Ending the Game

Democracy, Dictatorship, and Communism

democracy n.  [Fr. democratie; ML. democratia; Gr. demokratia, democracy, popular government <demos, the people, + kratein, to rule].  1. government by the people, either directly or through elected representatives; rule by the ruled.  2. a country, state, community etc. with such government.  3. majority rule.

- from Webster's New World Dictionary
Foreword

The purpose of this text is to bring some order to the jumbled topics of democracy and dictatorship as they are presently being discussed in what passes for the revolutionary movement. Generally speaking, this discussion has begun from a false premise, namely the ideology of democracy and dictatorship, rather than from an examination of the historical facts of the real origin and function of these political forms. Specifically, the debate has been clouded by the twin mystifications of Stalinism and Social-Democracy. The classical ultra-left, which grew up as a reaction to the Stalinist and Social-Democratic counterrevolution, remained for the most part trapped within the same politicalism that characterized its opponents: to authoritarian management it opposed democratic management, to the bureaucratic Leninist fetishism of the "party" it opposed a fetishism of workers' councils, and so forth.

In the early 1970's, there appeared a number of theorists, notably Jean Barrot and his associates in the group Le Mouvement Communiste who returned to the original analysis developed by Marx in The German Ideology, the Grundrisse, and elsewhere, and who began to use this analysis to criticize anew both the Social-Democratic and Stalinist traditions, and the ultra-left. In particular, they revived Marx's scathing criticism of "the foolishness of those socialists... who want to depict socialism as the realization of the ideals of bourgeois society articulated by the French revolution." (Grundrisse, p. 248)
Need I point out that this foolishness remains almost universal among contemporary "socialists"?

The text which follows is, in a sense, a continuation and correction of the work of Le Mouvement Communiste: certainly it owes a great deal to them, as also to Guy Debord's Society of the Spectacle. It does not pretend to be exhaustive, and its historical content has been kept as summary as possible in the interests of brevity. In the first of the three parts, I have attempted to summarize Marx's arguments concerning the origin of the notions of liberty and equality, and the effects on political life of the contradiction between production and circulation within capitalism. In the second part, I have analyzed in somewhat more detail the relationship between democracy and dictatorship in the capitalist state over the past three hundred years. In the third, I have tried to apply this analysis to the necessities of the immediate and long-term future for the communist movement.

Finally, I should say that the text assumes some general familiarity with Marxian theory -- say, to have read, and understood, Value, Price and Profit and the Manifesto. To have read Barrot's text "Capitalism and Communism" in Eclipse and Re-emergence of the Communist Movement would also be helpful, despite my several disagreements with it which, for those who know it, will become obvious from what follows. Meanwhile, as a necessity of its argument, my own text resumes a good deal of elementary material, which necessity will, I hope, not prove too trying to those readers who have already digested Capital, the Grundrisse, and so forth. In moments of boredom or frustration during the reading of this essay, such sophisticated readers will perhaps be more forgiving if they should reflect that they are as yet very few in number, and likely to remain so for some time to come.

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Introduction: Politics and Exchange

The rise of politics as an \textit{organized mediation} between social decision and action is inseparable from the development of the market, of commodity exchange. The city, from which politics derives its name, grew up around the marketplace: but even before this, as "primitive" hunting and gathering or agrarian communities were at once joined together and eroded by trade, as classes formed along with the growth of a social surplus product, political mediation began to become necessary. The development of the market, as the development of economic intercourse between \textit{separate} producers,
required in turn the development of a secular right, beyond religion, clan or hereditary caste. Unfettered commodity exchange is impossible without liberty, the right of producers to dispose of their own product to their own advantage, and equality, which places producers on the equivalent juridical footing appropriate to the exchange of commodities of equivalent value. n1

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Democracy, the form of politics based on liberty and equality, came into its own with the bourgeoisie. At first, as might be expected, suffrage was based on the ownership of landed property -- and still is in some parts of the world -- but was eventually extended to the propertyless classes, often after protracted and bloody social struggles. Modern democracy rests on the political individual who, given universal suffrage, possesses the right to vote for parties and candidates whom he or she believes will represent his or her interests within the State. However, this individual is also an economic individual, who has the right to sell whatever he or she possesses at the going price. In the case of those who possess no land or other means of production, but only their labor-power, the question is complicated by the fact that this labor-power must be sold through time and under conditions determined by the owner of the means of production. The alienation between society and individual implied in commodity exchange becomes explicit as more and more producers are forced to sell away their control over the labor-process itself, so that their combined product confronts them as an alien power which itself comes to dominate the whole of society. n2 Hence, while democracy can and does grow out of the market, the realm of circulation, the relationship of buyer to seller of labor-power within production must be essentially dictatorial.

