

THE CRISIS OF THE

GROSS
NATIONAL
SPECTACLE

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Overview

The miserable wealth of the disassociated producers is rapidly becoming a public commonplace. But the widespread protest over the qualitative poverty of daily life continues to produce the spectacle as the alienated form of its real aspirations, even as these aspirations turn confusedly toward the *revolutionary transformation* of existing conditions. The spectacle is only too pleased to confine its concessions to filling the demand for quality products and democratically ameliorated conditions of reification. It's not simply a question of the spectacle recuperating profound dissatisfaction by fulfilling "pseudoneeds" with "pseudo-goods"; all moralizing aside, commodities do not provide the illusion of real satisfaction so much as they satisfy the real need for illusion. This is the *sine qua non* of the *spectacular* commodity society.

The commodity, unity of exchange-value and use-value, did not escape the general inversion to which it gave rise. By the time of the well-functioning economy which succeeded the second world war, it had largely completed a synthesis of its internally antagonistic elements, to whose antagonism the economic crises of old had owed their existence: use acquired the form of exchange and exchange became the content of use. In so doing the commodity detached itself from all the *concrete ends* that had formerly rationalized its domination. It became a means toward nothing other than itself *as a commodity*. Today, the concrete material survival of humans is a largely incidental result of this epoch's fundamental production and consumption of abstraction; particularly of *abstract community*,¹ community in and for commodity consumption. It is exactly here where the commodity rediscovers its self-contradictory nature, just when it thought to have overcome it: as a use-value, it promises *above all* to bring about an authentic human community; that is, precisely the *only thing it cannot bring about* as an exchange-value. The commodity which had originally confined its self-critique to the underachievement of its real possibilities, and which in doing so effectively had become the guarantor of generalized material survival - all that it ever could have in itself promised or achieved - now, insofar as it promises the impossible, contains its own critique *qua commodity*. Nevertheless, this critique remains a *public secret*.

The commodity remains the object of the accumulation of capital, but wants to become *the* subject which makes the revolutionary critique of this process. This has not been in recent years very conducive to such accumulation! Thus it is not strictly speaking correct to affirm a "return" of the simple economic crisis: there is not so much a current crisis *within* the system of commodity production as the first pronounced economic crisis of this system in trying impossibly to become *something other than itself*. Capitalism is actually willing to go rather far in practicing its own critique, just as far as is necessary to ward off the threat of someone else making a more practical critique of capitalism. Its degree of success will depend on just *how well* revolutionary theory knows itself to be the enemy of revolutionary ideology. The critique of the economic crisis therefore aims at exposing it to be an epiphenomenal side-effect that capitalism reluctantly endures in its tactical retreat before the revolutionary project; it would be scandalous indeed to allow them to present a mere *symptom* of our limited but nonetheless *general success* as the *essence* of their aggravated but only *particular failure*.

Ideology: Qualitative Moment of the Accumulation of Capital

The history of the capitalists' attempt to preserve the society of classes is also the history of their attempt to *organize the coherence* of social structures and their ideological counterpart. In this process ideology has not generally been an automatic or incidental by-product of material production proper, nor have its specific shapes been linear corollaries of particular modes of social production. Ideology has always been *directly produced* and with varying degrees of self-consciousness; sometimes it has followed the trend of social existence and other times it has set it.¹

The society of the spectacle distinguishes itself from previous modes of capitalist social organization in that ideology has become its essential product, the only one within it that *even in principle* has no viable substitute. Plastics may supplant steel, but when the logic of social decomposition forces power to go underground, the police can replace ideology only at the risk of blowing everything.

In the 19th century, that of bourgeois ascendancy, ideology (chiefly that of political economy) performed the non-negligible role of justifying the barbarism of the bourgeois to themselves; for the masses the police took over where religious opiates failed. The Wealth of Nations meant - and then *only* had to mean - the wealth of the bourgeois, and they knew it. The inevitable misery of the masses was "scientifically" shown to be the result of the inborn inferiority of their class. Ideology and capitalist abundance remained something *particular*, the privileged property of the bourgeois and their professional lackeys. Political economy, as the scientific attempt to comprehend the rapidly changing structure of social life, and as the moral-philosophic attempt to sanctify the class domination of the bourgeoisie, always came *after the fact*, which is to say that ideology followed the trend while reinforcing it.

