



More and more workers are realising that the trade unions have become little more than organisations selling insurance. But even in their traditional role, they have continually undermined working class struggles throughout this century. This pamphlet looks at how workers have organised to escape the limitations of the unions in order to defend their own class interests against those of capital, and how this struggle for autonomy offers a basis for the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat.



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# ***On Workers' Autonomy***





# ON WORKERS AUTONOMY

**by Pour une Intervention Communiste**

## **Introduction**

In Britain the political degeneration of the ruling class is becoming more and more apparent. The campaigning for the forthcoming general election has already started, and far from reflecting an ability of the major political parties to conduct any sort of meaningful public debate, it has merely exposed the squalor of all those concerned as they each try and find a gimmick to attract 'middle class' votes (i.e. including those working class people who like to consider themselves as middle-class). They are unwilling to use the election as a forum to discuss the issue which most divides the British ruling class — the extent of participation in European unification — precisely because these divisions run so deep. Of course James Goldsmiths Referendum Party may emerge from the twilight . . .

Meanwhile, recent TV items have had to deal with the fact that increasing numbers of young working class people have no interest in the machinations of the politicians. Other aspects of the state are also in crisis: the Monarchy, the Church of England, and possibly the union of Scotland with England and Wales. All these factors need to be recognised as a generally weakening of the ideological structures erected to control us. However such phenomena are of passing relevance, unless the working class exploits these weaknesses in order to express its own interest, which lies not so much in gaining a more equitable division of the fruits of our labour as in the overthrow of capitalism and the suppression of commodity relations.

By reprinting a pamphlet which is nearly twenty years old we are not indulging in some sort of nostalgia for the seventies. Rather it is a response to something which hasn't developed yet, but which we are confident will emerge. It is apparent to us that in the wake of the next general election, the new government, which ever it may be, will set about attacking the working class with renewed gusto. These attacks will not be conducted in ideal circumstances for the ruling class, and there is every prospect that these attacks will be met by a vigorous response from the working class, a response which we hope will move beyond simply defensive manoeuvres. These are the circumstances which will give rise to new autonomous workers groups.

This text is not a 'cookery book' offering recipes how such groups should be set up. These groups arise organically from the conditions which spark off the struggles of which they are a part. Such recipes are irrelevant. This text goes beyond



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that by dealing with the *consequences* of the re-appearance of these groups. By producing this text now, rather than in response to their re-emergence, we hope that the debates and experiences of the seventies and eighties will *from the outset* strengthen this new wave of struggle.

In the eighties, we went into struggles with a certain confidence — and suffered a series of major defeats: the steel strike, the miners strike, Wapping. The severity of these defeats was such that many people have seen the struggle against the Poll Tax as a victory, when it was nothing but a draw. (The separation of the business rate from direct payment to the local government in itself constituted a major shift of resources away from the working class). For those in any doubt about this, the state's successful mobilisation of the *whole of society* behind the War in the Gulf should offer the final proof of this. The half-hearted attempts to resist the war proved futile, and did little more than nurse their participants through the trauma of witnessing the mass murder of working class people in Iraq.

The defeats of the eighties left their toll on the 'revolutionary organisations': some of which drifted into leftism (*Class War*), others became obsessed about their own supposed 'importance' (*International Communist Current*). Many comrades saw no point in maintaining formal organisations during this period. However such a refusal to waste energy in propping up an organisation as a thing-in-itself is far from adopting a position of resignation in the face of the need to maintain continuity in the development of the class struggle. It is a refusal to fetishise such a continuity around bureaucratic practices.

However, experience has shown that whereas the corrupting influence of 'party-building' is certainly a nuisance, the confusions of anarchism can be even more stultifying. Often this shows itself as a resolute determination not to follow through the ramifications of a critique into action and instead elevate vacillation to a point of principle. By tapping into workers' experiences, we hope this text helps prepare the ground for a new wave of struggle which will need to overcome the limitations experienced in the seventies and eighties.

Richard Essex  
Unpopular Books  
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Note: This text originally appeared in *Jeune Taupe* (Young Mole), issue 17 (Oct/Nov 1977). This was the publication of Pour une Intervention Communiste (PIC), now defunct. We do not go along with all the positions advanced here, particularly their notion of decadence, however despite such weaknesses we feel that this text may prove useful in the discussions which the class struggle will generate.

