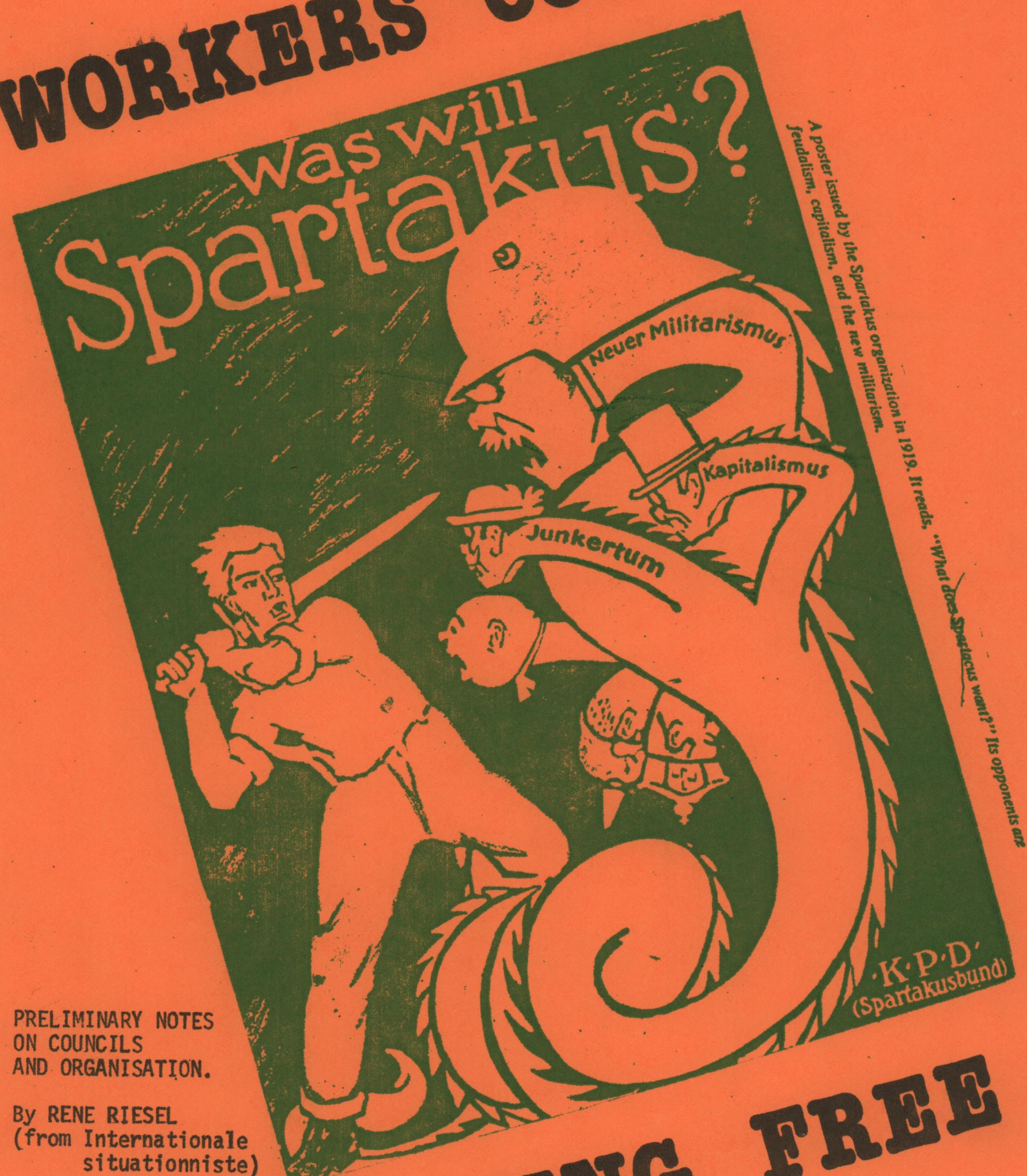


WORKERS COUNCILS.



PRELIMINARY NOTES
ON COUNCILS
AND ORGANISATION.

By RENE RIESEL
(from Internationale
situationniste)

MARXISM,
PREFIGURATIVE COMMUNISM,
AND THE PROBLEM OF
WORKERS CONTROL,

By CARL BOGGS

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PRELIMINARY NOTES ON COUNCILS AND ORGANISATION

"The Workers' and Peasants' Government has decreed that Kronstadt and the rebellious ships must immediately submit to the authority of the Soviet Republic. Therefore, I command all who have raised their hand against the socialist fatherland to lay down their arms at once. The obdurate are to be disarmed and turned over to the Soviet authorities. The arrested commissars and other members of the government are to be liberated at once. Only those surrendering unconditionally may count on the mercy of the Soviet Republic.

Simultaneously I am issuing orders to prepare to quell the mutiny and subdue the mutineers by force of arms. Responsibility for the harm that may be suffered by the peaceful population will fall entirely upon the heads of the counter-revolutionary mutineers.

This warning is final."

Trotsky, Kamenev, "Ultimatum to Kronstadt".

"We have only one thing to say in reply to all that: ALL POWER TO THE SOVIETS! Take your hands off them - your hands are red with the blood of the martyrs of freedom who fought the white-guards, the land-owners and the bourgeoisie!"

Kronstadt Izvestia No. 6.

FOR THE FIFTY YEARS since the Leninists reduced communism to electrification, the Bolshevik counter-revolution erected the "Soviet" state on the corpse of the power of the Soviets, and the term Soviet ceased to mean "council", revolutions have simply thrown the vindication of Kronstadt in the faces of the Kremlin masters: "ALL POWER TO THE SOVIETS, NOT TO THE PARTIES." The remarkable persistence of a real tendency towards the power of Workers' Councils throughout this half century of endeavours and repeated suppressions for the modern proletarian movement, henceforward imposes Councils on the new revolutionary wave as the only form of dictatorship of the proletariat which is anti-state, and as the only court with the capacity to pass judgement on the old world and carry out the sentence personally.

The notion of the "Council" must be specified, not simply to avoid the crude falsifications accumulated

by social-democracy, Russian bureaucracy, Titoism, and even Ben-Bellism; but especially so as to recognise the insufficiencies so far outlined in the brief practical experiences of workers' councils in power, and of course in the conceptions of the revolutionaries who have advocated them. What the "Council" tends to be in totality appears negatively in the limits and illusions which have marked its first manifestations and which, quite as much as the immediate and uncompromising struggle which is normally waged against it by the dominant class, have caused its defeat. The Council is the attempt to find the form of *practical unification* of workers who are creating the material and intellectual means to change all existing conditions, and are making their own sovereign history. It can and must be the organisation in deeds of historical consciousness. Now it has in no way yet succeeded in overcoming the separation which all

specialised political organisations involve and the forms of ideological false consciousness that they produce and defend. Moreover, whilst the Councils as principle acting powers of a revolutionary moment are normally *Councils of delegates*, to the extent that they co-ordinate and federate the decisions of the local Councils, it appears that the general assemblies of the rank-and-file have been almost always considered as simple assemblies of electors, so that the first layer up of the "Council" is situated above them. Here already is one principle of separation, which can only be surmounted by making the local general assemblies of all the workers into *the Council itself*, from which every delegation has to draw its power from it at all times.

Leaving aside the pre-council aspects of the Paris Commune which fired Marx with enthusiasm ("the finally discovered form by which the economic emancipation of work might be realised")—which in any case can be noticed more in the organisation of the Central Committee of the National Guard, which was composed of delegates of the Parisian proletariat in arms, than in the elected Commune—the famous St. Petersburg "Council of Workers' Deputies" was the first rough sketch of an organisation of the working class in a revolutionary moment. According to the figures given by Trotsky in "1905", 200,000 workers had sent their delegates to the St. Petersburg Soviet, but its influence extended far beyond its immediate area, with many other Councils in Russia taking inspiration from its deliberations and decisions. It directly grouped the workers from more than five hundred firms, and received the representatives of sixteen unions which had rallied to it. Its first nucleus was formed on the 13th of October, and from the 17th the Soviet set up over itself an Executive Committee which, says Trotsky, "served it as a government". Out of a total of 562 delegates the Executive Committee comprised only 31 members, of which 22 were actually workers delegated by the whole of the workers in their firms, and 9 represented three revolutionary parties (mensheviks, bolsheviks, and social-revolutionaries). However, "the representatives of the parties were not entitled to speak or vote". Granted that the rank-and-file assemblies were faithfully represented by their revocable delegates, the former had obviously given up a great part of their power, in a very parliamentary way, into the hands of an "Executive Committee" in which the party political "technicians" had an immense influence.

How did this Soviet originate? It appears that this form of organisation had been found by some politically aware elements of the ordinary workers, who for the most part themselves belonged to small socialist groups. It seems really excessive for Trotsky to write: "One of the two social-democratic organisations in St. Petersburg took the initiative of creating an autonomous revolutionary workers' administration" (what's more this one "of the two" social-democratic organisations, which immediately recognised the importance of this workers' initiative, was no less than the mensheviks). But the general strike of October 1905 in fact originated first of all in Moscow on the 19th of September when the printers of the Sytine press came out on strike, notably because they wanted punctuation marks to be counted among the 1,000 characters which made up their unit of payment. Fifty printing works followed them out, and on the 25th of September the Moscow printers set up a Council. On the 3rd of October "the assembly of workers' deputies of the printers, mechanics, carpenters, and tobacco workers' guilds, and others, adopted the resolution to set up a general council (Soviet) of Moscow workers" (Trotsky op. cit.). So it can be seen that this form appeared spontaneously at the beginning of the strike movement. And this movement which began to fall back in the following days, sprung forward again up to the great historic crisis of the 7th of October, when the railwaymen, in

Moscow first, spontaneously began to interrupt the traffic.

The Council movement in Turin, of March and April 1920, originated in the concentrated proletariat of the Fiat factories. Between August and September 1919, new elections for the "internal commissions"—which were a type of collaborationist factory committee, founded by a collective convention in 1906, and aimed at the better integration of the workers—suddenly gave the chance, in the social crisis that was then sweeping Italy, for a complete transformation of the role of these "commissioners". They began to federate themselves, as direct representatives of the workers. In October 1919, 30,000 workers were represented at an assembly of the "executive committees of the workers' councils", which resembled more an assembly of shop stewards than an organisation of Councils in the true sense (on the basis of one commissioner elected by each workshop). But the example acted as a catalyst and the movement radicalised, supported by a fraction of the Socialist Party which was in the majority in Turin (with Gramsci), and by the anarchists of Piedmont (viz. the pamphlet by Pier Carlo Masini, "Anarchici e comunisti nel movimento dei Consigli a Torino"). The movement was opposed by the majority of the Socialist Party and by the unions. On the 15th March 1920 the Councils began a *strike and occupation of the factories*, and restarted production under their own independent control. By the 14th of April the strike was solid in Piedmont; in the following days it affected much of northern Italy, particularly the railwaymen and the dockers. The government had to use warships to land troops at Genoa for the march on Turin. Whilst the programme of the Councils was to be later approved by the Italian Anarchist Union when it met at Boulogne on the 1st of July, it is clear that the Socialist Party and the unions succeeded in sabotaging the strike by keeping it in isolation: when 20,000 soldiers and police entered the town the party newspaper "Avanti" refused to print the appeal of the Turin socialist section (viz. Masini). The strike which evidently would have permitted a victorious proletarian insurrection throughout the country, was defeated on the 24th of April. What happened next is well known.