The partial success - the failure - of the old workers movement effectively refuted the ideology of the inevitability of mass misery. Indeed, the very existence of this movement had been contingent upon the fact that the industrial revolution had already destroyed the material basis of the "iron law of wages" even as a *credible* ideology, much less a scientific theory. The task of refuting an ideology and transforming the social practice which makes an oppressive use of it never presents itself in a practical way until all the material conditions for its effectuation are already present or at least in the course of formation. The bourgeoisie did not emerge from its victorious struggle with the old workers movement unscathed. Unable to any longer affirm the inevitability of mass misery, it was forced to proclaim the *inexistence* of mass misery; and to put its money where its mouth was by establishing mass affluence as an explicit and realizable goal. The Wealth of Nations *now* meant - and now *had to* mean - the Wealth of the People, and *they* knew it. At this moment the principal task of the 20th century bourgeoisie was formulated (implicitly) for the first time: that of generalizing wealth quantitatively by means of destroying it qualitatively. The birth of *the ideology of consumable pleasure* and of Ideology for the People bear the spectacle in embryonic form. Ideology still

assuages the bad conscience of the bourgeois, but now by promising in time the poverty of bourgeois wealth to everyone. As soon as capitalism and Social Democracy agree on a quantitative definition of pleasure, the ideology of mass production and the production of mass ideology join hands on an extended stroll down quantity street, at the end of which the modern revolutionary project discovers itself as the sole partisan of quality. It is beginning with the practical redefinition of *pleasure itself*.

Ideology democratized itself and became for *everyone* precisely because it could no longer be trusted of its own accord to remain the self-serving possession of any *one*; because the bourgeoisie could no longer dominate all of social life without encountering answerable opposition, be it reformist or revolutionary. Neither *social consciousness*, nor the socio-economic existence out of which it had more or less spontaneously evolved, could be allowed to develop as anarchically as in the past. This consciousness had to be directly determined as social *false consciousness*, not in order to more favorably "correspond" to (Marx) or "react" upon (Engels) the economic base but in order to *co-determine it, and on equal footing*. *This historically decisive* turnabout didn't evince the power of the bourgeoisie but its powerlessness to resist it. Certainly by this time the ideal side - the *qualitative moment* - of the process of the accumulation of capital had achieved a measure of relative independence, one sufficient to make possible the eventuality that the economic process could depend on it from a position of *inferiority*.

The 20th century has seen this possibility become more and more an actuality. Things have come to the point that whereas ideology once sought to interpret and justify social reality, it is now the case that this reality equally *materializes quasi-autonomous ideology*. This is of paramount importance when the ideology in question is the ideology of *revolution*. "The work of the negative goes on mainly at the level of forms before becoming itself a visible content" (Denevert).² By this ambiguity power is still able to invest the form of *historical becoming* with the content of alienation. Nevertheless such an investment by power is very risky, for the very logic of historical becoming compels it to relentlessly become *more historical*. One of these days capitalism is going to overdose on the negative.

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If originally the ideology of the achieved bourgeois revolution followed the trend of social existence, later on the ideology of the not-as-yet-achieved proletarian revolution began to *set* the trend. The view, for example, which has the society of consumption the simple consequence of this epoch's alleged "production for itself", and which has the poor consumer the manipulated servant of greedy capitalists or some omnipotent Capital, has things quite reversed. In reality the ideology of consumable pleasure is already in everyone's head, and it is not the *admen* who have put it there; "...the system of commodity production implicitly contains its *own situationism*, in the form of a utopia of economic pleasure consumable without limits and without the defects" (Denevert). The bureaucratic attempt in every country to manage a well-functioning economy aims at providing a material prop for the ideology of consumption (in the West) or consumption of ideology (in the East) which *presupposes* this attempt. Certainly the profit/power motive is an end in itself and tries to construct an ideological

climate in accordance with its own needs, but the terrain of possible maneuver is ultimately circumscribed by ideology itself. Commercial publicity follows the trend while reinforcing it.