# ON WORKERS AUTONOMY

*All through our lives, it has always been those who have shouted the loudest about unity who have caused us the most nuisance and dealt us the worst blows.*

Engels to Bebel (20th June 1873, before the fusion of the Eisenach 'Marxists' with the Lassallians.)

## Confusion and Real Movement

Since May '68, the term autonomy has been bandied about and has become entangled with a great deal of confusion. The workers' struggles in Portugal, Spain and Italy have more recently contributed to the reinforcement of the mythology surrounding this term, a mythology propagated and maintained by the blossoming of 'marginalist' groups, anti-union groups — which however support the 'new CNT', groups describing themselves as part of the 'movement for Autonomy' . . . But what is *the basis in reality* for this trend, as it is not merely a resurgence of 'old ideas in new clothes' (e.g. anarcho-syndicalism, revolutionary syndicalism or councilism)?

The deepening of the economic crisis of capital, of its contradictions, of the difficulties from which all political factions defending this system suffer are all important factors to explain the proletariat's search for autonomy as regards its struggles. (The groups of whatever 'autonomous' ilk generally deny these factors !) But these aren't the only factors. During a period of generalised 'mounting class struggle' at a world level (Poland, Egypt, Peru . . . as well as western Europe), the proletariat is always led to reflect on both its actual struggles and its historic experience. This is the phenomena of *ripening* of class consciousness and it is confirmed as much by the qualitative level reached in the struggle as by its ability to continually surpass itself, or by the appearance of 'workers' groups' which in their struggle to draw out the radical lessons of conflict refuse to succumb to confusion or the latest gimmick. These groups can play a role of clarification in the real movement of the whole class. (This second factor is denied or minimised by the ultra-left 'party-builders' for whom workers' autonomy is merely a slogan . . . and an empty one at that.)

Historically, the autonomy asserted by the proletariat signifies the expression of its *political independence as a revolutionary class*, an independence that will openly realise itself with the establishment of its own 'dictatorship' to translate Marx



literally, its political hegemony over all the other classes of society. All experience of past struggles has correctly revealed that the forces of the old world are in league against this autonomy whenever it shows as much as the tip of its nose, and they are ready to overthrow it, should it be successful in imposing itself.

Already, through this brief analysis, there appears the *roots of confusion* amongst the two currents who speak so noisily about autonomy. The first, christened 'marginalist', 'associationist' or quite simply 'autonomous', reject all ideas of political expression as a category integrated into capital, and they develop all sorts of measures which are a foretaste of communist relations negating the role of the proletariat, which is dissolved into the concepts of a 'universal class' or 'human collectivity'. The others, the ultra-leftists, aspire to be 'the fore-runners of the future world party of the proletariat' and theorise that the formation of this party is the guarantee for the autonomy of the class, and it through this the Bordiguist-Leninist ideas are revived, whereby the only political expression of the dictatorship of the proletariat is the dictatorship of the party.

In the *social* movement towards communism, the proletariat no more prefigures the society to come through this autonomy, anymore than it is the bearer of a political program which it then realises to the letter. Reaching out for its goal, it undeniably displays 'powerful indicators' of these new relations, but it remains above all the *gravedigger of capital*. Communism shall be born "of new people from the height of a new world." (Marx)

What, in fact, is the prospect for workers' autonomy given the plans of the capitalists to deal with the crisis through the regimentation of the proletariat? What are the tasks of revolutionaries, particularly in France where the electoral arsenal has been used for the 'victory of the left' with the application of the common programme after March 1978..... When the same left was overrun by a movement of 10 million workers just ten years ago?

Since its creation, the group *Pour une Intervention Communiste* (For a Communist Intervention) accepted the necessity for both the most precise analysis possible of the ripening of the class in relation to its autonomy and also practical which actively contributes to the expression of this autonomy — in particular in aid for the emergence of 'workers groups' which preserve some of the clarity after a struggle has ended<sup>1</sup>. Today we are more than ever determined to follow through with general activity in this area. In this text we are trying to answer the preceding questions as well as to criticise the sources of confusion and those who foster them.