Despite certain remarkably advanced aspects of this rarely cited experience (masses of leftists seem to think that factory occupations were started in France in 1936), it is advisable to note that it involves deep ambiguities, even among its partisans and theoreticians. Gramsci wrote in no. 4 of *L'Ordine Nuovo* (second year): "We conceive the factory council as the historic start of a process which must necessarily lead to the foundation of the workers' State." Whereas the anarchists that supported the councils were trying to organise syndicalism and claimed that the Councils would give it a new impetus.

However, the manifesto launched by the Turin Councils on March 27th 1920, "to the workers and peasants of all Italy" for a General Congress of Councils (which did not take place) formulates several essential points of the Councils' programme: "The struggle for victory must be led with weapons of victory, no longer simply those of defence (this is aimed at the unions, 'resistance bodies . . . crystallised in a bureaucratic form'—S.I. note). A new organisation must develop as a direct antagonist of the organs of the bosses' government; for that task it must spring up spontaneously in the workplace and reunite all workers, because all, as producers, are subjected to an authority that is foreign ('estranea') to them, and must liberate themselves. Here is the origin of liberty for you: the origin of a social formation which by spreading rapidly and universally, will put you in the situation to eliminate the exploiter and the middle-man from the economic field, and to become your own masters, masters of your machines, your work, your life. . . ."

It is known that, in a more simple way, the Councils of workers and soldiers in Germany of 1918-1919 in most cases remained dominated by the social-democratic bureaucracy, or else were victims of its manoeuvres. They tolerated Ebert's "socialist" government, whose main support came from the General Staff and the Freikorps. The "Hamburg seven points" (on the immediate liquidation of the old army) presented by Dorrenbach and passed with a large majority by the Congress of Soldiers' Councils which opened on December 16th in Berlin, was not put into practice by the "people's commissioners". The Councils tolerated this defiance, and the legislative elections which had been quickly fixed for the 19th January, as well as the attack launched against Dorrenbach's sailors, and then the crushing of the Spartakist insurrection on the very eve of these elections. In 1956, the Central Workers' Council of Greater Budapest, set up on November 14th, and declaring itself determined to defend socialism, at the same time as demanding "the withdrawal of all political parties from the factories", pronounced itself in favour of Nagy's return to power and free elections within a short time. Doubtless at that moment it was continuing the general strike when the Russian troops had already crushed armed resistance. But even before the second Russian intervention the Councils had asked for parliamentary elections; i.e. they were seeking to return to a situation of dual power, at a time when they were in fact, in the face of the Russians, the only effective power in Hungary.

Consciousness of what the power of the Councils is, and must be, is born out of the actual practice of that power. But at a stage where this power is hampered, it may be greatly different from what any individual member or even a whole Council thinks. *Ideology* is opposed to the truth in action which shows itself in the system of Councils; and this ideology manifests itself not only in the form of hostile ideologies, or in the form of ideologies *about Councils* built up by political forces which want to harness them, but also in the form of an ideology favourable to the power of the councils, which restrains and reifies their total theory and practice. Lastly a pure *Council-ism* would itself be a powerful enemy of the Councils in reality. Such an ideology, more or less rationally formulated, carries the risk of being adopted by the revolutionary organisations that are in principle oriented towards Council power. This power, which is itself *the organisation of the revolutionary society*, and whose coherence is objectively defined by the practical necessities of this historical task discovered as a whole, can in no case escape the practical problem of *specialist organisations* which, whether more or less genuinely in favour of the Councils, interfere in every way with their functioning. The masses organised in the Councils must be aware of this problem and overcome it. Here, council-communist theory and the existence of authentic council-communist organisations have a great importance. In them already appear some essential elements which will be at play in the Councils, and in their own interaction with the Councils.

All revolutionary history shows the part played in the defeat of the Councils by the appearance of an ideology advocating Councils. The ease with which the proletariat's spontaneous organisation of its struggle assures its victory, often gives way to a second phase in which the counter-revolution works from the inside, in which the movement sacrifices its reality for the shadow of its defeat. Thus council-ism is the new youth of the old world.

Social-democrats and bolsheviks both wish to see the Councils as just auxiliary bodies of the Party and the State. In 1902, Kautsky, worried because the unions were becoming discredited in the eyes of the workers, wanted the workers in certain branches of industry to elect "delegates who would form a sort of parliament designed to regulate the work and keep a

watch over the bureaucratic administration" (The Social Revolution). The idea of a hierarchical system of workers' representation culminating in a parliament was to be applied with much conviction by Ebert, Noske, and Scheidemann. The way in which this type of council-ism treats the Councils was authoritatively tested—for the benefit of those whose heads aren't completely full of shit—as early as the 9th of November 1918, when the social-democrats combated the spontaneous organisation of the Workers' Councils on its own ground by founding in the offices of Vorwaerts a "Council of the Workers and Soldiers of Berlin", which was made up of twelve men trusted by the manufacturers, the officials, and the social-democratic leaders.

When the Bolsheviks advocate Councils they aren't so naive as Kautsky or so crude as Ebert. They jump from the most radical base, "All Power to the Soviets", and land on their feet just after Kronstadt. In "The Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government" (April 1918) Lenin adds enzymes to Kautsky's washing powder: "Even in the most democratic capitalist republics in the world, the poor never regard the bourgeois parliament as 'their' institutions. It is the closeness of the Soviets to the 'people', to the working people, that creates the special forms of recall and other means of control from below that must be most zealously developed now. For example, the Councils of Public Education, as periodical conferences of Soviet electors and their delegates called to discuss and control the activities of the Soviet authorities in this field, deserve full sympathy and support. Nothing could be sillier than to transform the Soviets into something congealed and self-contained. The more resolutely we now have to stand for a ruthlessly firm government, for the dictatorship of individuals *in executive functions*, the more varied must be the forms *definite processes of work*, in definite aspects of *purely* and methods of control from below in order to counteract every shadow of a possibility of distorting the principles of Soviet government, in order tirelessly and repeatedly to weed out bureaucracy." For Lenin then, the Councils, like leagues of pity, have to become the Councils, like charities of pity, have to become pressure groups correcting the inevitable bureaucracy of the State's political and economic functions, respectively insured by the Party and the unions. Like Descartes' soul, the Councils have to be hooked on somewhere.

Gramsci himself simply cleaned Lenin up in a bath of democratic niceties: "The factory commissioners are the only true social representatives (economic and political) of the working class, because they are elected under universal suffrage by all the workers in the same workplace. At the different levels of their hierarchy the commissioners represent the united workers to the extent that this unity is realised in the productive units (work gang, factory department, union of factories in an industry, union of the companies in a town, union of the productive units of the mechanical and agricultural industries in a district, a province, the nation, the world) whose Councils and Council system stand for power and the direction of society" (article in *Ordine Nuovo*). Having reduced the Councils to the state of socio-economic fragments, preparing a "future soviet republic", it goes without saying that the Party, that "Modern Prince", appears as the indispensable social bond, as the pre-existing mechanical god taking care to insure its future existence: "The Communist Party is the instrument and historical form of the process of internal liberation by which the workers become not executants but initiators, not masses but leaders and guides, and are transformed from hands into minds and wills" (*Ordine Nuovo*, 1919). The tune may be different but the song is the same: Councils, Party, State. To treat Councils fragmentarily (economic power, social power, political power), as does the Revolution Internationale group

of Toulouse, is just cretinous.

Austro-marxism, in keeping with the slow reformist evolution that it advocated, after 1918 also constructed a council-ist ideology of its own. For example, Max Adler, in his book "Democracy and Workers' Councils", sees in the Council the clear instrument of working-class self-education, the possible end of the separation between order-givers and order-takers, and the establishing of a *homogeneous people* who could realise socialist democracy. As Adler is a theoretician of *legalised double power*, that is to say of an absurdity which will be inevitably incapable of lasting, while gradually approaching revolutionary consciousness and wisely preparing a revolution for later on, he is denied the one element that is truly fundamental to the self-education of the working-class: the revolution itself. To replace this irreplaceable land of proletarian homogenisation, and this single mode of selection for the actual formation of the Councils, as well as of ideas and modes of coherent activity within the Councils, Adler just imagines resort to this ridiculous rule: "Voting rights for the elections to the Workers' Councils must be based on membership of a socialist organisation."

It must be stressed that apart from social-democratic or bolshevik ideology about councils, which from Berlin to Kronstadt had always a Noske or a Trotsky too many, Council-ist ideology itself as developed by past Council-ist organisations and by some at present, has always several general assemblies and imperative mandates too few: all the Councils that have existed up to now, with the exception of the Aragon agrarian collectives, were in theory just "democratically elected councils"; even when the highest moments of their practice gave the lie to this limitation, and saw all decisions taken by sovereign General Assemblies mandating revocable delegates.

Only historical practice, through which the working class will have to discover and realise all its potentialities, will indicate the precise organisational forms of Council power. On the other hand it is the immediate task of revolutionaries to establish fundamental principles for the Council-ist organisations which are going to be born in every country. By formulating some hypotheses and recalling the fundamental requirements of the revolutionary movement, this article—which should be followed by a certain number of others—is intended to open a real egalitarian debate. The only people who will be excluded from it will be those who refuse to pose it in these terms, those who today declare themselves adversaries of any form of organisation, in the name of a quasi-anarchist spontaneism, and simply reproduce the defects and confusions of the old movement: those mystics of non-organisation, workers discouraged by being mixed up with troskyist sects for too long, or students, prisoners of their impoverishment, who are unable to escape bolshevik organisational schemas. The situationists are certainly partisans of organisation—the existence of the situationist organisation bears witness to that. Those who announce their agreement with our theses but credit the S.I. with a vague spontaneism simply don't know how to read.

Organisation is indispensable precisely because it isn't everything and cannot save everything or win everything. Contrary to what butcher Noske (in "Von Kiel bis Kapp") said about the day of January 6th 1919, the crowds did not fail to become "masters of Berlin by noon of that day" because they had "fine talkers" instead of "determined leaders", but because the form of autonomous organisation of the factory councils had not achieved a sufficient level of autonomy for them to do without "determined leaders" and separated organisation to ensure their liaisons. The shameful example of Barcelona in May 1937 is another example of this: that arms come out so quickly in response to the stalinist provocation, but also that the

order to withdraw given by the anarchist ministers is so quickly carried out, speaks a lot for the Catalan masses' immense capacities for autonomy, and for the autonomy that they still lacked for victory. Tomorrow too it will be the workers' degree of autonomy that will decide our fate.