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Capitalism is the highest and most developed form of commodity society, i.e., of society in which the ruling relationship between the producers of the means of life is exchange. In capitalist society, value -- the equivalence of quantities according to the average time socially
necessary to produce them -- dominates, in the form of exchange-value, the relationships between human beings and their production, and hence between one human being and another. However, within capitalist production the exchange of equivalents -- in this case, of a day's wage for a day's use of labor-power -- masks the extraction of a surplus value from the producers' labor. At the heart of this society of liberty and equality there therefore persists a real un-liberty and inequality, as the surplus value transformed into profit and reinvested as capital, expands relentlessly, converting the great mass of the population into propertyless wage workers. Democracy, growing out of circulation, is always overshadowed by the dictatorial power exercised by the agents of capital within the production process. Just as capital is the logical and historical culmination of commodity exchange, so dictatorship is the necessary complement to democracy in capitalist political life: both rest, like capital itself, on the law of value on the mediation of exchange between separate producers. The communist revolution, which aims to unite the world's producers in conscious cooperation, must put an end to the law of value, and to the separations to which value gives rise. In particular, it must abolish the separation of the producers from the means of social production, of "political" from "social" and "economic" life, of the particular from the general interest.

The goal of the communist revolution is not to make existing social relations more democratic, since democracy, like politics in general, grows out of the separation and opposition of human beings mediated by exchange. Instead, its goal is the creation of new social relations based on the full and free development of every individual within a global community. Once this community is fully realized, democracy, like dictatorship, will cease to exist, because human beings will no longer need any formal mediation between their particular interests, between the individual and the collective, between decision and action. Of course there may still be, from time to time, the necessity of voting if a group fails to reach agreement on a particular course of action. However, this will not be because of a fundamental conflict of particular material interests, but
because the group must arrive at a decision on the basis of limited information and within a limited time: the disagreement will be taking place over the best way of satisfying a real general interest. This is no longer democracy because it is not a form of rule, of government (kratein), but a simple means of last resort in settling a dispute: the majority and minority share the same relationship to social production, and have neither the means nor the desire to assert collective power over one another. There will no longer be any question either of democracy or of dictatorship, since the domination of one human group by another will have come to an end.

Marx and Engels analyzed the bourgeois State as the "materialized abstract general interest of... society." It is abstract
because in capitalist society, there can be no real, concrete general interest of the whole: society remains divided into classes whose interests are antagonistic. In the nineteenth century, this general interest was the more abstract because, in addition to the competing classes, there were also different sectors within those classes, e.g., industrial capital versus mercantile capital versus landed capital, etc. However, once the real domination of capital was established not only over direct production but over social reproduction as a whole, once capital was concentrated and centralized in the hands of the modern corporation and the State, this State came to represent visibly what it always had essentially -- the interest, not of any one capitalist or group of capitalists, but of capital itself.

Political representation has not always existed. In the medieval parliament, the lords "represented" only themselves as personifications of feudal right. With the rise of the bourgeoisie as the ruler of more and more of economic life -- and hence of the economy as a separate realm having its own laws -- the class struggle between the aristocracy and the various other possessing classes including the bourgeoisie (landed gentry, merchants) had also to be embodied in the State. The growth of political representation as the main form of government marks the growth of the power of the bourgeoisie. If the bourgeois State represents the abstract general interest of society, the various parliamentary parties represent real particular interests within that State -- representation within representation. This is true not only of the specifically bourgeois parties, but also of the parties of the working class "in-itself" as a factor of capital-production, the "Labor" and Social-Democratic parties. These latter parties, in times of prosperity, help to secure the interest of the national capital as a whole by helping to prevent the average social price of labor-power being pushed too far below its value, and hence the destruction of the worker-geese that lay capital's golden eggs. Thus, representative democracy acts as a cybernetic regulator over the anarchy of the market (including the labor market) as do labor unions, trade and manufacturing associations, and so forth. However, during periods of crisis, this regulating function is
upset: a general decline in the rate of profit forces capital to attack the proletariat, by lowering real wages and expelling masses of workers from production. The State as representative of capital becomes the agent of this attack, and, if the crisis is sufficiently severe and prolonged, must cease to be democratic.

Throughout the history of capitalism, the relationship between democratic and dictatorial political forms has paralleled that between monopoly and competition among capitals. Modern bourgeois democracy originates in the period of intensive domestic competition during the rise of industrial capitalism, its ascendant phase between about 1800 and 1913. But this democracy was made possible by the monopolistic division of African, Asian and Latin-American colonies among the "Great Powers". Nations that had failed to put their colonies to good capitalist use, like Spain and Portugal, or that had formed too late to gain substantial ones, like Italy and Germany, could not achieve a stable bourgeois democracy. Following World War I, itself the result of the first great depression of modern times, German and Italian capitals were unable to obtain the necessary mass of profit to become competitive in the newly-redivided world market: Germany, in particular, was being looted by the victorious powers of the Entente through the Versailles Treaty and the "War Reparations". Hence these countries followed Russia into the revolutionary crisis that resulted from the near-collapse of their economies under the weight of the war. It was not possible for their working classes to reproduce themselves physically and mentally at the pre-war level. Hence, their representatives, in the form of the Social-Democratic workers' parties, turned against them and crushed their revolutionary initiatives. Democracy, through the unions, the parliamentary parties, and even the workers' councils which had been created during the post-war interregnum, served as a means of disarming the proletariat and crushing the revolutionary minorities with the tacit assent of the relatively passive majority n5: dictatorial military repression went hand in hand with "free" elections.