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Ideological development is the qualitative moment of the accumulation of capital, that within it which is essentially *historical*. The productive forces themselves—that is, considered in their narrowly material aspect alone—remain, whether they augment, stagnate, or diminish, at the *same historical juncture* of blind economic development; whereas the thought which variously interprets, justifies, opposes, and in the end comes to determine this process follows an irreversible dialectic of acceptance, rejection, struggle, and reconstitution at more historically advanced *moments of choice*. In a word this thought becomes more *universal*: it begins in promoting economic development as in the interests of the small minority which rules the nascent State; goes on to rule in favor of the entire bourgeois class; and in the end declares that economic development must be in the direct interests of *all* classes, including that of the *declassed*. *However, since economic development can only be in the direct interests of the ruling class(es), and insofar as this development prefers not to be ruled in a contrary manner, this latter stage of universalization conveniently marks the moment after which statist revolutionary ideology either abruptly (Russia 1917) or gradually (U.S. 1932) inhibits the process of capitalist development.* (This in no way contradicts the fact such ideology can at times temporarily rejuvenate ailing capitalisms; the appropriate metaphor is that of a heart transplant and its eventual rejection.) Where this ideology has been generally imposed from the top down (as in the concentrated spectacle, where the material base is lacking for an even partial realization of this ideology) the resulting socio-economic catastrophes have forced it to make tactical retreats (e.g., Lenin's N.E.P.) even as the *political* impossibility of a complete surrender compels this ideology to continue inhibiting economic development. Where this ideology has generally emanated from the masses, either explicitly or as a spectacular recuperation of their revolutionary aspirations (as in the diffuse spectacle where the material base can afford a partial realization of this ideology) economic development retreats before the development of revolutionary ideology. From this standpoint one can see it is only apparently paradoxical that some of the most modern assaults on capitalism have occurred in places where the level of capital accumulation is still relatively retarded; in these places (typically in Eastern Europe) ideological development has proceeded to such a point that the social question is radically *simplified from* "need there be a revolution?" to "what is the revolution?"

The social question has also been radically simplified in the overdeveloped West, but in a less historical and more immediate manner. The *number* which had defined the "good life" and which had always threatened to outstrip capitalism's ability to deliver the goods now finds itself attacked not only in terms of its magnitude but also in terms of *its very sense*; and therefore, by those for whom the very best capitalism could do necessarily couldn't be good enough. The movement which had extended its domination everywhere according to the principle of *quantify and conquer* now finds it must conquer itself, and thereby reconquer all else by implication, via a *self-qualitativization*. It hopes to in this manner become the very agent of a revolutionary

transformation; ironically, in its sudden concern for the "quality of life" capitalism winds up blurting out that which it had formerly attempted to conceal, namely the scarcity of pleasure in the plethora of commodities. In demanding *more* of the good life, the old workers movement forced capital to put its money where its "trickle-down theory" mouth had been; in demanding a *transformed* good life, the modern workers movement forces the *spectacle*-capital to such a degree of accumulation that it becomes an image-to give its money a revolutionary mouth. Now: when the spectacle dreams the impossible dream of getting to anything other than itself it's *the economy*, the actor which must enact this unplayable role into reality, which gets booted off the stage. It must sacrifice its *own* development to the delusion of a spectacle which believes its own lies.

The delusion of the spectacle could become such a major material force only because revolutionary lucidity could begin to impose itself as something to be dealt with. This in no way means that this delusion can't effectively recuperate; only that power responds to contestation with about as much *foresight* as the first quasi-reptile that stepped from a dying primeval sea onto the shore. Whereas the "real movement" finds its strength in being able to consciously invent those forms of organization that best suit the development of *its own content*, capital can *at best adapt* its more or less rigid forms to a content it is increasingly obliged to appropriate from the negative. By this certain adaptability capital is able to extend its temporal survival in a deteriorating environment, but only at the cost of straying from the path of its own development. Capital will meet its doom not in developing according to its "self-destructive internal laws of motion," but on the contrary, while abandoning them to the real movement that suppresses the reign of social *laws* of motion.

Those who derive their strategies for a proletarian revolution from the latest set of worsening economic indicators still haven't understood that it's not that an economic crisis will end the life of the spectacle, but rather that the skirmishing between the lived spectacle of transformation and the lived transformation of the spectacle results in, among other things, an economic crisis.

East Meets West

When capitalism was still expanding, it rejected every sort of social organization.... If we compare that with current attempts to harmonize a 'planned economy'... we are forced to admit that what we are witnessing is the capitulation of the class consciousness of the bourgeoisie before that of the proletariat.