So the Councilist organisations which are to be formed will not fail to recognise and adopt on their own account, and effectively as a minimum, the "Minimum definition of Revolutionary Organisations" carried by the 7th Conference of the S.I. (cf. Int. Sit. 11, pp. 54 and 55). Since their task will be to prepare for Council power, and since this power is incompatible with all other forms of power, they will be aware that an *abstract* agreement with this definition dooms them to non-existence. For this reason their real agreement will be in practice determined in the non-hierarchical relations within the groups or sections which make them up, in the relations between these groups, as well as in relations with other groups or autonomous organisations—in the development of revolutionary theory and the unitary critique of the dominant society, as well as in permanent criticism of their own practice. By refusing the old technique of partitioning off the workers' movement into separated organisations, parties and unions, they will affirm the unity of their programme and practice. For all the fine history of Councils, all the past councilist organisations have sanctified the separation of political, economic and social sectors. One of the few old parties that is worth analysis, the Kommunistische Arbeiter Partei Deutschlands (K.A.P.D., German Communist Workers' Party), adopted Councils as its programme but assigned itself just propaganda and theoretical discussion, "political education of the masses", for its essential tasks, thus leaving the role of federating the revolutionary factory organisations to the "Allgemeine Arbeiter Union Deutschlands" (A.A.U.D., General Workers' Union of Germany), a scheme not far from traditional syndicalism. Even if the K.A.P.D. rejected the Leninist idea of the mass party just as much as the parliamentarianism and trade-unionism of a K.P.D. (Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands—German Communist Party), and preferred to gather politically-conscious workers, it remained tied to the old hierarchical model of the avant-garde party: professional revolutionaries and salaried theoreticians. The rejection of this model, principally the rejection of a political organisation separated from the revolutionary factory organisations, led in 1920 to the secession of one faction of the members of the A.A.U.D., who founded the A.A.U.D.-E. (Einheitsorganisation—"United"). By the simple working of its internal democracy the new unitary organisation accomplished the educational work that till then had fallen to the lot of the K.A.P.D., and it assigned itself the co-ordination of struggles as a simultaneous task: the factory organisations that it federated would transform themselves into Councils in the revolutionary moment, and would ensure the administration of society. At this point the modern keynote of Workers' Councils was still mixed with messianic memories of the old syndicalism: the factory organisations would magically become Councils when all the workers took part in them.

All that led where it inevitably would. After the crushing of the 1921 insurrection and the repression of the movement, the workers, who were discouraged by the removal of the prospect of revolution, left the factory organisations in great numbers, and as they ceased to be organs of a real struggle the factory organisations declined. The A.A.U.D. was another name for the K.A.P.D. and the A.A.U.D.-E. saw the chances of revolution grow fainter at the same rate as the decline of its own strength. Now they were no more than the holders of a *councilist ideology* that was more and more cut off from reality.

The K.A.P.D.'s terrorist evolution, and the support

then given by the A.A.U.D. to demands for compensation, led in 1929 to the split between the factory organisation and its party. In 1931 the dead bodies of the A.A.U.D. and the A.A.U.D.-E. took the pitiable and unprincipled step of merging against the rise of nazism. The revolutionary elements of both organisations regrouped to form the K.A.U.D. (Kommunistische Arbeiter Union Deutschlands—German Communist Workers' Union). A self-consciously minority organisation, the K.A.U.D. was also alone amongst the movement for Councils in Germany in that it did not claim to take upon itself society's future economic organisation. It called on the workers to form autonomous groups and to assure for themselves liaison between these groups. But the K.A.U.D. came too late. By 1931 the German revolutionary movement had been dead for almost ten years.

If only to make them start, let us remind the anachronistic devotees of the anarcho-marxist quarrel that the C.N.T.-F.A.I., with its greater practice of liberating imagination, apart from the dead weight of anarchist ideology, rejoins the marxist K.A.P.D.-A.A.U.D. in its organisational arrangements. In the same way as the German Communist Workers' Party, the Iberian Anarchist Federation wanted to be the *political* organisation of politically conscious Spanish workers, whilst its A.A.U.D., the C.N.T., took charge of the management of the future society. The F.A.I. militants, the elite of the working class, spread the anarchist idea amongst the masses; the C.N.T. did the practical work of organising the workers in its unions. Two essential differences however, the ideological one of which demonstrates what one might have expected: the F.A.I. did not want to take power but only to influence all the C.N.T.'s behaviour; on the other hand the C.N.T. *really* represented the Spanish working class. Adopted on the 1st of May 1936 at the C.N.T. Congress of Zaragoza, two months before the revolutionary explosion, one of the finest programmes ever advanced by a revolutionary organisation of the past was to see itself partially put into practice by the anarcho-syndicalist masses, whilst their leaders foundered in ministerialism and class-collaboration. With the procurers of the masses Garcia Oliver, Segundo Blanco, etc., and the under-mistress Montseny, the anti-state libertarian movement, which had already supported Kropotkin, the trench-anarchist prince, found at last the historical crowning of its historical absolutism: governmental-anarchists. In the *last* battle that it was to join, anarchism was to see all the ideological sauce that made up its being fall back in its face: the State, Liberty, the Individual, and other highly musty spices with capital letters; whereas the militia-men, the workers and the libertarian peasants were saving its honour, were supplying the international proletarian movement with *its greatest practical contribution*, were burning the churches, were fighting against the bourgeoisie, fascism and stalinism on all fronts, and were beginning to *make the communist society a reality*.

Some organisations exist today which craftily pretend not to. This godsend allows them not to bother with the simplest clarification of the bases on which they can gather anybody at all (whilst magically labelling them "workers"); to give no account to their semi-members of the *informal leadership* which holds the controls; and to say anything and particularly to condemn in *amalgam* all other possible organisation and every previously anathematised theoretical statement. In this way the "Informations Correspondence Ouvrieres" group writes in a recent bulletin (I.C.O. no. 84, August 1969): "The Councils are the transformation of strike committees under the influence of the situation itself, and in response to the actual necessities of the struggle, within the dialectic of that struggle. All other attempts, at any moment in a struggle, to formulate the necessity of creating workers' councils must depend on a councilist ideology such as can be seen in diverse forms in

certain unions, in the P.S.U. and among the situationists. The very concept of the council excludes all ideology." These individuals know nothing of ideology—as might be thought, theirs is distinguished from more full-grown ideologies only by a spineless eclecticism. But they have heard tell (perhaps in Marx, perhaps only from the S.I.), that ideology has become a bad thing. They take advantage of this to try to have it believed that all theoretical work—and they avoid it like the plague—is an ideology, amongst the situationists just as in the P.S.U. But their valiant recourse to the "dialectic" and the "concept" which henceforth decorates their vocabulary, in no way saves them from an imbecile ideology of which the above sentence alone is evidence enough. If one idealistically relies on the "concept" of the council, or, what's even more euphoric, on the practical inactivity of the I.C.O., to "exclude all ideology" in real Councils, one must expect the worst: it has been seen that historical experience justifies no optimism of this kind. The overstepping of the primitive form of Council can only come from struggles becoming more conscious, and from struggles for *higher consciousness*. I.C.O.'s mechanical view of the perfect automatic response of the strike committee to "necessities", which shows that the Council will easily come of its own accord and when it's needed, just so long as it's not talked about, completely ignores the experience of the revolutions of our century, which shows that "the situation itself" is just as ready to make the Councils disappear, or to craftily co-opt and recuperate them, as to make them flourish.

Let us leave this contemplative ideology, and very degraded derivative of the natural sciences, which would observe the appearance of a proletarian revolution almost as though it were a solar eruption,

Councilist organisations will be formed, although they must be quite the opposite of a headquarters designed to make Councils spring up to order. Despite the period of the new open social crisis that we have entered since the movement of the occupations, and the encouragements that the situation lavishes here and there, from Italy to the U.S.S.R., it is very probable that true councilist organisations will still take a long time to form, and that other important revolutionary moments will be produced before they are in a position to intervene in them at an important level. One must not play with councilist organisation, set up or support premature parodies of it. But it is beyond doubt that the Councils will have a much greater chance of maintaining themselves as sole power if they contain conscious councilists, and there is a real possession of councilist theory.

In contrast to the Council as the permanent base unit (ceaselessly setting up and modifying Councils of delegates emanating from itself), and as the assembly in which all the workers of a firm (workshop and factory councils) and all the inhabitants of an urban area that's rejoining the revolution (street councils, neighbourhood councils) have to participate, the councilist organisation, if it is to guarantee its coherence and the effective working of its internal democracy, will have to *choose its members*, in accordance with what they precisely want and with what they can effectively do. The coherence of the Councils is guaranteed by the single fact that they are *the power*; that they eliminate all other power and decide everything. This practical experience is the field in which men acquire intelligence from their own actions—"realise philosophy". It goes without saying that their majorities also run the risk of accumulating momentary mistakes, and then not having the time or the means to rectify them. But they cannot doubt that their own fate is the true product of their decisions, and that their very existence will be forcibly annihilated by the consequences of their unovercome mistakes.

Within the councilist organisation real equality of all in making decisions and carrying them out will not be an empty slogan or an abstract claim. Of course not all the members of an organisation will have the same talents, and it is obvious that a worker will write better than a student. But because in aggregate the organisation will have all the necessary talents, no hierarchy of individual talents will come and undermine the democracy. Neither adherence to a councilist organisation nor the proclamation of an ideal equality, will allow its members all to be noble and intelligent, and to live well; this will only come by their natural dispositions to become more noble, more intelligent, and to live better, freely developing in the only game that's worth playing: the destruction of the old world.

In the social movements that are going to spread, the councilists will refuse to let themselves be elected onto the strike committees. Their task will be the opposite: to act in such a way that all the workers organise themselves at rank-and-file level into general assemblies that decide how the struggle is carried out. It will be very necessary to understand that the absurd call for a "central strike committee", advanced by some naive individuals during the movement of the occupations, would, if it had succeeded, have sabotaged the movement towards the autonomy of the masses even more quickly, since almost all the strike committees were controlled by the stalinists.

Given that it is not for us to forge a plan for all time, and that one step forward by the real Council movement will be worth more than a dozen councilist programmes, it is difficult to state precise hypotheses about the relationship between the councilist organisations and the Councils in the revolutionary moment. The councilist organisation—which knows itself to be separated from the proletariat—will have to cease to exist as a separated organisation at the very moment when separations are abolished; and it will have to do this even if the complete freedom of association guaranteed by the power of the Councils allows various parties and enemies of that power to survive. It may be doubted however that the immediate dissolution of all the councilist organisations *as soon as* the Councils appear, as Pannekoek wished, is a feasible measure. The councilist will speak as councilists within the Council, and will not have to make an example of the dissolution of their organisations so as just to reunite straight off, and play at pressure groups in the general assembly. In this way it will be easier and more legitimate for them to combat and denounce the inevitable presence of bureaucrats, spies and old scabs who will infiltrate here and there. Equally, they will have to struggle against phoney Councils or fundamentally reactionary ones (police Councils) which are bound to appear. They will act in such a way that the unified power of the Councils does not recognise these bodies or their delegates. Because the setting up of other organisations is wholly contrary to the ends they are pursuing, and because they refuse all incoherence within themselves, councilist organisations must forbid double membership. As we have said,

all the workers of a factory must take part in the Council, or at least all those who accept its rules. The solution to the problem of whether to accept participation in the Council by (in Barth's words) "those who yesterday had to be thrown out of the factory at gunpoint", will only be found in practice.

