction, as an imposition by force normalized by custom.

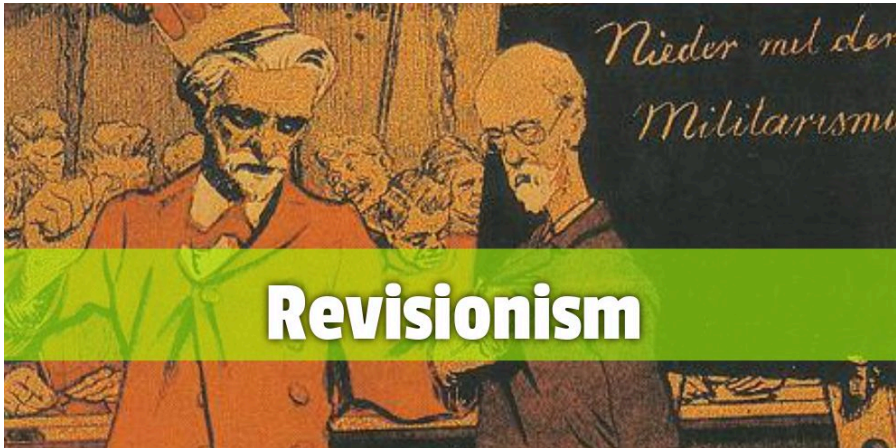
At a first level, the morality of bourgeois society shapes how “individuals” are to be and what they are to expect from others and from society. Its core, the religion of the commodity, has nothing to do with norms and restrictions, with social prudishness and sexual repression. On the contrary, the religion of the commodity is a **religion of liberty and equality** whose main sacrament is exchange, buying and selling.

The religion of the commodity founds the **individual as an abstract being in permanent conflict with its surroundings**, makes exploitation invisible and, above all, educates in the “naturalness” of scarcity, in the necessity of property and in the acceptance of the reification of human relations and needs.

At a second level, this individual, permanently cornered and on the defensive against others, is then “socialized”, that is, moralized by the state and the political religion. Layers of morality -always nationalist, sometimes democratic- will instruct him in a false “**fraternity**” with his exploiters, from the most abstract -the **nation**- to the closest: the confraternity or the club. The nation, in the end, is nothing but the effective leadership of society as a whole by the exploiting class, that is, the **dictatorship** of the needs of capital over human needs.

And only finally, at a third level, will the family, that pre-capitalist communal remnant, be given the opportunity to season all that with a bit of conveniently bourgeoisified feudal and ancient “**superstitio**”.

Revisionism



Theoretical position that appeared within the Second International, which held that capitalism had overcome or was overcoming its own contradictions, so that it was imperative to carry out a “revision” of the Marxist foundations, renounce the revolutionary perspective and redefine the socialist parties as democratic parties defending social reforms.

Origins of revisionism

Only two years after Engels' death, Bernstein, one of his literary executors, published in the “Neue Zeit”, the theoretical journal of the SPD, a series of articles that would later appear as a book under the title “The Preconditions of Socialism and the Tasks of Social Democracy”. It is the first theoretical argument for reformism. Its final conclusion: “The party should present itself as what it is: a democratic party of social reforms”.

At first, the party leadership seemed not to take the onslaught seriously. Kautsky, the journal's editor, gave his approval to the publication, but did not bother to put forward a reply either, citing lack of time and of any desire to polemicize. After all, Bernstein was a friend from “the hard years of the anti-socialist laws”. In reality, with Marx and Engels dead, theory had lost centrality and weight in the daily life of the party. The real leadership of the movement lay with the parliamentary group, which merged with the party's formal leadership body, and with the trade union bosses.

The role of scientific debates was by then regarded as little more than a cultural programme of the party, a specialised and ultimately useless activity, like a poetry contest which, at best, had the virtue of keeping impetuous young people and intellectuals with political aspirations busy without affecting the rank and file.

If **opportunism** had replaced consistent theoretical analysis in the setting of the leadership's goals, **reformism** was its unavowed everyday discourse. The party secretary himself, Auer, an old demagogue who had held the post since 1875 and by then was a happy and well-settled “boss”, sent a famous secret letter to Bernstein, which would be made public decades later, reprimanding him in the Jesuitical and cynical manner of the **bureaucrats** of all times:

My dear Ede, one doesn't formally decide to do the things you suggest, one doesn't say such things, one simply does them.

Ignaz Auer. Private letter to Eduard Bernstein, 1898

So the silent reproach of the old social-democratic leadership to Bernstein was not for “revising” the Marxist programme, as his book claimed to do, but for giving theoretical form to the reality of the **reformism** that had eaten away at it and whose centre lay in the parliamentary group and the trade union leadership.

The real danger for them lay in a public debate on serious theoretical bases: they did not want to set the mass of party members, the famous rank and file, up as judges, lest they call into question the comfortable atmosphere of class conciliation that increasingly reigned in the institutions of the German state. Nor did any of them see the need to lower the revolutionary flag, as Bernstein proposed. **Opportunism** made it possible to combine a **reformist** practice indistinguishable from that of a petty-bourgeois party while still keeping the most conscious part of the class regimented.

The first response would come from a young Polish woman, and therefore a Russian subject, recently taken refuge in Germany and naturalized German, who was then 27 years old: Rosa Luxemburg. It consisted of two articles, the first published in September 1898 in Leipzig, which would be republished as a book in 1900 under the title “Reform or Revolution”.

The work became the main theoretical basis of the Left of the Second International, but it did not give way to a sincere debate with consequences: the party bureaucracy closed ranks against Bernstein as a way of not submitting its own opportunism to discussion. The 1899 SPD congress in Hannover opened with a six-hour report by Bebel that turned the four days of debate into a real trial, almost a lynching, of Bernstein, who came close to being expelled. The spectacle of the party’s hypocritical public profession of faith was then repeated in the **trade unions**, with all the social-democratic organizations without exception reaffirming themselves around the **class struggle** and the perspective of revolution.

The great theoretical and public defeat of Bernstein’s revisionism was the great victory of the **opportunism** of the party and trade union bosses. Like Auer, they all thought, and admitted in private, that in reality the party already was what Bernstein proposed. But accepting

it in front of the mass of working-class militants and voters would have deprived them of the powerful image of being hardened revolutionaries restrained only by an exercise of historical responsibility.

In reality they all thought the discussion futile because practically none of them shared the Marxist predictions any longer. They never imagined that they would face a cataclysmic crisis of capitalism, a world war of extermination and still less a world workers' revolution. And yet, when the moment came, when the war broke out and they had to take sides, none of them hesitated for a single instant to close ranks with the bourgeoisie and its state.

Is there revisionism today?

No, for the same reason that there is no **reformism**: no one believes that the “reforms” proposed by the left of the system lead to **socialism**... they do not even claim to.

Revolutionary defeatism



A tactic that is the only possible internationalist response to any war or conflict between two bourgeois or bureaucratic factions in the decadence of capitalism. It consists of the denunciation of both sides (“the enemy is in your own country”) and the corresponding call to turn the war into revolutionary civil war; that is, into class war (“war on war”).

Imperialist war, decadence and revolutionary defeatism

The outbreak of the first imperialist war fought on a world battlefield, in August 1914, marked a point of no return in the development of **imperialism**. Capitalism showed that it had reached a limit to its geographical expansion beyond which any enlargement of the scope of national markets would necessarily turn into conflict between states.

On the other hand, the conditions of economic growth during the war and in the reconstruction, on top of piles of corpses and ruined cities, and by states structurally marked by **militarism**, ever more totalitarian, showed clearly that the dissociation between development and economic growth was already a worldwide reality. Capitalism no longer allowed a free development of the productive forces. It had entered its phase of **decadence**.

In **decadence** all wars between two bourgeois factions are reactionary, since what is historically on the agenda is the overcoming of capitalism. There can be no **progressive** capitalism, no **rising capitalism** in a single country... because the global, systemic conditions make it impossible. In fact, every conflict between states is necessarily imperialist, whoever the formal “aggressor” may be, because in reality every national capital is stifled in its possibility of expanding, of reaching new markets with their corresponding opportunities for sales and investment.

National capital is constrained within the borders it created in its day in order to develop; a permanent tendency to crisis appears, together with a hunger for markets which, since it cannot be satisfied, transforms the **organization of national capital and its relationship to the state**.

Imperialism has completely buried the old bourgeois-democratic program; expansion beyond national borders (whatever the national conditions of the annexed countries) became the platform of the bourgeoisie of all countries. If the term “national” remained, its real content and function have turned into their opposite; it serves only as a miserable cover for imperialist aspirations and as a battle cry of their rivalries, as the one and last ideological means of winning the adherence of the popular masses so that they play their role as cannon fodder in the imperialist wars.

Rosa Luxemburg. **The Crisis of Social Democracy**, 1916

One after another, the European states send their own workers to die and to kill other workers en masse in a war of extermination that expresses the point that over-accumulation had reached and the extent to which the markets, both national and colonial, were becoming insufficient, at an accelerating pace, for each and every national capital. **The war is a world war because capitalism no longer “fits” in the national market, because capital has entered into acute contradiction with the national state.**

Therefore, there is no possible progressive way out of any war or conflict that does not pass through the defeat of the bourgeoisie and capitalism as a whole. There is no possible progressive side in a war. Revolutionary defeatism is the only option for workers in any conflict between two bourgeois factions.

The first slogan of revolutionary defeatism: “The enemy is at home”

The war precipitates the break between the left and opportunism within the International. On one pretext or another -for France the war would be purely defensive, for Germany the aim would be to put an end to the feudal tsarist regime, etc.- practically all the big socialist parties close ranks around the war effort of their bourgeoisies.

The SPD parliamentary group votes en bloc to approve the war credits. Only Karl Liebknecht votes against, and he is prevented from reading out his reasons, from having them entered into the record of the session and from publishing them in any newspaper. Nevertheless, revolutionary defeatism had found its first voice.

My vote against today's War Credits Bill is based on the following considerations: This war, wanted by none of the peoples involved, has not broken out to further the welfare of the German people or of any other. It is an imperialist war, a war for the division of important territories of exploitation for capitalists and financiers.

From the point of view of the arms race, it is a war provoked jointly by the German and Austrian war parties, in the darkness of semi-feudalism and secret diplomacy, in order to gain advantages over their opponents. At the same time the war is a Bonapartist effort to disorganize and split the growing working-class movement.

Karl Liebknecht. **Vote against the war credits**, 1914

When Lenin, in Zurich, reads the Vorwärts, the official newspaper of German social democracy, supporting the war and the credits, he thinks that the copy he holds in his hands is a forgery produced by

German military intelligence. The collapse of the International is total, and it is time to declare it dead. He is clear that what must be developed, the only possible option, is revolutionary defeatism.

The betrayal of socialism committed by the majority of the leaders of the Second International (1889-1914) signifies the political and ideological bankruptcy of this International. The main cause of this bankruptcy lies in the actual predominance within it of petty-bourgeois opportunism, whose bourgeois character and whose danger the best representatives of the revolutionary proletariat of all countries have long been pointing out.

The opportunists had long been preparing the bankruptcy of the Second International,

by denying the socialist revolution and substituting bourgeois reformism for it;

by denying the class struggle and its indispensable transformation, at certain moments, into civil war, and

by advocating class collaboration; by preaching bourgeois chauvinism under the names of patriotism and defense of the fatherland, and by ignoring or denying the fundamental truth of socialism, already set forth in the Communist Manifesto, that the workers have no fatherland;

by confining themselves, in the struggle against militarism, to a sentimental petty-bourgeois point of view instead of recognizing the need for a war of the proletarians of all countries against the bourgeoisie of all countries;

by turning the unavoidable use of bourgeois parliamentarism and bourgeois legality into a fetishism of that legality, forgetting that in times of crisis illegal forms of organization and agitation are imperative.

Lenin. The Tasks of Revolutionary Social-Democracy in the European War, 1914

Revolutionary social democracy, the left of the Second International, sets to work under a level of general repression unknown until then. They are few, very few; they fight against an atmosphere of war hysteria relentlessly promoted by the media and shielded by the strictest censorship. Advocating revolutionary defeatism has become a crime of treason.

The absurd slogan “hold out” has hit rock bottom. It only drags us ever deeper into the vortex of genocide. The class struggle of the international proletariat against international imperialist genocide is the socialist command of the hour.

The main enemy of every people is in its own country!

The main enemy of the German people is in Germany: German imperialism, the German war party, German secret diplomacy. This enemy at home must be fought by the German people in a political struggle, cooperating with the proletariat of the other countries, whose struggle is against their own imperialists.

Karl Liebknecht, *The Main Enemy Is at Home*, 1915

Turn the weapons against the real enemy, transform the war into revolution. When Lenin launches the first slogans characteristic of revolutionary defeatism, they sound unreal amid the oppressive atmosphere of patriotic hooliganism.

Wide propaganda, extended both to the troops and to the theater of military operations, for the socialist revolution and for the need to turn the weapons not against our brothers, the wage slaves of other countries, but against the reactionary and bourgeois governments and parties of all countries. The obligatory organization of clandestine cells and groups among the troops of all nations to carry out this propaganda in all languages.

A relentless struggle against the chauvinism and “patriotism” of the petty bourgeois and bourgeois of all countries without exception. Against the leaders of the present International, who have betrayed socialism, an obligatory appeal to the revolutionary consciousness of the working masses, who bear the whole burden of the war on their shoulders and who, in most cases, are hostile to opportunism and chauvinism.

Lenin. The Tasks of Revolutionary Social-Democracy in the European War, 1914

There is no internationalism without revolutionary defeatism

From the first imperialist world war onwards, it is impossible to uphold **internationalism** without putting revolutionary defeatism into practice.

[The] revolutionary meaning [of internationalism is the] solidarity of the world proletariat as a unit against international capitalism. Solidarity in ideas as well as in deeds, directed against the nation and patriotism first and foremost, colonial countries included.

There can be no interest higher than that of the world proletariat, not even that of a country where the revolution had triumphed.

The internationalists fight with equal ferocity both contending sides in local imperialist wars (Vietnam) as well as in wars of a world character, and brand the respective partisans and propagandists as traffickers in human flesh.

They propose and strive to organize the action of the exploited, at the front and in the rear, against their respective governments and military commands.

All national defense -even at the level of resistance- conceals exploitation and oppression. The immediate enemy, for each proletariat, is in its own country; harassing it to the utmost is the condition for unleashing the struggle of the proletariat in other countries and undertaking, united, the destruction of capitalism throughout the world.

Consequently, the internationalists reject as reactionary the slogan: "Non-interference in the internal affairs of another country". It is designed to prevent the solidarity and collective action of the proletariat in the various countries, while it fosters the constant economic interference of the great powers in the affairs of the small ones and often brings about their military intervention: local wars, the invasion of Tibet, of Santo Domingo, of Hungary and Czechoslovakia, of Cuba, plus the gigantic arms

trade. The proletariat of any country has not just the right but the obligation to intervene in the struggles of the proletariat of any other country.

“Lexicon of contemporary political trickery, compared with the revolutionary lexicon”. G. Munis, 1970

Right to self-determination



A right to which the bourgeoisie or petty bourgeoisie of a territory within a state would supposedly be entitled: that of submitting the formation of an independent state to a referendum among the whole population, or the part of it considered “co-national”.

The right to self-determination and the feudal empires

The slogan of the *right of nations to self-determination* was taken up by the Second International as a way of addressing the **national liberation** of the bourgeoisies subjugated under the last great feudal empires: Austria-Hungary, Russia, etc. Later, the *right to self-determination* was also applied to the colonies and protectorates of the European states.

The critique of the right to self-determination and the understanding of imperialism

However, the right to self-determination soon met with criticism among the Marxists who were beginning to work out an understanding of imperialism.

The development towards the Great State, which characterizes the modern epoch and gains in importance with the progress of capitalism, condemns the whole mass of mini- and micro-nationalities to political weakness from the outset.

Alongside a few very powerful nations, which are the true managers of capitalist development because they possess the material and intellectual means indispensable for preserving their economic and political independence, “self-determination”, the autonomous existence of mini- and micro-nations, is increasingly illusory.

This return to autonomous existence of all, or at least of the great majority, of the nations currently oppressed would only be possible if the existence of small states had possibilities and prospects for the future in the capitalist epoch. For the time being, the economic and political conditions proper to a large state are so necessary in the struggle for existence of the capitalist nations that even the politically independent small states, formally equal in rights, that exist in Europe play only a symbolic role and are most of the time puppets of other states.

Can one speak of “self-determination” for the formally independent Montenegrins, Bulgarians, Romanians, Serbs or Greeks, or even, in a certain way, for the Swiss? (...)

The second fundamental aspect of recent evolution that makes this slogan utopian is capitalist imperialism. (...) The result of this tendency is the permanent liquidation of the independence of an ever-growing number of countries, peoples and entire continents. (...)

Taking into account this evolution and the need of the great capitalist states for the struggle for existence on the international market, for world politics and for colonial possessions, *what is most suited to carrying out their functions under present conditions*, that is, what best corresponds to the needs of capitalist exploitation, is not the *national state* -as Kautsky supposes- but the imperialist state. (...)

As socialists understand it, this right [self-determination] must by its very nature have a universal character, and the mere fact of recognizing this is enough to show that the hope of realizing this “right” within the existing system is a utopia in direct contradiction with the tendency of capitalist development, on the basis of which social democracy was constituted. Returning to the goal of dividing all existing states into national units and delimiting them from one another on the model of national states and small states is a desperate and, from a historical point of view, reactionary attempt.

Rosa Luxemburg. *The National Question and Autonomy*, 1908

Lenin's position on the right to self-determination

Part of Russian social democracy, headed by Lenin, rejected Rosa Luxemburg's early conclusions, changing the formula of the right to self-determination from *right of nations* to *right of peoples*.

People is, fundamentally, the **proletariat** together with, or under the leadership of, the **petty bourgeoisie**. If it is the petty bourgeoisie that leads, the utopian and reactionary meaning it gives to the *right to self-determination* does not change.

After the bankruptcy of the bourgeois parties, new social forces - the intelligentsia and the petty bourgeoisie, seeking refuge in the workers' movement- tend to impose their unrealizable wishes on it. If the socialist parties had not had the possibility of verifying objectively what actually corresponds to the needs of the working class, and had confined themselves to imagining what is “good” and “useful”, their program would have turned out to be a collection of utopias.

Rosa Luxemburg. The National Question and Autonomy, 1908

And if it is the proletariat that leads, what sense would it make for it to march backwards, towards the creation of a national state? The national state is created to organize its exploitation; the proletariat will not create national states.

The idea that the self-conscious proletariat could create a modern state is as absurd as proposing to the bourgeoisie a new establishment of feudalism.

Rosa Luxemburg. The National Question and Autonomy, 1908

But the underlying question that Rosa Luxemburg is pointing to, and that Lenin does not see, even though he writes his reply to Luxemburg's text a few months before the outbreak of the world war, is that once the world capitalist market has developed there can be no independent development of national capitalism, and there is therefore no room for true national independence. In that framework, the right to self-determination and independence cease to have a historically progressive meaning, and with it *national self-determination* becomes a reactionary slogan.

Rosa Luxemburg's final argument against the *right to self-determination* will assert that the same thing that makes **defensism** and its slogan of *defense without annexations* an impossible, reactionary and de facto imperialist slogan is what turns the slogan of the *right to self-determination* into a gift to imperialism and a shot in the foot for the revolutionary movement itself:

As long as capitalist states exist, as long as imperialist world policy determines and shapes the internal and external life of the states, the right of national self-determination will have nothing to do with their practice, either in war or in peace.

Moreover: in the present imperialist milieu there can be no wars of national defense whatsoever, and any socialist policy that disregards this particular historical milieu, that seeks to be guided in the midst of this world whirlpool solely by the one-sided viewpoints of its own country, will be nothing but a house of cards from the outset.