## Workers' Autonomy in Aspic:

### 1. The Party is the Class

*It is well known that when the ruling class has diarrhoea they claim that the masses have stomach ache.*

Leo Jogiches

What characterises the ultra-left 'party-builders'<sup>2</sup> is their denial — to a greater or lesser extent — of all possibility of the ripening of class consciousness outside what they call the 'regroupment of revolutionaries'. The class movement can produce nothing on the organisational or political plane apart from an ever increasing flow of members into the group which prefigures the party. That in itself serves as a measure of the demagogy of their proclamations about the 'Power of the Workers' Councils' or about workers' autonomy, for how can the class organise itself if there is no process of clarification and homogenisation of consciousness *which is distinct from that of the party*. In justifying this denial of all 'autonomous' maturation, these groups develop the following points:

★ On the one hand, a purely *fatalist* view of the crisis (along the lines of Kautsky and the 2nd International, the organisation which integrated the masses into the system before 1914 and which they see as part of the 'historic continuity' of the proletariat!) Thus for them: "To the extent that capitalism does not produce glaring evidence of its complete failure, it is futile to wait for the party of the working class to grasp a clear consciousness of the necessity of destroying it, and the means of this destruction." (from *texte d'orientation* presented at the National Conference of *Revolution Internationale*<sup>3</sup> in June 1973 and taken up at the November Conference that same year). The aberrant concepts of "glaring evidence" and "complete failure" which appear nowhere other than at the economic level . . . for the very good reason that they are undemonstratable, (The only tangible evidence and the only obvious failure — which would also be a failure of the proletariat — would be the outbreak of a third world war.) allow a rejection of a "grasping of clear consciousness" by the working class, *but above all eliminates all phenomena of maturation outside of the sphere of the party*. The proletariat is somehow considered as an informal mass which rises up on day D at H hour, without there having been a trace of consciousness in the body of the class previously. The spontaneity of the masses would then be 'only trade-unionist' and so it could not produce any political ideas following on from the important proletarian struggles. By following this line of thought it can be seen what workers' councils are reduced to: an assembly which rubber stamps the decisions of the party, to which Trotsky — with the jacobin conception of the Bolsheviks — called 'a Workers' parliament'!

★ On the other hand a purely *voluntarist* organisation to 'build the party' which is the guarantee of autonomy after all other political or organisational forms thrown up by the class have been theorised away. The circle is completed: the class can only produce the party as a 'political' organ (the councils will then be conjured up as an apparition without any previous maturation . . . unless the spontaneity of the 'spontaneists' is resurrected), in other words 'The Party is the Class'. (This is in line with the cardinal points of Bordiguism, which



constitutes a left-leninist ideology, the Italian left remaining under the wing of the 3rd International — that organisation which defended the interests of the Russian state — until 1926). Actually the organisational 'diarrhoea' of these people, who see the 'stomach ache' of the masses as the need, for a party, shows itself as a fishing line cast into the stagnant waters of leftism (Trotskyism, Maoism, anarchism, etc.) i.e. through a tactical manoeuvre at recruitment (c.f. the methods used by R.I. in their continuing polemics with various . . . sects who have hardly broken with leftism, the last to date being *Le Bolshevik*). But this voluntarism has also affected relations with 'autonomous workers' groups': after their phase of brutally denouncing 'mixed' or 'confused' groups, they recognised the possibility of the existence of 'discussion' groups . . . able to develop positively! But such an opportunist change about can be explained: faced with the growth of this sort of group, it is better for our 'apprentice bureaucrats' to recuperate most of these groups by putting aside such epithets as 'abortions of capital' (which was applied in its time to *Union Ouvriere* with disastrous results). But at heart nothing has changed: such groups mustn't crystallise their discussions into a platform, they cannot make regular interventions in their workplace for fear of fostering "Communism" or "immediateism" . . . , their steps are to be guided: the groups to be dissolved and then — but not immediately — to join the "regroupment of revolutionaries" i.e. the future "party of the Class". Once again this explains why the 'party-builders' do not understand the positive movement of the class which is not merely gradual but proceeds in leaps and bounds (i.e. continually surpassing itself). The prospect of co-ordination of 'autonomous workers' groups' to constitute a "political inter-company network" at a higher social level, is not possible as it signifies the relativising of the role of the party as a 'historic memory' of the class!

## Workers' Autonomy in Aspic:

### 2. This 'World We Must Leave'<sup>3</sup>

*Don't say that the social movement excludes any political movement: there is never a real political movement which isn't social at the same time.*

Marx: *The Misery of Philosophy*, 1847

What characterises the so-called 'autonomous' groups<sup>4</sup> is their rejection of all conception of the *political* expression of the proletariat, in the name of the theory — more or less developed — of the 'direct leap' of the social movement into communist relations. This allows them to ignore the real problems that appear in the process of destroying the capitalist system: dictatorship of the proletariat, extension of the revolution, period of transition, abolition of all state activities . . . Thus the

word 'autonomy' becomes vague and filled with confusion, as it no longer describes the search for the political independence of the proletariat. The word develops a *magical quality*, whereby some people imagine that they can shield themselves from events as they hold the key to the future: to be 'autonomous' is to have Ali Baba's 'open sesame', . . . which sometimes amounts to having 'already left this world' !!! More vulgarly it can also be used to explain or justify more or less anything.