In the end councilist organisation stands or falls by the coherence of its theory and its action, and its struggle for the complete disappearance of all remaining power situated outside the Councils, or trying to make itself independent of them. But to simplify this discussion straight away, by refusing even to take into consideration a crowd of councilist pseudo-organisations which might be simulated by students or people obsessed by professional militantism, let us say that it does not seem to us that an organisation can be recognised as councilist if it is not comprised of at least two-thirds workers. As this proportion might perhaps pass for a concession, let us add that it seems to us indispensable to include this rider: in all delegations to central conferences at which decisions can be taken that have not been previously provided for by a hard mandate, workers ought to make up three-quarters of the participants. In sum, the inverse proportion of the first congress of the "Social-Democratic Workers' Party of Russia".

It is known that we have no inclination towards workerism of any form. That perspective is concerned with workers who have "become dialecticians", as they will have to become en masse in the exercise of the power of the Councils. But on the one hand the workers find themselves the *central* force capable of halting the existing functioning of society, and the *indispensable* force for reinventing all its bases. On the other hand, although councilist organisations obviously must not separate other categories of wage-earners notably intellectuals from itself, it is in all events important that the latter are severely restricted in the doubtful importance they might assume. This can be done by considering all aspects of their lives and checking that they are really councilist revolutionaries, and also by seeing to it that there are as few as possible in the organisation.

The councilist organisation will not agree to speak on equal terms with other organisations unless they are consistent partisans of proletarian autonomy; likewise the Councils will have to rid themselves not only of the grip of the parties and the unions, but also of any tendency towards giving them a recognised place, and to negotiate with them as equal powers. The Councils are the only power, or they are nothing. The means of their victory is already their victory. With the lever of the Councils and the fulcrum of the total negation of the spectacular-commodity society, the Earth can be raised.

The victory of the Councils is not the end but the beginning of the revolution.

Rene RIESEL (from "Internationale Situationniste", No. 12, pp. 64-73) (trans. D.R.).



MARXISM, PREFIGURATIVE COMMUNISM, AND THE PROBLEM OF WORKERS' CONTROL

Carl Boggs

A conspicuous deficiency of the Marxist tradition has been the failure to produce a theory of the state and political action that could furnish the basis of a democratic and non-authoritarian revolutionary process. The two most widely-tested strategies for advancing revolutionary goals — Leninism and structural reformism — provide no real alternative to the bureaucratic hierarchy, the power of the centralized state, and the social division of labor characteristic of bourgeois society. While Leninism did furnish a mechanism for overturning traditional structures, it has reproduced within the party-state a bureaucratic centralism that retards progress toward socialism. And structural reformism, as expressed in traditional Social Democracy and the Communist parties of the advanced capitalist societies, has led to the institutionalization of working-class politics, into bourgeois electoral, judicial and administrative structures. Both strategies have actually reinforced the growth of modern bureaucratic capitalism through their obsession with state authority, "efficiency" and discipline.

Because these models lack a conception of the particular socialist forms that would replace the established models of domination, and since both mirror and even extend some of the most repressive features of the bureaucratic state, they are never really able to escape the confines of bourgeois politics. Thus "Marxism-Leninism" and Social Democracy, which in the U.S. have been the main strategic responses to the disintegration of the new left, are actually two sides of the same coin. Despite their ideological contrasts, they rest upon many of the same theoretical (and even programmatic) assumptions.

It would be easy to attribute this phenomenon to the temporary aberrations of "Stalinism" and "revisionism", but the problem has deeper roots. It stems from the failure of Marxism to spellout the process of transition. Note that Marx thought communism on a world scale would appear organically and quite rapidly. One finds in Marx scarcely a hint of what forms, methods, and types of leadership would give shape to the unfolding socialist order; whatever strategic directions can be unravelled from his work are ambiguous and often inconsistent.⁽¹⁾ At times he seemed to indicate that socialist transformation would resemble the passage from feudalism to capitalism, to the extent that changes in civil society would necessarily precede, and anticipate, the actual transfer of political power — but he did not set out to conceptualize this process or take up the problem of strategy.

The crude determinism that overtook European Marxism in the period between Marx's death and World War I did little to clarify this task. The presumed mechanics of capitalist development undercut the need for a conscious scheme of transition; "crisis", collapse, breakdown — these fatalistic notions propelled Marxism toward the most naive faith in progress. Since that capitalism was expected to disappear through its own contradictions (the falling rate

of profit, crises of over-production, concentration of wealth, immiserization of the proletariat), the transformative process was never viewed as problematic. The ends and methods of socialist revolution were assumed to be determined by the logic of capitalism itself, as automatic mechanisms that side-stepped the issue of political strategy and subjective intervention. Obstacles that stood in the way of this historical advance toward socialism — bureaucratic domination, the social division of labor, lack of mass socialist consciousness — were viewed as merely reflections of an outmoded production system. Attempts to confront such obstacles directly, or to specify the actual character of the transition, were dismissed as exercises in utopian speculation.

Leninism overcame this strategic paralysis, but its "solution" was an authoritarian and power-oriented model that only further repressed the democratic and self-emancipatory side of Marxism. In the past century, the most direct attack on statist Marxism has come from what might be called the prefigurative tradition, which begins with the nineteenth century anarchists and includes the syndicalists, council communists, and the New Left. By "prefigurative", I mean the embodiment, within the ongoing political practice of a movement, of those forms of social relations, decision-making, culture,

and human experience that are the ultimate goal. Developing mainly *outside* Marxism, it produced a critique of bureaucratic domination and a vision of revolutionary democracy that Marxism generally lacked. Yet, wherever it was not destroyed by the bourgeois state or by organized Marxist parties, it fell prey to its own spontaneism, or wound up absorbed into established trade union, party and state institutions. These historical limitations, along with a powerful critique of Leninism and Social Democracy, are the legacy of prefigurative radicalism that commands renewed attention today.

1. SOCIALISM OR STATISM?

THE PROBLEM DEFINED

The eclipse of traditional Social Democracy was hastened by the Russian Revolution and the endurance of the Bolshevik state. Leninism always stressed the danger of "spontaneity" and the need for a centralized and disciplined organization to correct the immobilism of the "open" parties of the Second International. The Bolshevik party was constructed less for underground combat (a theme that is often over-exaggerated) than for carrying out a "minority revolution". Two conditions shaped this strategy: a small proletariat co-existing with a large peasantry in a pre-industrial society, and a weak state subject to extreme crises of legitimacy. For Lenin, everything hinged on the *immediacy* of the struggle for power. As Lukacs noted, Lenin's major accomplishment was to defy the "laws" of capitalist development and to inject political will into Marxism: the strategy was one of *Realpolitik*. (2) The party-state is more central to Leninism than the vaguely anarchistic vision of mass participation that Lenin sketched in *State and Revolution*. Since the Bolsheviks conquered power at a moment of grave crisis, and without a sustained build-up of popular support beyond the cities, their schema did not call for a transformation of civil society preceding the transfer of power. They achieved immediate power objectives, but the isolation and opposition they faced made their *socialist* goals unrealizable. To preserve a revolutionary regime under such conditions meant solidifying the party-state; beyond that, the project of *transforming* such a society would call for massive use of control, manipulation, and coercion.

The Leninist monopoly of power in Russia had two main consequences: it transformed the masses "represented" by the party into manipulated objects, and it generated a preoccupation with bureaucratic methods and techniques. Lenin's whole approach was that of the technician who stresses the organizational means of political struggle while downplaying the ends themselves. (3) This suppression of values permits the utilization of capitalist methods to advance "socialist construction": hierarchical

structures, Taylorism, the authoritarian-submissive personality, alienated labor. All stirrings from below were thus dismissed as "utopian", "ultra-leftist", or "anarchistic". The very means which Bolsheviks used to lay the economic-technical basis for the transition to communism, inevitably subverted those ends and encouraged the growth of bureaucratic centralism.

Lenin equated workers' power with the fact of Bolshevik rule, mocking the "petty bourgeois illusions" of leftists who clamored for democratic participation. By 1921, the regime had already destroyed or converted into "transmission belts" those popular and autonomous institutions — the Soviets, trade unions, factory committees — that played a vital role in the revolution. Before his death, Lenin recoiled from the bureaucratic tide, but the Bolshevik tradition offered no alternative strategy. The only conception of transition in Lenin was the one followed in *practice* — an adaptive, flexible tactics that, when combined with the primacy of the party, favored centralism.

Beyond references to the "dictatorship" of the proletariat, the Bolsheviks scarcely raised the question of structures. Aside from futile internal protests from the left communists, there was no analysis of what political forms and authority relations were comparable with the Marxian vision of a classless and stateless society. For Lenin, the nature of the transitional period always remained unspecified; the demand "all power to the Soviets" was essentially a slogan, and in any case had no impact on post-revolutionary development. The Soviets were viewed as stepping stones to the conquest of power rather than as the nucleus of a new socialist state. The party always took precedence over the Soviets and strove to limit their autonomy; true to Lenin's administrative emphasis, his vision of revolution was anchored in large-scale organization. (4) Having "smashed" the authoritarian state, the Bolsheviks soon recreated it.

Though Marxism was originally an anti-statist theory, Soviet development since Lenin has produced what the Yugoslav Stojanovic calls the "statist myth of Socialism." (5) Revolutionary goals became inseparable from state initiative in the realm of control, ownership, planning, capital accumulation, employment of the workforce. The transition to socialism assumed a mystical quality: the consciousness, social relations, and political habits necessary to build a socialist order would seem to spring from nowhere, with no lengthy and organic process of transformation within civil society to nurture them.

Whereas Leninism has functioned best in pre-industrial countries with weak institutions of authority, the strategy of structural reforms has taken hold in advance capitalist societies where bourgeois traditions are more firmly

implanted. Even where "Leninist" movements have survived in the industrialized countries, they have either abandoned their vanguard status or drifted toward isolationism.

The theory of structural reforms is often understood as a reversion from Leninism to traditional Social Democracy, but the model introduced by the Italian Communist Party after World War II contained a more positive conception of the transition. It seeks to by-pass the extremes of vanguardism and spontaneism by participating *within* and *extending* the forms of bourgeois democracy (elections, parliament, local governments, trade unions). Its premise was that Marxist governments could not gain hegemony until the political balance of forces strongly favored them; increased working-class strength would gradually modify structures, breaking down the power of the monopolies and the central bureaucracy while injecting new life into mass politics. In contrast to Leninism, it envisaged a gradual, peaceful democratization of the state; against the "ultra left", it offered a "tangible" strategy that looked to intermediate objectives within the prevailing culture and traditions rather than to struggles of total confrontation.

The evolution of Communist parties in the developed societies reflects the contradictions of structural reformism: electoral-parliamentary struggles have led to *strategic* (not just tactical) involvement in bourgeois structures and to institutionalization within the system. This process has unfolded at three levels: (1.) like Leninism, the strategy itself discourages prefigurative forms that would permit the masses to define the revolutionary process; (2.) parliamentarism undercuts any commitment to grassroot struggle, workers' control, and cultural transformation and detaches the party from everyday life; (3.) years of electoral campaigns geared to winning votes and building power coalitions favored the rise of interest-group politics based on appeals to economism, populism, and patronage.

Structural reformism thus perpetuates the division between politics and economics. On the one hand, the party mobilizes votes, creates alliances, and expands its local administrative and parliamentary representation; on the other, the trade unions attempt to advance the material demands of labor through contractual bargaining. This separation fragments the working-class movement and makes it difficult to link immediate struggles with broad socialist objectives. Electoralism minimizes popular mobilization and encourages a partial, alienated, institutional approach to politics,⁽⁷⁾ whereas trade unionism reproduces the hierarchy, discipline, and corporativism of the capitalist factory.