However, the simple suppression of the revolution was
insufficient for the needs of German and Italian capital. In these countries it was also imperative to loot the population, to super-exploit the workers so as to extract from them what could not be extracted from colonies -- the mass of capital necessary for renewed accumulation. Hence the coming into power of the Fascist and National Socialist dictatorships simultaneously suppressed all democracy within the national borders and prepared for the imperialist expansion across Europe which resulted in World War II. \textsuperscript{n6} Since the war the pattern has been essentially similar: the restoration of democracy in Western Europe and Japan has been made possible by the imposition of dictatorships in the "Third World" whose brutality rivals the worst "excesses" of Hitler and Mussolini. \textsuperscript{n7} In Western Europe, the official Communist parties are competing with the Social Democrats for the position of managing the austerity made necessary by the renewal of the crisis; and in Germany in particular the SPD is repeating its brilliant performance of 1918-23, with even more poise and polish than before. Capital's wardrobe departments have done a fine job of repairing their \textit{民主装扮}, although here and there an old bloodstain is still regrettably visible.
In Russia the Social-Democracy was forced, by the backwardness of the country, to play a somewhat different role. Without the overthrow of the Czarist State, it had been impossible for the workers to gain representation as a class within capital. Social Democracy in Russia had to be revolutionary, and hence the Russian social-democratic parties rode to power on a wave of communist revolt. The Left-wing of the Social-Democracy (movement) - led by Lenin - split off from the Right in 1903, not over fundamentals but over tactical questions, provoked by the necessity of underground, illegal activity for the democratic movement. However, as the communist wave began to rise throughout Europe in 1917, the Bolshevik party became an expression, albeit a partial and contradictory one, of the class aims of the proletariat. The failure of the German revolution (to which it also contributed) resolved the contradictory nature of the Bolshevik Party in favor of capital. The bureaucracy which had formed as a result of the chaos of the German invasion and the civil war, ossified into a dictatorship which suppressed the remnants of the proletarian movement and proceeded to carry out brute force industrialization, pillaging the countryside and converting those peasants it did not shoot or starve into wage laborers. Meanwhile, through the parties of the Third International, this Russian bureaucracy proceeded to facilitate the crushing of genuinely communist initiatives throughout the world, especially in countries such as Spain and France where the bourgeoisie was in disarray! After World War II, by means of the "Red" Army, the domestic Stalinist parties, and in many cases ex-Nazi bureaucrats and police, the USSR established in Eastern Europe the "Peoples' Democracies" -- economic and political colonies ruled by what might be called comprador bureaucracies, which sold a huge proportion of the industrial product of those countries to the USSR at substantially below world market prices. However, the ferocity with which these local bureaucracies, (and on occasion, the Russian army) have repressed outbreaks of working-class revolt in these countries, together with the increasing coherence of such outbreaks and their tendential abandonment of a certain petty-bourgeois nationalist content, testify
to the persistent weakness of these regimes.

In countries and in periods where the national bourgeoisie is too weak to achieve hegemony and hence to carry out industrial development, the State becomes the principal agency for capital-accumulation. During the epoch prior to 1914, such a development could lead to the formation of a relatively strong industrial bourgeoisie, as in Germany. Since World War I, however, the strength of the Western imperialist powers has proven too great to permit this. Instead what has occurred has been a series of nationalist revolutions, usually aided by the Russian bureaucracy. These revolutions, of which the Chinese is perhaps the best example, involve the small local proletariat but are led by peasant and petty-bourgeois elements welded into a bureaucratic military party. These revolutions accomplish most of the tasks which during the ascendant period of capitalism were accomplished by the democratic industrial bourgeoisie in the West: primary accumulation, the conversion of an economy based on small-scale peasant production into one based on wage-labor in both industry and agriculture. As in bourgeois countries during wartime, the market relations between industrial enterprises are largely suppressed and goods and labor-power are distributed according to a State plan. The crucial difference between this type of development and that imposed by the Western powers on most of Latin America and Africa is that the surplus value extracted from the population does not simply flow out of the country, but instead is predominantly reinvested in a domestic industrial base which permits -- and necessitates -- a substantial improvement in the living-standards of the working population. In these countries, as in the USSR, once the bureaucracy is secure in its economic and political hegemony, it can and must open up trade with the world market in order to obtain industrial goods. This in turn subjects these countries more fully and directly to the law of value and gives further capitalist substance to the still-capitalist form of their relations of production.
The cybernetic or regulating function of democracy rests on the formal separation of political and economic power. As this separation erodes and disappears, so does democracy. A sector of the bourgeoisie can tolerate another sector in power for a short period, and the bourgeoisie as a whole can even tolerate a working class party in power, so long as the major capitalist retain their property-titles to means of capital-production. But the State as sole administrator of the national capital can tolerate no political opposition, since no particular bureaucrat or group of bureaucrats holds title to particular means of production. When the state-capitalist bureaucracy is deposed politically, it is also deposed economically. Struggles may take place within the bureaucracy, in which workers and other sections of the population may even be mobilized by the rival factions (e.g., the "Cultural Revolution" in China); yet if this struggle escapes the terms of the ruling social relations it is savagely put down. The representations of particular interests are swallowed by the general one, the "general interest" of Society, the Nation, the People, etc. which is really the interest of the bureaucracy.