The principle *implications* of this rejection of the political aspects of the social movement are as follows:

### An 'Economist' Viewpoint

This is based on the denial of any inherent crisis in the functioning of the capitalist system itself, claiming that the so-called 'radical' demands put capital in difficulty and *represent a break with it*. From this viewpoint the system can eternally rebuild itself on the economic plane (A third world war isn't envisaged, "Socialism or Barbarism" aren't the only alternatives . . . that would be scare mongering) unless of course workers put forward these minimal demands. These, (for example the auto-reductions of all sorts of prices which has been particularly popular in Italy since autumn 1969) are viewed as a break with capitalism rather than simply as a very good way to resist its pressures. Another 'recipe' that seemed wonderful several years ago, has appeared again today in the U.S.A.<sup>5</sup> is *absenteeism* which is theorised as the "*revolt against work*". This is conceived as the absolute weapon to undermine the system . . . increasing unemployment since 1974-75 has sounded the death knell on any hopes entertained about this form of resistance which has existed since the dawn of the workers' movement.

### A 'Utopian' and 'Gradualist' Viewpoint

*The future society should be nothing other than the universalisation of the organisation that the international will develop. We must take care that our organisation corresponds as closely as possible to our ideal . . . The international, the embryonic form of the future society of humanity, is henceforth held to be the faithful image of our principles of Liberty and federation, and we must reject from its being all principles leading to authority and dictatorship.*

(Congress of Sonvilier 1871 — the Bakuninist Federation of Swiss Jura, taken from the circular to all federations of the association of workers.)

Here it is suggested that, apart from economic demands, it is possible, even at a local level, to 'leap' to new social relations ('anti-wage' labour, collectives etc.) *before* capitalism has been destroyed at its roots i.e. *the world market*. For some, these new relations can be established by more or less crafty means (it takes a certain knack) which serves as a 'pedagogical tool' for the apprenticeship of non-wage labour society (c.f. the '*bread-oven*' experiment by the Roanne group theorised in the



pamphlet *For the Abolition Wage Slavery* (Spartacus series B No.75). For others, these relations are born through the movement of the self-negation of the proletariat, and its dissolution into a 'universal class', a 'human collectivity' produced by the 'material community' established by capital today (c.f. the theses of *Invariance*, partially taken up — following their situationist period — by *Injure Sociale*, aremnant of *Union Ouvriere*.)

All this leads to a triple of negation:

- ★ *That of all economic crises of capital* (as with the previous viewpoint) as capital has created, through its own development, all the practical conditions for communism. (There is no period of decadence, but a continued development since 1914)
- ★ *That of class struggle* as the proletariat is dissolved into a 'human community': 'The conflict takes on all dimensions, the struggle of abstract political classes gives way to the practical subversion of real relations, to the critique of escape, of hypocrisy, of alienated habits, of submission . . .'; "It is a question of appropriating the dialectic of human action" (c.f. the text *Proletariat et Communaute Humaine* of 20/6/77 signed Lopez and distributed by *Pour une regroupement de l'autonomie ouvriere* of Lille.
- ★ *That of all political processes* because the totality of communism is . . . to hand. There is no phase for the real destruction of wage labour and market relations, in particular no preparation for the confrontation with the state, as the proletariat could straight away 'leave' the place it occupies within capitalist relations of production: "What is determined in the struggle led by the proletariat is the rupture with wage-labour, i.e. the *abandonnement* of the terrain of its self-conservation as a category of capital" (c.f. the same text, emphasis by PIC).

So this utopian vision has been clearly shown as a kind of resurgence of anarchist ideology even at times with its Prodhounist aspects — refusal of politics, rejection of class struggle, abandoning the fight against the basis of capitalism in order to revolt against its affects, etc . . . in short a true 'philosophy of misery'<sup>6</sup>. The confusion as regards the concept of workers' autonomy is here at its height. The means of struggle advocated by this viewpoint are in effect a "gradualist" process which limits itself to the interior of capitalism. Under the pretentious name of "multiform associationism" two gradualist concepts are hidden:

- ★ pre-existing organisations, whether baptised 'associationist', 'communalist' or otherwise, imagine themselves as pre-figuring the society to come, as being the embryonic form by virtue of the relations set up in their being: It is this that enables them to believe that they have attained 'autonomy'. And in this sense the growth of consciousness is seen as a mechanical process, the workers must either

reproduce such organisations or attach themselves to, or group themselves around, those that already exist, those which represent the future, which are 'islands of free communism' in a region or a village but located inside capitalist relations (see the proclamations of the CNT-FAI during the Spanish civil war.)