There is another problem — one stemming from the concept of a "neutral" state that views the bourgeois power apparatus as standing

"above" the class struggle, as a technical instrument that can be restructured and wielded for revolutionary purposes. The conservatism of structural reformist parties reveals that the state is inseparable from civil society, a product of capitalist development. The institutions that grew out of the bourgeois revolution are too deeply embedded in that tradition to be somehow miraculously lifted out of it and forged into mechanisms of socialist transformation. What Gramsci and Luxemburg noted in an earlier period still applies: liberal democratic structures function above all to *legitimate* bourgeois society. The excessive reliance on the state here differs from that of Leninism, but it too fails to situate the revolutionary process in the general society and in the unfolding of new political forms.

Despite a commitment to pluralism, structural reformism merely embellishes the statist myth of socialism in a different guise — the central state itself becomes the prime mover, the source of all initiative and legitimation, the main arena of participation. In the end, structural reformism and Leninism appear as two diametrically opposed strategies that lead to twin versions of state bureaucratic capitalism. Whereas Leninism reproduced the essentials of capitalism, including hierarchy, commodity production, and alienated labor, in a new and more total form, structural reformism promises to extend, refine, and "rationalize" existing bourgeois institutions.

2 A PREFIGURATIVE COMMUNISM?

Within Marxism, the problem of bureaucratic domination and hierarchy is usually understood as a manifestation of the class structure — a conceptual weakness that helps to explain the absence of a strategy grounded in new forms of authority. Prefigurative strategy, on the other hand, views statism and authoritarianism as special obstacles to be overturned; its goal is to replace the bureaucratic state with distinctly popular institutions. Ideally, this tradition expresses three basic concerns: (1.) fear of reproducing hierarchical authority relations under a new ideological rationale; (2.) criticism of political parties and trade unions because their centralized forms reproduce the old power relations in a way that undermines revolutionary struggles; and (3.) commitment to democratization through local, collective structures that anticipate the future liberated society. The prefigurative model — at least in some of its more recent expressions — stressed the overturning of *all* modes of domination, not only the expropriation of private ownership. Statist attempts to introduce nationalization, central planning, and new social priorities may achieve a transfer of legal ownership but they may also leave the social division of labor and bureau-

cracy intact.(8)

The idea of "collective ownership" remains a myth so long as the old forms of institutional control are not destroyed; the supersession of private management by state or "public" management poses only a superficial, abstract solution to the contradictions of capitalism. As Gorz puts it: "There is no such thing as communism without a communist life-style or 'culture'; but a communist life-style cannot be based upon the technology, institutions, and division of labor which derive from capitalism."(9) Only when the workers themselves establish new participatory forms can alienated labor and subordination be eliminated. This transformation includes but runs much deeper than the problem of formal ownership — it penetrates to the level of factory hierarchy and authoritarianism, fragmentation of job skills, commodity production, and separation of mental and physical functions that grow out of the capitalist division of labor. These features, which are often thought to be necessary for greater efficiency and productivity, can better be understood as a means of ensuring control of labor.(10) The drive toward specialization and hierarchy comes not primarily from capital accumulation and technological development in the narrow sense, but from the need to create a bureaucratically organized and disciplined workforce.

Bureaucratization creates obstacles to revolutionary change that were only dimly foreseen by classical Marxism. The expansion of the public sphere and the convergence of state and corporate sectors has meant more centralized and total networks of power and, correspondingly, the erosion of popular democratic initiative. Bureaucratic logic, which enters every area of public existence, helps to enforce bourgeois ideological hegemony insofar as it diffuses a culture of organizational adaptation, submission, pragmatism, routine; it depoliticizes potential opposition by narrowing the range of political discourse, by institutionalizing alienation, and posing only "technical" solutions to problems. Once entrenched, bureaucracy tends to produce a rigidity that resists fundamental change. Marxist movements themselves have been repeatedly victimized by their own internal bureaucratization.

Yet this dynamic, even as it permeates new spheres of life, opens up breaches in the capitalist power structure; new points of vulnerability and new centers of resistance begin to appear. Not only production, but every aspect of social existence is brought into the class struggle. While prefigurative movements first appeared during the early stages of industrialization and bureaucratization, the explosion of popular insurgency in the 1960s — the revolutionary left in Western Europe, Japan and elsewhere, the new left, rank-and-file working class struggles, oppositional movements in Eastern

Europe — demonstrated that they are still very much alive.

The institutional focus of prefigurative communism is small, local, collective organs of popular control — factory councils, soviets, neighborhood assemblies, revolutionary action committees, affinity groups — that seek to democratize and reinvigorate revolutionary politics. Generally an outgrowth of traditional structures that express some vague commitment to direct democracy — for example, the peasant collectives in Russia, China, and Spain, the shop-stewards organization in Britain, the trade union grievance committees in Italy and France — they often become radicalized at times of crisis and produce broader revolutionary forms. The Paris Commune, the Russian and Chinese Revolutions, the Hungarian Revolutions of 1919 and 1956, the Spanish upheaval of 1936-39, the Vietnamese Revolution, and the 1968 Revolt in France were all catalyzed by extensive networks of "dual power."

Such groups, generally called councils, can generate a leadership organically rooted in the local workplaces and communities that is directly accountable to the population. They possess other advantages: for example, by collectivizing work and "management" functions, councils can more effectively combat the social division of labor; by emphasizing the transformation of social relations over instrumental power objectives, they can incorporate a wider range of issues, demands, and needs into popular struggles; by posing the question of ideological hegemony, they can furnish the context in which the masses would develop their intellectual and political potential — where a sense of confidence, spirit, and creativity would begin to replace the fatalism, passivity, and submissiveness instilled by bourgeois authority;(11) and, finally, by encouraging political involvement that is centered outside the dominant structures, the capacity to resist deradicalization can be greatly strengthened.

In the broadest sense, prefigurative structures can be viewed as a new source of political legitimacy, as a nucleus of a future socialist state. They would create an entirely new kind of politics, breaking down the division of labor between everyday life and political activity. As Cornelius Castoriadis suggests, "What is involved here is the de-professionalization of politics — i.e., the abolition of politics as a special and separate sphere of activity — and, conversely, the universal politicization of society, which means just that: the business of society becomes, quite literally, everybody's business."(12)

The early prefigurative tradition, of course, rarely achieved this level of politicization. There is a striking contrast between the old European anarchist and anarcho-syndicalist movements and the postwar council insurgencies in Russia,

Italy, Germany and elsewhere. The earlier variants scorned politics and celebrated spontaneity to such an extent that they could never transcend their own social immediacy or work out an effective strategy. They represented a flight from larger societal issues that often inspired contempt for "theory" and "organization" in any form (a style that was repeated in the early new left). Initially a response to organized Marxism, their fate was one of two extremes: either flailing away helplessly from the outside or assimilation into Marxism itself. The difficulty of extending local centers of revolutionary democracy within a repressive order only intensifies this problem.

Anarchism and syndicalism have responded to this problem by insisting that a lengthy period of ideological-cultural transformation could gradually erode the moral foundations of bureaucratic state power. But all such prefigurative movements were in fact destroyed because their hostility to coordination and leadership enabled the ruling forces to monopolize the political terrain. Moreover, to the extent that they arose out of a peasant or petty bourgeois world-view, they were basically romantic and utopian, longing for a past uncorrupted by industrialization and urbanization.

From the Marx-Bakunin debates of the late 1860s until World War I, the relationship between Marxism and anarchism was one of polarized conflict: organization vs. spontaneity, leadership vs. self-activity, centralism vs. localism, etc. In some ways this polarization was intensified by the Bolshevik Revolution, when the success of Leninism forced anarchists into retreat. At the same time, with the postwar crisis of European capitalism, prefigurative movements began to look to new models — the soviets in Russia, the factory-council struggles in Italy, Council Communism in Germany and Holland. While still suspicious of all "political" activity, the council tendency did attempt to integrate the best elements of both traditions. Council theorists such as Pannekoek and Goerter, for example, moved beyond a strict commitment to spontaneous and local movements; they sought, at least in theory, to incorporate the needs for structure, leadership, and coordination into a democratic and prefigurative revolutionary process.

Councillism marked a distinct advance beyond the earlier approaches on three levels. First, despite a general differentiation between party and council communism, the general direction was toward fusing popular organs of self-management with larger systems of coordination and planning — called in German a *Raetesystem*, or federated network of councils. Local assemblies were understood as part of a broad political strategy. Second, while contestation for state power was never defined as the overriding goal, nor viewed in vanguardist or

electoral terms, neither was it contemptuously dismissed. The process would be different: established structures would have to be undermined from below and replaced by collective popular structures. Third, councillorism did not look to an idyllic past rooted in a primitive collectivism but to a Marxian vision of the future — to the unfolding potential of the working class, and to economic-technological development as the basis of human liberation.

But even councillorism failed to produce a mature revolutionary strategy that could be translated into a sustained movement. Born out of crisis, the councils rapidly disappeared once stability returned; explosive advances were crushed and neutralized. In Russia, they were destroyed by the Leninist party-state, in Italy by an isolation bred of localism and factory centeredness, and in Germany by a narrow interest-group politics that was the expression of a rising stratum of highly skilled, professionalized workers in crafts occupations. These failures, in one form or another, have been repeated elsewhere many times since the original postwar council upsurge. The prefigurative dimension of revolutionary politics has repeatedly clashed with the instrumentalism of bureaucratic power struggles.

3. RUSSIA: THE TRIUMPH OF JACOBINISM

The Russian working-class movement, though small and lacking in political maturity by general European standards, first emerged as a radical force at the turn of the century. Politicized by the repressive apparatus of the authoritarian Tsarist state, it naturally sought autonomous forms of proletarian organization. Such forms initially appeared on a large scale during the 1905 Revolution, when factory committees and local soviets (councils rooted in the factories and/or communities) organized strikes and mass demonstrations; but they quickly subsided after the insurgency was bloodily repulsed by Nicholas II, and they did not reappear until 1917. In 1905 they were limited to a few urban areas, and while some grew to enormous size (the Moscow soviet recruited more than 80,000 workers) they were generally short-lived. In the months immediately preceding and following the October Revolution, however, they were able to establish a powerful geographical and institutional presence as organs of "dual power."

By March of 1917, more than 140 soviets were thriving in Russia and the Ukraine; only a few months later the number mushroomed to about 200, many of them in the countryside. Factory committees also appeared by the hundreds, in the industrial center of Petrograd and elsewhere. More closely tied to the daily lives of workers and peasants than was the feeble Provisional Government, the soviets and factory committees became the legitimate decision-making bodies in many important communities and factories.

Radicalized by the wartime disintegration of economic and political life, they developed into vital agencies of revolutionary mobilization and potential centers of collective political power. They were the primary catalysts of the October Revolution.