Lu kacs

The worldwide tendency towards centralized economic planning everywhere discovers the disappointing truth that although markets can be planned, the market itself refuses to be *planned away*. Planned markets operate efficiently (economically speaking) to the extent that power's arbitrarily chosen variables approximate those that would have been churned out by the unfettered confluence of supply and demand. Where they do not, the symptoms are shortages, surpluses, black markets, queuing, rationing, riots,

etc. The pioneers in the theory of state economic planning (Lange's *On the Economic Theory of Socialism*, Leontief's input/output analysis) quite unabashedly point out that their primary intent is to reproduce the competitive market results without the embarrassing visibility or annoying unpredictability of the markets themselves; hence a perfected capitalism (perfected in the dual sense of minor technical and major ideological improvements). If the planning and/or circumvention of markets signifies an ideological endeavor to recuperate the revolutionary project of a consciously determined social existence, the persistence of the movement despite repeated and often devastating failures (from the 5-year plans to wage/price controls) only demonstrates just how far capital's need to develop anarchically has had to be sacrificed to this endeavor. In the West it has been sacrificed to power's need to appear non-anarchic, socially conscious.³ Nevertheless, such a profound movement cannot be attributed to what is at most a semi-conscious need for a radical appearance; Western powers believe they have discovered *purely economic* reasons that could justify large-scale interventionism - but then again their *bourgeois class consciousness* needs to discover them in order not to discover or publicize the class struggle that in reality makes *laissez-faire* obsolete. In the East no one worries about appearing non-anarchic. Central economic plans are to guarantee the absolute power of the bureaucracy, which only in moments of absolute desperation would place itself at the mercy of an even semi-autonomous market. The more enlightened bureaucrats there will one day hold sway. Over Brezhnev's dead body.

The famous "convergence of east and west" does not signify the *economic* efficiency of the "mixed economy" (no matter how defined). It is a convergence from opposite directions on the most momentarily workable compromise between the two conceptual poles of *the political economy*: the society of anarchic capital and the society of revolutionary ideology. As such, it is the least miserable solution in what has become for power the worst of all possible worlds. *Detente*, which is posed as the final solution for powers east and west to the awesome threat of *external* nuclear attack, more accurately constitutes their sharing of ideas on how to neutralize *internal* opposition to the global rule of separate power. While *Pravda* hacks blather on about the death throes of decadent capitalism, Russian economists offer advice to their western counterparts on how to curb inflation; and while Senate humanists selfrighteously demand the Kremlin extend basic civil liberties to the oppressed Russian citizenry, IBM sells the bureaucracy the sophisticated computers it would need to even contemplate the *efficient* stalinization of the Russian economy.

On Pricking the Keynesian Bubble

The Great Depression of 1929, which began as the last of the old-style business cycles, and which *persisted* as the first modern economic crisis, was terminated in such a way as to become the progenitor of today's crisis of economy. Regarding its physiognomy, suffice it to say that capitalism once more found itself trapped in this bind: lacking employment, workers were unable to generate a level of aggregate demand sufficient to financially justify a greater production and employment; whereas the capitalists, lacking a remunerative market for their products, were unwilling to generate a

sufficient level of employment and production to restore the deficient aggregate demand. By successfully resisting a general and sufficient decline in money wage rates, the proletariat vitiated capitalism's traditional response to such an impasse. So much for the Marxist economists who in speaking of the "internal contradictions of capitalism" *never fail to leave out the proletariat*, which is consigned in their scientific analyses to wait on the sidelines, ready to rush in and take over during capital's last hour! Their moralizing attempt to portray the proletariat as the hapless victim of a sinister capital is more abusive than the analysis of Keynes, which correctly recognizes the proletariat as the villain of the piece even as it retains a *calculated silence* on the matter. If Keynes expressed it, it was the proletariat which produced his *The General Theory*; he condemned it to invisibility behind his *assumption* of downwardly inflexible money wage rates, as though they were a law of economic science and not a proletarian criticism of the world which is expressed by economic laws.⁵ Insofar as it is an *economic* remedy, Keynesianism is nothing other than the "scientific" defense of inflation as a better method of achieving the necessary decline in real wages than cuts in money wages.⁶ Keynes cynically observed: "Having regard to human nature and our institutions, it can only be a foolish person who would prefer a flexible wage policy to a flexible money policy."

The Keynesian cure is only superficially understood as the government regulation of aggregate demand, usually a stimulation of it through massive government deficit spending. This is the only level of understanding permitted to economic science, which cannot go farther because it is not separate from the effects of Keynesianism, the scientific development of *organized* reification. It signifies a qualitative transformation of the capitalist society, and not as many critics believe a mere doctoring-up of the system of alienation. One can even say it is remarkably coherent in the sense that its methods and content are identical: methodologically, it wants *generally* to engineer inflationary government budgetary deficits in order to promote economic expansion in spite of workers' militancy; while in its content, it wants to use these deficits *particularly for programs of reformist pacification which would disarm this militancy*.