The trend toward the national centralization of capital in the hands of the State is constantly counterbalanced by the trend of capital to internationalize itself, to flow from areas of low to areas of high profitability as heat passes from a hotter body into a cooler one. The law of value inserts itself like a wedge between enterprises, forcing them apart and fracturing the best-laid plans of the State bureaucracies -- even as these bureaucracies struggle to administer the interest of the national capital as a whole. (cf. the Lierman and Sik reforms in the USSR and Czechoslovakia). The governments of most "underdeveloped" nations are forced to act, not as the "executive committees" of their own bourgeoisies, which are weak or nonexistent, but instead of the powerful bourgeoisies of the United States, Germany and Japan. (In certain cases, such as Brazil, the State has been reduced to a mere debt-collection agency for multinational banks.) Sacred ideological icons are smashed, political postures reversed overnight: thus, as enterprises in
"communist" Hungary are permitted to conduct independent foreign business dealings, the Republican anti-communist Nixon opens up increased trade with the USSR while setting American workers to shiver in a wage freeze. Capital perpetually undermines with one hand the barriers it builds with the other.

As the crisis of capital deepens, the necessity for dictatorial measures on the part of the State -- whether or not its leaders are elected -- goes hand in hand with the necessity of democratizing certain aspects of social life. The increasingly militarized nation must find the means of instilling esprit de corps into its demoralized rank-and-file as it prepares for the economic battles which will culminate in the next global war. In particular, workers and other proletarians are encouraged to assume the democratic management of their survival as proletarians, as actual or potential factors of capital-production. This serves a dual purpose: (a) it prevents the unification of the proletariat into a class for itself and against capital, by causing groups of proletarians to identify with "their own" workplace or neighborhood; and (b) it reduces the cost of reproduction of the proletariat by diminishing the number of bureaucrats, foremen, police and so forth required for this reproduction. Capital in effect informs the proletariat: "If you do not enforce your own exploitation, we will enforce it for you." So does the essence of capitalist democracy become visible. In this context, those who advocate "industrial", "participatory", or even "workers" democracy are more and more likely to be either conscious agents of the present capitalist class, or else unconscious agents of a "rationalized" capital, aspiring bureaucrats. In either case, the democracy of which they speak can only be the democracy of alienation and self-denial.

The modern State is little more than a means of regulating the contradictions of the law of value. Sometimes it does this by "enforcing" the law -- ensuring competition and trade, controlling the
prices of monopolized commodities, guaranteeing the right to strike; and at other times, by "overriding" the law -- establishing legal monopolies, restricting the money supply, forcing the price of labor-power below its value. In either case, it is an expression of the law of value. Value and the State move side by side: but only as someone’s image follows them in the mirror. Value mediates between any particular commodity and the universe of commodities, while the State mediates between any particular interest and all other interests within capitalism. But, just as capital, self-expanding value, removes itself from circulation only to return as circulation’s lord and master, so the State, subjected to the "general interest" of capital itself, comes to dominate the whole of social life, employing whatever combination of democracy and dictatorship may be necessary. As capital weakens, the State serves it, like the walking-stick in the hands of a sinister old man, for both prop and weapon.