The soviets were defined as primarily *political* assemblies. Even in areas where they became the ideological battleground for the three main leftist parties — the Bolsheviks, the Mensheviks, and Social Revolutionaries — they nonetheless reflected a broad social base, with delegates elected from virtually all popular strata. The number of delegates varies greatly — from less than 100 in some village and town councils to 3000 in the Petrograd Soviet. Meetings were held regularly, sometimes daily, and debate over local issues was usually open and heated. In the larger assemblies, of course, the executive committee assumed free rein over everyday matters and sometimes developed centralist tendencies, but the rapid turnover of delegates together with the quick pace of events imposed limits on bureaucratization. More than anything else, the soviets helped to legitimate the left by virtue of their stable grassroots presence in the midst of crisis; they must have been indirectly responsible for recruiting hundreds of thousands into the leftist movements — a task that the parties themselves could probably not have achieved.

As the crisis of 1917 brought Russia closer toward revolution, councilism ran into three serious problems. The first involved a split between the soviets and factory committees, between politics and economics. For the most part, soviets assumed decision-making powers over the general affairs of the *community*, while the committees were more directly concerned with workplace issues at the *point of production*. Although both lacked ideological homogeneity and strategic direction, the factory committees were consistently to the left of the soviets. The factory organs were more militant — and pushed for workers' control and mass action — strikes, demonstrations, occupations. The soviets, on the other hand, exercised a moderating force; they generally pressed for legal tactics, partly owing to their more diverse social composition and partly because of their commitment to institutional politics. The Petrograd soviet, for example, was slow to take up the popular struggles that built toward the October Revolution.⁽¹³⁾ At the same time, the committees were inhibited by a narrow emphasis on daily economic demands that tended to exclude political objectives. Acting through the committees, workers physically ousted the management of many factories and established their own system of control, but "politics" was left to the soviets and the council movement remained fragmented.⁽¹⁴⁾

The second problem was closely related to the

first: how to build geographical and political coordination. Without political unity, prefigurative politics was bound to disintegrate on its own or succumb to the logic of Jacobinism. In fact, the events of 1917 moved so rapidly that there was little chance for such a dispersed and ideologically-diffuse mass movement to construct nationwide structures of popular self-management. The idea of a Central Soviet was entertained, and several regional meetings produced debates around the proposals for federative coordinating bodies, but no consensus emerged. Strategic paralysis was thus hardly avoidable, given the power of regionalism, the cultural gulf between cities and countryside, and the rivalry between soviets and factory committees.

This brings us to the third problem — the conflict between prefigurative structures and leftist parties (notably the Bolsheviks), which ultimately led to the demise of the popular assemblies after the revolution. What was involved here was the capacity of the Bolsheviks to establish their political hegemony within the soviets and committees and then transform these organs into instruments of its own consolidation of state power. The general pattern was for the Bolsheviks to build a majority base of support, form a revolutionary committee that would be subjected to party discipline, and then utilize the local organs as a legitimizing cover for establishing party domination.⁽¹⁵⁾ These tactics worked admirably, given the tightly-knit, disciplined character of the party and the open, ill-defined nature of the soviets and factory councils. By the time of the Revolution, the bolsheviks controlled about half of all soviets and most of the large urban ones, including the crucial Petrograd soviet that played a major role in catapulting the party to power. And they were from the outside the most influential force in the factory committees.

The revolutionary conquest of power was actually taken in the name of the soviets; the party was envisaged as the global "expression" of local structures, as only one of the mechanisms through which the revolutionary process would occur. In reality, however, the Bolsheviks were always suspicious of the soviets — especially those which retained autonomy vis-a-vis the party — and began to wage an all-out assault on them in early 1918. Independent local organizations of all sorts were denounced as havens of "parochialism" and "anarchism" (not to mention Menshevism), and workers' control was dismissed as a "leftist illusion". The Bolsheviks were now in a position to subordinate the remaining soviets, even where they lacked a clear majority, though not without stiff resistance. These councils, along with others that had come under Bolshevik hegemony in the pre-revolutionary period, were gradually emptied of collective-democratic content and trans-

formed into "transmission belts" for implementing decisions made by the party leadership. The factory committees were dismantled by the trade union apparatus, which had already become an adjunct of the party. By mid-1918 the "leftists" of the Supreme Economic Council had been purged opening the way to decrees which terminated workers' control in certain key industrial sectors.(16)

This was perfectly consistent with general Bolshevik strategy. The rise of bureaucratic centralism and the suppression of prefigurative structures was accelerated by the civil war and the post-revolutionary crisis, but the dynamic had been set in motion much earlier, before the seizure of power. Lenin saw workers' control as a tactical objective to be exploited before the party took over state power — as a means of limiting capitalist hegemony in the factories, of spurring insurrection, and, ultimately, as a step toward nationalization and a top-down state-planned economy. Popular self-management, whether through the soviets, factory committees, or some other form, was never viewed by the Bolsheviks as a principle of socialist state authority. Already in early 1918, Lenin argued that the survival of the Bolshevik government — not to mention the development of a productive economy — depended upon central planning and coordination, a rationalized administration, "one-man management", labor discipline, and strict controls over local organizations.(17)

The bureaucratic centralism implicit in this strategy could only lead to what leftist critics of the regime were already calling "state capitalism". Many felt that bureaucracy itself was a crucial enemy of socialism and insisted that the revolutionary goals of the Bolsheviks had already been forgotten. They stressed workers' control, local autonomy, and open debate within the party. In response, the Bolsheviks dismissed these critiques as "utopian" and "syndicalist"; they looked upon the soviets, factory committees, and even trade unions as disruptive impediments to the main task of consolidating the party-state in the face of grave political threats. In the period 1918-1920, the regime moved to eliminate left opposition with the party (culminating in the ban on factions at the 10th party congress in March 1921) and subordinated the hundreds of mass organizations that were the backbone of revolutionary struggle. The soviets became structures of government power; the factory committees either disappeared or lost their management functions; the trade unions became auxiliaries of the party and the workers' opposition was defeated by 1921; and the left Communists were finally driven from the party or crushed by force (as at Kronstadt).(18)

In the battle between Leninist and prefigurative forces in Russia, the former rapidly gained the upper hand. The party was unified and disciplined while the popular organs were

terribly fragmented. Moreover, a central premise of the prefigurative movement — that revolutionary initiative should be taken away from the party and "returned to the class" — was unrealistic given the small and isolated proletariat in Russia and the historical pressures that favored centralism. Conflict and crisis strengthened the Jacobin tendency toward restoration of order, and the compelling demand for "unity" could only reinforce the vanguardist and statist strategy that Lenin had outlined as early as 1902.

4. ITALY: THE LIMITS OF SPONTANEISM

The Italian council movement sprang up out of the *Biennio Rosso* (the "Red Two Years") that swept the northern part of the country during 1918-1920, ending with the collapse of the factory occupations in Turin. The crisis of the bourgeois order had actually begun in the prewar years, when the ideological consensus that Premier Giovanni Giolitti manipulated (through the political art called *trasformismo* — the molding of broad elite alliances which served to absorb leftist opposition) started to crumble. Rapid economic growth after 1900, with the development of the "industrial triangle" of Milan, Turin, and Genoa, established the basis for a highly class-conscious and militant proletariat.

Industrial workers joined the Socialist Party (PSI) and the trade unions in large numbers, though many were attracted to syndicalism and some even looked to anarchism. Like other parties of the Second International, the PSI proclaimed a revolutionary strategy that masked a reformist practice; it struggled for liberal reforms in the political sphere and social welfare measures in the economic sphere — an approach that produced large membership and electoral gains that by 1919 gave the party 156 seats (roughly one-third) in the Chamber of Deputies. The PSI's trade union partner, the General Confederation of Labor, (CGL) functioned mainly as a bargaining instrument with capitalist management; it sought to strengthen working-class economic power with the idea of precipitating a general crisis that would hasten the "natural death" of capitalism.

Such a reformist scenario might have advanced the fortunes of the PSI had it not been for the outbreak of the war and the Russian Revolution. The military defeat left Italy in a state of paralysis. Defeat led to social disruption and severe economic decline, characterized by food shortages, unemployment, inflation, and a sharply falling *lira*. Popular militancy spread rapidly; by 1917-1918 a wave of strikes, street demonstrations, and land occupations began to erode the PSI-CGL reformist domination and inspired an outpouring of syndicalism. (Working-class struggles confined to the point of production). Proletarian rebellion was centered

in Piedmont, notably Turin, where the rise of a skilled, concentrated, and relatively homogeneous proletarian culture prompted comparisons with Petrograd on the eve of the Bolshevik Revolution. News of the October upheaval fueled these struggles, which reached a peak that would irreversibly transfigure the old political terrain.

What evolved was a movement directed as much against the established Marxist organizations as against the capitalist order, and basing itself on a total, uncompromising break with all bourgeois institutions. It inspired three major tendencies — Leninist vanguardism, syndicalism, and, above all, a council communism born out of the Turin working-class movement. By mid-1919 tens of thousands of workers were recruited into the *consigli di fabbrica*, or factory councils, that grew out of the trade union grievance committees at Fiat and other enterprises once proletarian demands could no longer be absorbed within the union framework. These council-based struggles inspired new modes of class warfare and ultimately pressed for a revolutionary strategy that challenged the PSI-CGL reformist model.

Though distinct from syndicalism, the council movement assimilated much that was positive in the syndicalist critique of hierarchical and vanguardist Marxism and emphasized many of the same goals: direct democracy at the point of production, working-class solidarity, and collective self-management of factories. In May 1919 Turinese council revolutionaries founded the journal *L'Ordine Nuovo*, which through the efforts of Antonio Gramsci and others sought to establish a new theoretical grounding for what was an explosive but still amorphous popular insurgency. The journal set out to analyze and facilitate the conditions making possible the transition to socialism; the factory councils were seen as the first step toward more comprehensive forms of socialist democracy, as the "embryo" of a new proletarian state. In the period 1918 to 1920 Gramsci outlined an organic or "molecular" conception of revolutionary process distinct from both the Social Democratic and Leninist model.

One reason the factory councils became a vital force in postwar Italy, aside from their very dramatic expansion in the Piedmont region, was the sense of impending upheaval that overtook the left. Gramsci especially sensed this, at times adopting an almost religious optimism toward the new opportunities created by the political chaos. The council movement based its hopes on a simplistic crisis theory: bourgeois society was crumbling everywhere, capitalism had lost the initiative, and out of the catastrophe would come the seeds of a revolutionary order implanted in the councils and other popular assemblies.

Class strife in Italy exploded into the open in

early 1920. The increased scope and militancy of the council movement set the stage for a powerful counter-offensive by industrialists in Piedmont and Liguria, which involved massive lockouts and troop occupations of many factories. What followed was a general strike in Piedmont, "defensive" in its origins, that mobilized more than 500,000 workers for the entire month of April. Strikes spread throughout Northern Italy, but went no farther. The appeal for an Italian general strike went unheeded. The hostility of the PSI and CGL leaderships was too much for this localist movement to overcome, and defeat was unavoidable. Isolated geographically and politically, exhausted, and with depleted financial resources, the workers returned to the factories.