Otherwise expressed: the formal requirements for economic success are perfectly satisfied by the content of what is politically expedient, *and vice versa*. *Therefore, Keynesianism explains not how governments can regulate the economy but how they can regulate all of society-and be able to pay for it*. It inaugurates the *stalinization* of western capital. As Keynes put it, "Dangerous human proclivities can be canalized into comparatively harmless channels. The task of transmuting human nature must not be confused with the task of *managing* it."

Ironically, in its moment of *public* acclaim (Nixon: "We're all Keynesians now.") Keynesianism was to discover that all of its efficacy resides in the *secrecy of its magic and the frugality* of its use. The benefits of inflation cease as soon as the public's awareness of its *non-abnormality* overtakes the rate at which money is being printed; while the charm of the old reformism fades before the loss of its novelty. It is the very *coherence* of Keynesianism that lends to the coherence of the modern assault on the political economy, which assault immediately - but most often *only* immediately, and not yet *historically*-translates the "leadership vacuum" into an "economic crisis" and *vice versa*.

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All of the usual explanations of the current inflation clearly contain an aspect of concrete truth. Wage-price spirals, Arabian oil intrigues, self-fulfilling prophecies, excessive government spending deficits, etc. all play their part. We need add to the list only the *central aspect* of the inflation: the rising *cost* of and *diminishing returns* to *investment in scientific reification*. The inexorably increasing portion of the *Gross National Spectacle* devoted to massive programs of reformist pacification and ideological deformation, which could only finance itself on the basis of its ability to improve or at least stabilize the general environment for the manufacture of alienation, has instead encountered a developing *wildcat of daily life*. Such a wildcat not only poses an immediate threat to economic prosperity, but undermines capitalism's ability to generate that surplus out of which it finances its long-run programs of recuperation. It's not surprising that governments, faced with the immediate need to step up their investments in reification at a time when they could least afford it, have chosen to fight the class struggle *on credit*. The more perspicacious of the social engineers understand that they must not so much increase the volume of such investment as improve it in quality; it's the old principle of "more bang for a buck" applied to *internal opposition*. Nevertheless, quality products are *more expensive*; no one in the spectacle's think-tank can know what it will eventually cost to get each individual self-managing his own alienation, but everyone there agrees that *money is no object*. They have a finer appreciation of what is at stake than their deceived opponents who see only things and their rates of inflation. If capitalism so heavily promotes the image of its *absolutely non-existent* program to "whip inflation now," even as it calculatingly invests in a neo-reformism whose inevitable economic counterpart is renewed inflation, it is in order to *buy time on borrowed money* until the dividends roll in as a working class which itself would assume the liabilities for *its own reification*. Modern inflations are engineered with reluctance, but nevertheless with skill and with careful calculation of the rate at which the parties who suffer will not squeal too loudly. To make the inflation an effective economic stimulant, and to hold its required rate at a feasible level, the public must be persuaded that: 1) the intended currency depreciation is unintended; 2) the government is a tragic victim of economic vicissitudes; and 3) the inflation will abate. *Political economy*, the old science of "the invisible hand," makes its return as the scientific attempt to organize *the invisibility of the visible hand*.

It's not that the state *merely* presents the appearance of having a strategy to *reduce* the rate of inflation; this appearance is its strategy to *stabilize* inflation at the rate *it* requires. The spectacle's *first step* in regaining effective control over a situation threatening to run out of control is to depict it as *already* under control. That's why it promotes the ludicrous media debate over whether state policy should aim at reducing inflation or increasing employment (between which goals there is an alleged "trade-off"), as though the state had *both* the means and the willingness to appreciably realize either objective-even disregarding the other. When public confidence in the state is ebbing, abstract statements of noble intentions take *center stage* over the concrete policies which are to realize them; because the correspondingly concrete and public failure of these policies might have more dangerous consequences for the state than those to be expected

from a deliberate policy of concealed inaction. But when things get bad enough, this inaction yields rather suddenly to a rash program of social activism, as when the New Deal succeeded the old conservatism almost overnight.⁷

For example: The government has chosen to subsidize the unemployed via its program of inflationary reformism rather than *risk failing to re-employ them* via an economic expansion which moreover could send inflation sky high. Its margin of maneuverability between inflation and unemployment has been considerably reduced by the *unprecedented mass aversion to work*, which phenomenon economists try to mask off as some incomprehensible "institutional change in the economy which has shifted the Phillips curve to the right." In the 1930's unemployed workers who demanded jobs were paid to dig holes and fill them up; today they demand the money without having to dig the holes-and get it. Many of the "unemployed" are in fact *voluntarily dis-employed*, which makes it all the funnier to see a leftist self-righteously deny the existence of "mass welfare fraud." It is *less* inflationary, but still *very inflationary*, to *print money* for the unemployed than to engineer an expansion that would in the end find most of them still unemployed. Some workers become involuntarily unemployed as a result of the occasional contractionary measures the reformist inflation requires. As soon as they join the welfare rolls, a new round of inflation begins.