Democracy reproduces dictatorship, dictatorship reproduces democracy. But this equation, far from removing the difficulties of the present situation, results in a situation still more difficult and confused. If, therefore, one alters the basis on which present-day political relations rest, if one destroys the present mode of production then this will not only destroy democracy, dictatorship and their antagonism, but also their unity, their synthesis, the movement of capital which is the real equilibrium of dictatorship and democracy.
State and Revolution (Revisited)

If the bourgeoisie is the class of representation, of separate power, the proletariat is the class of the impossibility of representation. It cannot be represented because it cannot separate economic and political power. Either the proletariat as a whole gains direct and collective disposal over social production, or it does not, and someone else does: a bureaucracy, a State-in-embryeo, a new representative of the "general interest". In order to emancipate itself, the proletariat must re-own the social self-powers that it collectively alienates to capital every day, by reproducing capital through wage-labor and commodity exchange in general. The proletariat cannot do this without abolishing all classes, hence abolishing the abstract general interest of society, and creating the only possible real general interest: the realization of each individual through the association of
all. In order, therefore, to assert themselves as individuals, the proletarians must abolish the State.

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The "class interest" of the proletariat contains the real general interest of the human species as the seed contains the flower. Because this interest is paramount above all others and excludes all others in conflict with it, its assertion takes the form of a dictatorship, in which the proletariat organizes itself as the ruling class. This dictatorship, however, as the last political enforcement of class power in history, is of a unique sort. To begin with, the wage workers and their dependents, together with the unemployed and "non-employed" (those who are not only separated from the means of production, but excluded from any kind of production -- capital's human scrap-heap) constitute the immense majority of the population in the industrialized countries. Since democracy means majority rule, the dictatorship of the proletariat is democratic even in this elementary sense.

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The conditions for communist society accumulate within capitalist society in the form of a necessary development of productive forces. However, these productive forces as materialized in machines, etc. are shaped by the rationale of capital-accumulation, since they are developed primarily in order to reproduce capital. What is perhaps less obvious is that the proletariat, the greatest productive force of all, also bears the stamp of capital, of value. The submissive, narrowly egoistic character structure of the proletarian is the internalization of their exchange value on the labor market, the necessary condition for the sale of their labor-power. Just as the law of value is simply the law of the unconscious global cooperation which is the world market, so it is the law of value as it acts on individual proletarians which reproduces this unconsciousness itself. The proletariat is not yet capable of taking over world production in its own interest: it can only become so through the process of communist revolution, by which it organizes itself to overthrow capital.
The dictatorship of the proletariat must be directed not simply against the capitalist class and its agents (army, police, petty-bourgeois and bureaucratic remnants, etc.) but against capital itself, against capitalist social relations. The dictatorship, then, is the forcible assertion of communist social relations (free human self-production) over and against wage-labor, the enterprise, the State, and above all value. This assertion is carried out over the whole terrain of capitalist society, including human beings. The struggle is waged inside the proletariat as well as "outside" it: it is waged inside each and every proletarian.

The completion of that partial socialization of humanity which capital accomplishes by means of the world market, is the task of "the
lower stage of communist society”, the transition from the formal to the real domination of the producers over the means of production.

n15 Since this socialization is necessarily incomplete at the time of the revolution, and since, moreover, useful production will have been severely retarded and disrupted by the crisis from which the revolution emerges, a fairly complex structure of class wide decision-making will initially be necessary in order to coordinate the transformation: this structure will grow simpler and less formal as the world is reorganized according to the needs of the producers. One might say, in fact, that the extent to which production is still unsocialized, to which it still bears the stamp of exchange-value, determines the width of the gap between any particular interest and the (still-unrealized) universal interest -- the gap that must be bridged by formal organization. For, just like the world they live in, proletarians are still "incompletely socialized" at the point when the revolution explodes out of the very core of capitalist society -- out of them. This is so both objectively in the separations imposed between proletarians by the capitalist organization of production, and subjectively in the aspects of proletarian character which are not dissolved in the revolutionary explosion. The conditions for a free and universal human association thus do not yet fully exist, and must be consciously fulfilled. But they can only be fulfilled by the process of association itself.

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The process of association does not begin with the outbreak of revolution. As the contradictory tendencies of the decaying capitalist relations tear them away from each other and from themselves, proletarians begin to form a negative association, an association based on active (if not always conscious) opposition to the existing society. n16 This association often springs up spontaneously in the course of strikes and riots, in which capitalist relationships are partially and temporarily dissolved and a human community begins to come into being. However, without the rapid generalization and deepening of the movement, this association is quickly broken up and its unbearably pleasurable memory repressed by most of the participants as well as by the conscious agencies of capital. Nevertheless, as such incidents become more frequent and widespread, and as the misery of
everyday existence becomes less and less bearable, groups of proletarians tend to form and to acquire a revolutionary theory, i.e., a consciousness of their own really human needs and actions.

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The movement toward revolutionary association passes through a complex process of advances and retreats, distortions and dissolutions. At times it may even employ temporarily certain organs of the existing society, such as unions reform groups, or Leftist parties, simply because they provide a locus for discussion or common action. Nonetheless, these fragmentary associations, if they are to sustain themselves and extend their influence and understanding, must inevitably link up, and, eventually, weld themselves into a single, more or less formal organization. This organization cannot be a political party in the sense of a body aimed at gaining State power for itself. It is simply, at all stages, the organized, conscious activity of the proletariat as it forms itself into a revolutionary class. Wherever a revolutionary action takes place, wherever there is a group of communists, there is the historical party of communism. The organized, "formal" party is only the convergence and distillation of such groups and actions. This is the sense in which Marx and Engels originally used the phrase, "our party".