The collapse of the Piedmont general strike, however, was followed five months later by a series of factory occupations that seemed to push Italy to the edge of revolution. An upsurge again engulfed most of Northern Italy: the occupation of more than 200 factories by 600,000 workers revitalized the sagging council movement. As in April, the upheavals began mostly as a defensive move to preempt a lockout by industrialists over a bargaining stalemate. But the struggles that grew out of attempts to take over and manage the factories, under chaotic and burdensome conditions, quickly politicized the workers and broadened the agitation beyond its earlier limits. From Milan, Genoa, and Turin the occupations spread to other areas. While the council structures as such did not spread beyond their Piedmont origins, the occupations everywhere were infused with a sense of proletarian solidarity and a drive toward workers' control. The occupations proceeded in an orderly and peaceful fashion, and a revolutionary euphoria was in the air. The industrialists too thought revolution was imminent; Giovanni Agnelli, convinced that capitalism was too badly maimed to resurrect itself, was on the verge of surrendering Fiat-Centro to the occupying workers, asking, "How can you build anything with the help of 25,000 enemies?"(19)

The failure of the occupations resulted, not so much from their abandonment by the PSI hierarchy, and even less from actual or threatened state repression, but mainly from skillful cooperation carried out through collaboration between government, progressive industrialists, and trade unions. Historian Paolo Spriano called it "Giolitti's Masterpiece" — a final, gallant effort to save Italian capitalism through an elite-engineered "reformist solution". Out of the *Biennio Rosso* came the vague formula of "union control", which on paper meant equal trade union participation in enterprise management and state economic planning, but which in reality meant little since the fascist avalanche would soon make a mockery of such agreements.

The factory council movement won great victories in Turin, but lacked the strategic thrust and resources to sustain them. The organs of workers' control that galvanized the entire Piedmont proletariat one moment vanished the next. The masses that had so resolutely detached themselves from bourgeois institutions were just as completely reintegrated into them, and the initiative soon passed back into the hands of the bourgeoisie. This sequence of events seemed inevitable, owing to the ideological and political weaknesses of the factory councils themselves.

The weaknesses were many, the most fatal being a geographical isolation rooted in Piedmont (and even Turin) "exceptionalism." During this period the region was the base of Italian industrialism, typified by a system of factory production and an urban working class culture duplicated nowhere else on the peninsula. Predictably, the council movement produced by these conditions was itself unique; it nourished a regionalism and a certain arrogant provincialism that negated attempts to expand beyond its Piedmont origins. Within Turin itself, a phenomenon known as "factory egoism" appeared, thus destroying the possibility of unified organization even among the Turinese Workers. As Gwyn Williams has pointed out, "Every factory looked to its own defenses, like a militia. There was no coordination." (20) Cut off from the rest of Italy and politically alienated from the PSI and CGL, the council movement was ultimately confined by its own narrowness as much as by the force and cunning of the bourgeoisie.

In the end, the failure of the Italian council communists to build a mature revolutionary movement was largely an *internal* one. The proletariat, though militant, could not transcend its own divisive parochialism; in the absence of any coordinating centers, without any real links of communication, the insurgency would up immobilized by its spontaneism. The fragmentation of social forces from factory to factory, city to city, and region to region arrested the movement short of the political-institutional sphere. In contrast with Russia, where local movements were rapidly subordinated to the vanguard party, in Italy they withered away in the absence of integrated leadership and strategic direction — the same dilemma seen from a different side.

The Italian case thus dramatically reveals the limitations of a narrowly prefigurative strategy. Gramsci himself soon realized that the factory councils alone were not enough; after the defeat of the *Biennio Rosso*, he paid more and more attention to the role of the party, seeing it as a counter to the spontaneism of the councils. Yet Leninism was clearly no solution to the failures of 1918-1920. To whatever extent the crisis might have permitted a seizure of central state power, in retrospect it is clear that there was no

cohesive *popular* force to carry out the process of general socialist transformation. The very amorphousness and localism of even the most advanced Piedmont struggles was itself a sign that ideological preparation among the masses was lacking — or had only just begun — suggesting that a vanguardist seizure of power would probably have reproduced the old divisions and resulted in the same kind of centralized power that occurred in Russia.

5. GERMANY: THE CORPORATIVIST IMPASSE

The German factory councils, or *Arbeiter-räte*, also had their origins in the postwar crisis and played a vital role in the strike wave that swept the country in 1917-19. Hundreds of councils appeared in the most important industrial centers (for example, in Hamburg, Berlin, Frankfurt, and the Ruhr area) during this period, and many subsequently spread into the small towns and countryside in regions such as Saxony and Thuringa. The movement for popular self-management, which grew out of years of proletarian struggles at the point of production, also mobilized large sectors of the military and the peasantry. As in Italy, the councils were the radicalized expression of more traditional structures: shop committees, cooperatives, neighborhood associations, and strike committees. They were associated with the left wing of the German Communist Party (KPD) and with the independent Social Democratic Party (USPD) and the "ultra-leftism" of Ernest Dauemig. The powerful Social Democrats, on the other hand, dismissed workers' control as "council anarchy" and attempted to neutralize and assimilate it through the strength of its party and trade union organizations.

In theory, the main political tendency of German councilism differed little from its Russian and Italian counterparts; the strategy was essentially prefigurative. The councils championed "proletarian autonomy" and "industrial democracy" as the basis of revolutionary transformation, which naturally placed them in an adversary position vis-a-vis the state, the parties, and the unions. Some theorists envisaged workers' councils as the first step toward a future socialist state; others saw them as limited to managerial functions within particular enterprises; but most viewed them as agencies of democratic counter-power in a rigidly authoritarian society, as the dialectic between class consciousness and proletarian institutions that would directly confront capitalist domination in Germany.

This last point brings us to the key assumption of the German movement. By establishing themselves as a strong counter-force to bourgeois hierarchy in the factory and by undermining the collaborative role of the unions — that is, by subverting the ideological legitimacy and nar-

rowing the economic options of a fragile-capitalist system — it was assumed that the councils could push the society toward fatal crisis. To the extent that the proletariat was able to overcome a traditional submissiveness to authority through the democratizing impact of the councils, it would prepare to take control of the economy and establish its own hegemony once the crisis destroyed the capacity of the bourgeoisie to rule.(21) This schema held sway until 1923, when it became evident (even to the "ultra left") that European capitalism had recovered from its postwar breakdown.

The political scenario constructed by the German revolutionary left was never a serious historical possibility, even with the crisis; the prefigurative dimension was feeble from the outset. There were in fact two types of factory councils in Germany already in 1917-18: one that stressed the expansion of direct proletarian democracy and a commitment to mass insurrection (in the tradition of Luxemburg), another that held out the possibility of advancing workers' interest (and even "workers' control") within the existing managerial structure. It was this latter — the interest-group or corporatist approach — rather than the autonomous model that increasingly prevailed after 1919.

As Sergio Bologna has shown, the largest and most significant elements of the Germany council movement were composed of highly-specialized machine workers who were concentrated in medium-sized enterprises (e.g., chemicals and tool-making) that had not yet experienced high levels of rationalization. These were not the assembly-line workers of mass production but the skilled craftworkers who had been since the turn of the century a predominant force in German industry. As a skilled and professional stratum, they took on the narrow, self-interested outlook of a privileged "aristocracy of labor" and tended to set themselves apart from the unskilled "mass" workers of the large factories.(22)

In those regions and enterprises where technicians, engineers, and machine-workers became a leading force in the factory councils, the movement rapidly assumed a "managerial" character; the goal of workers' control, which emphasized job freedom and creativity, was closely associated with the struggle to attain or retain professional status. These workers understood their councils to represent the specific interests and aims of one sector of the proletariat against the whole. (In contrast, the Russians and Italian councils — despite strategic problems stemming from localism and spontaneism — viewed workers' control as a process of socialist transformation that would unite the struggles of *all* workers.) Many German councils were shaped by a provincialism that looked to proletarian control over single factories; others wanted to convert the trade

unions into structures that could take over factory production.

This was the essence of corporatism. It left intact the social division of labor within the factory, even intensifying it by broadening and institutionalizing the separation between mental and physical labor, "experts" and mass workers. In replacing the old managerial structure with a new one based upon expertise and job "autonomy" — that is, by implementing a system of co-management — these councils merely reconstituted hierarchy. Moreover, the corporatist model accepted the basic capitalist practice of contractual bargaining; as long as the wage contracts existed, "workers' control" actually reinforced managerial exploitation and commodity production in the total economy.(23) It is hardly surprising that the leading sectors of the German workers-councils movement, lacking a general class perspective, could never generate broad struggles directed against capitalist domination in either specific industrial enterprises or in German society as a whole. The failure to raise proletarian struggles to the political sphere was merely one aspect of this problem.(24)

Corporatism, even had it led to the overthrow of the propertied class within individual factories, would not have mobilized the German proletariat toward socialist goals; and even had the skilled technicians been able to achieve some "autonomy", they would not have achieved structural leverage over the entire economy. Indeed, Gorz has argued that this limited defense of technical and professional interests — however cloaked in the rationale of proletarian self-management — necessarily inhibits politicization of the skilled stratum itself. Instead of socializing or collectivizing technical expertise, the corporatist tendency reifies bourgeois divisions. In Gorz's words: "The capitalist division of labor, with its separation of manual and intellectual work, of execution and decision, of production and management, is a technique of domination as much as technique of production."

The postwar development of the German *Raete* bore little resemblance to the council theory developed by Daeumig, Pannekoek and Gorter in the 1920s. Their theoretical approach, which transcended the factory-centered ideology of syndicalism, moved toward an organic merger of politics and economics; the councils would perform both economic and political functions, they would ideally represent the movement of the entire working class, and they would be integrated into regional and nationwide federative networks of assemblies that would supply the necessary element of strategic planning and coordination.(26) By 1921, however, this theory had become detached from the actual politics of the working-class movement, and the gap between the vision of council communism and the corporatist degeneration of the real living

councils widened irretrievably.

According to Bologna's analysis, the growing rationalization of German industry after the postwar crisis undercut the prospects of council communism from the beginning; the skilled technicians, bent on preserving their creativity against encroaching bureaucratization, constituted a phenomenon of the early stages of capitalist development. From the viewpoint of prefigurative revolution, this is true enough. Yet the German councils, far from disappearing, in reality adapted smoothly to the capitalist schemes of rationalization, proliferated as they became absorbed into the reformist Social Democrat apparatus, and eventually wound up as a (corporatist) model for the future. Where the *Raete* survived, they lost all independence and increasingly assumed narrow, economic functions.

Recent attempts to institutionalize "workers' participation" in West Germany, Scandinavia, and Czechoslovakia all bear the mark of the original council experiments in Germany. These modern versions of corporatism all have in common a managerial concept of workers' control. It entails an input into enterprise decision-making by the most skilled and "responsible" employees according to the principle of comanagement; worker involvement is limited to the enterprise itself and does not extend to the overall shaping of public policy. The councils assist in management, but they are in no sense autonomous organs, having become fully absorbed into the party-union-state directorate.(27) Such reforms have historically functioned to integrate workers into a more streamlined and "democratized" capitalist production apparatus — a fate that the early Russian and Italian council movements, whatever their strategic weaknesses, resisted until they were either destroyed from above or disappeared.

6. CONCLUSIONS

Though the council movements were crushed, died out, or were absorbed into capitalist structures in Russia, Italy and Germany after World War I, their tradition lived on, to reappear in new contexts: in Spain during the Civil War; in Italy again during the Resistance; in Hungary in 1956; and in many advanced capitalist societies during the 1960's. These more recent versions of prefigurative politics encountered the same obstacles and dilemmas and experienced similar patterns of decline: Jacobinism, spontaneism, and corporatism.