This mass aversion to work is of course not limited to those who have become voluntarily disemployed. The economists who used to bitch when the rate of increase of workers' productivity slowed to a mere 1% or 2% a year now stare in disbelief at a productivity which *decreases* by as much as 3% a year. Productivity being a measure in physical terms of commodities produced per hour of labor-time, its decline gives negatively a *very rough* index of heightened resistance by workers on the job. Over and beyond the obvious inflationary impact of such a rise in unit labor costs, declining productivity presents a *new kind* of problem for capitalism,⁸ one which can be expressed in several ways: the old problem of the *realization* of surplus-value is augmented by that of its very initial *generation*; the depressive effects of a declining quantity of labor demanded are aggravated by a declining *quality of labor supplied*; the primordial deficiency in the will to purchase joins up with a modern deficiency in the will to *produce purchasing power*. Capitalism, which knew how to disarm the critique of the inegalitarian *results* of commodity production by means of democratizing *consumption*, must now learn how to simultaneously disarm the developing critique of the *very mode* of commodity production by democratizing the *work-place*. The epoch of permanent economic crisis will be dominated by the long-run incompatibility of these two goals; for each attempt to inaugurate "workers control" in production will cut down on that economic efficiency which enabled capitalism to afford its experiments in reforming consumption; e.g., the reform of the assembly line will raise the price of automobiles, the decline of the automobile industry will reduce the tax base for non-inflationary "social spending," etc.

The recent upsurge of *organized muckraking* poses still another threat to economic efficiency. The myriad of mini-movements which unite under the banner of "ecology" - distinguished from one another chiefly by their particular environmental fetishes - share the central defect of criticizing the system of commodity production on a symptomatic

level, in merely demanding it eliminate its (spectacularly identified) unsanitary by-products; and what's worse, without even duly noting the economic strain they are nonetheless able to put at the center of this system as a mere by-product of their peripheral critique. Certainly capitalism has at its disposal the *technical means* to reduce pollution to an "acceptable level," but then again it also has the technical means to establish a colony on the planet Mars. Confronted with the ecologists' demand for the financially impossible, capitalism comes out fighting on the ideological battlefield-clearly its own favored terrain-with a better spectacle: it launches a frontal assault on the environmentalists with the "energy crisis." (It knows that public opinion will deem waiting lines at gas stations more aggravating than the melting of the Alaskan tundra.) (Not at all surprising that the environmentalists are being hit on the head with an energy crisis which is considerably of their own making through years of opposing the proliferation of nuclear power plants, oil pipelines, off-shore drilling operations, etc.; such is the predictable fate of all those who would leave the *implications* of their practice to be determined by their opponents.) Since the existence of massive pollution greatly antecedes that of the mass movement against it, one can infer that opposition *to pollution* has become timely mainly because *opposition itself* is now *in the air*; that if such an appreciable portion of this opposition enters the ecology movement it is because virtually no other movement could be as absolutely *non-controversial* (who could *publicly* speak out against clean air?); that therefore this opposition remains largely *abstract*, still in search of both its precise enemy and effective weapons. Nevertheless: although the dialectic can escape ecologism, ecologism can't escape the dialectic. The *very concreteness* of its failure - either in making utopian, impossible demands of capitalism *qua capitalism*, or in waging empiricist struggles the emptiness of which are revealed in the moment of victory - forces it to either *aim better or disappear*.

Epilogue

The economists who in the late '60s announced the end of the business cycle were correct (current appearances notwithstanding). Capitalism has entered an epoch of permanent crisis in which periods of stagnation yield not to periods of prosperity but to periods of less stagnation; England has been a trail-blazer in this regard. The conservatives who dream of returning to the sound principles of economic science (free trade, balanced budgets, etc.) cannot refute the liberals' argument that the *political* world in which these principles operated effectively can no longer exist; whereas the front-running liberals can only dream of being in *any other world but this one*, since *it* irrefutably demonstrates the *economic* untenability of the "socialism" they espouse. In a moment of panic James Tobin has summarized the liberals' last word on scientific economics: "If we really want to curb inflation, we shouldn't be scared off by a few computer runs." Less rashly, pragmatist Simone Clemhout has precised the point: "We need some kind of action to give the people the impression that something is going on." (Much can be expected of those whose solution to unemployment is to continually revise upwards the percentage rate of unemployment which defines "full employment.") In moments where nothing seems to work, the spectacle falls back upon its powers of incantation; which defines our project negatively as that of demystifying the incantations of power.