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The form of the communist party is determined by its function. For example, as long as communists are a very small minority, their activity will be limited chiefly to developing and broadcasting their "program", i.e. the array of measures required to create a new world; to disseminating information; and to intervening in various situations to explain what they think is going on. At this stage their form of organization is the small, more or less temporary association grouped around a particular project, such as studying together, producing a publication (whether printed or electronic) or carrying out some subversive activity in a particular situation. There is little need for democracy, since organization is small-scale and fluid to the point of instability, and in any case the relative underdevelopment of the social
movement neither permits nor requires a very high level of practical agreement.

However, as social reproduction contracts still further and begins to break down, and proletarians in general find themselves obliged to challenge the State in mass strikes and other actions, the functions of the party will grow more complex and its organization correspondingly more solid. The party must not only elaborate its "program" but must also aid in the self-defense of the whole class, in order to preserve, as necessary preconditions for communist creation, the physical and mental powers of the population. In addition, it must prepare itself and the rest of the class as fully as possible for the economic and military tasks of expropriating capital and destroying the military forces of the State (cf. Lenin's "Letter to the Bavarian Soviet Republic", 1919). In countries under more or less overt dictatorship, it must be able to operate clandestinely; and a large and growing part of its operations will have to be clandestine even in the most democratic nations, since States everywhere will continue to develop their anti-communist machinery. Meanwhile, as the party grows, the need for internal democracy will begin to make itself felt. Procedures such as the mandation and recall of delegates to the central bodies, and even voting, will become necessary to prevent the development of bureaucracy and to ensure that all actions are well understood and agreed upon by those who carry them out. On the other hand, to insist on "decentralism" or even federalism is to succumb to the same organizational fetishism as do the Leninists, only from the other side. A glance at revolutionary history (say, the "March Action" in Germany, 1921) shows that both authoritarian centralism and "libertarian" decentralism work beautifully to reproduce an organization as long as there is relative class peace, or even counter-revolution; but the moment the organization is picked up and thrust forward by the very social forces it has been working to set loose, its structure, whether brittle or flaccid, disintegrates into helpless fragments. Our party's organization must be at once as strong and as flexible as a sail, able to catch, and to fill with, the winds of revolutionary initiative that blow both around and within it. What is more, this can only be so if the party's activity is authentically revolutionary (see Thesis 26).
In a revolutionary association as anywhere else, democracy guarantees nothing. The majority can easily be wrong, (e.g. the suppression of the "Left" by the Leninists during the Second and Third Congresses of the Communist International) and the minority forced either to go along with the blunder or else leave the organization to watch helplessly as the blunder results in the predicted disaster. The best assurance of conscious, unified, and above all appropriate activity later on is in fact the very widest possible discussion and experiment from the very beginning. Also, the necessary division of activity within the organization must be prevented from degenerating into the separation between decision and action, between creative work and routine work (or, as Marx put it, between "universal" and "cooperative" labor) that is one of the defining characteristics of all class societies. Once this separation is generalized, let alone institutionalized, all the democracy in the world will not prevent the organization from becoming counter-revolutionary: for its binding energy is no longer the expansion of the living desires and creativity of its members, but the reproduction of their proletarian character, their submissiveness and fragmentation, by means of the famous Leninist "iron discipline". If this occurs, the task of communists is not to try to regain control of the organization, which by definition is no longer within the party of communism, but instead to subvert and destroy it.
Repeatedly throughout this century, during periods of social crisis, the proletariat has tended to organize itself more or less spontaneously into assemblies and committees of delegates -- the soviets, workers' and soldiers' councils, workers' committees, etc. These bodies have, to varying degrees, been able to coordinate mass strikes, to organize armed resistance against the State, and sometimes to take over basic social production. However, they have in the past been attempts by the proletariat to reproduce itself as such during periods when the external authority of capital has broken down, as much as they have been really revolutionary associations, means to the communization of society and the self-abolition of the proletariat. n18 They have often remained confined to the enterprise or the military unit, or have come together only to surrender their power to the reconstituted State (Germany, 1918). n19

Hence the need for an organized party of communists does not end with the formation of class organs such as councils. On the contrary, it is here, especially at moments of hesitation or confusion, that the coherent action of communists will be decisive. Within these
organs at all levels, the communists will have to argue clearly: for coordination, for strategy, for the formation of militias, for the immediate takeover of all means of useful production and communication both to sustain the revolution and to undermine the military force of the State, for the international extension of the movement, and for their "program" in general.