Rosa Luxemburg. **The Crisis of Social Democracy**, 1916

The experience of the right to self-determination during the Russian Revolution

Rosa Luxemburg understood **imperialism** as a historical phase of capitalism as a whole. Lenin, on the other hand, thought that imperialism was a phase in the development of each national capital. That is why, for Rosa Luxemburg, the Leninist slogan of the *self-determination of peoples* and its emphasis on *national liberation movements* could be nothing but a manifestation of boundless optimism, and were bound to have, as they did, disastrous consequences for the Russian revolution.

What is this right to self-determination supposed to mean? That socialism is opposed to every form of oppression, including that of one nation by another, is the ABC of socialist policy.

In spite of this, politicians as serious and critical as Lenin, Trotsky and their friends, who respond with nothing but an ironic shrug to any kind of utopian phraseology such as disarmament, the League of Nations, etc., in this case made a hollow phrase of exactly the same kind their favorite hobby. This is due, it seems to me, to a policy made up for the occasion.

Lenin and his comrades calculated that there was no surer method of winning the foreign peoples of the Russian Empire over to the cause of the revolution, to the cause of the socialist proletariat, than to offer them, in the name of the revolution and of socialism, the most extreme and unlimited freedom to determine their own destinies. It is a policy analogous to the one the Bolsheviks adopted towards the Russian peasantry, satisfying their land hunger with the slogan of direct appropriation of the noble estates, on the assumption that this would win them over to the revolution and the proletarian government. In both cases, unfortunately, the calculation proved completely wrong.

It is clear that Lenin and his friends hoped that, by becoming champions of national freedom to the point of advocating “separation”, they would make Finland, Ukraine, Poland, Lithuania, the Baltic countries, the Caucasus, etc., faithful allies of the Russian Revolution.

But exactly the opposite happened. One after another, these “nations” used their newly acquired freedom to ally themselves with German imperialism as mortal enemies of the Russian Revolution and, under Germany’s protection, to carry the banner

of counterrevolution into Russia itself. A perfect example is the little game played with Ukraine at Brest, which caused a decisive turn in the negotiations and brought to light the political situation, both internal and external, that the Bolsheviks now face. The attitude of Finland, Poland, Lithuania, the Baltic countries and the peoples of the Caucasus shows us convincingly that this is not an exceptional case but a typical phenomenon.

Certainly, in all these cases it was not really the “people” who drove this reactionary policy, but the bourgeois and petty-bourgeois classes. These, in complete opposition to their own proletarian masses, perverted the “right to self-determination”, turning it into an instrument of their counterrevolutionary policy.

But (and we come to the crux of the matter) herein lies the utopian, petty-bourgeois character of this nationalist slogan: in the midst of the harsh realities of class society, when antagonisms are sharpened to the utmost, it simply becomes an instrument of bourgeois rule.

The Bolsheviks learned, to their own great harm and that of the revolution, that under capitalist rule there is no self-determination of peoples, that in a class society each class of the nation strives to “determine itself” in a different way, and that for the bourgeois classes the conception of national liberation is entirely subordinated to that of their class rule. The Finnish bourgeoisie, like that of Ukraine, preferred the violent rule of Germany to national freedom if the latter bound it to Bolshevism.

The hope of turning these real class relations into their opposite, of winning a majority vote for union with the Russian Revolution by making it depend on the revolutionary masses, as Lenin and

Trotsky seriously intended, reflects an incomprehensible degree of optimism.

And if it was merely a tactical device in the duel with Germany's policy of force, then it was a very dangerous game with fire. Even without the military occupation by Germany, the result of the famous "popular plebiscite", supposing it had come to that in the border states, would have given the Bolsheviks little cause for joy.

We must take into account the psychology of the peasant masses and of large sections of the petty bourgeoisie, and the thousand ways the bourgeoisie has of influencing the vote. Indeed, it must be considered an absolute law that, in these matters of plebiscites on the national question, the ruling class will always know how to avoid them when they do not serve its purposes or, when they are held, will use every means to influence their results, the same means that make it impossible to introduce socialism by popular vote.

The mere fact that the question of national aspirations and separatist tendencies was introduced in the midst of the revolutionary struggle, even put on the table and made the watchword of socialist and revolutionary policy as a result of the Brest peace, caused the greatest confusion in the socialist ranks and actually destroyed the positions won by the proletariat in the border countries.

In Finland, where the proletariat fought as part of the close-knit Russian socialist phalanx, it achieved a predominant position in power; it had the majority in parliament and in the army, reduced its bourgeoisie to complete impotence and was master of the situation within its borders.

Or take Ukraine. At the beginning of the century, before the nonsense of “Ukrainian nationalism”, with its silver rubles and its “universals”, and Lenin’s hobby of an independent Ukraine were invented, Ukraine was the backbone of the Russian revolutionary movement. There, in Rostov, Odessa and the Donets region, the first rivers of revolutionary lava burst forth, setting the whole of southern Russia ablaze in a sea of flames (as early as 1902-1904) and thus preparing the uprising of 1905. The same thing happened in the present revolution, in which southern Russia supplied the picked troops of the proletarian phalanx.

Since 1905, Poland and the Baltic lands were the most powerful and important revolutionary centers, and in them the proletariat played a role of the first magnitude.

How is it, then, that the counterrevolution triumphs in all these countries? The nationalist movement, precisely because it tore the proletariat away from Russia, mutilated it and delivered it into the hands of the bourgeoisie of the border countries.

The Bolsheviks did not act according to the same genuinely internationalist class policy they applied in other matters. They did not try to achieve the compact union of the revolutionary forces of the whole empire. They did not defend tooth and nail the integrity of the Russian Empire as a revolutionary area, opposing to every form of separatism the solidarity and inseparability of the proletarians of all the countries within the sphere of the Russian Revolution, with the latter functioning as the supreme political command.

Instead, the Bolsheviks, with their hollow nationalist phraseology about “the right to self-determination up to separation”, achieved exactly the opposite, and gave the bourgeoisie of the border

countries the most refined, most desirable pretexts for their counterrevolutionary efforts.

Instead of warning the proletariat of the border countries that all forms of separatism are simply bourgeois traps, they did nothing but confuse the masses of those countries with their slogan and deliver them up to the demagoguery of the bourgeois classes.

With this nationalist demand they brought about the disintegration of Russia itself and put into the enemy's hands the knife that would be plunged into the heart of the Russian Revolution. Certainly, without the help of German imperialism, without "German rifles in German fists", as Kautsky's *Neue Zeit* put it, the Lubinskys and other petty scoundrels of Ukraine, the Erichs and Mannerheims of Finland and the Baltic barons would never have won over the best of the socialist working masses of their respective countries. But national separatism was the Trojan horse in which the German "comrades", bayonet in hand, made their entry into all those lands.

The real class antagonisms and the real balance of military forces brought about the German intervention. But the Bolsheviks provided the ideology with which this counterrevolutionary campaign was masked; they strengthened the position of the bourgeoisie and weakened that of the proletariat.

Rosa Luxemburg. *The Russian Revolution*, 1918

Rising capitalism



Historical period during which the capitalist relations of production served the free development of the productive forces of Humanity. This is the period in which the world market and the global systems of communications and transport were born, the productivity of almost all factors multiplied, the global population grew as never before, and a universal class appeared: the proletariat.

Rising capitalism and progress

Capitalism was, for a long period, a progressive system. **Progressive** not in the false moral sense of “humanitarian” or egalitarian, far from it, but because it revolutionized the whole world, developing the **productive forces** of humanity as never before by commodifying social relations and creating a universal class, the **proletariat**.

The bourgeoisie, historically, has played a most revolutionary part.

The bourgeoisie, wherever it has got the upper hand, has put an end to all feudal, patriarchal, idyllic relations. It has pitilessly torn asunder the motley feudal ties that bound man to his “natural superiors”, and has left remaining no other nexus between man and man than naked self-interest, than callous “cash payment”.

It has drowned the most heavenly ecstasies of religious fervour, of chivalrous enthusiasm, of philistine sentimentalism, in the icy water of egotistical calculation. It has resolved personal worth into exchange value, and in place of the numberless indefeasible chartered freedoms, has set up that single, unconscionable freedom — Free Trade. In one word, for exploitation, veiled by religious and political illusions, it has substituted naked, shameless, direct, brutal exploitation.

The bourgeoisie has stripped of its halo every occupation hitherto honoured and looked up to with reverent awe. It has converted the physician, the lawyer, the priest, the poet, the man of science, into its paid wage labourers.

The bourgeoisie has torn away from the family its sentimental veil, and has reduced the family relation to a mere money relation.

The bourgeoisie has disclosed how it came to pass that the brutal display of vigour in the Middle Ages, which reactionaries so much admire, found its fitting complement in the most slothful indolence. It has been the first to show what man’s activity can bring about. It has accomplished wonders far surpassing Egyptian pyramids, Roman aqueducts, and Gothic cathedrals; it has conducted expeditions that put in the shade all former Exoduses of nations and crusades.

The bourgeoisie cannot exist without constantly revolutionising the instruments of production, and thereby the relations of production, and with them the whole relations of society. Conservation of the old modes of production in unaltered form, was, on the contrary, the first condition of existence for all earlier industrial classes.

Constant revolutionising of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones. All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind.

The need of a constantly expanding market for its products chases the bourgeoisie over the entire surface of the globe. It must nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, establish connexions everywhere.

The bourgeoisie has through its exploitation of the world market given a cosmopolitan character to production and consumption in every country. To the great chagrin of Reactionists, it has drawn from under the feet of industry the national ground on which it stood. All old-established national industries have been destroyed or are daily being destroyed. They are dislodged by new industries, whose introduction becomes a life and death question for all civilised nations, by industries that no longer work up indigenous raw material, but raw material drawn from the remotest zones; industries whose products are consumed, not only at home, but in every quarter of the globe.

In place of the old local and national seclusion and self-sufficiency, we have intercourse in every direction, universal interdependence of nations. And as in material, so also in intellectual production. The intellectual creations of individual nations become common property. National one-sidedness and narrow-mindedness become more and more impossible, and from the numerous national and local literatures, there arises a world literature.

The bourgeoisie, by the rapid improvement of all instruments of production, by the immensely facilitated means of communication, draws all, even the most barbarian, nations into civilisation. The cheap prices of commodities are the heavy artillery with which it batters down all Chinese walls, with which it forces the barbarians' intensely obstinate hatred of foreigners to capitulate. It compels all nations, on pain of extinction, to adopt the bourgeois mode of production; it compels them to introduce what it calls civilisation into their midst, i.e., to become bourgeois themselves. In one word, it creates a world after its own image.

The bourgeoisie has subjected the country to the rule of the towns. It has created enormous cities, has greatly increased the urban population as compared with the rural, and has thus rescued a considerable part of the population from the idiocy of rural life. Just as it has made the country dependent on the towns, so it has made barbarian and semi-barbarian countries dependent on the civilised ones, nations of peasants on nations of bourgeois, the East on the West.

The bourgeoisie keeps more and more doing away with the scattered state of the population, of the means of production, and of property. It has agglomerated population, centralised the means of production, and has concentrated property in a few hands. The

necessary consequence of this was political centralisation. Independent, or but loosely connected provinces, with separate interests, laws, governments, and systems of taxation, became lumped together into one nation, with one government, one code of laws, one national class-interest, one frontier, and one customs-tariff.

The bourgeoisie, during its rule of scarce one hundred years, has created more massive and more colossal productive forces than have all preceding generations together. Subjection of Nature's forces to man, machinery, application of chemistry to industry and agriculture, steam-navigation, railways, electric telegraphs, clearing of whole continents for cultivation, canalisation of rivers, whole populations conjured out of the ground.

What earlier century had even a presentiment that such productive forces slumbered in the lap of social labour?

Karl Marx and Frederick Engels. **Manifesto of the Communist Party**, 1848

Crisis and expansion in rising capitalism

In its rising phase capitalism has room to breathe in order to realize the surplus value it obtains from the workers: it sells not only to the demand it creates itself -the workers' **wages**- but also to the independent peasants, the artisans and the other remnants of feudalism in its own territory and, increasingly, in the colonial and semi-colonial markets. With a whole world before it, it unleashes and awakens dormant and unthinkable productive forces all over the world. In this phase, the bourgeoisie presents itself as revolutionary vis-à-vis the previous ruling classes.

Of course the bourgeoisie is not homogeneous, nor does it ever stop competing within itself in the market. This competition took place - and still takes place- in two ways. The simplest and most obvious is to increase **surplus value in absolute terms**: simply to pay less per hour worked, lowering wages and lengthening the working day. But this strategy ended up aggravating the problem by reducing demand even further. The optimal way is to incorporate technologies that make it possible to produce more with fewer hours of labor, that is, to increase **relative surplus value** by incorporating new capital. In theory this would make it possible to raise wages and profits at the same time, but only on condition that the market grew as well.

In the rising period of capitalism the “classic” dynamic of capitalist crisis, in which overproduction of commodities, unemployment and falling wages go hand in hand and feed off each other, only materialized for brief periods and on a national scale. In other words, the tendency towards **pauperization** only materialized temporarily and locally.

Crises, national in principle, generally occurred when a limit or a fall in demand appeared in the internal extra-capitalist market. It was not that the peasants “ran out”, but that a poor harvest or the lack of communications infrastructure limited their capacity of absorption. To save accumulation, as each crisis approached there was an expansion of credit -to inflate demand artificially- and an increase in competition among capitalists to raise surplus value and hold on in the existing market.

Thus the typical economic cycle of rising capitalism would be:

--> expansion of the market and of demand -->
technological development -> rise in wages and fall in
the cost of more commodities --> improvement in the

living conditions of the workers --> increase in the mass of workers --> signs of market saturation --> expansion of credit --> appearance of unemployment and overproduction -> increase in absolute surplus value -->

In other words, each cycle closed with the “overproduction” of commodities and the pauperization of the workers, and began with a new expansion of markets both inside the national state (through disentanglement of lands, construction of communication routes, etc.) and outside it (conquest of colonies, national unification, imposition of free trade in new regions, etc.). Since this was still possible, because a vast pre-capitalist economy existed globally and even locally, each cycle of crisis closed with the expansion of a capitalism empowered by new technologies, more productive forces, a proletariat enlarged by newly dispossessed masses, new developments in transport, etc.

National liberation in rising capitalism

Rising capitalism is that of the expansion and rise of the bourgeoisie as the leading class. With the bourgeois revolutions the **nation** appears as the expression of the bourgeoisie’s project of articulating society as a whole. In the great empires in which regional bourgeoisies appear that can articulate an alternative for the whole territory of the estate-based state, the bourgeois revolution can take the form of **national liberation**, that is, of the separation of a territory from the dynastic state in order to become a national market under a national state of its own.

As long as there is no proletariat with a capacity to lead -as will be the case in the Russian empire and its most industrialized provinces, such as Poland or Finland, from 1900 onwards- these movements will be progressive. Progressive because they point towards the expansion of

the world market, the development of a mass working class within the new borders and, therefore, the formation of the **proletariat** as a universal class.

Trade unions, parliamentarism and workers' struggle

The revolutionary bourgeoisie, needing to lead all the social classes in its seizure of power, will equip itself with a “democratic program”. That is, within the framework of a general and historical tendency towards expansion, it will be able to grant the workers freedoms and guarantees for their own political organization. Within that framework, participation in parliaments in the manner of the parties of the Second International -without voting for the government's budgets or getting involved in the internal quarrels of the organization of the bourgeois state- plays a doubly positive role.

On the one hand, it helps to make the proletariat visible as a class in a state that has not yet absorbed into itself the expressions of bourgeois “civil society”, nor crushed the “workers' democracy” built by the Second International: that whole mass fabric of diverse organizations -from trade unions to cultural associations and cooperatives- with which the proletariat constitutes spaces and environments in which its consciousness can develop and assert itself in its universality, beyond the divisions of trade, workshop or territory.

On the other hand, it serves the working class to win concessions which, within the framework of rising capitalism, are lasting in the economic sphere and contribute to its constitution as a class in the political sphere: universal suffrage, reduction of the working day, etc.

Like parliaments, the trade unions, as wholesalers of labor power in the market, still represent the workers' need to band together in the face of a capitalism that, as a tendency, can grant real improvements in conditions of life, of work and of access to knowledge.

All this will disappear in capitalist **decadence** with the counter-revolution (**Stalinist**, **democratic** or **fascist**), the development of **state capitalism** and the consolidation of different forms of state totalitarianism.

Sectarianism



Organizational tendency that puts the particular interests and achievements of an organization above the general interests of the class movement and its historical perspective.

Origins and evolution of sectarianism

In the origins of the labor movement, the “socialist sects” saw themselves, and not the class, as the subject called upon to transform reality. They were already then an expression of weakness that reproduced in the first international mass political structures (1st and 2nd Internationals) the old messianic and quasi-religious forms of **utopianism**.

The development of socialist sectarianism and that of the real labor movement always stand in inverse ratio to each other. Sects are justified (historically) so long as the working class is not yet ripe for an independent historical movement. As soon as it has attained this maturity, all sects become essentially reactionary.

Incidentally, the history of the International has repeated what history in general shows us everywhere. What is obsolete tries to re-establish itself and maintain its positions within the newly achieved forms. The history of the International has also been a continuous struggle of the General Council against the sects and the amateur experiments which tried to assert themselves within the International against the real movement of the working class.

Karl Marx. Letter to Friedrich Bolte, November 23, 1871

The Second International knew sectarianism in the form of “organizational patriotism”, that is, as a tendency to deny debate and critical analysis of one’s own positions when they clashed with reality, so as not to “weaken confidence in the organization”. This type of sectarianism also occurred in the Third International and was used instrumentally first by **Zinovievism** and later by **Stalinism**. That is to say, it was used by the political expressions of the degeneration and capture of the International.

Semicolonial countries



Formally and legally independent states whose national capitals are nevertheless valorized on the basis of one or two primary export industries. The state acts as a redistributor of profits within the national capital, ensuring demand for the rest of the productive sectors, which necessarily play a subordinate role.

The general picture of the semicolonial world is that of an export sector that *subsidizes* the rest of investment through the state, a permanent tendency towards devaluation and monetary storms caused by the capital flight and currency hoarding that inevitably result from the lack of domestic investment outlets. And, as a consequence, difficulty in retaining and attracting foreign capital, and periodic crises of the public accounts.

Bases and consequences of the semicolonial economy

Historically, these are national capitals that arrived relatively late in global capitalist competition. In them, when capitalism was already entering its **imperialist phase**, a national industry was only just beginning to emerge. When it finally did, the domestic non-capitalist markets -craftsmen, independent peasantry, etc.- did not have the weight to generate sufficient demand for all the **value** that the export sector produced.

That is to say, they are national capitals that were born already with a pressing need to win foreign markets. In the countries of older capitalisms, this hunger for markets -and for outlets for the capital accumulated in each cycle- translated into **militarism** and a violent struggle for colonies, into a brutal increase in the centralization and concentration of capital that would end in the monopolies and the **state capitalism** of today, and into two world wars.

But these then *young* national capitals came from colonial economies. Apparently they had no shortage of buyers. The same imperialist powers that were savaging each other, sending millions of workers to die on the *fields of honor* to secure their profits, supplied themselves with raw materials of every kind, buying from them in massive quantities. Logically, the national capital concentrated even more in these export industries.

The paradox was that those who apparently had no problems exporting did not easily achieve the mass industrialization that had characterized **ascendant capitalism** either. The reason is understandable. The primary sector does not increase its productivity at the same speed as industry and services. It will soon find a limit to the placement of capital. Moreover, international demand will sooner or later hit a ceiling or fall. And what is even worse: international

prices will vary with the conjuncture and, as the capital of the buyers becomes concentrated in large monopolies, these will exercise more and more power over margins.

As a result, the accumulated profits of the primary sector will, at a certain point, have difficulty finding placement within the sector itself. And outside it... there is little or nothing. The situation of these countries had gone from colonial to... semicolonial.

How will the national capital try to get out of the impasse? By developing a particular form of **state capitalism** that we find today from Argentina and Chile to **Cuba** and **Mexico**, but also in a large part of Africa and Asia:

The state will load the primary sector with double-digit export taxes and with that will maintain a consumption base and an industry protected by tariffs and, in many cases, directly subsidized. That is to say, the state *guarantees* the realization of the surplus value that the market by itself could not realize, on the basis of the levy on the export of a couple of products on the international market.