- ★ To accelerate the growth of consciousness, it is not necessary to reckon with the surpassing of the limits of the social movement itself. On the contrary, it is a question of 'creating situations' thanks to a *succession of exemplary acts* which facilitate this acceleration. The notion of the exemplary acts is that of an act carried out by a *minority* and destined by its contents to 'wake up the masses'. Thus more often than not the *fetishism of violence* emerges from this notion. The use of 'exemplary' terrorism has been theorised by an element of the 'movement for autonomy' in Italy and this theorising is beginning to appear in France through the intermediary of the magazine *Camarades* and the groups, workers or otherwise, who gravitate around it.

In fact taken together, the 'utopian' and 'gradualist' viewpoint is the *otherside of the coin* to the concept of 'party-building' just as anarcho-syndicalism (or revolutionary syndicalism) in relation to social democracy between 1875 and 1914, it is based on a form of *substitutionism* and thus does not break with the false alternative: mass party or mass union!!

After the experience of the Paris commune, Marx put forward a view against all types of anarchist illusions

*The working class didn't expect miracles from the commune. They had no ready-made utopias to introduce by decree of the people. They know that in order to work out their own emancipation and along with it the higher form to which present society is irresistably tending by its own economic agencies, they have to pass through long struggles, through a series of historical processes, transforming circumstances and men. They have no ideals to realise, but to set free the elements of the new society with which the old collapsing bourgeois society is pregnant.*

Marx: *The Civil War in France*, 1871

## A 'Workerist' View point

This outlook fails to understand that the movement of the proletariat is active in breaking with the system throughout society and thus in other classes, but *restricts* the growth of consciousness to those who sociologically comprise the proletariat within capitalism. It rejects an essentially *political* determination of the struggle ("The proletariat is revolutionary or it is nothing." — Marx) and approaches the preceding viewpoints: economism, utopianism and gradualism. It leads to a refusal of an organisation of revolutionaries *distinct* from the general organisation of the class and from the different organisational forms of its maturation (autonomous



workers groups). This is for example, Otto Rühle's conception when he says "The revolution is not a party affair", theorising an irreducible opposition between workers' councils and the party form the latter being seen as being fundamentally bourgeois. In fact, Rühle proposed a *unitary* organisation (the AAUE as opposed to the AAUD and KAPD<sup>7</sup>) as more or less a fore-runner to the workers' councils through its level of homogeneity. In this way the problem of the distinction between the two types of organisation is emptied, to allow the re-introduction *in a councilist fashion* of the old theme of *the identification of class and party*. In effect, to the extent that those elements who break with their own class are directly, rather than organisationally or politically, integrated into the proletariat (when it is not the movement of capital itself which produces this integration: proletarianisation) this ends with an error which is no longer based on 'The party is the class' *but its inverse 'the class is the party'*. As with the other conception, the door is opened to possibilities of 'leadership' and 'substitutionism' (but 'obscured' and 'unrecognised' in the person of the central committee or of a general secretary) on the part of intellectuals and/or 'theoricians'. In its misunderstanding of the notion of the workers' councils as the absolute political subject (unification of the executive and legislature) of the dictatorship of the proletariat, councilism gives Leninism a hand, just as anarcho-syndicalism gave a hand to social-democracy.

From the resurgence of the illusions and errors of anarchism underlined above, the different views of the 'marginalist' groups equally characterise themselves by *their resumption of all the weaknesses of the German left*:<sup>8</sup>

- ★ economic demands as the basis for the break with capital (despite affirming its mortal crisis).
- ★ The formation of mass factory councils on the basis of these economic demands despite various political imperatives, such as the requirement to recognise the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' to belong to the AAUD!
- ★ The prefiguration in the organisation of the society to come, or at least of the workers' councils, thanks to the relations set up within the factory councils (*Unionen*<sup>10</sup>).
- ★ Denial of all 'organisation of revolutionaries' (or party) by some tendencies that broke with the KAPD (eg. the AAUE).
- ★ Fetishism of violence and terrorism — not even always in relation to the actions of the masses (this is not to dismiss the exploits of Max Höltz in response to the the movement's needs).