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Insofar as other proletarians act in accord with the communists -- and as the communists are able to transform their own theory and practice in accord with the creative innovations of the wider movement -- the formal limits of the party are already dissolving, because the proletariat is really asserting itself as a subject, as the class of communism. Like the proletariat of which it is only the most developed and conscious expression at any given moment, the communist party organizes itself precisely in order to abolish itself. Just as the proletariat can only abolish itself by communizing society, by abolishing the very conditions of its previous existence as a class, so the communist party can only abolish itself by abolishing the conditions of its existence as a separate organization by making common its own aims.

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Let it be said once and for all: the goal of the communist movement is not the overthrow of capital and the communization of society for their own sake, but simply and solely for the sake of human emancipation for the free and joyful realization of all the historically-developed powers of the species. Hence the communist party has as both means and end the transformation of its membership into really social individuals, human beings developing and exercising their creative self-powers in transforming the world. The use of coercion to enforce the party's aims either within the party or against other proletarians, is thus directly in contradiction with these aims. The party can and must defend itself against the counter-revolution, which defense includes the expulsion of renegades or agent provocateurs: but it cannot make others communist against their will,
nor can it seek to manage the activity of others. In every situation where it is feasible, the party can put forward its perspectives, and attack ideology and authoritarian conditioning; but in no sense other than this can it act for the class as a whole, or else it will find itself isolated from the class and liable to be crushed by the State, as was the Spartakist uprising of 1918 in Berlin.\textsuperscript{21} Thus, the party is also subject to a sort of democracy in relation to the rest of the class: the failure of the majority to carry through the process of communization would be a "vote" that the party could only ignore at its peril. In such a situation the party would be forced to retreat and to attempt to re-create the subjective conditions for revolution at a higher and more widespread level. Otherwise it would either be destroyed, or else forced into the position of assuming State power over what would eventually become a centralized national capital; it would suffer the fate of the Bolsheviks.

27

Human beings, proletarian or otherwise, are not merely the embodiments of abstract "historical forces". They are the subjects of history whose conditions of subjectivity are historically determined, "given and transmitted from the past". More, they contain within themselves the contradictions and constraints both of their own time
and of all previous human evolution. Thus, one cannot count on the reactionary, unsocialized and hence unindividualized aspects of proletarians, that is to say their character as such, vanishing overnight, any more than one can dismiss the contradictions between real particular interests just by wishing them away. This would be just as foolish as imagining that the present physical layout of society, thoroughly shaped as it is by capital, could be transformed at the snap of our fingers into the world of poetry made real that communist society will create. It is true that the revolution is an assertion of collective necessity, but this necessity is also the necessity of freedom. The human race must become master of itself, of its own production, or else perish. This self-mastery, this freedom involves the collective assertion and discovery by each proletarian of individual necessity, the necessity of social individuals. The process of association is the process of the resolution of contradictions between individual necessities, particular interests, and their harmonization into a real general interest. And it is precisely because there are contradictions, because collective necessity is not a set of eternal commandments inscribed in letters of fire for all to see and obey, that democracy and dictatorship are both inseparable aspects of the communist revolution. The manifestation of conflicts between particular interests "internal" to the proletariat, (the struggle of minorities and majorities), will necessitate collective debate and decision, just as surely as the manifestation of other, "external" interests, in the form of the agents of capital, will necessitate forcible suppression.

The modern State grew up as an inevitable result of the contradictions between particular interests in class society. Where compromise could not be reached between the opposing interests by democratic means, one of these interests was dictatorially suppressed. However, just as the democracy of the State was always representative democracy, the democracy of representation and thus often a mere representation of democracy, so the State as representative of the non-existent general interest concealed and perpetuated the dictatorship of the most powerful particular interest. By contrast, the proletariat neither represents nor is represented. It
cannot assert itself as the ruling class without simultaneously abolishing all representation; it cannot abolish itself without completing the conditions for a free, classless human association, without creating a general interest of all humanity. Its dictatorship is majoritarian: its democracy is direct, without representation. Neither the democratic nor the dictatorial aspects of the process are institutionalized, they are simply moments transient responses to changing necessities. The class rule of the proletariat is thus best described as the anti-State. n23