In periods of *commercial peace* and rising prices for what they export -such as wars between great powers-, the aim of governments will be to strengthen the national capital by closing off imports and trying to create a domestic consumption base capable of serving as demand for industry.

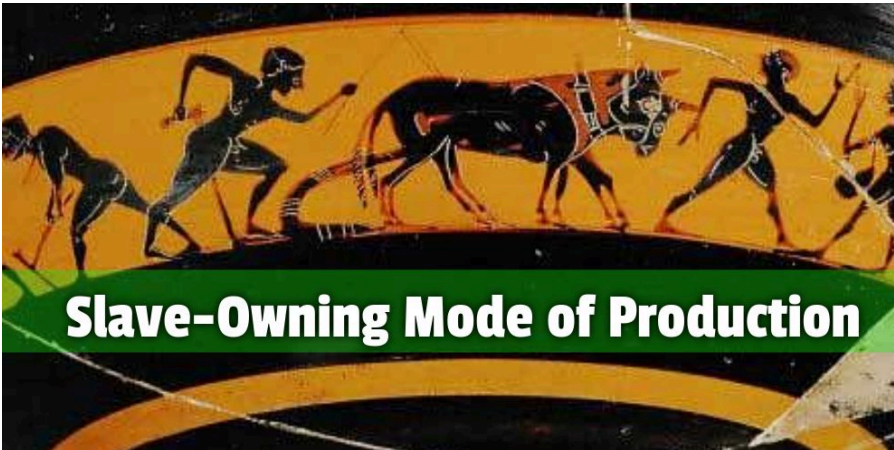
This is the whole secret of the cyclical South American *miracles*: the **rate of profit** rises in those periods, capital reproduces itself happily and the state has room to sell its demand-strengthening policies as *productive revolutions*. They are temporary joys. **The Venezuelan case is paradigmatic**. The Bolivian one even more so. The Argentine one, even though starting from a much more developed national capital, has followed the script. South Africa and Turkey too.

But there is more: the lack of a domestic market in which to sell new products leaves the national capital with an endemic lack of opportunities for placement. That is why the balance of payments deficit -capital inflows minus outflows- is endemic. The national capital of the semicolonial countries has always been *bleeding out*. And it does so not because of the supposedly *stateless* nature of the national capital or because of the *betrayal* of a creole bourgeoisie *sold out to imperialism*. It does so precisely because **semicolonial capitalism is imperialist**.

Lacking markets to which to export industrial goods and services, it exports capital. And those exports, which in moments of global crisis turn into massive flights, are what produce a **permanent tendency towards inflation and currency crisis**.

That in many cases the particular geographic and economic conditions do not allow expansionism does not deny the daily game of pressures and alliances, nor the economic reality as a whole. Imperialism, under semicolonial conditions, is exactly what we see in the semicolonial countries. Turkey and South Africa, so similar to other *peaceful* semicolonial countries but in different *neighborhoods*, show that the **militarist** and expansionist temptation beats within the general conditions of imperialism and manifests itself... when there is an opportunity.

Slave-owning mode of production



Slave-owning mode of production or slavery. Mode of production based on the physical ownership of most of the labor force by the exploiting class within the framework of an economy which is only very partially commodified.

General characteristics of the slave-owning mode of

production



The slave-owning mode of production spread throughout the ancient world from Hindustan to the Atlantic, sweeping away or transforming the civilizations based on the **Asiatic mode of production**. In Europe it lasted until the fall of the Roman Empire and the **development of feudalization**, in the Middle East until the spread of Islam and in much of Africa until the 19th century. Under this **mode of production** the state develops, and there appear the great empires of the West (from Persia to Africa), the first great trade networks, complex legal systems and the great ideological apparatuses of Antiquity.

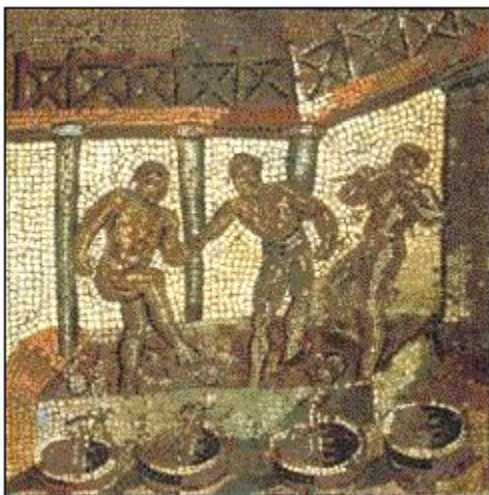
Its main defining elements are:

- Most of the labor force -and of the population- is the property of the families of the exploiting class and, to a lesser extent, of the state. Exploitation is personal and direct, and the worker, individually, is regarded as an object, like any other means of

production. The slave is not, however, a **commodity**; he is not produced to be sold (as would happen under US slave-owning capitalism), and his transferability or emancipation will depend on his position in the productive apparatus and on the situation of his owner.

- The buying and selling of the main means of production, the agricultural and mining estates with the slaves attached to them, is relatively rare and is highly regulated and ritualized. It is normally restricted to the ruling class, or at the very least to non-foreign “free men”.
- A commodity economy develops, with large trade circuits strictly in the hands of the ruling class and the state. These trade circuits will also be limited in their growth, since most of the population -the slaves- cannot even go to the market except on behalf of their masters.
- War and territorial expansion fulfill a double economic function: on the one hand, to capture slaves in order to offset their high cost of reproduction; on the other, to increase the land under production, easing the tensions between the ruling class and the other free classes.
- The state develops complex institutions and mechanisms -legal, political, ideological and welfare- to cushion the conflict between free classes and to repress both the rare slave uprisings -a true obsessive panic of the ruling classes- and the cyclical revolts of subjugated peoples and tribes which, with productive systems mostly based on communal ownership of land, will refuse to pay levies.

Class structure of the slave-owning mode of production





The nobility of the slave-owning mode of production is usually a remnant of a conquering people or tribe, or of a fusion of several. It monopolizes the ownership of land and the leadership of the state and of its ideological and bureaucratic apparatuses. It is internally hierarchical and stratified in various degrees. Alongside it there will appear in most cases a heterogeneous plebeian class that will press for access to the ownership of land and to gain weight in the state.

The slaves will form the bulk of the exploited class, the majority in society. Their origin in the conquered tribes and peoples is evident in Sparta. There it is the city -that is, the political structure of the free families- that is the collective owner of the helots, on whom it declares war every year so that they lose their human status and can be killed without this constituting a crime against property. Thanks to Thucydides we can deduce that they kept certain forms of communal exploitation of the land and marriage rights.

The state of permanent class war, and the fact that Thebans and Athenians regarded the helots as a subjugated people and not as mere slaves, nevertheless reveals that Sparta never fully established the slave-owning mode of production, which would not fully develop until the Roman conquest. Yet precisely for that reason it reveals the permanent tension that, more or less symbolized, the slave-owning state would sustain against the exploited class throughout its historical course.

Class struggle under the slave-owning mode of production and the emergence of feudalism

It could not be, however, the rare, though always threatening, slave revolts that would put the slave-owning mode of production in check, but rather the confrontation between nobility and plebeians over access to the ownership of new lands and of hands to exploit.

The relatively low productivity of the land and the high cost of reproduction of slaves forced recourse to wage labor at different times, for example in the **mining operations of the Roman Republic in Baetica and Cisalpine Gaul**. However, the limited commodification of the means of production, the demographic scarcity of subjugated “free peoples” and the absence of a developed commercial bourgeoisie -long-distance trade was in the hands of the nobility and the state bureaucracy- made the emergence of circuits of **capital accumulation** impossible.

Nevertheless, still in the rising period of the slave-owning mode of production, and in different forms depending on the civilization, the figure of the *colonate* will appear: hordes of assimilated nomadic peoples and freed slaves who are attached to a piece of land that they cultivate -generally under a communal regime and as subsistence agriculture- in exchange for rent.

The extension of this system during the decadence of the slave-owning mode of production -in Rome it was regulated from the 3rd century onwards- came in response to an underlying tendency towards depopulation and a lack of new slaves, materialized first of all as a fiscal crisis... and therefore as a crisis of the city. That is why it would interest, first of all, a part of the nobility and the peripheral bureaucracy.

The colonate serves them to overcome the conflict with the landowners of the interior -plebeians turned landowners- and to recover tax revenue at a time of political weakness and fragmentation. Not only because it serves to put new areas into production, but because taxes will be collected directly from the colonists, not from the landowners, and it is always easier to collect taxes from a fragmented and geographically isolated exploited class than from a propertied class that organizes social labor in a region where the coercive forces of the state have little presence.

The plebeians who had benefited from the distribution of plots and land for military services, or as a relief valve for the class tensions of the capital, will thus become landowners and will exploit a labor force that is legally free but attached to an agrarian estate it cannot leave.

The colonate actually prefigures **feudalism** within slave-owning society during its decadence. The arrival of the barbarian invasions would align the interests of this new class of agricultural landowners with those of the new invading nobility against the state apparatus of the cities, bringing about the definitive change of mode of production.

Socialism



Transitional phase between the seizure of power by the proletariat and the total decommodification of production. In it the economy, managed collectively by the workers themselves, is oriented towards decommodification, direct production according to needs and the increase in the productivity of the factors, especially of labor. It measures its success by the reduction of the working day, the increase in working-class consumption and the radical transformation of culture characteristic of a society that has resumed development.

Socialism as the liberation of productive forces constrained under decadent capitalism

Capitalism has generated an incredible amount of **productive forces** that it can hardly contain within itself any longer. Through the world market it has created the conditions for a global economic metabolism; through the development of communications,

cybernetics and robotics it has created a sketch -deformed, like everything it does- of the direct application of science to production, of social knowledge turned directly into a social worker (for example, when an entire production process is directed and controlled by an Artificial Intelligence that “learns” from the iterations of that same process).

They are organs of the human brain, created by the human hand; the objectified power of knowledge. The development of capital reveals to what degree general social knowledge has become an immediate productive force, and therefore to what degree the conditions of the process of social life itself have come under the control of the general intellect and been remodeled in accordance with it; to what degree the social productive forces are produced not only in the form of knowledge, but as immediate organs of social practice, of the real life process.

Karl Marx. *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*, 1857-1858

In doing so, it opens up the material possibility of a society that leaves behind “labor forced by necessity” and puts an end to **wage** slavery and **commodification**. But that material possibility becomes a social and “economic” impossibility in a system whose goal is the production of **surplus value** by means of **commodities**.

Capitalism on the one hand calls to life all the powers of Science and of Nature, as well as of social cooperation and exchange, in order to make the creation of wealth (relatively) independent of the labor time employed on it. On the other hand, it sets out to measure with labor time these gigantic social forces thus created, and to confine them within the limits required for the value already created to be preserved as value.

Productive forces and social relations -both of them different aspects of the development of the social individual- appear to capital solely as means, and are for it nothing more than means to produce on its narrow foundation. But in fact they constitute the material conditions for blowing that foundation sky-high. As Charles Wentworth Dilke says, “a nation is truly rich when the working day is 6 rather than 12 hours. Wealth is not command over surplus labour time,”but disposable time, apart from that used in direct production, for every individual and the whole society”.

Karl Marx. **Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy**, 1857-1858

Objectives of the economy under socialism

The road to **communism** involves progressively “appropriating” increases in productivity, until labor “forced by necessity” is reduced to zero.

Necessary labor time will be aligned on the one hand with the needs of the social individual, while on the other hand we will witness such a growth of the productive forces that leisure will increase for everyone, while production will be calculated according to the wealth of all. And since real wealth is the full productive power of all individuals, the measure will then be not labor time but disposable time.

Karl Marx. **Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy**, 1857-1858

Organization of the economy under socialism

Under socialism, that is, in a transitional economy, the productive apparatus is managed by the workers as a whole in the manner of a gigantic cooperative federation which jointly plans the broad outlines of production so as to consciously subvert the meaning of reserves, subordinating them to the needs of expanding consumption and of reducing the labor time necessary to make it possible; that is, to the strategy of simultaneously increasing the productivity of labor -and, secondarily, of natural resources- and reducing labor “enslaved to necessity”, that is, wage labor.

In his main work, Marx gave and interpreted the formula of capitalist reproduction: $c + v + s$, where c designates constant capital or instruments of labor, v variable capital, the wages or means of subsistence for the workers, and s surplus value or value added in the labor process, part of which is consumed by the capitalists and the other part invested (capitalized) for the further growth of production. The latter therefore necessarily passes through the expanded accumulation of capital.

In bourgeois society, c increases only to the extent that the capitalists realize surplus value by selling the commodities in which it is contained. And lately, to make it easier to sell at better prices, they resort to the pure and simple destruction of part of production. For its part, v increases only in a certain proportion to c .

In a planned economy (it goes without saying: a non-capitalist one), on the contrary, the increase of c depends solely and exclusively on the needs of v , which covers the whole population, and on the magnitude of s . This turning inside out abolishes capitalist relations of production. c ceases to be capital, v is no longer the price of labor power that reduces the majority of the population to meager consumption, and s in turn appears in the form of newly created goods, ready for greater individual and collective consumption. There are no longer profits, that is, other people's labor appropriated by the bourgeois, by officials or by institutions.

Expanded reproduction must therefore be planned as a response to the direct demands of the human whole that makes up society; it has ceased to be accumulation of capital. In other words, during

the transitional period the extension of consumption in its many orders presides over expanded accumulation (the former constant capital) and determines it.

G. Munis. **Party-State, Stalinism, Revolution**, 1974

Daily life under socialism

Politically, socialism is a **dictatorship** of the **proletariat** as a class over an organization of production that is still commodity-based. Political power is exercised by the workers through their own assembly bodies and the direct control of the cooperative structure of production.

In daily life, socialism is the battle to reduce the cost in hours of labor of producing each thing, making its consumption free. Its history will be that of the conquest of free provision of more and more products and services, in parallel with the reduction of the working day, until production as a whole loses the condition not only of **commodity** but of “scarce” good, at which point **communism** will have been reached.

The abolition of the capitalist form of production makes it possible to restrict the working day to necessary labor. The latter, however, other conditions being equal, would extend its territory. On the one hand, because the worker's conditions of life would be more ample and his vital demands greater. On the other hand, because a part of present surplus labor would be counted as necessary labor, that is, the labor required to form a social fund for reserve and accumulation.

The more the productive power of labor increases, the more the working day can be shortened, and the more it is shortened, the more the intensity of labor can increase. Considered socially, the productivity of labor also increases with its economical use. This implies not only economizing the means of production, but avoiding all useless labor. While the capitalist mode of production imposes economy within each individual enterprise, its anarchic system of competition generates the most unbridled squandering of society's means of production and labor-powers, creating in addition a host of functions that are at present indispensable, but in and of themselves superfluous.

Given the intensity and productive power of labor, the part of the social working day necessary for material production will be all the shorter, and the part of time won for the free intellectual and social activity of individuals all the longer, the more evenly labor is distributed among all the able-bodied members of society.

Karl Marx. Capital, 1867

Socialism in one country



A political doctrine and practice born as a banner of counter-revolution in Russia, which asserted that a world revolution was not necessary to “build” socialism and that the Russian state, rechristened the “socialist fatherland”, was the main conquest of the universal proletariat.

The main consequence of socialism in one country was the primacy of the international relations of Russian **state capitalism** over the development of the world revolution, and the unconditional subordination of the International and its various national parties to the defense of the “socialist fatherland”.

Socialism in one country in practice

In practice its adoption asserted the interests of the Russian **bureaucracy** above the world revolution. Once it was imposed on the national parties by the Comintern, these parties paved the way for

ever bloodier defeats of the proletariat (Britain in 1926, the handing over of the Chinese revolution to the Kuomintang in 1926-27, Hitler's rise to power in Germany...) until they became the direct organizers of the counter-revolution and of the massacre of the workers in Spain in 1936-37, opening the way to a new imperialist world war in which, after two years of alliance with Germany, they would call for lining up behind the Allied imperialist powers.

The break with internationalism, that is, with the struggle of the world proletariat, was officially marked in the mid-1920s by the hoax of “socialism in one country”. It brought with it the Stalinization of the Communist International and the consequent transformation of its parties into organs for the para-military or military defense, as the case may be, of Russia’s borders. By natural extension, also into organs of imperialist expansion, since between defense and expansion there stands only a military incident, when not simply a diplomatic one.

The first directly military use of a party took place in China. Shortly after the destruction of the soviets by Chiang Kai-shek and Mao Tse-tung in coalition, Moscow gave the order to launch an undeclared war of harassment against the former, supplying the indispensable logistical support and a protective border. The fundamental method of its foreign policy was established once and for all: first of all keep the proletarian revolution at a distance and, if necessary, crush it; then, direct or indirect military defense of Russian interests.

The abandonment of Germany to Hitler, the Popular Front, the destruction of the Spanish revolution, all belong to this political line, which denies and prevents the struggle of the exploited class in each country and internationally. With the war, this line culminates in the installation of Russia as the second imperialist power, though not without material help from the first. Then the meaning of the foreign policy inaugurated in China is laid bare: rejection of the communist revolution at all costs, as the condition for the free play among imperialist powers.

All the operations mounted by Russia (Korea, Vietnam, Cuba, Bengal, etc.) differ from the military-police intervention in East Berlin, Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Poland not by their nature

but by mere geographical accident, by taking place in the American zone. There is strict continuity and completion between Mao Tse-tung's so-called "long march", the crushing of the revolution in Spain and the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968.

G. Munis. *Party-State, Stalinism, Revolution*, 1974

Soviet



Committees, commissions, workers' councils or "soviets" are bodies of delegates elected directly by the workers' assemblies, accountable exclusively to them and revocable at any moment. They are born from the extension of the mass strike and, as the struggles develop, they tend to become the form of organization of the class as a whole as the "party" of bourgeois society; that is, they assert a "dual power" that prepares them to become the organ through which the class will exercise its "dictatorship". They then become a real "transitional state" which, as the revolution becomes global, will be able to undertake the decommodification of society.

Origin

With the development of imperialism, in the last decade of rising capitalism, the class struggle intensifies and begins to show new forms all over the world. The main one, the mass strike, is very far from the syndicalist fantasy of the “revolutionary general strike”. The “unexpected”, unplanned mass strike merges with the revolution. There is no macro-organization calling it, no structure of full-time officials, no gigantic strike fund.

Therefore, if the Russian Revolution teaches us anything, it is above all that the mass strike is not artificially “made”, not “decided” at random, not “propagated”; it is a historical phenomenon which, at a given moment, results from social conditions with historical inevitability.

It is therefore not by abstract speculations on the possibility or impossibility, the utility or the harmfulness of the mass strike that the problem can be understood or discussed. The factors and social conditions out of which the mass strike grows in the present phase of the class struggle must be examined. In other words, it is not a matter of the subjective criticism of the mass strike from the standpoint of what is desirable, but of the objective investigation of the sources of the mass strike from the standpoint of what is historically inevitable.

Rosa Luxemburg. *The Mass Strike, the Political Party and the Trade Unions*, 1906

But if the mass strike is the primary form taken by the constitution of the class in the imperialist era, the constitution of the class as the party of society will come from the extension and fusion of the workers’ assemblies in the course of those struggles. Assemblies that elect committees accountable to them and revocable at any moment.

These committees, an evolution of the strike committees, become councils (in Russian, “soviets”) of delegates, which will expand to become territorial structures of class organization.

The soviet organized the working masses, led strikes and demonstrations, armed the workers and protected the population against pogroms. However, other revolutionary organizations did the same before it, at the same time and after it, and they never had the same importance. The secret of this importance lies in the fact that this assembly arose organically from the proletariat during a direct struggle, determined in some way by events, which the working class waged “for the conquest of power”.