The rejection of the political aspects of the social-movement can also be found in such perspectives as *federalism, regionalism, localism, self-management, ecology*

etc. but also can also be added to all the confusions tied up with frontism, inter-classism in general and of the conception of socialism. By their direct relations with capitalist politics of the left, as much as the right, these viewpoints reveal *their role as anti-proletarian mystifications*<sup>9</sup>.

## Clarification of Workers' Autonomy

### Communist Workers Groups

The struggle for workers' autonomy is the struggle of the proletariat to assert itself as a revolutionary class and to realise its political independence in the form of its dictatorship over the whole of society and in particular over capital. In the course of the historical movement, workers' councils have appeared as *the most adequate expression* of the exercise of this dictatorship. If they appear spontaneously this does not deal with the homogenisation of class consciousness within their being. This means that contrary to the theories of 'spontaneism', the proletariat does not find theoretico-practical unity in one go.

The roots of the heterogeneity of consciousness originate in the basis of the dominant ideology, particularly in the countries of 'old' capitalism (c.f. Pannekoek, *World Revolution and Communist Tactics*). The qualitative struggles which offer the possibility of breaking with this ideology are linked to the necessity of the *maturation* of class consciousness. This phenomenon of maturation can only be *immanent* to the proletariat as a revolutionary class: in that it is opposed to all 'transcendent' interpretations, as they remain exterior to it and can only be introduced into its being through some form of 'mediation'. (c.f. the theme of *adjudged* consciousness in Lukács' *History and Class Consciousness* 1923).

In a period of increasing struggle leading to the revolutionary phase, at a time of successive 'open' confrontation (strikes, occupations, demonstrations . . .) with the system, the maturation is accomplished *in and through* the organs of assembly with which the class equips itself at such moments — anti-union strike committees, factory councils of some kind, organs that are the direct preparation if not the functional fore-runner of the workers' councils.

However in our epoch of the decadence of capitalism, given the economic erosion and ideological disintegration of the system, such mass organisations cannot suffer a temporary but real retreat without becoming 'rejuvenated' or 'red' unions or dissolving themselves. *How then does maturation develop? Must it completely disappear to reappear all the better in the following confrontation? Does it concentrate itself in a uniquely visible way 'in the organisation of revolutionaries?'*

Previous experience (workers' circles 'without the party' in Russia before the soviets of 1905, and between February and October 1917; groups of 'revolutionary' workers in Germany against the unions and the workers' councils recuperated by the Social Democrats in 1918-20 before the formation of *Unionen* i.e. the AAUD) has been confirmed by more recent events (Portugal, Italy, Spain, France): the surge of small 'groups of workers' outside the unions and all established political groups



following from struggles is *one of the main means produced by the working class to develop the maturation of class consciousness whilst waiting for the next assault*. Born in such moments of maturation, these groups are by no means artificial recipes, or a kind of 'cooking pot of the future' either.

They are neither transmission belts, nor the cells of any party (constituting revolutionary organisation) but they participate *at the level of consciousness* in the movement towards the self-organisation of the class. They can be outlined as follows:

- ★ Their positions are entirely *political* (i.e. a communist platform rather than a list of more or less radical demands.)
- ★ Numerically small, they function as a nucleus without pretensions. They do *not* prefigure either strike committees or workers' councils.
- ★ Sociologically they are composed entirely of *wage-workers who have no ideological role in the regimentation and mystification* of the functioning of capitalism;
- ★ They are based *in enterprises or between enterprises* and function at the level of the struggles from which they grew:
- ★ They act to *clarify* at all levels — as much at the theoretical level (elaboration of platform, discussion about struggles, historic experience) as at the practical level (regular intervention using all possible forms: leaflets etc....)<sup>10</sup>

From this outline, most of the weaknesses of the German Left, which we have underlined above, have been superseded rather than reproduced: No identification of the 'communist workers' groups' with what will become the unitary organs.

Without wishing to read the tea-leaves, as such questions will only be settled in practice, we would nevertheless like to suggest that the necessity for the working class to reflect about itself will drive groups of workers to *define themselves yet again*. In particular, by no longer placing themselves at the level of a particular sector (even where they appear at this level at first) but at the level of the class as a whole, these groups will *co-ordinate themselves* and so open the way to the constitution of true *political networks of clarification*. One of the first realisations arising from this co-ordination could be the regular appearance of a *workers paper*, representing the forefront of the maturation of class consciousness.