Footnotes

1 Dialectical materialists take note: if Marx could affirm in 1859 that it is men's social existence which determines their consciousness and *not the other way around*, if he could speak of ideological superstructures which merely *correspond* to the relations of production, it was because he was still identifying the proletariat with the bourgeoisie in terms of mainly *objective preconditions* for revolution. In reality, the proletariat is the class which must consciously revolutionize its social existence, must transform the very conditions of its consciousness, and must *know* that it does so. Nonetheless, what we have to deal with here is a *situationist* movement not as *it* develops on its *own* foundations, but on the contrary, as it *emerges* from spectacular society; which is thus stamped in every respect, theoretically and practically, with the ideological birthmarks of the old society from which it emerges. The class struggle finds its expression in each and every individual as the contradictory process of his attempting or not attempting to comprehend through praxis his own engagement in it. The effective struggle against the spectacle begins by knowing it to be ideology become dialectically materialized.

2 See *Theory of Misery/Misery of Theory* by Daniel Denevert, available from me in its English translation.

3 By this I don't mean to ignore the banal existence of special interest groups which solicit "state regulation" in their own favor, which fact has nothing to do with recuperation in itself. But states come increasingly to cloak this archaic variety of capitulation to individual capitals in a modern garb of "social consciousness," which duplicity tends to develop a momentum in its own right; e.g., the bailing out of some particular bankrupt capital is presented as the saving of a few hundred workers from unemployment. Moreover, new kinds of special interest groups - "socially conscious" ones, like consumer advocates, environmentalists, etc. - also solicit state regulation (usually against the interests of the old groups) in a manner which is directly recuperatory.

4 Monsieur Jean Barrot, in graciously summing up his theory of the proletariat in just a few words, provides a representative sample of this sort of revolutionary ignominy: "... the workers only attack capital if it attacks them because of its inner problems (fail of the rate of profit, etc.)" (*Eclipse and Re-Emergence of the Communist Movement*). With such an explicitly *anti-situationist* starting point, naturally he finds that the S.J. lacks "an understanding of capital." Jacques Camatte (in *The Wandering of Humanity*) resumes this butchery of Marx precisely where Barrot leaves off: not content with the latter's *static eternalization of the categories of capitalist existence*, he proceeds to *dynamize* this eternalization. Schematically: "It's not that everything's the *same* now as it was then, but that everything now *is even more* like it was then." Since by the very logic of his bourgeois standpoint he can only hope to correct everyone else's *a-historical perceptions* of capital, by this same logic he must *actually* constitute himself as a press-agent for modern capital's own *pseudo-historical* adventurism. "The proletariat ceases to be the class that negates.... The point is not to rehash the debates and return to Marx.... What he presented as the project of communism has been realized by capital The

revolutionary solution cannot be found in the context of a dialectic of productive forces where the individual would be an element of the contradiction."

I propose the following as the title of a critique of *Black & Red* (P.O. Box 9546, Detroit, Michigan, 48202), the English language publisher of these two texts and others of the same genre: "Reproduction of Daily Life/Daily Life of Reproduction."

5 It would be very naive to pump up this "criticism-in-acts" into some sort of "revolutionary assault" on capitalism. Nevertheless, it would be equally naive to dismiss it as "mere reformism"; the direct refusal of the traditional mechanism of economic self-regulation was already a refusal of the society which based itself on this mechanism.

6 Nothing is funnier than hearing a Keynesian describe how a "macroeconomic equilibrium can co-exist with involuntary unemployment in the labor market" (except Marxists like Paul Mattick trying to perform the same chore). Clearly if wage-rates are permitted to decline the labor market must be inevitably cleared (supply, demand, etc.). That's how business cycles used to end. Are we to believe that in 1929 the self-regulating *market* just picked up and went out on strike? It should surprise no one that *The General Theory* was a *shuck*, the spectacle of economic theory. Quacks like Keynes were given the bird by the classical economists he pretended to correct. They knew what to do with mercantilists and demagogues of cheap money. The overwhelming academic and political success of Keynesianism lies not in an effective refutation of the classical economists-who quite precisely understood the consequences of market rigidities-but to the false consciousness of an epoch which feared the consequences of acting on the *implications* of classical economics: overt warfare against the class which was undermining the world of economic law. The success of the postwar spectacular commodity society relied not on the sophistication of economic science but on the power of its lies and the lie of its power.