If the proletarians on the one hand, and the reactionary press on the other, gave the soviet the title of “proletarian government”, it was because this organization was in fact nothing other than the embryo of a revolutionary government. The soviet held power to the extent that the revolutionary might of the working-class districts guaranteed it; it fought directly for the conquest of power to the extent that power still remained in the hands of a military and police monarchy.

Before the appearance of the soviet we find among the industrial workers numerous revolutionary organizations, led above all by social democracy. But these were formations “within the proletariat”, and their immediate aim was to struggle “to gain influence over the masses”. The soviet, on the contrary, immediately became “the very organization of the proletariat”; its aim was to struggle for “the conquest of revolutionary power”.

Being the point of concentration of all the revolutionary forces of the country, the soviet did not dissolve into revolutionary democracy; it was and remained the organized expression of the class will of the proletariat. In its struggle for power it applied methods that naturally proceeded from the character of the

proletariat as a class: these methods relate to the role of the proletariat in production, to the importance of its numbers and to its social homogeneity.

Moreover, while fighting for power at the head of all the revolutionary forces, the soviet did not for a moment cease to guide the spontaneous action of the working class; it not only contributed to the organization of the trade unions but even intervened in particular disputes between workers and employers. And precisely because the soviet, as the democratic representation of the proletariat in the revolutionary epoch, stood at the crossroads of all its class interests, it came from the start under the all-powerful influence of social democracy.

That party then had the opportunity to use the immense advantages that its grounding in Marxism gave it; being capable of orienting political thought in the existing “chaos”, it had no need to make any effort to turn the soviet, which formally belonged to no party, into the organizing apparatus of its influence.

Leon Trotsky, *Conclusions of 1905*, 1909

Committees and trade unions in the great revolutionary wave of 1917-37 and after

These workers' committees and councils, or “soviets”, will also be the protagonists of the revolutionary wave opened by the first great imperialist world war, confronting and overcoming the *trade unions*, which by then were already openly defending the state into which they were being integrated. Within the framework of the *mass strike* they evolve from strike committees into “soviets”, from a system of mass organization into an organ of class power in the very course of the revolution.

The Russian revolutions of 1905 and 1917 gave rise to a new fighting body that springs from social reality itself: the factory committee or council, democratically elected in the workplaces, whose members are revocable at any moment. They were seen to appear in St. Petersburg and Moscow at the end of the 1905 revolution, whose high point they mark. However, still too weak and inexperienced, they proved incapable of fulfilling the task they had set themselves, the overthrow of tsarism.

They are seen to reappear from the very beginning of the 1917 revolution, now more sure of themselves, and they would soon spread throughout the country. Spurred on by Lenin and Trotsky, they carry out the October revolution. Meanwhile, the trade unions trail behind them, holding back the movement with all their might. Not a single revolutionary initiative is owed to them; on the contrary. John Reed, in his "Ten Days That Shook the World", brings out their hostility to the soviets on several occasions, to the point that the railway workers had to break union discipline in order to carry from Petrograd to Moscow the reinforcements needed to put down the counter-revolution of the junkers in the latter city.

The German workers, soldiers and sailors who rose up in 1918 did not for a single moment think of turning to the trade unions to lead their struggle against the imperial regime; in the midst of the fighting they created their committees of struggle, which took over the factories and the ships and drove out the capitalist authorities. The trade unions intervened only later, to put a brake on the struggle, to contain the revolution within bourgeois limits, that is, to betray it. That spectacle definitively clarified the thinking of the German revolutionaries and showed Herman Gorter and the

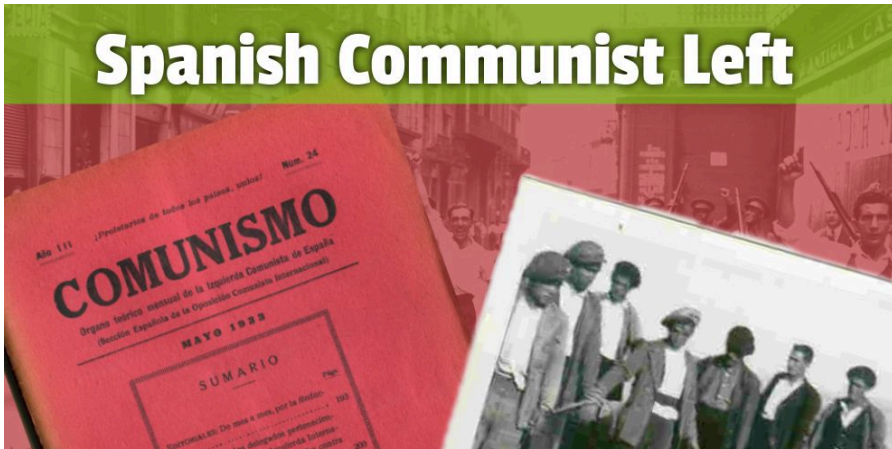
German-Dutch left the way forward, making him in that period one of the first theoreticians of left communism and of a genuine class-against-class tactic.

In the Spanish revolution of 1936, from the first days of the insurrection committees sprang up everywhere, like mushrooms after a storm. But unlike in Russia, where the soviets relegated the trade unions to the background, here the latter smothered the committees (juntas). The result: Stalinism triumphs without the trade unions really opposing it. They even come together to collaborate in its triumph, through a CNT-UGT liaison committee, and the revolution is betrayed by Stalinism, which opens the door to Franco.

G. Munis, “The factory committees, motor of the social revolution”, in “Unions Against Revolution”, 1960

When the miners’ strike in Asturias in 1962 gave the first sign of a new sharpening of the class struggle after the reconstruction that followed the second imperialist world war, the phenomenon was reaffirmed. The strike committees in the pits spontaneously began to organize themselves into “workers’ commissions” as the isolated strikes turned into a mass strike. Francoist repression would give the Stalinist PCE the opportunity to capture them and “unionize” them. A “two-pronged” (pincer) strategy that we will see again and again from the mass strikes of 1968-69 onwards, and which in Poland would reach its peak with the enthronement of “Solidarność”.

Spanish Communist Left



Internationalist organization founded in Liège in 1930 that would regroup the founding current of the Spanish Communist Party (PCE in Spanish) of 1920 and would join the International Left Opposition as its Spanish section. It would inspire the communist lefts of Argentina, Uruguay and Chile.

Brief history of the Spanish communist left

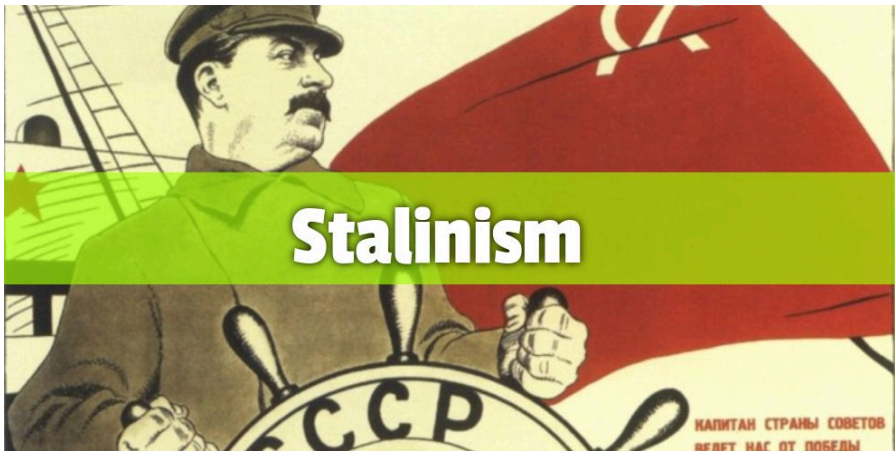
In 1930, a group of Spanish migrant and exiled workers in Liège (Belgium) formed the “Spanish Communist Organization” (OCE in Spanish) around Francisco García Lavid (“Henri Lacroix”). The OCE would grow rapidly, regrouping the founding current of the PCE (Esteban Bilbao, Juan Andrade), of the Red International of Labor Unions (Nin) and a new generation of militants who joined already under the banners of the International **Communist Left** (Fernández Grandizo -“Munis”-, Félix Galán, Luís Rastrollo -“SEM”-, etc.). The OCE

would take part in founding the Spanish section of the International Left Opposition and would change its name in 1932 (2nd National Conference) to “Spanish Communist Left” (ICE in Spanish).

In 1935, the ICE split into two tendencies: the one that gave priority to remaining within the International Opposition (Bilbao, Fersen, Munis) and the majority that, under the influence of Andrade and Nin, chose to merge with the centrist and regionalist Catalan group BOC to gain critical mass, forming the POUM.

After the split, the current was rebuilt around the minority that remained in the International Left Opposition (the “Bolshevik-Leninist Group”). They would be the only Marxists in Spain to take a clear stand for the revolution, fighting at the same time in the militias against Franco and confronting the Republican state alongside the workers in the May Days of 1937. In 1938 they would join the Fourth International as its Spanish section and, from 1942 onwards, would form the nucleus of **its internationalist left**.

Stalinism



The ideological form taken by the consolidation of the counter-revolution in Russia, from where it spread through the subjugation and instrumentalization of the Third International from its Fifth Congress onwards and through Russian imperialist expansion from the 1940s. Its main characteristic is the identification as “socialism” of a state capitalism based on the party-state fusion and the affirmation of a state-run, centralized and militarized organization of production. Although Stalinism takes particular forms in different countries and generates different currents serving and depending on the origins of different state bourgeoisies (Maoism, Hoxhaism, Castroism, etc.), they all share the exaltation of wage labor and an open nationalism, completed depending on the case by anti-Semitic, xenophobic or openly racist tendencies, an obscurantist culture and a retrograde sexual morality.

Stalinism and counter-revolution

The triumph of the October Revolution was followed by a civil war and the invasion of the former Russian Empire by the main capitalist powers of the time. In the besieged Russian state, with its proletariat scattered by famine and war, holding out while waiting for the World Revolution meant above all rebuilding relations with the peasant petty bourgeoisie in order to feed the cities. The “New Economic Policy” (NEP) was adopted, a desperate attempt at resistance that consisted fundamentally in halting the attack on capitalist relations and organizing a **state capitalism** that would rebuild the productive framework.

Rebuilding production by creating, practically out of nothing, a “state capitalism under the leadership of the proletariat” (Lenin) is in itself something desperate. But it was even more so considering that the soviet structure had been emptied along with the factories. Only the Bolshevik party remained as the last guarantor of the revolutionary program. Its youngest cadres, trained during the war, would be the ones to take the reconstruction of national capital into their hands. With the soviets languishing -in the best of cases- the leaders sent by the party began to turn into real “factory dictators” and collectively to form a **bureaucracy** that would gradually take shape within the party and align itself more and more around the Stalinist faction.

The program of the bureaucratic faction would converge towards the primacy of reconstituted capital in every field: from differential wages to foreign policy. That is where the banner of “**socialism in one country**” comes from. What were at first apparently pragmatic attitudes would soon become a clash of class interests. For the **bureaucracy**, if the revolutionary movement was not strong enough to overthrow capitalism in the central countries, it had at least to secure non-intervention against Russia by supporting non-belligerent governments.

The problem is that this translated first into precipitation, smothering the remnants of the German revolutionary movement, and then into a head-on clash between the interests of the world revolution -which needed to break with “**national liberation**” movements in order to develop- and those of the Russian state, which favored nationalists and “progressives” according to its own interests. The betrayal by the Russian party and the International of the mass strike in Britain first, and above all of the Chinese revolution immediately afterwards, showed with piles of corpses that the formula “**socialism in one**

country” meant nothing other than the subordination of the revolutionary movements of the world to the supposed “construction of socialism in Russia”.

From then on, each consolidation of the state bureaucracy born of the Bolshevik party would become a new setback for the revolution, and each setback of the revolution in a new country would strengthen the bureaucracy in Russia. All in a “crescendo” that would culminate in the policy of “popular fronts” -alliance with the “democratic” sectors of the bourgeoisie- and the open leadership of the Stalinized CPs in the repression of the other great European revolution: Spain.

With all this, what kind of property relations did the October Revolution establish? Certainly not socialist ones. That revolution was made by true communists, but their sole aim was permanent revolution (Lenin in the April Theses), waiting for the proletariat of the developed countries to come to their aid. Even the tactics of the Bolsheviks before the seizure of power were entirely inspired by that perspective, which is enough to reject them at the present hour.

After the magnificent attempt called war communism, which, far from responding only to the emergencies of the civil war, aimed directly at the disappearance of wage labor, there was a turn towards state capitalism as Lenin conceived it: capitalist relations of production and distribution, but real political power of the proletariat, based on the soviets. The effective preservation of that power was, in Lenin's eyes, the only guarantee of a future socialist development; it would allow it to wait for the victory of other revolutions in industrialized countries and to pass together to the transitional society and to communism.

It can be stated today that the only truly socialist thing that existed in the former Soviet Union was, despite its defects, political power. Once the power of the soviets had disappeared and the Bolshevik party had been corrupted, there was nothing left but state capitalism, pure and simple, which went on consolidating itself and recognizing itself as such from the NEP to the five-year plans. Property, production and distribution relations were brought back to the most rigorous capitalist norms.

Thus was carried out a counter-revolution such as history had never known, whose main concern is to prevent any proletarian revolution in the world. Is any more proof needed after the surrender of power to Hitler in 1933, after the crushing of the

Spanish revolution, not by Franco but by the Russian government and its Spanish Stalinists, after the imperialist policy of national resistance and all the reactionary work of Moscow and its parties since the postwar period?

“Critique of the Draft Manifesto for a New Workers’ Party of the Workers’ League of England”, 1961

State



The state is a social apparatus that appears with the division into classes in order to keep society constrained within the prevailing social relations, preventing it from collapsing as a result of the class struggle. It is therefore fundamentally conservative and will present itself as “neutral”, above the classes in conflict, although it cannot be anything other than a tool of the oppression and exploitation of one class by another.

Origin

The state is the direct product of the split of society into classes.

A society had just emerged which, by virtue of the general economic conditions of its existence, had had to divide itself into free men and slaves, into rich exploiters and poor exploited; a society which not only could not reconcile these antagonisms but, on the contrary, was compelled to drive them to their utmost limits. A society of this kind could exist only in the midst of an open and incessant struggle of these classes against one another, or under the rule of a third power which, standing apparently above the warring classes, suppressed their open conflicts and allowed the class struggle only in the economic field, in so-called legal form.

Frederick Engels. *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, 1884

But the fact that it presents and places itself “above” the class conflict does not mean that it is not part of it. The state is an instrument of class exploitation and oppression.

As the State arose from the need to hold class antagonisms in check, and as, at the same time, it arose in the midst of the conflict between those classes, it is, as a rule, the State of the most powerful class, of the economically dominant class, which, with its help, also becomes the politically dominant class, thereby acquiring new means for holding down and exploiting the oppressed class. Thus the ancient State was, above all, the State of the slave-owners for holding the slaves down; the feudal State was the organ the nobility used to hold down the serf peasants; and the modern representative State is the instrument capital uses to exploit wage labor.

Frederick Engels. *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, 1884

The state is not a mechanical, blind tool of the ruling class. It is, above all, a protector of the social order whose main mission is to constrain the permanent struggle that strains the seams of a society torn apart by the existence of classes and exploitation. Its first objective is to hold those seams together in order to ensure the preservation of the order of exploitation and, with it, its own self-preservation. This gives it a certain autonomy even with respect to the ruling class, especially in those periods when the class struggle stagnates without losing virulence and threatens to produce what the Manifesto described as “the common ruin of the contending classes”. That is why Engels continues the previous paragraph by pointing out that...

Nevertheless, by way of exception, there are periods in which the warring classes are so balanced that the power of the State, as apparent mediator, acquires a certain momentary independence in relation to both. Such was the case of the absolute monarchy of the 17th and 18th centuries, which kept the balance even between the nobility and the bourgeoisie.

Frederick Engels. *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, 1884

Periods of open struggle between two historical exploiting classes, one decadent and the other ascendant, are a struggle for the state, to take control of it, not to destroy it. Both classes are interested in keeping the social whole dominated and cohesive for exploitation, albeit under different social and legal relations. Destroying the state would be equivalent to destroying the conditions under which each expects to build the forms of its own domination.

Before the exploiting classes the state thus appears as “power” itself, and that is why, at least in the moments before and after the great revolutions, the struggle between the new and old masters is

preceded and followed by a guerrilla war, a game of positions within the state itself. When the economically dominant class is also politically dominant, the state itself then appears as the terrain of a **bureaucratically cushioned** struggle between the old class, which resists giving up political power, and the new class, which is waiting to take its place or has already taken it.

The proletariat and the state

For the bourgeoisie as a class, during much of its historical life, the state presented itself as a body to some extent external to itself, precisely because it was necessary for exercising its social domination. That appearance vanishes when the leading role in the class struggle is taken by the proletariat, the first non-exploiting class that aspires to take political power and which therefore...

...cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery, and wield it for its own purposes.

The centralized state power, with its ubiquitous organs of standing army, police, **bureaucracy**, clergy, and judicature – organs wrought after the plan of a systematic and hierarchic division of labor – originates from the days of absolute monarchy, serving nascent middle class society as a mighty weapon in its struggle against feudalism. (...)

At the same pace at which the progress of modern industry developed, widened, intensified the class antagonism between capital and labor, the state power assumed more and more the character of the national power of capital over labor, of a public force organized for social enslavement, of an engine of class despotism. After every revolution marking a progressive phase in the class struggle, the purely repressive character of the state power stands out in bolder and bolder relief.

Karl Marx. **The Civil War in France**, 1871

Forms and objectives of the workers' state

With the entry of capitalism first into its **imperialist** stage and, almost immediately afterwards, into its **decadence**, the forms of the workers' struggle are transformed. The **mass strike** appears, and with it the workers' councils or "**soviets**", the organization of the class as a whole which, in the course of the revolution, become the form of that "transitional state" through which the working class imposes, that is, exercises its **dictatorship**, over the logic of capital.

The Soviets of Workers', Soldiers', Peasants' and other Deputies are not understood, not only in the sense that the majority do not clearly see their class significance and their role in the Russian revolution; they are not understood also in the sense that they represent a new form, or rather a new type, of state.

The most perfect, the most advanced type of bourgeois state is the parliamentary democratic republic. Power is vested in parliament; the state machine, the apparatus and organs of government are the usual ones: a standing army, a police and a bureaucracy that is practically irremovable, privileged and placed above the people.

But since the end of the 19th century, revolutionary epochs have brought forward a higher type of democratic state, a state which in certain respects, as Engels put it, ceases to be a state, "is no longer a state in the proper sense of the word". This is a state of the Paris Commune type, which replaces the army and the police, divorced from the people, by the direct and immediate arming of the people itself. Therein lies the essence of the Commune, which has been so slandered by bourgeois writers, and to which, among other things, they have wrongly attributed the intention of immediately "introducing" socialism.

The Russian revolution began to create, first in 1905, and then in 1917, a state of precisely this type. A Republic of Soviets of Workers', Soldiers', Peasants' and other Deputies, united in an All-Russia Constituent Assembly of people's representatives or in a Council of Soviets, etc.: that is what is already taking shape in the life of our country, now, at this moment, on the initiative of a people of many millions who are creating a democracy on their own, in their own way, without waiting for prior authorization, without waiting until the Cadet professors draft their bills for a bourgeois parliamentary republic, and without waiting until the

pedants and routine-worshippers of petty-bourgeois “Social-Democracy”, like Messrs. Plekhanov or Kautsky, stop distorting the Marxist theory of the state. (...)

The bourgeois parliamentary republic hampers and stifles the independent political life of the masses, their direct participation in the democratic building of the whole state, from the bottom up. The Soviets of Workers’ and Soldiers’ Deputies do the opposite.

The Soviets reproduce the type of state which was being evolved by the Paris Commune and which Marx described as “the political form at last discovered under which to work out the economic emancipation of labour”.

“The tasks of the proletariat in our revolution”. Lenin, 1917

With the “semi-state” of the workers’ councils, that new form of **dictatorship** which is nothing but the imposition of the satisfaction of generic and universal human needs can confront the law of value and begin the decommodification of society, that is, take the first steps towards **socialism** from the first phases of its worldwide extension. That is its essential objective.