What's more, perhaps the networks so constituted need not automatically dissolve themselves during the revolutionary phase as early as the appearance of strike committees or even workers' councils: this will depend on *the level of no-return* reached in the homogenisation of class consciousness. Faced with the perspective of the expression of counter-revolutionary tendencies, they could share

an important role with the revolutionary organisation in *the defense of revolutionary organisation*.

## The Organisation of Revolutionaries

The movement for the emancipation of the proletariat initially creates the conditions for the growth of consciousness within its being. Through this process it passes from the arena of the *class-in-itself* (i.e. politically integrated into capital and which only has a sociological reality as an economic category) to the arena of the *class-for-itself* (i.e. struggling for the destruction of capital in a process that has a political phase of confrontation with the state). Basically, from its essential place in the capitalist relations of production, it must become *revolutionary* if it is to become the subject of history. Apart from the crisis which exacerbates the contradictions of the system, the conditions of growth of proletarian class consciousness on the subjective plane are found in its capacity to draw out the lessons of its qualitative struggles and to re-appropriate the positive elements of its historical past.

But this movement stirs up the whole of society; and in speeding up the decomposition of society, it contributes to the detaching members from other classes who *'take part' in the struggle of the proletariat*. In addition to the direct means (communist workers' groups) moving towards its self-liberation, the proletarian movement produces other political organs *which will contribute just as much*.

These other groups bring together revolutionaries, *workers or not*, (this is the function of their formation and development) on the basis of communist positions drawn from the various revolutionary attempts of the proletariat and on the basis of general activity directed toward a contribution to workers' autonomy.

At an advanced level, they transform themselves into true *revolutionary fractions* (a qualitative development marked by a significant audience within the working class) which, at their height of the phase preceding the insurrection, can fuse into an *Organisation of Revolutionaries* (to sum up, the term 'party' must be used as something completely foreign to what is meant by the 'mass party' of Social Democracy or Leninism — c.f. *The Manifesto*, *The Appeal* and *The Theses* of the KAPD). The conditions for such a fusion will be *maximum* political clarification both between fractions and in relation to their practice as regards workers' autonomy.<sup>11</sup>

Arising from the same movement, the groups of communist workers and the groups of revolutionaries such as the PIC are *distinct but complementary* at the level of their political roles. So *dual membership* is possible for a revolutionary worker — based on the search for the greatest general effectiveness, but it cannot just mean that such a worker merely endeavours to convert their workers' group into an offshoot or cell of the revolutionary organisation to which they also belong. What is essential is agitation for generalised class consciousness, rather than the albeit muted defense of this or that *particular* position of this or that 'school'.



## Perspective

Objectively workers will have a *hard time asserting their autonomy*. They are faced with the various fraction of capital (particularly those of the left) trying to manage the crisis by regimenting the proletariat throughout Europe. When this autonomy starts to appear, it will have to confront a *series of confusions* which we have tried to deal with above. In the wake of the struggles in Portugal, Italy has, in these last few months (Autumn 1977), been a typical example of the enormous difficulties that await the proletariat on its road to autonomy.

Meanwhile, particularly here in France, the electoral mystifications are in full flood, without a break between the local and legislature elections. Compared to Italy or Spain, the Left has a greater chance of *playing its anti-proletarian role* by gaining power. The struggle for a real intervention must strike out against the dogmatism that unites the 'party-builders' and the so-called 'autonomists'.

If dogmatism is put aside, action — beyond the facilitation of clarification (which cannot be reduced to a matter of serious discussion) — must be conceived in common between these two types of organisation arising from the working class movement. This is the meaning of the PIC's proposal to certain 'workers' groups' to undertake a campaign denouncing the elections in France.

Concerning this proposal, the PIC has been reproached for uncritically publishing the texts of 'workers' groups'. This is to forget that:

- 1) The PIC has for a long time (cf. note 1. This article is further evidence) defined *the political framework* of its intervention in the sense of workers' autonomy.
- 2) When a specific text is judged publicly the first thing to do is to make it *public* by publishing it *as it stands*.
- 3) If there are fundamental criticisms to be made, these should be done not merely within a single group.