Keynesianism was not the work of one enlightened bourgeois economist or social theorist. Keynes only expressed better than anyone else the epoch's *implicit Keynesianism*. Hitler's Germany had already used it to surmount *its* Great Depression before the publication of *The General Theory*. And America adopted these techniques not because it had recognized their scientific validity but because it needed them to arm itself for WWII. (It is notorious that Keynes failed to persuade F.D.R. as to their workability; the latter's New Deal program of scientific fetishism is a Keynesianism of independent origin, distinguished from the real thing by its partial and one-sided application mainly on the purely ideological terrain and not on that of technical economic management.)

7 This sort of discontinuity in state policy-making, which ultimately arises from the very nature of the rivalry of separate powers in the political sphere, lends power the tendency to separate itself from the conditions of its own stable temporal continuity. The various momentary caretakers of power generally apply it to the short-run exigencies of their own maintenance of it and not to the long-run exigencies of *power itself*, always hoping that the historical blow-out will come with someone else in the driver's seat. Examples: Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin, the Keynesian inflationary

remedy, fascist Spinola's April 25 revolution, the current gamble on encouraging the generalized self-management of alienation.

8 It also poses in modern conditions a *very old* kind of problem for the proletariat, that of its relation *to its own practice*. Isolated, spontaneous acts of on-the-job resistance (including absenteeism), provided they are sufficiently widespread, can momentarily play a non-negligible role in undermining the system of commodity production. But *as such*, these acts of resistance hardly *consider themselves* strategically or *as objectively strategic*, and therefore can't know how to become a *more strategic* opposition to capitalism. In the end capitalism either straightforwardly wipes out these pockets of resistance, or (if they are unusually chronic, exemplary, or numerous) more cunningly tries to disarm their critique by presenting it with a *disarmingly disarmed* object of criticism. At this moment, if the agitators do not coordinate their agitation, and on the basis of its most concretely radical possibilities, they will have to at best continue as before-under even more difficult conditions-and at worst watch this agitation die a slow death. This applies equally to individual workers and to isolated groups of workers.

Notable Quotes

"Speaking to industrial managers, [Brezhnev] complained that 'in the ranks of branches of industry there is an ever lower rate of return on investment, but ministries and leaders go on demanding money for the construction of new enterprises.'"

Business Week (April 7, 1975)

"Alan Greenspan, Ford's # 1 economic hack, says inflation is "essentially a political, not an economic problem," and that politicians are far more interested in spending money the government doesn't have on social programs that will pay them immediate political dividends than they are in worrying about the long term consequences of their actions."

Newsweek (Feb. 24, 1975)

"I think there's got to be more central planning. Not the kind of central planning the "Russians have, where they order the whole damned economy from a central plan.... This country developed in a particular way because of the automobile, and you can't just push a button and change it."

Henry Ford II

"Socialism does not develop on its own foundation... in many respects -the economic, moral-it still bears an imprint of the old system, from which it has emerged.... It would be a fatal error to decree the introduction of communism before all the necessary conditions for it have matured."

Nikita Khrushchev

"Planning is socialism plus cybernetics."

Nemchinov (1960's, Russian economist-reformer)

"Communism is Soviet power plus the electrification of the entire country."

Lenin

"Lenin is said to have declared that the best way to destroy the Capitalist system was to debauch the currency."

Keynes (1920)

"When we are victorious on a world scale, I think we shall use gold for the purpose of building public lavatories. But however 'just,' useful, or humane it would be... [we must wait].... When you live among wolves, you must howl like a wolf."

Lenin (1921, on the occasion of Russia's return to the gold standard amidst the incredible Bolshevik hyperinflation)

"...as a result of the advantages of socialism, the increment in effective demand ... always exceeds the increment in production, pushing it forward."

Stalin (1930, defending "repressed inflation"; 4e., Bolshevik Keynesianism)

"The insufficiency of effective demand will inhibit the process of production.... But beyond this no obvious case is made out for a system of State Socialism...."

Keynes (1935, pointing out the disadvantages of capitalism)

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