The revolution will be a social revolution in the very place where it arises, and not simply a political one (the seizure of power by the proletariat). A workers' state, let us stress, cannot in any case be maintained if the international revolution does not break out, which is why socialism cannot be established in a single country. Let us add that the suppression of capitalist relations is in no way equivalent to socialism (nor to communism!!) but only -and in all this we take for granted that it is a destruction carried out by the working class itself- a step towards socialism. But this step, we maintain, must be taken as quickly as possible through the immediate attack on and suppression of wage labor, even before the proletariat takes power on an almost global scale. Without this, however proletarian the power may be, it will turn into its opposite, since the devastation of the revolution is not a clear and immediately perceptible break.

Even if it occurs in only a single industrial district, a social revolution takes the standpoint of the whole, because it is a protest of man against dehumanized life, because it starts from the standpoint of each real individual, because the community from which the individual strives not to remain separated is the true community of man, human nature. The political spirit of a revolution, on the contrary, consists in the tendency of the classes without political power to put an end to their isolation from the state and from power. Its standpoint is that of the state, an abstract whole that exists only through its separation from real life, and that would be unthinkable without the organized contradiction between the general idea and the individual existence of man. In keeping with its limited and ambiguous nature, a revolution with a political spirit thus creates a ruling sphere in society at the expense of society itself.... Every revolution dissolves the old society: in this sense it is social. Every revolution overthrows the old power: in this sense it is political.

Marx in The King of Prussia and Social Reform. By a Prussian

“Letter to the Third International Conference of groups of the ‘Communist Left’”, FOR, 1980.

State capitalism



The form that the organization of capital takes in decadent capitalism. It materializes the concentration of finance capital - the union of banking and industrial capital - and the monopolies within and around the state. Socially it promotes the integration of the remnants of the former exploiting classes with the bourgeoisie and the state bureaucracy, and politically it rests on the end of civil society and the integration of broad layers of the petty bourgeoisie as middle cadres in the state apparatus and big business.

Origin of state capitalism

It is not that the bourgeoisie has no fatherland. It is that the “fatherland”, the national state, is theirs; it is they themselves, organized against the rest of society.

Imperialism will already drive a reorganization of the bourgeoisie. Little by little, capitalist competition is replaced by small groups of large companies born of mergers and gigantic concentrations of capital. These companies, until then the owners of the banks, become the property of the banks. And they all become intertwined with the state in what is nothing but a form of socialization, that is, the organized orientation of all of society towards a single objective: the **accumulation** of capital. This socialization also meant a “socialization of the concept of capitalist” through, initially, the joint-stock company and the emergence of a “managerial” bourgeoisie.

The triumph of the descending tendency will not necessarily appear as an absolute numerical decrease in medium-sized enterprises. It must appear, first, as a progressive increase in the minimum capital indispensable for the functioning of enterprises in the old branches of production; and second, in the constant shortening of the interval of time during which small capitalists have the opportunity to exploit the new branches of production.

The result, as far as the small capitalist is concerned, is an ever shorter duration of his stay in the new industry and an ever faster change in the methods of production as a field for investment. For the middle capitalist strata as a whole there is an ever faster process of social assimilation and dissimulation. [...]

What, in the last analysis, does the economic phenomenon of the joint-stock company mean? It represents, on the one hand, the unification of a number of small fortunes into one large capital for production. It represents, on the other hand, the separation of production from capitalist ownership. That is, it denotes that a double victory has been won over the capitalist mode of production: but still on capitalist foundations.

What, then, do the statistics cited by Bernstein, according to which a growing number of shareholders participate in capitalist enterprises, mean? The statistics demonstrate precisely this: today a capitalist enterprise does not correspond, as before, to a single owner of capital but to a series of capitalists.

Consequently, the economic notion of “capitalist” no longer corresponds to an isolated individual. The industrial capitalist of today is a collective person, composed of hundreds, even

thousands of individuals. The category of “capitalist” has become a social category. It has been “socialized”, within the framework of capitalist society.

Rosa Luxemburg. *Reform or Revolution*, 1899

This process, which starts in the early stages of *imperialism* and becomes generalized and radicalized throughout capitalist *decadence*, changes the structure and composition of the bourgeoisie: the boundaries between the old landowning classes, the captains of industry, the bankers and the high state *bureaucracy* will become blurred. A good part of the bourgeoisie will cease to hold the legal ownership of a large industry and will instead become shareholders in financial consortia.

Others not even that. In a good part of the new states that came out of *national liberation* during *decadence*, starting with Turkey, the first country to achieve it in the imperialist epoch, the new national bourgeoisie will be made up mainly of military officers, *high bureaucrats*, managers, bankers and leaders of the very political apparatus of the new state... from which they will generate business bourgeoisies.

The incomes that sustain and incentivize the contemporary bourgeoisie all over the world have in many cases lost the direct relation to a concrete part of production that they had when the bourgeoisie was made up of individual factory owners. The ways of distributing income within the ruling class are by now so diverse and imaginative that they are sometimes classified simply as “corruption”.

Although it may seem remote today, it is something very similar to what the Spanish ruling class experienced during the 1914 war or, a little later, the Argentine ruling class, the matrix of today’s state

capitalism, in which the state bourgeoisie is described as an amalgam of “castes”, “oligarchs”, “apparatchiks” and “power networks”.

This transformation of competition into monopoly is one of the most important, if not the most important, phenomena of the economy of capitalism in recent times. (...)

(...) Competition becomes monopoly. The result is a gigantic progress in the socialization of production. In particular, the process of technical invention and improvement is also socialized.

This has nothing to do with the old free competition of scattered employers who did not know each other and who produced for an unknown market. Concentration has reached such a point that an approximate inventory can be made of all the sources of raw materials (for example, iron ore deposits) of a country and even, as we shall see, of several countries and of the whole world. Not only is this calculation made, but gigantic monopolist associations seize those sources.

An approximate calculation is made of the capacity of the market, which the associations mentioned “share out” among themselves by contract. Skilled labor is monopolized, the best engineers are hired, and the means of transport and communication - the railways in America and the shipping companies in Europe and America - fall into the hands of the monopolists.

Capitalism, in its imperialist stage, leads directly to the socialization of production in its most varied aspects; it drags the capitalists, so to speak, against their will and their consciousness, into a certain new social order, a transitional one from absolute freedom of competition to complete socialization. (...)

We are no longer dealing with a competitive struggle between large and small enterprises, between technically backward and technically advanced establishments. We are faced with the

strangling by the monopolists of all those who do not submit to the monopoly, to its yoke, to its arbitrariness. (...)

The development of capitalism has reached a point where, although commodity production still “reigns” as before and is regarded as the basis of the whole economy, in reality it has already been undermined, and the main profits go to the “geniuses” of financial manipulation. These manipulations and swindles are rooted in the socialization of production; but the immense progress of humanity, which has achieved this socialization, benefits... the speculators. Later on we shall see how, “on this basis”, the petty-bourgeois and reactionary critique of capitalist imperialism dreams of going back to “free”, “peaceful” and “honest” competition. (...)

The suppression of crises by the cartels is a fable of bourgeois economists, who spare no effort to embellish capitalism. On the contrary, the monopoly created in certain branches of industry increases and aggravates the chaos inherent in capitalist production as a whole. (...)

The scattered capitalists come to form one collective capitalist. When it keeps a current account for several capitalists, the bank apparently performs a purely technical, merely auxiliary operation.

But when this operation grows to gigantic proportions, it turns out that a handful of monopolists subordinate the commercial and industrial operations of the whole of capitalist society, putting themselves in a position - through their banking relations, current accounts and other financial operations - first, to know exactly the situation of the various capitalists, then to control them, to influence them by widening or restricting credit, facilitating it or

hindering it, and finally to decide their fate entirely, to determine their profitability, to deprive them of capital or to allow them to increase it rapidly and in immense proportions, etc. (...)

At the same time there develops, so to speak, a personal union of the banks with the largest industrial and commercial enterprises, the merging of the one with the other through the ownership of shares, through the appointment of bank directors to the supervisory boards (or boards of directors) of industrial and commercial enterprises, and vice versa. (...)

The “personal union” of the banks and industry is completed by the “personal union” of both with the government. “Seats on the supervisory boards,” writes Jeidels, “are voluntarily entrusted to well-known personalities, as well as to former state officials, who can facilitate relations with the authorities to a considerable degree (!!).” (...)

The result is, on the one hand, an ever-growing merger, or, in N.I. Bukharin’s apt expression, coalescence of bank and industrial capital and, on the other, the transformation of the banks into institutions of a truly “universal character”. (...)

In commercial and industrial circles one often hears complaints about the “terrorism” of the banks (...) At bottom, these are the same complaints of small capital about the yoke of big capital, only in this case the category of “small” capital is made up of a whole consortium! The old struggle between small and big capital is being reproduced at a new and immeasurably higher stage of development. (...)

Concentration of production; the monopolies arising from it; the merging or coalescence of the banks with industry: such is the history of the rise of finance capital and such is the content of that

concept. (...)

The management of capitalist monopolies inevitably becomes, under the general conditions of commodity production and private property, the domination of a financial oligarchy (...) [While] the apologists of imperialism and finance capital do not expose but conceal and embellish the mechanism of the formation of the oligarchies, their methods, the size of their “licit and illicit” incomes, their relations with parliaments, etc., etc.

Lenin. *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*, 1916

Stalinism and state capitalism

State capitalism is a general phenomenon in all states throughout the whole period of capitalist **decadence**. In Russia first and in its satellites later, however, it took on a particular and characteristic form. The counter-revolution in Russia had ridden precisely on these tendencies, embodying itself in the managerial layer of a state capitalism which, as a result of isolation and civil war, was no longer counterbalanced by the political power of the organized workers.

This managerial layer would capture the state and the Bolshevik party with a program of defense of the national capital it represented and of subordination of class objectives to it. Its formula of “**socialism in one country**”, first put forward in 1924 and imposed as a dogma of faith in 1928, meant nothing other than the subordination of the interests of the world revolution to the national capital that the post-revolutionary state had laboriously concentrated.

When it finally seizes all power in 1928, it will give free rein to all the tendencies generated by that national capital. Tendencies that were the same as those of any other national capital in capitalist **decadence**:

imperialism, nationalism, militarism, pauperization of the working masses...

There is an important difference, however. The new Russian bourgeoisie did not emerge organically from the transformation of business ownership driven by finance capital. It was born of the state itself.

And it was not just any state: it was the state that had been formed to defend the revolution during the civil war. It was therefore a bourgeoisie that justified itself politically as the continuation of the October revolution and that would consequently try by every means to sell its particular form of state capitalism as socialism. What is more, its origin would bind it together around the capture and domination of the party of the revolution, which it would completely remake in its own image and likeness, preserving only its outward symbols and massacring the generation of revolutionaries who had been the protagonists of October.

State capitalism and totalitarianism

The totalitarian tendency is a direct consequence of the concentration of state and capital. During the counter-revolution, the state tries to absorb the whole of bourgeois “civil society” and to destroy or subordinate the spaces of “workers’ democracy” created during rising capitalism by the Second International. This is the central objective of the rise of fascism.

Fascism is not merely a system of repression, violence and police terror. Fascism is a particular system of the state based on the extirpation of all the elements of proletarian democracy in bourgeois society. The task of fascism is not only to destroy the communist vanguard, but also to keep the whole class in a state of forced atomization.

For this it is not enough to physically exterminate the most revolutionary layer of the workers. All free and independent organizations must be crushed, all the bases of support of the proletariat destroyed, and the results of three quarters of a century of work by social democracy and the trade unions annihilated. For it is on this work that, in the last analysis, the communist party rests.

Leon Trotsky, “**The Turn of the Communist International and the Situation in Germany**”, 26 September 1930

Exactly the same will be done by the Stalinist counter-revolution, first in Russia and then in the countries integrated into its imperialist bloc after the Second World War. The whole fabric of workers’ socialization will be destroyed root and branch and replaced, as in the fascist states, by parodies dependent on the ministries and watched from within by the terrorist apparatus of the state.

What is more, in the European democracies, the Socialist and Communist parties will be fundamental in producing a “democratic” version with similar results. Not only the trade unions, which had followed a path of integration into the state on their own since the beginning of the imperialist epoch, but also cultural associations, cooperatives, neighborhood groups... will be taken over, controlled and integrated into formal state bodies on which they will end up depending ideologically and financially.

The state's voracity will not stop at the organizations that brought workers together. The political expressions of particular factions of capital and of the petty bourgeoisie - parties, associations, research centers... - everything that liberal democracy had articulated within a framework that emulated the market, representing the competition/conflict of interests and ideas, came to be defined by the new functions of the state. They became more or less autonomous organs of the state.

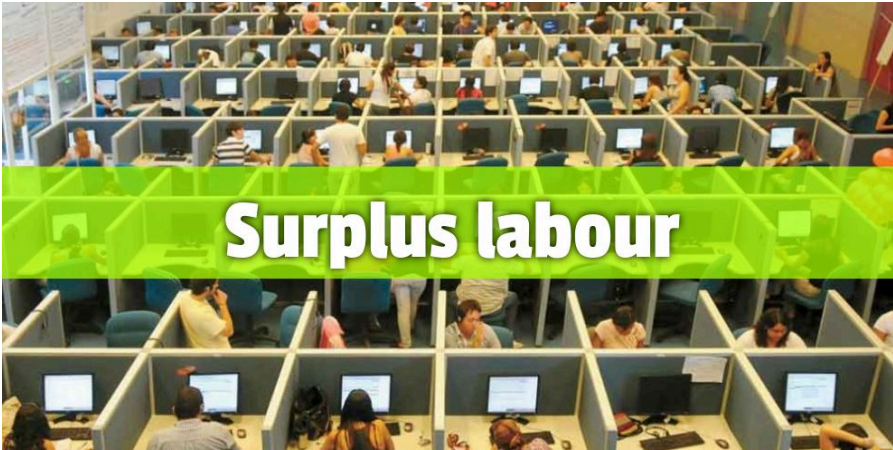
The analogy of state capitalism is no longer the "perfect competition" between parties and interests whose aggregation lies beyond their powers, but the "table" at which the great monopolies "plan" and "make pacts". As a consequence, "social groups" - trade unions, employers' organizations, etc. - cease to be expressions of the different fractions of society before the state and become expressions of the state before the different layers of society. This is particularly clear in the case of the trade unions, treated as monopolists of labor power on the model of the energy companies or heavy industry.

But it is identical in territorial administration. For example, until then the difference between an elected official and a governor or government delegate was that the former represented the citizens before the state and the latter represented the state before the elected officials. Under state capitalism, elected officials become representatives of the state in the territory, and this responsibility is required of them even by law. Only in moments of acute political crisis will the "systemic" social fabric be called into question again, if not redirected by a petty bourgeoisie in revolt.

But this does not negate - quite the contrary - the main tendency: state capitalism consciously seeks to instrumentalize and occupy the whole political and social space, integrating expressions of discontent whenever it can and silencing and repressing them when it cannot.

This can be seen clearly in the space of “opinion”, where the “pluralism” that once represented the difference of interests and the subjects of political conflict now serves, above all, to affirm “in diversity” the consensus of power around the management of the system.

Surplus labor



Time of use of labor power that exceeds the time needed to produce the value equivalent to its cost of reproduction.

Surplus labor and surplus value

The production process can be divided into two parts. In the first, **labor power** produces the value equivalent to its reproduction, that is, the **wage**. In the second, labor power generates **surplus value**. Surplus labor is therefore the measure in *social* time, that is, in average socially necessary time, of surplus value. The secret of the process of valorization of capital is none other than the capacity to dispose of unpaid labor.

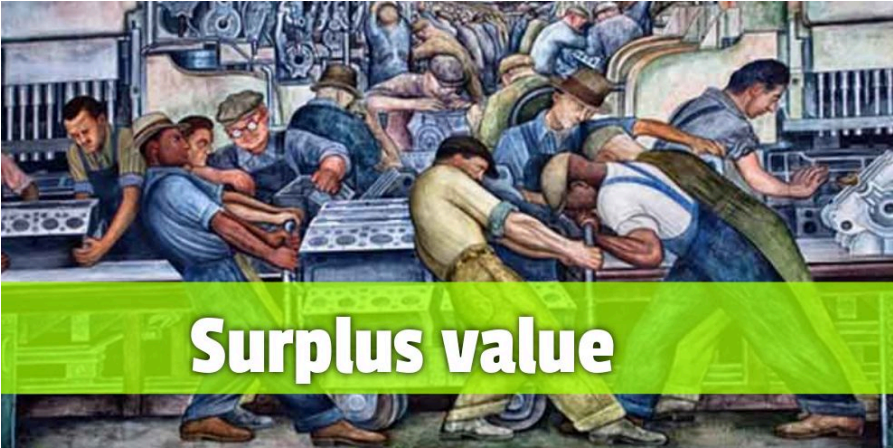
The capitalist pays the value of labor power (or its price, diverging from its value) and in exchange obtains the right to dispose of living labor power. His use of this labor power is divided into two periods.

During one of these periods the worker produces only a value = the value of his labor power, that is, only an equivalent. In exchange for the advanced price of labor power, the capitalist thus obtains a product of the same price. It is as if he had bought the finished product on the market. In the period of surplus labor, on the contrary, the use of labor power forms value for the capitalist without that value costing him any replacement of value. He obtains this mobilization of labor power for nothing. It is in this sense that surplus labor can be called unpaid labor.

Capital, therefore, is not only the command over labor, as Adam Smith says. It is, in essence, the command over unpaid labor. All surplus value, whatever particular form -profit, interest, rent, etc.- it may subsequently crystallize into, is in substance the materialization of unpaid labor time. The mystery of the self-valorization of capital resolves itself into the fact that capital can dispose of a definite quantity of other people's unpaid labor.

Karl Marx. **Capital**, Book I, Chapter XVI, 1867.

Surplus value



Difference between the overall value generated by labor power and the value of labor power itself, that is, the social cost of its reproduction in a quality and quantity similar to that used.

Conditions for the production of surplus value

For surplus value to exist, there must first be the possibility of converting money into **capital**, that is, **labor power** must be a **commodity** that is freely bought and sold on the market. For this, the seller must be able to meet the buyer as persons who exchange commodities under “equal rights”.

The worker must be “free”, that is, the owner of the commodity he is going to sell, and willing to sell his labor power for a definite time as something separate from himself -if he sold himself he would be a slave, and if his labor power did not belong to him by right he would

be a serf. For all this, besides having no alternatives, he must be dispossessed of the means of production that would allow him to turn his labor power into commodities by himself.

For the conversion of money into capital, therefore, the owner of money must find the free worker in the commodity market; free in the double sense that on the one hand, as a free man, he disposes of his labor power as his own commodity, and that, on the other hand, he has no other commodities to sell; he is exempt and deprived, rid of all the things needed to set his labor power in motion.

Karl Marx. *Capital*, 1867.

As can be seen, *capital* and *wage labor* appear within a historically very precise, and in fact very recent, framework of social relations.

What characterizes the capitalist epoch, then, is that labor power takes for the worker himself the form of a commodity that belongs to him, and his labor the form of wage labor. On the other hand, it is only from this moment that the commodity form of the products of labor becomes generalized for the first time.

Karl Marx. *Capital*, 1867.

To cupellate



To define oneself in the critique of the historical class experience until gaining the necessary clarity to adopt clear-cut political positions and defend them without equivocation.

Munis and the political use of “to cupellate”

We owe the term *to cupellate* (“acendrar” in Spanish) to the leader of the **Spanish Communist Left**, Manuel Fernández Grandizo (“G. Munis”). Munis spent his adolescence in Llerena, where his family came from, and he had been one of the founders of the ICE in the district, which would become the largest section of the Spanish Communist Left.

In Llerena and its region, the mining world was very present. Although most of the workers were day labourers, a good number of them also worked in the nearby **mines of Guadalcanal**. They are no ordinary mines: **according to the most recent historical research**, they

were, together with other mines in the sierra, the first place in Europe where the capital-labor relationship organized the regional economy... in the first century BCE, long before capitalism imposed itself as a mode of production on an entire society.