However in cases of co-ordinated activity, the PIC does not hesitate to offer criticism, where appropriate, of any proposals presented to such a regroupment of workers. To do otherwise would be a negation of the role of the organisation of revolutionaries, a denial of dual membership . . . and a denial of all manner of other problems

JEUNE TAUPE 17 (Oct/Nov.1977)

### NOTES

- 1 See the articles: 'Mise au point sur l'Intervention Communist' (On Communist Intervention), *Jeune Taupé*, No.4, 'Perspective d'activité' (Perspective on activity), *Jeune Taupé*, No.7, 'Perspectives révolutionnaires' (Revolutionary Perspectives) in 'Lutter contre le chômage ou contre le capital' (The Struggle against Unemployment or the Struggle against Capital) *Jeune Taupé*, No.12
- 2 The *International Communist Current* is a good example of this type of ultra-left 'party builder' The British section is *World Revolution*, BM Box 869, London WCIV 6XX. The French section, *Revolution Internationale*, is referred to in the text.

- 3 'Ce Monde qu'il faut Quitter' an article in No5, series II of *Invariance*. This article was published as *This World We Must Leave* in the seventies in London It is now available in the Jacques Camatte anthology of the same name. J.Camatte the author can be contacted at:
- 4 Examples of such groups in France were: *Combat Pour l'Autonomie Ouvrière* (Fight for Workers' Autonomy), *Pour l'Abolition du Saliariat* (For the abolition of wage-labour). In England at the time of publication there was the London Workers' Group. *Exchange and Movement* is still active (Echanges, BP 241, 75866 Paris Cedex 18, France)
- 5 See "Creation and its Enemies: The Revolt against Work" by J.Zerzan, published by Mutualist Books, Box .283, Rochester, New York, U.S.A. C.Reeve wrote an interesting response in "'La droit à la paresse" de Paul Lafargue' (Paul Lafargue's "Right to be Lazy"), *Spartacus* Series A, No.44.
- 6 These modernist theories which so often tend to take up questions of 'group dynamics' replace the marxist method with sociological explanations.
- 7 "The German Left" refers to communist groupings in Germany who broke with Bolshevism. The *Kommunistische Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands* (the Communist Workers Party of Germany — KAPD) was founded in April 1920, who in their 'First Appeal' maintained their support for the Third International, and indeed had a member on the Executive Committee. The KAPD was linked to the *Allgemeine Arbeiter Unionen Deutschlands* (The General Workers Union of Germany — AAUD) Here 'union' had quite a distinct meaning from 'syndicat', which refers to trade unions. "In the revolutionary zones the trade unions were themselves supplanted (rather than replaced, as the trade union practice [practice syndical] was itself abandoned by revolutionary organisation located in the enterprise, such as the AAU (general workers unions) which were revolutionary, rejecting reformism and struggling to impose the dictatorship of the proletariat (even though these factory organisations with their shop stewards which had appeared during the war practiced, and during the 'peace' continued to practice 'hard' syndicalism, which was nevertheless reformist." Denis Authier ('Pour l'histoire du mouvement communiste en Allemagne de 1918 à 1921' in *La Gauche Allemande*, La Veille Taupe, Paris, 1973. The AAUD grouped these 'unions' together in February 1920 and became some sort of 'economic organisation' of the KAPD. However the AAU-E (Einheitlern — united) broke away later in 1920, opposing the existence of a party separate from the factory organisations and denouncing the Bolshevik dictatorship in Russia. The AAUD and the AAUE each had about 100,000 members at this time.
- 8 There are two articles in *Spartacus* which deal with the German Left and anarchism 'Les Fractions Révolutionnaire dans la 1st Internationale' (No. 4) and 'Les Fractions Révolutionnaires dans la Gauche Allemande' No.6). Despite their weaknesses, these articles are a positive contribution to the understanding of these periods.
- 9 On ecology, see the articles in *Jeune Taupé* No.s 5 and 14
- 10 As an illustration of the characteristic of such groups, see the platforms which have been published in *Jeune Taupé* No. 15 ('Plateforme du groupe autonome ouvrier inter-entreprise de Clermont-Fd') and No. 16 ('Plateforme du groupe de travailleurs communistes des banques, Paris')
- 11 See the articles 'Mise au point sur l'organisation' in *Jeune Taupé* No. 6, 'Les fractions révolutionnaire aujourd'hui' in 'Rosa Luxembourg et au-delà', post-script to the *Spartacus* publication *Rosa Luxembourg et sa doctrine* (series B, No.80)

(These notes are based on the original notes, changes being made as appropriate. Note 7 was added by the translator)



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