Although the form of the anti-State association process cannot be determined precisely in advance, we can assume that it will bear about the same relation to the Soviets and factory councils of 1917-23 as the present capitalist society bears to the one of those days. In other words, it will reflect the completion of the transition from the formal to the real domination of capital! n24 It will not emerge, this time, from cities surrounded by a peasant and petty-bourgeois countryside, from a capitalist industry surrounded by pre-capitalist modes of production and consumption. Instead, it will have - as its base - cities that are gigantic reproduction factories in which social
survival has been almost entirely industrialized, collectivized, and around which the peasantry has become a minority. Rather than being a political federation of workplace organizations, it would develop and function as a unitary social organism, containing "cells" which carry out different tasks -- productive, distributive, military, and so forth. As in a biological organism, transformation at the cellular level would be very rapid, virtually continuous, while the overall structure, once established, would change more slowly. To be precise, the composition of the cells in specific production units or neighborhoods would be in constant flux, as old residential areas, old factories, old schools and so forth are replaced by new structures and instruments which better serve the needs of the community, and as the remnants of the old non-proletarian classes are absorbed into the association of producers, the Commune. Meanwhile, the reorganization of production at a global level, the abolition of starvation and privation, would entail the building up of vast new networks of communication, of the distribution of goods and the processing of data. The composition of any regional, continental, or global coordinating bodies, as well as their structure and precise function, would thus be rotated and modified at a lower rate. In general, the form of the anti-State would reflect the tasks of communization and would alter as they were accomplished. However, it must always be such that it does not involve a renewed alienation (disowning) of the social self-powers that the proletariat has just taken back by overthrowing the wage-relation and the State. It must, therefore, aim from the very start to permit the full participation of every individual in the planning of global social reproduction. This does not mean that everyone will spend all their time planning and making decisions, but rather that the task of all specialized planning bodies will be to outline the feasible alternatives in a given case to those concerned, corresponding to the generally expressed needs of the entire population.
Make no mistake. There is no question here of "advocating" democracy any more than of "advocating" dictatorship. When the
need appears for voting, for the recalling of a delegate, or for
democratic procedure in general, (just as when the need appears for
organized violence) more than likely a sign that the old world is
reasserting itself, whether as an objective conflict between particular
interests of the moment or as the persistence of capitalist character-
structure. Form is never more than the expression of content -- and,
in this case, democracy is the expression of the contradiction between
the necessity of creating a global community of realized human beings
and the obstacles to that necessity both in society at large and in the
individual. It is the expression of the struggle of subjectivity to create
its own universe.

31

The direct democracy of the communist party, and later of the
associated producers, is democracy in the process of superseding
itself. Insofar as it is a mediation between the momentary interests of
particular groups or individuals, it remains political. Yet it is at the
same time anti-political since (a) it is the means by which a real
common interest is discovered, made concrete and expressed in
practice, and (b) it is the means by which the material contradictions
which necessitate it in the first place - are resolved once and for all.

32

The proletariat can only abolish itself by simultaneously realizing
itself through its own dictatorship. This dictatorship - in turn - must
realize democracy so that the human race can abolish both democracy
and dictatorship.

"Tweedledum and Tweedledee
Agreed to have a battle;
For Tweedledum said Tweedledee
Had spoiled his nice new rattle.

Just then flew down a monstrous crow,
As black as a tar-barrel;
Which frightened both the heroes so,
They quite forgot their quarrel."

- Lewis Carroll, Through the Looking Glass
Footnotes

n1 cf. Grundrisse, pp. 241-245.


n3 cf. The German Ideology, Part I.

n4 Much of the “humanism” of the ruling classes can be traced to this fact. One recalls Robert MacNamara’s worried observation in 1973 that “at the present rate, the next generation of Brazilians will be unable to work.”


n7 cf. Auschwitz ou le grand alibi (Le Mouvement communiste, Paris - 1975). Also: numerous reports by North American Congress on Latin America (NACLA) and the daily newspaper.

n8 cf. V.I. Lenin, What Is To Be Done? (New World Paperbacks, New York).


n11 abc

n12 abc

n13 abc
Graphics Notes

1 Title Page: Joe Gomez Flores, “Little Sister” (Detroit) seen at Dark’s Art Parlour Gallery, http://www.darksartparlour.com/gomgal.html


3 Thesis 5: John Tenniel (ill.) in Complete Works of Lewis Carroll, Chapter 4 of Through the Looking Glass (Vintage Books, NY - 1976; p. 190)

4 Thesis 8: from Zbynek Brynych’s film, “And the Fifth Horseman is Fear” (Czechoslovakia, 1964) - taken from Amos Vogel’s Film as a Subversive Art (Random House, NY - 1974; p. 142)

5 Thesis 14: John Tenniel (ill.) in Complete Works of Lewis Carroll, Chapter 4 of Through the Looking Glass (Vintage Books, NY - 1976; p. 192)


8 Thesis 27: from Sergei M. Eisenstein’s film, “Strike” (USSR, 1925) - taken from Amos Vogel’s Film as a Subversive Art (Random House, NY - 1974; p. 35)

9 Thesis 29: “Remorte”, author unknown

10 Thesis 30: Jimmy Stewart in Alfred Hitchcock’s film, “Vertigo” (USA, 1958) - taken from Amos Vogel’s Film as a Subversive Art (Random House, NY - 1974; p. 195)

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