From that time on, silver was extracted and “refined” in special furnaces by means of a technique called “cupellation” (“acendrar” in Spanish). This process is based on the fact that silver is a noble metal and does not oxidize at high temperatures, while the base metals that accompany it separate when heated, forming slag. It is called cupellation because the required temperatures are so high that a special container is needed, the “cupel”, which could only be made of one material, “cendra”. Cendra is a paste made from bone ash.

That is why in the folklore of those silversmiths and miners who had preserved the art of their trade for centuries, the cendra appeared in a set of metaphors in which it symbolized everything from resilience to knowledge, from moral strength to the memory of the past. For Munis, “to cupellate”, “acendrar”, would become the word-formula that summarizes a process of political maturation.

Trade union



Wholesaler of the sale of labor power, originally created by the workers themselves to defend their working conditions within a framework of class conciliation and of affirmation of their own existence within the institutions of the national state. With the monopolistic development of national capital and the universalization of state capitalism, the trade union is recognized as one more monopolist and, like all of them, absorbed into the structures of the national state.

Origins and development

Trade unions are by no means the first organizations of the working class, nor the *inventors* of the strike. The first modern forms of workers' struggle through strikes appeared in the 16th century in France and in the 17th century in Spain, organized through

confraternities and brotherhoods of wage earners within the artisan regime. These were later replaced, first by “mutual societies” and then by “resistance funds”, the direct forerunner of the trade union.

Modern trade unions were born from 1860 onwards out of a fraction of the **proletariat** still mostly tied to artisanal production, in a setting of small-scale production in which the tendency towards class conciliation, characteristic of the still weak proletariat of the small workshop, was reinforced by the general conditions that **rising capitalism** made possible: sustained wage improvements (as productivity soared) and the conquest of an autonomous space for the representation and organization of the class.

Within this framework the big unions would train and oil their function as “wholesalers” of **labor power**, improving not only the immediate conditions of the workers but also equalizing the conditions of competition among capitalists and evening out the **rate of profit** between the different sectors (uses of capital) more effectively than individual competition among workers could.

The first trade union did not appear until 1864. Any idea of class struggle was foreign to it, since, on the contrary, it presented itself as proposing to reconcile the interests of workers and employers. Tolain himself [a member of the First International] assigned it no other goal. It must also be noted that the trade union movement was by no means started by the most exploited layers of the working class -the nascent industrial proletariat- but rather by workers belonging to the artisan trades.

It therefore directly reflects the specific needs and ideological tendencies of those layers of workers. While the shoemakers and the typographers, artisans par excellence, created their unions in 1864 and 1867 respectively, the miners, who constituted the most heavily exploited proletariat, did not create their first union until 1876 in the Loire (in 1882 in the Nord and the Pas-de-Calais), and in textiles, where working conditions were particularly appalling, the need for a union was not felt until 1877.

Where, then, did this ferment of minds come from at a time when socialist ideas (and anarchist ideas, which would only later become differentiated) were spreading throughout the working class of the big cities, when the most exploited workers so plainly shunned union organization while those with a better standard of living sought it out?

First of all, we must recall that the first unions created by workers in the artisan trades were merely bodies of conciliation, not of class struggle. They would become so only some time later. Moreover, they represented the form of organization best suited to trades that, spread over many workshops, brought together a fairly small number of workers of the same craft. It was the best

means of grouping workers of the same trade scattered across the workshops of one city, of giving them a cohesion that the very conditions of their work tended to prevent.

It should also be remembered that the artisan character of a trade often means that employers and workers work side by side and lead the same kind of life. Even if the employer's economic situation is far superior to the worker's, the human contact he frequently maintains with the latter prevents the appearance of the chasm that separates workers and employers in big industry. Between employers and workers in the artisan trades there also persists a minimum of craft familiarity, completely absent from, and inconceivable in, big industry.

All these reasons combined, most of the time, to induce conciliation rather than struggle... The situation of workers in the textile and mining branches (to take them as examples) was entirely different. Among the miners as among the textile workers, great masses of workers of various occupations were crowded together in factories and pits, subjected to inhuman working conditions.

If workers in artisan enterprises were the first to organize in order to discuss their interests with the employers, those in big industry, subjected to the most relentless pressure of capital, were the first to perceive what irreducibly opposed them to the employers, to rebel against the situation imposed on them, to practice direct action, to claim their right to life arms in hand; the first, in short, to orient themselves towards social revolution.

The revolt of the Lyon "canuts" [silk workers] in 1831, as well as the miners' strike of 1844, shows this clearly. While between 1830 and 1845 the typographers, for instance, do not appear even once

on a list of the trades that received the greatest number of convictions, the miners appear three times (the mining industry was then in full development) and the textile workers almost every year.

The inescapable conclusion is that the workers of big industry attached no interest whatsoever to a form of organization that offered them conciliation (which they sensed to be impossible) between opposing classes. They came to it only later and, so to speak, grudgingly, since their very situation pushed them towards forms of open struggle against the employers that the union did not take into account, at least at first. In fact, the workers of big industry joined union organization only from the moment it inscribed principles of class struggle at the head of its statutes.

It was they, moreover, who would lead the most violent struggles over demands between 1880 and 1914. With this concession to their aspirations, they resigned themselves to joining the union, but for several other reasons as well. First, because no other form of organization was conceivable at the time. Furthermore, the prospect of a broad, progressive development of capitalism then lay ahead, hence the need to tighten the cohesion of the working class in order to wrest from the employers more satisfactory conditions of existence, which would better prepare the workers to launch the final assault on property.

From its very beginnings, the union appeared to the workers of big industry as a mere stopgap. It was nevertheless acceptable at the time because of the artisan survivals that industry still contained. It was a positive solution in that period of continuous development of the capitalist economy, accompanied by a constant

growth of freedom and culture. Its recognition by the State, and through it the recognition of the right of association and of the press, was a considerable gain.

Nevertheless, even when trade unionism adopted the principle of class struggle, it never set itself, in its daily combat, the overthrow of society; on the contrary, it confined itself to grouping workers for the defense of their economic interests within capitalist society.

At times this defense takes the form of a fierce struggle, but it never carries the purpose, either implicit or explicit, of transforming the workers' condition through revolution. None of the struggles of the period, not even the most violent, aimed at such an objective. At most, the union glimpses, for an indeterminate future -which from then on takes on the meaning of the carrot dangled before the donkey- the abolition of the employers and of wage labor, and consequently of the capitalist society that engenders them. But it will never undertake any action in that direction.

Benjamin Péret, "The Unions and the Class Struggle" in "The Unions against the Revolution", 1954

Trade unions, monopolism and state capitalism

With the development of **imperialism** and the entry of capitalism into its phase of **decadence**, the unions gradually move from being wholesalers to being monopolists of **labor power**. In exactly the same way as the coal and steel cartels -the first unions of capitalists- their relationship with bank capital and the state consolidates a new form of organization of the bourgeoisie in the face of the new conditions that national capital undergoes: **state capitalism**.

They are in the process of passing from the “free” competition between the supply of and the demand for labor power to the phase of the regimentation of supply by demand, that is, of the working class by monopoly or state capital, an exclusive monopoly. [...] They are as far from being modifiable in a revolutionary direction as any other estate of exploitative society. In its image, they use the working class for their own particular ends, while men will never find a way of adapting them to their revolutionary requirements; they can only destroy them.

G. Munis in “**The Unions against the Revolution**”, 1960

The transition would become visible in the evolution of the Second International: the **reformist** and **opportunist** tendency was at every moment supported and driven forward by the social-democratic union bureaucracy, culminating in the enthusiastic defense of the state, the call to regimentation and enlistment in the army and, finally, the denial of the most basic **internationalism**, the true **class boundary**.

In the period preceding the First World War, the union leaders were not the legitimate representatives of the working class, except insofar as they had to assume that role in order to increase their credit with the capitalist State.

At the decisive moment, when they had to choose between risking a position already acquired by calling on the masses to reject the war and the regime that engendered it, and strengthening that position, they chose the second term of the alternative, opting for the regime, and placed themselves at the service of capitalism. This was not the case in France alone, since the union leaders of the countries involved in the war adopted the same attitude everywhere. If the union leaders betrayed, is it not because the very structure of the union and its place in society made that betrayal possible from the outset, and then inevitable in 1914?

Benjamin Péret, “The Unions and the Class Struggle” in “The Unions against the Revolution”, 1954

The 1905 revolution, however, had brought forth new forms and means of class struggle that would prove as opposed to the unions as they were fundamental to the whole revolutionary wave opened in 1917: the **mass strike** and the workers’ **committees** and **councils**. These new means:

The factory committees or councils, democratically elected by the workers in the workplaces, whose members, under the immediate and constant control of those who elected them, are recallable at any moment. Such committees are obviously a direct emanation of the will of the masses in motion and facilitate their development. That is why, as soon as they appear, even in the provisional form of strike committees, they come into conflict both with the union leaders, whose power they threaten, and with the employers. Both feel equally threatened, and in the same way, so much so that the union leaders generally intercede between employers and workers to bring the strike to an end.

I am convinced that no worker who has taken part in a strike committee will contradict me, above all with regard to the strikes of recent years. Moreover, it is only natural that this should be so. Since strike committees represent a new organ of struggle, the most democratic one conceivable, it tends, consciously or not, to replace the union, which in such a case defends its acquired privileges by trying to restrict the powers granted to the strike committee. Imagine, then, the hostility of the unions towards a permanent committee, called by the very logic of things to subordinate and supplant them!

G. Munis, “The Factory Committees, Engine of the Social Revolution” in “The Unions against the Revolution”, 1960

Why do the unions “betray”?

The **state capitalism** under which we live leaves the workers, and what they call our “*legitimate demands*”, a very narrow space: the negotiation, mediated by the unions and their works councils, of the

price of our hour of labor, company by company and sector by sector. A negotiation that all parties -unions, employers and the state- accept as subordinated to the existence of profits.

From the very start, “complying with the collective agreement” -that is, with the law- and securing a “workload” for the companies headed the demands raised by the unions. It is an old story, **already familiar to the Navantia workers in Cádiz**. It hammers home the idea that “the workers’ well-being depends on the company’s results”: the old formula drilled in by the unions for years in the form “we can’t ask the company for what it can’t give”.

Can the unions have a leadership different from the famous corporatist union bureaucracy?

The business of the unions is not to help struggles develop. Therefore it is not the business of their leaders either. Their business is to broker the sale of labor power, aspiring to turn the organization of which they are professional cadres into one more monopolist within the great game of capitals that determines prices and wages.

Getting paid for organizing labor power in production is exactly what the manager of any company does. The salaried manager is the characteristic form of the corporate bourgeoisie under the state capitalism in which we live. What can we expect from the corporate... union bourgeoisie?

In this way, the unions actually abort the organization of the workers by **corporatizing** them, channeling the will and the need to fight onto a terrain that in reality simply *organizes* the labor market, not the struggle for the universal needs of the workers. As in the market, in the union the whole range of possibilities boils down to the outcome of supply and demand in a rigged game.

In other words, neither as an organization nor as a body of cadres and full-time officials can they set themselves the goal of really extending the struggle, **the only way it can win**. They have long been part of the state; indeed, fundamental pieces of the state capitalism through which the bourgeoisie organizes its own rule. Pieces that are neither more nor less contradictory than any others.

That is why **the whole union experience of the last century cannot be anything but demoralizing**: because the unions are no longer tools for organizing the workers as a class. And without class organization there can be nothing but atomization -however *coordinated*- and demoralization.

Why do the unions replace strike assemblies with information meetings and secret ballots?

What gives strength to every strike, small or large, as to any class struggle, is that it materializes, even if only potentially, a collective subject. A subject far more powerful than any mere sum of individuals whose level of commitment and cohesion nobody knows. If the assembly decides so, we all go on strike; if not, however much we believe it necessary, we will have to accept it and keep fighting to convince our fellow workers.

Yet we see more and more often that the unions call us out on strike without even first convening an assembly or, when they do, reducing it to an *information meeting*. The result is strikes that are not even strikes of a workforce, but of individuals; that is why their *turnout* is expressed in percentages: “60% of the workforce joined the strike”, they tell us, as if it were a success. But if the majority wanted to strike, why not discuss it in an assembly and all go out together?

The point is that if the assembly calls the strike, the assembly decides, and it also decides who represents it. The same assembly that calls and leads the strike elects a *strike committee* and changes its composition whenever it sees fit. What is more, the assembly is sovereign and may well choose -this is the way forward- to include on an equal footing temporary workers and those employed by subcontractors. In other words, the assembly, when it really is one, tends to constitute a broader base than the one the *works council*, regularly elected from among union candidates in compliance with labor legislation, claims to represent.

That is the heart of the whole matter: who holds sovereignty, the workers or the *works councils*; the bodies we give ourselves, which tend to include everyone, or the bodies imposed by law, which make us choose among the unions.

Assemblies atomized workplace by workplace, and works councils self-appointed as (false) strike committees, mean subordinating the organization of the strike to the unions and their goals, the first of which is the profitability of the company.

Their “ideal” model is to present the strike as an *individual right*, limited to following the unions or not. This turns the strike into the opposite of a class affirmation, and therefore of anything useful for satisfying our needs. The strike thus becomes an *exercise of citizenship*, isolating us, atomizing us and, as in any market or parliament, reducing our sovereignty to choosing among the options offered to us by the institutions of state capitalism.

Accepting the union disorganization of the struggle therefore means limiting negotiation to a closed-door carve-up with the employers, in which both “management teams” set prices and conditions through an analysis of the company’s situation.

Every workers' struggle that gets anywhere is an exercise in **centralism** around the strike assembly. Everything else means breaking the workers apart, setting them against one another and provoking a demoralization that sterilizes the path to new struggles.

A soft but no less insidious version of the same union *citizenism* is the imposition of secret ballots in assemblies. Isolated before the ballot box, we stand alone before the company and the unions, that is, before the power of capital and the state. That is why they remind us to vote *thinking of our own...* which is never the collective, but the anguish of not making it to the end of the month and being left alone if the strike goes on.

By contrast, when we discuss openly and vote by show of hands, face to face, shoulder to shoulder with our fellow workers, the vote itself is a bond of commitment and a display of courage. Assemblies organized in this way allow decisions to be made not only according to numbers, but according to the commitment and spirit of their members. And the strike committees they elect cease to be representatives of the unions before the workers and become true delegations of the workers before capital.

Why is “combative” unionism no better?

“Combative unionism”, supposedly “radical”, adds to the old union playbook new roads to disaster under the cloak of a false courage and indignation.

Although the “combative unions” do not sit at the negotiating table, they generally do nothing to turn workplace information meetings into general strike assemblies. Their fight is with the “major” unions, over grabbing representation.

Their distinctive role is to derail the “radicalism” of the most committed workers away from the fight for a real strike assembly and onto the sterile terrain of letting off steam in the street with the police, which the media love so much as a way of trying to isolate struggles.

But that is only the first move. When the big unions force a “settlement”, instead of opposing to the capitulation the unity of the assembly -which they helped to abort- the “combative unions” separate the most combative workers from the rest, forget about the general assembly and lead them into a lonely, sterile strike that only serves to isolate and demoralize them in the face of the “lack of response” from their fellow workers.

That is, when the mobilization technique of “left-wing unionism” does not consist from the very first moment in keeping the workers on the move and dispersed. Plenty of pickets, plenty of road blockades and mobilizations segmented by category and trade. Anything to avoid calling open assemblies so that the extension of the struggles becomes real and the workers in struggle come together.

This is what we see, taken to the extreme, in the *piquetero* movements exalted by the Trotskyist-Stalinist left tradition in Argentina, which presents pickets and road blockades as an example to follow in the struggle to win better conditions. Nothing could be more destructive. With these methods they disperse and weaken our class, which can only assert itself in the factories, the schools, the hospitals and the neighborhoods through sovereign assemblies, electing its own representatives and taking coordinated steps.

Tragedy of the commons



Neo-Malthusian argument used to argue the supposedly unsustainable character of communal property and, more generally, of the non-market organization of production.

The “tragedy of the commons”, more correctly “tragedy of the commonland” or “of communal goods”, is an argument developed by Garrett Hardin, one of the most influential neo-Malthusians of the second half of the 20th century. He was not an economist but an ecologist, and it was from this discipline and his deep love for Malthus that he published the famous article “The Tragedy of the Commons” in the journal Science:

The tragedy of the commons develops in this way. Picture a pasture open to all. It is to be expected that each herdsman will try to keep as many cattle as possible on the commons. Such an arrangement may work reasonably satisfactorily for centuries because tribal wars, poaching, and disease keep the numbers of both man and beast well below the carrying capacity of the land. [...] Finally, however, comes the day of reckoning, that is, the day when the long-desired goal of social stability becomes a reality. At this point, the inherent logic of the commons remorselessly generates tragedy.

As a rational being, each herdsman seeks to maximize his gain. [...] The rational herdsman concludes that the only sensible course for him to pursue is to add another animal to his herd. And another; and another... But this is the conclusion reached by each and every rational herdsman sharing a commons. Therein is the tragedy. Each man is locked into a system that compels him to increase his herd without limit—in a world that is limited.

“The Tragedy of the Commons”, Garrett Hardin, 1968

It is one of the arguments most used by **environmentalism** today. Following pure “economic rationality”, human beings would be incapable of exploiting the planet’s resources in common without acting like a predatory species that wipes everything out like a plague of locusts. The tragedy of the commons appears in countless ecology books and has influenced many economic and political discussions but, as was to be expected, a mere review of the historical and social record of humanity is enough to reject such claims.

That was the criticism that earned Elinor Ostrom a Nobel Prize in 2009. However, although the historical falsehood of the supposed dilemma was clearly demonstrable, the solutions proposed did not go

beyond the capitalist horizon by a long way. In order to square the circle of a traditional management of communal goods without going beyond the very capitalist economy that had destroyed them, Ostrom and her school could only suggest heavy **bureaucratic apparatuses**. All of it served with a sauce of commercial exchanges with pollution clauses, as well as various tax and financial mechanisms against climate change.

The reality of communal goods

In agrarian societies all over the world, local mechanisms have existed for centuries and even millennia to prevent over-exploitation and to share out common lands and resources among the collectivity. The peasant world was always extremely variable in terms of property and mechanisms, even between neighboring provinces. In lands that were recently conquered en bloc, one generally finds large estates and settlers, whether in southern Europe, South America or East Africa.

However, on lands cultivated in a stable way for centuries (even taking migrations into account) all over the world, one generally finds a very similar local mechanism: cultivation of the land by the community with cyclical redistribution of the arable plots. The model can be found in 19th-century India:

The areas to be cultivated were distributed by lot [...] If the land to be distributed was variable in quality, the clan authorities would prepare a number of circles or series, consisting of good, middling or bad lands, or lands distinguishable in some other way. The groups of cultivators then had to take their lands evenly from each quality group. [...] But in any case, even taking the classification of the soil into account, inequality in holdings could not be excluded, so a periodic system of exchange or redistribution was practised over a long period.

The principle of lands worked in common combined with plots allotted at random and cyclically redistributed among the different members of the community could also be found in 19th-century Scotland and in much of Europe before the great enclosures of fields:

Instead of each tenant having a house on a separate farm, a group of small huts is crowded together in a Township, as in a rustic village. In it live tenants and small peasants. The land around the village belongs to all of them in common. The meadows are the common field where all their cows graze. The arable land is sometimes cultivated and harvested in common too, the produce of the harvest being divided among them.

This is one of the most ancient customs of our country. It is a relic of the pastoral age, or feudal system. But it is ruinous to the interest of the landlord, the tenant and the public, according to the enlightened agriculture of our day. Where lands are not the property of Townships, they are generally held in Run-rigs.

This mode of occupying land originated from the same source. It is the natural outgrowth of the Township, and was no doubt devised as an improvement on the earlier plan. Instead of the arable land being held, cultivated and harvested in common, each individual has a plot assigned to him. Sometimes, instead of one, he has two or more, especially if the arable land is of unequal quality. In this case the tenants have one plot in the best part and another in the worst.

In the feudal age, this kind of tenure prevailed over Britain and perhaps over the whole of Europe. Caesar mentions that it was the traditional practice among the Gauls.

“General report of the agricultural state of Scotland”, Sir John Sinclair, 1816

The nineteenth-century examples might give the impression that these systems disappeared through some inexorable “force”, but this kind of redistribution system not only persists unless it is actively destroyed, it reappears in the countryside when state domination

weakens or disappears. This is what happened in 18th-century Japan, when the weakening of central power allowed the reappearance of the Iriaichi (入会地), common lands whose use was assigned by lot and regularly reassigned. Something similar happens today in southern India, where the weakness of the state allows the existence of villages with elected councils that decide the periodic redistribution of land and the common maintenance of irrigation works.

However, if anything characterizes the countryside it is its heterogeneity. The villages in India with elected councils are surrounded by villages of small private property, without rotation or commonland. The local scale of these institutions makes them disconnected and fragile in the face of attacks by a ruling class.

In France, although the feudal lords allowed the existence of more or less independent peasant “communities” and did not set about expropriating them until very late, things were different with the medieval bourgeoisie. The trading towns had a great effect on the surrounding countryside: merchants bought and expropriated the surrounding fields to graze livestock. This livestock served not only to feed the town; above all it served to supply local manufacture with wool for the main luxury industry of the Middle Ages, cloth-making. This brought the peasants into direct conflict with the burghers of the towns.

French peasants had an ingenious system for keeping their fields in common: the small plots (generally the rectangular stretch that could be ploughed in a day with an ox-drawn plough) that were redistributed among the peasants of the community were intermingled with one another and cultivated in common.

They were cultivated in the sequence summer wheat, winter wheat and fallow (uncultivated land), one stage per year, and were shared out so that there were fields at each stage in any given year. The fallow was kept to restore the nutrients of the soil through the work of weeds and the dung of the common herd. The common herd's access to any uncultivated field was not restricted, thereby fertilizing everyone's fields and ensuring that everyone's animals had enough food. Nobody had any incentive to increase the number of their animals and come into conflict with the rest of the community in order to sell on a market that did not exist far from the towns.

With the rise of cloth manufacture, the burghers began to buy and enclose the fields bordering the Norman towns from the 14th century onwards to graze ever larger flocks of sheep. The situation was much worse in Provence, where the great transhumant flocks took advantage of the peasants' open fields to graze (with the permission of the great lords) along their route. It was the ravages of transhumance that forced the Provençal peasants to enclose their fields to defend them from the onslaught of the sheep that drove the trade of the towns.

Neither the common meadows nor the fallow lands were safe. However, the immense majority of the population of France still lived in the countryside and kept fields and property in common, as texts from the time of Louis XIV show:

Each holder of a plot included in a “quarter” of similarly oriented plots cultivates—and it cannot be otherwise—on the same dates as his neighbours, and practises the same rotation cycle. When the field was fallow or covered in stubble, it was opened—and it is still so today [1931]—to all the livestock of the village without distinction, as the jurist Laurière said under Louis XIV: “when the harvest has been gathered, the land, by a kind of right of the people, becomes common to all men, be they rich or poor”.

“Les caractères originaux de l’histoire rurale française”, Marc Bloch, 1931

The situation was much worse in Flanders, where the enclosure of fields around the trading towns was far more extensive and the peasants were often reduced to taking part in domestic textile industry to supply the towns. And it is from here, at the end of the 17th century, that one of the main sources of what would later develop into capitalist ideology would emerge.

The Malthusian origin of the “tragedy of the commons”

It is no coincidence that Hardin took as his inspiration the essay of an English economist published in 1833, in the midst of an ideological campaign to finish driving the peasants off the land and to pass the new “Poor Laws”, forcing the new British proletariat into manufacture.

After the economic shock caused by the inflow of enormous quantities of precious metals from America, price inflation caused a fall in the income of the nobility, because the rents to be paid by the peasantry were fixed by agreement and not by the market. Many aristocrats and

not a few bourgeois began to devote themselves to agricultural improvement and the acquisition of land from the 17th century onwards.

The first agricultural treatises came out of the great trading cities, first Venice and then Flanders, and later spread from England to France. The lords started rental markets to increase the productivity of their tenants, and the discoveries of the new science were applied. It was possible to increase the productivity of the plots through rotations with clover (a nitrogen-fixing legume) and turnips, which could also be sold on the nascent market as fodder to obtain money.

The new crops broke the cycle of communal agriculture. There were no longer fallow fields; instead the fields had to be enclosed so that the communal herds would not eat the fodder in them. In the 18th century, the new movement of the physiocrats in France would proselytize to the utmost so that the priests of each rural parish would proclaim the virtues of agricultural improvement and enclosure. But the investments needed to acquire more hectares and employ farmhands did not come free, so the physiocrats pushed a large part of the countryside into debt. All this while physiocrats and English economists were trying to unify the national market in order to allow the circulation and accumulation of capital on a national scale.

However, there were still tenant peasants who defended and used the communal lands, as the text above on “run-rigs” in 1816 shows well. The final wave of expulsion from the land in Great Britain coincided, not by chance, with the definitive triumph of “Political economy” (= economic theory). In order to pay their debts and rents, much of the countryside had switched to wheat monoculture. Because of this, bad harvests and price volatility during the Napoleonic wars ruined

millions of small producers, who were forced to sell their fields to the big landowners. Something similar would happen later in the south of France, when vineyard monoculture was devastated by phylloxera.

But the Malthusian economists had plans, big plans. They finally achieved the abolition of relief to the peasantry in 1834 in order, openly, to provide industry with a circulating labor force. All in the name of reducing friction and improving the functioning of the “great social machine”:

Pure theory instils into us the natural and necessary tendency towards a just adjustment [of prices], leaves out of the question the intermediate difficulties, like friction in a mechanical problem; and justly condemns the folly of attempting to rectify inequality by law. But laws, though they cannot rectify the problem, can make it worse. Those very frictions can be resolved with care and skill. [...] Thus the labour of a manufacturing worker is a transferable commodity compared with that of a peasant. Competition informs the owner of its value, and it circulates freely through those districts where it is needed.

Edward Copleston, 1819

Although the **bourgeoisie**, after its victory, would go on to claim that the tendency towards privatization and over-exploitation was part of human nature, what was being naturalized was a crushing victory of the ruling class over the exploited.

The tragedy of the commons, “human nature” and capitalism

What bourgeois morality pretentiously calls “Human nature” is nothing other than capitalist rationality. In reality, the problem for the bourgeoisie was not that herdsman or farmers over-exploited the commonland and the whole system collapsed, but the opposite: the system was too stable to allow **commodification** to advance.

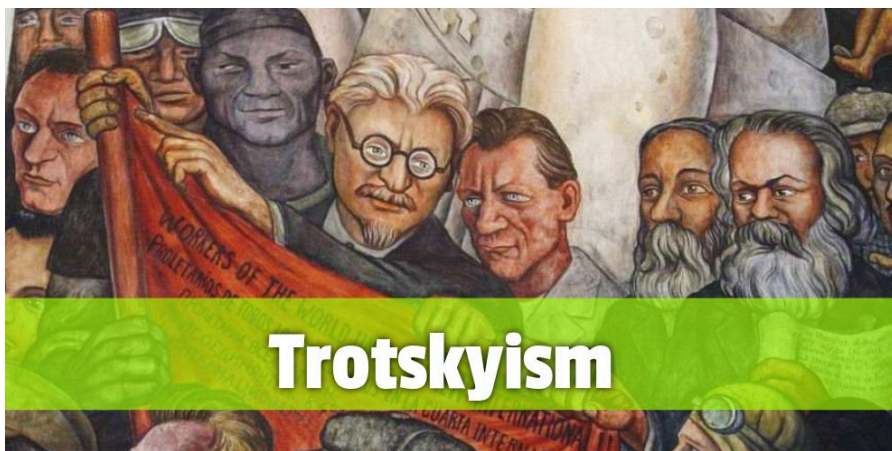
The peasants had neither the wish nor the need to become day laborers, farmhands or industrial workers. And without **absorbing their labor under the direction of capital** it was impossible to redouble rural productivity by increasing **exploitation in absolute terms**. Without cheap food, **turning the peasants themselves into industrial workers** would make the cost structure unviable for the new manufacture.

When the bourgeoisie manages to destroy the land communities on a scale sufficient to force this double movement of peasant over-exploitation and mass migration, it also needs to break the state protections against hunger... because even living on meagre public charity was more attractive than becoming an industrial proletarian. The bourgeoisie then needs to argue for a new morality asserting that the hunger and misery it was causing were in reality “incentives” for **progress**, while at the same time placing the responsibility on the shoulders of the worker. Thomas Malthus and Jeremy Bentham would be the theorists of this new capitalist morality, which asserts a new kind of “rationality” and with it a new “Human nature”.

When, almost a century and a half later, Hardin looks for arguments against communal property, he will only have to take for granted that “Human nature” has always been capitalist rationality in order to prove... that historical reality was “impossible”. That is the whole trick

underlying the “tragedy of the commons”. And what is worse, it also underlies the criticism of Ostrom who, unable to think of the commonland within any other framework of social relations, tries to fit the historical institutions of communal production to the **capitalism** that destroyed them, by justifying **bureaucracies**, experts and complex systems that would require a specialized managerial layer.

Trotskyism



A derogatory name given by stalinism to the Left Opposition in Russia, the current that led the resistance to the counter-revolutionary drift of the Bolshevik party until 1928 and that, from that date onwards, brought together the great majority of the International Communist Left. Stalinism later applied it to the whole Communist Left and its offshoots, regardless of their political content and of whether they are inside or outside the class terrain.

Origins of the term

For stalinism, the inventor of the term “trotskyism”, the whole **Communist Left** will therefore be “trotskyist”. The internationalists accepted the term at the time, not without a touch of irony. The brutality of the persecution and mass murder, under the charge of being “trotskyists”, of the militants and leaders of the Russian

communist party of October made the name an emblem. However, some national tendencies of the communist left, those that did not join the International Left Opposition to **stalinism**, disowned the term.

Even after the abandonment of **internationalism** by the structure and the largest sections of the Fourth International during the Second World War, the internationalists within it, who once again **had to form a left fraction** and finally break with the international organization, continued to make the name their own.

I formally broke with the Fourth International in 1948 -as Natalia Sedova-Trotsky did later- but that will not prevent me from raising my hand as a trotskyist in the face of the police slanderers of Moscow or Beijing.

G. Munis, 1972

From “trotskyism” to “trotsko-stalinism” after 1948

In reality, what remained in the failed Fourth International after the split at the Second Congress can hardly claim continuity either with Trotsky or with the organization he built to rally the vanguard of the class, in the course of the approaching world war, under the banners of **revolutionary defeatism**. Because what remained were precisely the sections that had supported, in one form or another, recruitment into the European national “resistances”.

The organization that went on calling itself the Fourth International and claiming to be trotskyist soon took a course that rapidly turned it into a satellite of **stalinism**. After asserting that the statified economy was **socialism**, they would assert that Russian imperialist expansion

had created “workers’ states”, albeit with “bureaucratic degenerations”, to which the principle of “unconditional defense”, until then applied to Russian **state capitalism**, should be extended.

In 1953, the Third Congress declared that the bourgeoisie-proletariat contradiction had been superseded by the US-USSR contradiction and that in the event of war the Soviet armies would be forced to be revolutionary. Trotskyism split in two. It would be temporarily reunified under the effect of Castro’s triumph, only to break up again afterwards into dozens of new groups. And yet a series of common elements would remain, exacerbating the obsolete elements of the “transitional program” written by Trotsky for the Fourth International.

The result is *trotsko-stalinism*, “trotskyism” in the sense commonly used today: a “democratic” and “leftist” squire of **stalinism**, defender of state capitalism as “socialism with bureaucratic excrescences”, in some cases even extending that definition to today’s Russia. A position completed by the defense, on principle, of **democracy** in the abstract - not the “islands of workers’ democracy” of Trotsky’s formula- and of **national liberation**, the perfect excuse to betray **internationalism** at the slightest opportunity, from the Falklands War to the massacres in Syria.

However, the fact that they are commonly called “trotskyists” means neither more nor less than the fact that the stalinists are called “communists”, the social-patriots of 1914 “socialists”, or that the most degenerate anarchism uses the acronym IWA as if it represented the continuity of the First International. The great defeats of the proletariat made Humanity lose precious time and hundreds of millions of lives. That the common meaning of a few names once wielded by the revolutionary generations of the past has been lost should no longer scandalize us.

United Front



A tactic affirmed at the 3rd Congress of the Communist International that sought to generate slogans capable of mobilizing the masses that still remained embedded in the trade unions and social democratic political parties – organizations committed to the defense of the state and the capitalist order.

The question of the United Front

The need for unity of action that workers demand is not the product of their regimentation by the state, but of the very nature of the class (**centralism**). The regimentation that boasts of being “unitary” therefore cannot be confronted simply by denying the need for unity or by asserting that it is enough for the workers now regimented to follow the communists. Such a tactic, the doctrinaire one, harms the movement as a whole.

It is another matter that this need for centralization is used by **the trade unions -which are part of the state-** and by the left of the political apparatus as a brake on the movement, by equating class unity with unity among themselves. That “unity within regimentation” can only take shape around slogans that lead nowhere or that run counter to the interests of the workers.

The question of the united front is thus the question of how to drive the most dynamic and conscious sectors of the class, **through a course of action** and therefore through concrete slogans, from the false unity of the left-unions trap to unity around a political orientation independent of the state.

The Third International and the United Front

The foundations of the United Front

It is from this perspective that the Bolsheviks put the United Front to the International, at its third congress, as the tactical basis of the moment.

The Party must take the initiative in securing unity in the present struggle. Only in this way will the Party draw closer to those two thirds who do not yet follow its leadership, who do not yet trust it because they do not understand it. Only in this way can the Party win them.

If the Communist Party had not broken drastically and irrevocably with the social democrats, if it had not become the Party of the proletarian revolution, it could not have taken the first serious steps along the road of revolution. It would have remained a parliamentary safety valve under the bourgeois state. Whoever does not understand this does not know the first letter of the ABC of Communism.

If the Communist Party did not strive to build an organizational path at the end of which joint coordinated actions between communist and non-communist masses (including those who support social democracy) were possible at any moment, it would expose its inability to win -on the basis of mass actions- the majority of the proletariat. It would degenerate into a Society for communist propaganda; it would never develop into a Party that fights for the conquest of power.

It is not enough to have a sword, it must have an edge; the edge is not enough: one must know how to use it. After separating the communists from the reformists, it is not enough to fuse the communists together by means of organizational discipline; it is necessary that this organization learn to guide all the collective activities of the proletariat in every sphere of the class struggle. This is the second letter of the ABC of Communism.

L. D. Trotsky at the **Plenum of the Executive Committee of the Communist International of March 1922.**

At that moment, the central thesis underlying the United Front is that, in the context of the world revolutionary wave, the mere movement of the class favors the development of its consciousness and therefore the development and growth into a mass party of the Communist Party as the “highest form of class organization” (Lenin).

Circumstances, therefore, make joint actions on a series of vital questions entirely possible between the workers united around each of these three organizations [centrist, social democratic and communist parties] and the organized masses that support them.

The Communists, as we have already said, not only must not oppose such actions but, on the contrary, must take the initiative, precisely for the reason that the more the masses are drawn into the movement, the greater their self-confidence will be; the mass movement will have more confidence in itself and will be more capable of marching resolutely forward, no matter how modest the initial slogan of struggle. And this means that the growth of the mass content of the movement makes it revolutionary and creates far more favorable conditions for the slogans, methods of struggle and, in general, for the leading role of the Communist Party.

The reformists fear the powerful revolutionary spirit of the masses; their most cherished arena is the parliamentary tribune, the trade union offices, the courts of justice, the antechambers of the ministries.

On the contrary, what interests us, apart from any other consideration, is to drag the reformists out of their paradise and place them beside us before the masses. Using a correct tactic, we can only win. The communist who doubts or fears this is like the swimmer who approved the theses on the best way to swim but does not want to risk diving in.

L. D. Trotsky at the **Plenum of the Executive Committee of the Communist International of March 1922.**

The United Front and the role of communists in the unitary organizations created during the Second International

When the United Front is affirmed as a tactic by the Third International, it is a synthesis of the political practice carried out by the Bolsheviks in Russia between 1905 and the October revolution. It is then meant to be used as a guide on a much broader stage, but one with which it shares a fundamental element: the existence of a diverse organized class fabric, ranging from trade union branches and workers' societies to mutual aid societies, cooperatives and educational associations, in which the communists have large minorities but not the organizational leadership.

There are two keys here:

1 The United Front tactic is not considered the main question, nor is it going to be judged by its results, wherever the communists form tiny propaganda groups. Because, as Trotsky says in the same text: "In cases where the Communist Party still remains an organization made up of a numerically insignificant minority, the question of its conduct on the front of the mass struggle does not take on a decisive political and organizational significance."

2 The United Front tactic is going to set aside the class nature of social democratic politics and of the trade unions. As Lenin himself had insisted again and again -with particular clarity in "Left-Wing Communism, an Infantile Disorder"- in the Bolshevik view that fabric, which Trotsky would later characterize as "proletarian democracy", is a terrain of political combat, and throwing out the dirty bathwater of its reactionary leadership along with the baby of its organizational and educational function for the class would be an unforgivable leftist error.

For the International, the United Front will therefore consist in organizing "red fractions" in every kind of organization created by the workers during the previous historical period, with the aim of

steering them to place themselves at the head of unitary struggles. To renounce trade unions or cooperatives because their leaderships were reactionary and their very nature did not make them revolutionary bodies would mean renouncing the main path by which the great masses of workers become conscious.

The degeneration and contradictions of the United Front tactic

The United Front will generate all kinds of contradictions as soon as an ebb of the world revolutionary movement sets in... that is, practically as soon as it is announced.

With bureaucratic forces permeating the Russian party from the state management machinery of the enterprises, and the large European parties from the trade unions, the United Front will gradually be assimilated to an alliance between communist and social democratic parties... which proved disastrous in every case. Suffice it to **recall how the socialist leadership turned the Workers' Alliances of 1934 in Spain** into a tool for derailing the revolution under way into a mere lever for a cabinet change.

The fact is that this degeneration of the original concept had soon led to the acceptance of the slogan of the “workers’ government”. In reality, this slogan was the mechanical translation of a concrete experience of the Russian Revolution.

When in 1917 the Bolsheviks put forward the idea of a Menshevik government (expel the capitalist ministers from the government), they did so taking into account, on the one hand, the deceptive faith that the masses had at that moment in the Mensheviks and in bourgeois democracy; on the other hand, they took into account the nature of the contradictions between the Mensheviks and the old classes, which would make the former, without will and without desire, grant greater freedoms to the masses and to the revolutionary vanguard in particular, which would allow the masses to condense their experience into organic forms and rise to higher stages of struggle.

The existence of the soviets, legally permitted by the Kerensky government and in which the Mensheviks, the Socialist Revolutionaries and the Bolsheviks took part in a united front, made this development possible.

Open letter to the Internationalist Communist Party, French section of the Fourth International, by Natalia Sedova, Benjamin Péret and G. Munis (June 1947)

But in 1923 the “workers’ governments” being proposed did not involve strengthening soviets that did not exist. That is why, when we read today the debates on the “workers’ government” slogan at the Fourth Congress, the arguments can only seem to us pure **centrist** scholasticism. But it is also true that today we see it with hindsight, knowing that for the Russian bureaucratic forces it was their first great triumph in the International. They hoped for relief in the trade war through the formation of “left-wing” governments in the industrialized European countries. No one managed to understand it that way at the time.

Nevertheless, it was the first great step on the road towards the definitive subordination of the interests of the world revolution to those of Russian state capitalism. A subordination that would crystallize around the slogan of “**socialism in one country**” and that would consistently turn the United Front into the **Popular Front**.

But... can the degeneration of the United Front tactic be equated with its uselessness?

The United Front after the destruction of the mass organizational fabric created by the Second International

The destructive work of the counterrevolution

The period 1933-1937, that is, the years that begin with the rise of Nazism to power in Germany in the face of the KPD's inaction and end with the defeat of the Spanish Revolution, the first counterrevolution led and organized by a “communist” party, the PCE, does not only mark the definitive passage of the Stalinist Comintern to the counterrevolution and the opening of the possibility of a new world imperialist war.

The defeat of the great revolutionary wave of 1917-37 materialized in the systematic destruction of the organizational class fabric built during the Second International, the end of that space of “Proletarian Democracy” that had nourished the Second and Third Internationals and of which only shreds remained when the Fourth was founded.

The second postwar period

At the end of the war it will be the left of the Fourth International that demands an end to the by then utterly untenable slogans of the united front and the “workers’ government”, which the left of the Fourth International had been criticizing since the Spanish Revolution.

At that moment, in the hands of the leadership of a Fourth International in full opportunist degeneration, the slogans had become electoral support “from outside” for the CPs and SPs. The communist left of the Fourth would then recall that no parallel is possible with the Bolsheviks’ “workers’ government” slogan of 1917, and that an electoral government of the forces that had organized the counterrevolution and the war can contribute little or nothing to the workers’ coming to consciousness.

Stalinism is today absolutely incompatible with any proletarian democracy. Wherever organs of revolutionary power have arisen, from Spain to Warsaw, Paris and Milan, it has hastened to destroy them. **Stalinism cannot allow revolutionaries to speak.**

The tactic of a united front with it and the PC-PS-CGT government **cannot in any way facilitate the creation of organs of proletarian democracy and power**, and any Stalinist government or government under Stalinist influence carries with it an imperious tendency to physically annihilate the revolutionary vanguard. It is therefore urgent that the PCI and our international movement withdraw these two now outdated slogans. Is the example of Eastern Europe not eloquent?

On the other hand, the proletariat today does not suffer from any real illusion about bourgeois democracy, social democracy or Stalinism. What it does suffer from is the fact of **finding itself trapped by the organic apparatuses of both tendencies**, Stalinism first and foremost. The **non-existence of a revolutionary organization** that would inspire it with confidence and combative assurance contributes more than a little to this; that is, our present policy contributes to it directly or indirectly.

Yesterday it was indispensable for the proletariat to go through the experience of governments set up by the leaders of the traditional organizations in order to understand that revolution was the only possible way out. **Not today.**

Open letter to the Internationalist Communist Party, French section of the Fourth International, by Natalia Sedova, Benjamin Péret and G. Munis (June 1947)

In other words, the underlying problem is that that fabric of “Proletarian Democracy” no longer exists, but only “organic apparatuses” tightly controlled by Stalinists and social democrats and, alongside them, the “great void” produced by the “non-existence of a revolutionary organization” which, for its part, cannot feed on what does not exist.

And if we go a little further, a somewhat deeper formulation gives an idea of the gravity of the situation. The most solid part of that class fabric had been made up of trade unions. But the trade unions are no longer, and can no longer be, class organizations with more or less reactionary leaderships and tendencies: **they are purely and simply an apparatus of state capitalism.**

That is to say, the situation from the end of the world war onwards not only demonstrates the counterproductive and reactionary character of the United Front slogan understood as an alliance with, or external support for, Stalinists and social democrats. It also leaves it without an object: there is no class fabric in which to exercise it in the way the Bolsheviks had done, and without it revolutionaries are confined to the role of “propaganda groups”. The kind of groups that the doctrine of the Third International had never considered to have any chance of even contemplating such a tactic, since they had no real influence on the course of the class struggle.

The FOR and the propagandist movements of the second half of the 20th century

To get out of this spiral, the revolutionaries of the second half of the 20th century went back to working on the basis of the experience of the Bolshevik party. It was assumed that, after an initial phase as a propaganda group, the militant nuclei would grow through mass struggles and strikes and that, eventually, they could support and be

supported by various relatively stable organizational expressions of the class: communist groups in workplaces, neighborhood collectives, committees for specific purposes, etc.

In practice this orientation meant working while ignoring the need for an organizational fabric beyond the propaganda group itself, taking it for granted that it would emerge as a sediment of the succession of struggles or that it would spontaneously take on new forms without it being the militants' task to foster one form or another. Numerous councilist tendencies even appeared that openly denied the need for, and possibility of, organizational expressions of the class beyond the development of its organs of struggle.

The main reason is that from the early sixties onwards (the Asturias miners' strike, the United Kingdom, northern France...) **mass strikes** reappear outside of, and often against, the trade unions. Their global proliferation makes it possible to imagine a development of the organization of the class exclusively through struggles. But when that great irregular wave of strikes and mobilizations, which would last until the end of the 80s, is exhausted, so too will be the revolutionary propagandist organizations of the period.

Can the United Front have any tactical use in the present?

Nor were there many elements to reflect on the alternatives. Only **very specific experiences of the Spanish Communist Left** in the 1930s - experiences never developed afterwards by internationalists in other countries- pointed to paths that united propaganda with the organization both of organs of struggle and of a class "fabric".

Significantly, however, these experiences were based on a particular practice of the United Front, which was addressed in every sphere and at every moment to the workers as a whole, combining slogans

that alienated the struggles from their theoretical social democratic organic leadership while at the same time promoting an organizational fabric for the workers as a whole that was of direct use to them (the House of the People, the school, trade committees - assimilated to trade unions but without organic structures of their own- and the workers' cooperative).

What did "United Front" mean in that experience? In reality, a way of posing the slogans and tasks that the revolutionaries set themselves, and those they set for the struggles, opposed both to that of the Workers' Alliances of the time and to the restrictive conception of the "propaganda group".

What we learn from all the accumulated experience is that without slogans that address the immediate and concrete needs of struggles and reflection, propaganda groups can only be moralizing groups, abstract preachers of **communist morality** with no practical consequences.

And even if they provide useful slogans for each stage of struggle, if they do not promote and support minimal independent organizational foundations of every kind -associations, struggle committees, solidarity networks, neighborhood groups, etc.- they will place the most spirited workers before the dilemma of atomization or regimentation, demobilizing in the immediate term and weakening the struggles of the future.

In the eyes of a worker convinced of the need to fight but not politically trained -the state of class consciousness to be expected when there is neither an extensive class fabric nor a continuum of mass struggles- it will always seem more "viable" to join a sterile,

falsely red fraction of a trade union than to preach the mass strike; to enter a neighborhood patronage network than to stimulate debates on the root of the housing question; etc.

In the long periods without great class mobilizations, the political **cupellation** of the workers is born in minority collective efforts that give collective answers to the concrete and universal needs of the workers “**negating the present state of things**”. And in that framework the United Front is above all a technology for elaborating slogans that direct that concrete grouping towards the class as a whole, giving rise to independent and higher forms of organization and struggle.

Utopia



An imaginary plan of social reorganization, outside the dynamics and social forces actually present, which is proposed as a universal solution if imposed on reality.

The defining character of utopias is not so much that they are set in an imaginary place as that they are set outside historical time, that is, outside the real movement of society. Utopia is a plan to be implemented, a scheme to be imposed on reality. That is why, from the first appearances of the **proletariat** as a political class, utopias are necessarily reactionary: they express the desire to stand outside the **class struggle** more than the **communist** goal that -with more or less foundation- many of them proclaim.

That is also why **class consciousness** is “anti-utopian”, and “The Manifesto” already takes care to stress this when it characterizes the communists.

[The communists] do not set up any sectarian principles of their own, by which to shape and mould the proletarian movement, [...] theoretically, they have over the great mass of the proletariat the advantage of clearly understanding the line of march, the conditions, and the ultimate general results of the proletarian movement.

Karl Marx and Frederick Engels. “Manifesto of the Communist Party”, 1848

Value



The value of social production is the product of the total amount of labor exploited in the economic system. Although it is impossible to calculate the value of an individual commodity without taking into account the capital market and the existence of an effective demand for it, its value will tend toward the amount of labor socially necessary for its production.

Use value and exchange value

Since Antiquity, the properties of **commodities** in a generalized exchange system were divided into two types of value:

- Use value, the features or physical properties that make a commodity useful.

- Exchange value, the quantity - measured in money - at which a specific commodity is exchanged.

In the vast majority of economic treatises and in what follows in this dictionary entry, we refer to exchange value when we speak of *value*.

Value and economic theory (ideology)

For centuries, the problem of the value of commodities - and especially its mirror image, the problem of the value of currency - was one of the great concerns of European states, whose currencies suffered continuous devaluations and whose commodity prices were extremely volatile. The first economic theory was developed within this context during the modern era, following the imperative of stabilizing both the value of currency and the general circulation of commodities. From then on, value and its theory would become the backbone of the new science of social organization of absolutism and soon of the bourgeoisie's own society.

But what do all these theories of commercial exchange, whose aim was always, openly, to improve the administration of the personal household of the ruling class, imply in the real world? In the world of theoretical abstraction, value is an intrinsic property of the individual commodity completely contained in itself. **The economic world is thus reduced to a circuit of mercantile transactions among objects.**

However, the real world underwent a complete transformation between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries, when the state treasuries that had previously been on the brink of bankruptcy shifted to a society in the throes of an economic boom. On the surface, economic activity was still measured in value, currency was still currency, and commodities were still exchanged according to their value. Yet, millions of peasants had been expelled from the

countryside, the entire productive system - the same one that produced the goods now flooding foreign markets - had changed from handicrafts to big industry, and a social class which lived by producing for a wage had expanded.

The labor theory of value

Was the old refrain of the theory of value a true reflection of what was really going on in the economy and society? One of the first great economists to question it was David Ricardo, who recognized that the great mass of wage labor in society was one of the main determinants, indeed the main determinant, of what was known as value.

With the labor theory of value, social reality began to creep into economic analysis. However, this theory still asserted that value was not a social property, but a property of the individual commodity, in which a mysterious qualitative transfer of labor from the wage earner to the commodity supposedly occurred. The value of a commodity was the quantity of labor that it *contained*.

The critique (=demolition) of the labor theory of value by Marx

Marx would be the one who carefully studied the work of Ricardo and the other economists in order to dismantle the whole apparatus of economic theory. The value of commodities does not respond to any peculiar characteristic of themselves taken individually one by one, but **the value of the whole ensemble of commodities produced responds to the coordinated activity of an entire exploited class.**

The value of the aggregate of commodities corresponds to the amount of wage labor socially necessary to produce them, but this labor is social, it is that of the whole of the working class at a given moment

and under given conditions.

This value is not contained in any individual commodity, it is an emergent consequence of large-scale industrial production and the generalized exchange of commodities.

That is to say, it is a consequence of the existence of the proletariat and its large-scale exploitation by another class and not a consequence of the genius of certain individual capitalists.

Value of total production vs. value of a particular commodity

We can know, therefore, what is the value of social production under capitalist forms, for it is nothing else than the mass of product resulting from employing the total of exploited labor. But what about the value of a specific commodity?

In his critique (=demolition) of economic theory, and with it of what economists call *value*, Marx had to examine step by step the whole set of capitalist relations from their foundation. But he has **dialectics** at the basis of his critique, so he does this not by *aggregating* parts, but by starting from a global aggregate representation. For ease of analysis he reduces all capital to a single capitalist with a single application for that capital - a firm - and a single group of workers.

And there it becomes clear what is that which economists cloak under the term value: the product of exploited labor-time.

Obviously, Marx realizes that this outline is... merely an outline, useful to unveil the true meaning of *value* whose *efficient* maximization would be the greatest virtue of capitalism according to the economists of yesterday and today. He is well aware that this is not a total description of capitalism as a system.

In fact he is very explicit about the idea that this outline leaves two fundamental parts out: the **extra-capitalist markets - without which the system would enter decadence from its very first minute** because by definition the purchasing power of wages will always be less than the value of the total produced - and the capital markets, without which the essential dynamic of the system cannot be understood: **capital accumulation**.

He will begin to address the first question in the materials that after his death will be recovered and edited as the third book of *Das Kapital* and will not be fully developed as part of Marxist critique until the publication of *The Accumulation of Capital* by Rosa Luxemburg. For the latter, Marx would produce a long and voluminous book of notes - published posthumously as *Theories of Surplus Value* - which he intended to incorporate into future books of *Das Kapital* which he never got around to writing because he died first.

In studying what the capital market does, Marx discovers that its function in the system is to equalize - or tend to equalize - the **rates of profit** of the possible placements of capital (the enterprises). Equalizing them necessarily destroys the equivalence between the extracted surplus value and the profit obtained. In fact, as a general rule, as **stressed by Marx**, surplus value will be different from profit.

What does this mean for the value of an individual commodity? That the inequality between profit and surplus value makes it impossible to calculate its individual value as something other than its price. We do know, however, that **on average it will tend towards the amount of socially necessary labor required to produce it. Socially necessary labor** being understood as the average number of hours of work necessary to produce its use value under the normal conditions of production prevailing in a society and with the average social degree of skill and intensity of labor.

It is plain that it is precisely the abstraction from their use values that characterizes the exchange relation between commodities. (...) As use values, commodities are, above all, of different qualities; as exchange values they can only differ in quantity, and therefore do not contain a single atom of use value.

Now, if we set aside the use value of the bodies of commodities, only one property remains to them: that of being products of labor. But even the product of labor has been transformed in our hands. If we abstract from its use value, we also abstract from the material components and forms that make it a use value. It is no longer a table, or a house, or yarn, or any other useful thing. All its sensuous properties have vanished. Nor is it any longer the product of the labor of the cabinetmaker, the bricklayer, the spinner or any other determinate productive labor.

With the useful character of the products of labor, the useful character of the kinds of labor represented in them also disappears, and with it the different concrete forms of those kinds of labor; they cease to be distinguished from one another and are all reduced to undifferentiated human labor, to abstract human labor.

All these things now tell us is that human labor power was expended in their production, that human labor was accumulated in them. As crystals of this social substance common to them, they are values.

In the exchange relation of commodities itself, their exchange value appeared to us as something entirely independent of their use values. If we then actually abstract from the use value of the products of labor, we obtain their value as it has just been determined. That common element which manifests itself in the

exchange relation or in the exchange value of commodities is therefore their value. The progress of the investigation will lead us back to exchange value as the necessary mode of expression, or form of appearance, of value, which for the time being, however, must be considered independently of that form.

A use value, or a good, therefore has value only because abstract human labor is *objectified* or *materialized* in it. How, then, is the magnitude of its value to be measured? By the quantity of the “value-forming substance” - the quantity of labor - contained in that use value. The quantity of labor itself is measured by its *duration*, and *labor time*, in turn, finds its standard of measurement in *definite fractions of time*, such as the hour, the day, etc.

It might seem that, if the value of a commodity is determined by the quantity of labor expended in its production, the lazier or clumsier a man was, the more valuable his commodity would be, because he would need that much more time to make it. However, the labor that forms the substance of value is undifferentiated human labor, the expenditure of one and the same human labor power.

The total labor power of society, which is represented in the values of the world of commodities, counts here as one and the same human labor power, even though it is made up of innumerable individual labor powers. Each of these individual labor powers is the same human labor power as the others, insofar as it has the character of an average social labor power and functions as such, that is, insofar as in the production of a commodity it uses only the labor time necessary on average, or *socially necessary labor time*.

Socially necessary labor time is the labor time required to produce any use value under the normal conditions of production prevailing in a society and with the average social degree of skill and intensity of labor. After the introduction of the steam loom in England, for example, roughly half as much labor as before sufficed to convert a given quantity of yarn into cloth. To make this conversion, the English hand-loom weaver now needed exactly the same labor time as before, but the product of his individual hour of labor now represented only *half* an hour of social labor, and its value consequently fell to half what it had been before.

It is therefore only the *quantity of socially necessary labor*, or the *labor time socially necessary for the production of a use value*, that determines its *magnitude* of value.

Karl Marx. **Das Kapital**, 1867

Wage



Part of total production with which capital buys labor power and which tends to equal the social cost of reproducing it with the necessary skill and knowledge required in production.

It is a part of capital, the part capital uses to buy **labor power**:

The wage is not the worker's share in the commodity he produces. The wage is the part of already existing commodities with which the capitalist buys a certain amount of productive labor power.

“Wage Labor and Capital”, Karl Marx 1849

As the **value** of **labor power**, the wage represents the social cost of reproducing the commodity consumed by the capitalist in the productive process. This includes not only the cost of keeping the **proletariat** alive, but also the cost of maintaining it with the average qualification necessary for its **labor power** to be productively employed for **capital**.

Wage labor



Form taken by the vast majority of social labor under capitalism.

Wage labor, originally occasional in the pre-capitalist world, became generalized with the **accumulation** of capital and the emptying of the countryside and industrialization that accompanied it.

Under these new conditions, the **surplus labor** extracted from the mass of the exploited takes place through the production and sale of commodities, and the exploited obtain, in return, the part of capital invested in ensuring the maintenance of their **labor power**: the **wage**.

Zinovievism



Centrist current that between 1924 and 1929, under the leadership of Grigory Zinoviev, paved the way for the destruction of the International and its sections with the organizational policies of “bolshevization” and “proletarianization” within the framework of the “class against class” tactic, which denied the need for transitional objectives in class struggles.

The three axes of Zinovievism

1. Bolshevization

Bolshevization can be defined as a bureaucratic reinterpretation of “democratic centralism” that destroys **centralism** by replacing it, in the name of functionality, with the centralization of decisions in the

executive bodies and the leadership, which thus end up creating organizations tailored to themselves. One of its spokesmen in Spain, later a Stalinist leader, argued it this way:

The communist parties, unlike the social democratic ones, are in essence and fundamentally parties of action. Discussions among the members are not opened by virtue of the democratic principle of “equality”, but exclusively to strengthen, to reinforce the action of the vanguard of the conscious proletariat. That is why our parties are disciplined parties; one joins them not to impose one’s own particular point of view, but to devote all one’s energies to the defense of the supreme interests of the party. That is why there is no room in them for idle discussions.

[...] In every critical situation, the demand for democracy has been characteristic of the reformist elements, incapable of understanding and, above all, of applying or enduring the Bolshevik iron discipline without which the working class cannot forge its political class party.

Gabriel León Trilla. **Bourgeois democracy and proletarian discipline, 1926.**

From 1925-26 onwards, the sections of the International thus gradually became organizations following the old Blanquist mold, adorned with extreme militarism. In the party, the only thing discussed is how best to carry out the directives of the higher level; the line to be followed is not discussed. Zinovievism paved the way for **Stalinism.**

The petty-bourgeois conception of democracy, which has penetrated even into the Communist Parties, enshrines a sacrosanct respect for “freedom of discussion”, for the right to the free exercise of criticism.

[...] And when they are told that the Communist Parties were not created to worship democracy, when we reject the fetishism of “freedom of criticism and discussion”, anathemas and accusations arise. When they are told that what is essential for us is to attain the political ends we set ourselves, and that if democracy gets in the way, if it prevents us from advancing, we restrict or suppress democracy, they brand us, scandalized, as wanting to stifle human thought, and if the scandalized one is some petty bourgeois who has slipped into the Party, he even claims that “we want to stifle the voice of the opposition dictatorially and by violence”.

“La Antorcha”. Fractions and the party, 1926

2. Proletarianization

It is the fetishistic belief that, by introducing quotas based on the social origin of the members of certain executive bodies, the class nature of an organization is guaranteed... regardless of its program and its political practice.

3. The “class against class” tactic

Although the **communist left** criticized this tactic as a negation of the **united front**, which it was, in reality it went much further: it was a negation of the very need for the **party** in the concrete struggles of the class, to which it refused to give transitional objectives that would serve their advance, replacing them with exhortations about the need for revolution in the abstract, as if revolution were not the result of

leaps in **class consciousness** arising from concrete struggles that escalate because they know how to set transitional objectives to move forward.