The Spanish and Hungarian councils, like the Russian, fell victim to bureaucratic centralism. In Spain during the Civil War, the rapid expansion of syndicalist and anarchist collectives — inspired by a long prefigurative tradition in the countryside — helped to define the strongest left-wing insurgency in Europe between the wars. But the drive toward popular

control was cut short by political forces (including the Communist Party) within the Popular Front coalition that sought to establish bureaucratic control over the movement in order to mobilize the masses against fascism. The military crisis spurred the development of bureaucratic management, leading to a dismantling of local democratic structures even in the liberated areas.(28) In Hungary before the Soviet intervention, hundreds of factory committees appeared in the few months preceding the October upheaval. It has been suggested that this was the first *total* revolution against bureaucratic capitalism in any country.(29) But the councils never became institutionalized; they lasted no longer than it took the Soviet occupation authorities (with the assistance of Hungarian party leaders) to destroy them.

The French upheaval of May 1968 gave birth to an unprecedented number and variety of local groups — action committees, factory councils, student communes, neighborhood groups — most of which collapsed from their own spontaneism. In Italy the revolt was not so spectacular, but the forms that grew out of it, such as the *comitati di base*, survived longer. This new period of popular insurgency helped to rejuvenate a European left that had long been suffocated by the Soviet model; it kept alive the prefigurative ideal and illuminated the bankruptcy of the established Marxist parties.

Most significantly, the radicalism of the sixties brought a new political content to the prefigurative tradition. It affirmed the importance of generalizing the struggles for self-management *beyond* the point of production, to include all spheres of social life and all structures of domination. It sought to integrate personal and "lifestyle" issues into politics — especially in the area of feminism — more extensively and more immediately than was true of past movements. (Since very few women participated in previous movements — the work force and therefore the various proletarian organizations being overwhelmingly male — the issue of patriarchy was scarcely raised.) And it focused on a wider range of issues that confronted the social system as a whole: health care, culture, ecology, etc.

At the same time, the new left was close to traditional anarchism in its glorification of spontaneity and subjectivity, in its celebration of everyday life, and in its hostility to "politics" and all forms of organization. It brought out the limitations of spontaneism in even more exaggerated form. The French May provides a good example: mobilized by the millions, students and workers were unable to translate their uprising into a force possessing leadership, structure, and direction, and popular energy dissipated quickly. The French Communist Party played an important role, but the new left nonetheless had its own logic. this was the fate of

the new left everywhere: in its fear of centralism, in its retreat into extreme subjectivism, and in its uncompromising abstentionism, it gave little strategic expression to its vision of liberation. It effectively attacked the ideological underpinnings of bourgeois society, but the means it employed — mass direct action politics on the one hand, small isolated groups on the other — were politically primitive.(30)

The corporatist development of modern councilism has followed three distinct paths. In certain Western European societies — West Germany and Sweden, for example — workers have been integrated into bourgeois managerial structures through elaborate schemes of co-participation that leave intact the features of capitalism as a whole. In other countries, such as Italy and France, workers' councils that emerged as autonomous centers of struggle in the late 1960's and early 1970's underwent bureaucratization and were absorbed by trade union and administrative structures. Finally, in Communist systems such as Yugoslavia, Poland, and Czechoslovakia, where proletarian self-management is an accepted objective and where councils have become institutionalized fixtures, the party-state has curtailed the autonomy of popular institutions, limiting them to narrow "co-management" functions within a broad economic plan imposed from above. The separation between economics and politics is established in each case: the corporatist councils have restricted decision-making authority within specific enterprises but have little or no impact on societal-wide public policy.

The dilemmas of modern prefigurative movements came from the legacy of the entire prefigurative tradition, which in contrast to Leninism and structural reformism sought to affirm the actuality of revolutionary goals. In rejecting a vanguardism, they often ignored the state and the problem of power; in stressing the prefigurative side, they downplayed the task of organization. And like the organized Marxist movements, they ultimately failed to articulate a democratic socialist theory of transition. The instability and vulnerability of dual power necessitates rapid movement toward a broad system of nationwide revolutionary authority; without this, as history shows, local structures are unable to translate popular energies into a

sustained movement that is both prefigurative and *politically effective*. What is required, and what the entire prefigurative strategy lacks, is a merging of spontaneism and the "external element", economics and politics, local democratic and state power struggles. But the recent experiences of radical movements in capitalist countries reflect a continued polarization between prefigurative and statist strategies that is harmful to such a possibility.

There have been attempts — for example, in the Chinese Revolution — to democratize Leninist vanguard strategy by combining the centralizing features of the revolutionary party with the localist elements of the prefigurative approach. Mao stressed the "national-popular" character of the party and the role of ideological struggle to counter-balance the primacy of the party-state. He envisaged a process rooted in grassroots structures of authority (e.g., revolutionary committees, communes) as well as the party itself. But the Maoist alternative really constitutes a modification of classical Leninism rather than a new synthesis. Insofar as a fusion between Jacobin and prefigurative elements exists, the Jacobin side is clearly hegemonic, with the party-state directing the process of revolutionary transformation from above.

An alternative schema would reverse this relationship by asserting the prefigurative over the Jacobin. For the party is essentially an *instrumental* agency preoccupied with concrete political tasks rather than the cultural objectives of changing everyday life and abolishing the capitalist division of labor; it tends naturally to be an agency of domination rather than of prefiguration. Since emancipatory goals can be fully carried out only through local structures, it is these organs — rather than the party-state — that must shape the revolutionary process. Centralized structures would not be superimposed upon mass struggles, but would emerge out of these struggles as coordinating mechanisms. Only popular institutions in every sphere of daily existence, where democratic impulses can be most completely realized, can fight off the repressive incursions of bureaucratic centralism and activate collective involvement that is the life-force of revolutionary practice.



FOOTNOTES

1. Stanley Moore, *Three Tactics: The Background in Marx* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1963).
2. George Lukacs, *Lenin* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1971), *Passim*.
3. Francois George, "Forgetting Lenin", *Telos* #18 (Winter, 1973-74). See also Frederic and Lon Jean Fleron, "Administrative Theory as Repressive Political Theory: The Communist Experience", *Telos*, #12 (Summer, 1972), pp. 89-94.
4. See the Flerons, *op. cit.*, and Ulysses Santa-Maria and Alain Manville, "Lenin and the Problems of Transition", *Telos*, #27 (Spring, 1976), pp. 89-94.
5. Svetozar Stojanovic, *Between Ideals and Reality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1937), ch. 3.
6. The Italian Communist Party, for example, advocates a two-pronged strategy of political "democratization" and economic "modernization". The first objective involves revitalizing parliament and local administration vis-a-vis central executive power; eliminating patronage, corruption, waste, and nepotism in government while building a more competent professional civil service; making public agencies more open and accessible; and developing a system of national "democratic planning". The second includes rationalizing production by eliminating the vestiges of backwardness and parasitism in Italian capitalism; undermining monopoly power and imposing limits on "distorted privileges"; encouraging productive efficiency through governmental development of scientific and technical programs; modernization of agricultural production; and development of a broad welfare system.
7. As Maria A. Macciocchi writes of her own experience as a PCI candidate for parliament, electoral campaigns tended to degenerate into spectacles and oratorical contests filled with shallow platitudes. She found it extremely difficult to raise substantive issues, for the PCI was too frightened of alienating potential new recruits from its electoral constituency. See M.A. Macciocchi, *Letters from Inside the Communist Party to Louis Althusser* (London: New Left Books, 1973), *Passim*.
8. See C. George Benello, "Anarchism and Marxism", *Our Generation* (vol. 10, no. 1, fall, 1974), pp. 55-56.
9. Andre Gorz, ed., *The Division of Labor* (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: The Humanities Press, 1976), p. xi.
10. See S.A. Marglin, "What do Bosses do?", in Gorz, *op. cit.* In modern societies, this bureaucratic domination increasingly permeates most spheres of everyday life to the extent that it becomes part of the psychology of the masses. See Henry Jacoby, *The Bureaucratization of the World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), p. 189.
11. The role of local councils in stimulating the development of proletarian subjectivity — and helping to overcome political fatalism — needs to be stressed. It was central to Gramsci's vision of the councils during the *Ordine Nuovo* period, when he saw one of their major contributions as instilling a "psychology of the producers" in the workers. It was also a common theme in Pannekoek and the German council movement, which Aronowitz sees as a drive to undermine the authoritarian personality that is created through the factory bureaucracy, and the family. See Stanley Aronowitz, "Left-Wing Communism: The Reply to Lenin", in Dick Howard and Karl Klare, eds., *The Unknown Dimension* (New York: Basic Books, 1972). See also Daniel Kramer, *Participatory Democracy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Shenkman, 1972), ch. 7.
12. Cornelius Castoriadis, "The Hungarian Source", *Telos* No. 30 (Winter 1976-77), p. 15.
13. On the moderate character of the Petrograd soviet, see Oskar Anweiler, "The Political Ideology of the Leaders of the Petrograd Soviet in the Spring of 1917", in Richard Pipes, ed., *Revolutionary Russia* (New York: Doubleday and Co., 1969), p. 148.
14. On the distinction between Soviets and factory committees, see Peter Rachleff, "Soviets and Factory Committees in the Russian Revolution", *Radical America* vol. 8, no. 6, Nov.-Dec., 1974, especially p. 94, 103.
15. See Dietrich Geyer, "The Bolshevik Insurrection in Petrograd", and John Keep, "October in the Provinces, in Pipes, *op. cit.*, pp. 245-46.
16. See Robert V. Daniels, *The Conscience of the Revolution* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1969), p. 84. Daniels sees this process as a crucial turning point in the evolution toward bureaucratic centralism.
17. The economic strategy of this period was in fact a subordinate part of the general militancy strategy designed to maximize Bolshevik control. See Daniels, *op. cit.*, pp. 121-25 and Maurice Brinton, *The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control* (London: Solidarity, 1970), p. 46.
18. For a detailed account of this development, see Brinton, *op. cit.*, pp. 15-47.
19. Quoted in Paolo Spriano, *The Occupation of the Factories: Italy 1920* (London: Pluto Press, 1975), p. 123.
20. Gwyn Williams, *Proletarian Order* (London: Pluto Press, 1975), p. 253.
21. On the relationship between the German council movement and the theory of the crisis, see Sergio Bologna, "Class Composition and the Theory of the Party at the Origin of the Workers-Council Movement", *Telos* No. 13 (Fall, 1972), p. 26
22. Bologna, *op. cit.*, p. 6
23. Guido De Masi and Giacomo Marramao, "Councils and State in Weimar Germany", *Telos* No. 28 (Summer, 1976), p. 27
24. See Brian Peterson, "Workers Councils in Germany, 1918-1919", *New German Critique* No. 4 (Winter, 1975), pp. 122-23.
25. Gorz, "Technology, Technicians, and the Class Struggle", in *The Division of Labor*, p. 174.
26. On the theories of Pannekoek, see Richard Gombin, *The Origins of Modern Leftism* (London: Penguin Books, 1975), pp. 88-97, and Aronowitz, *op. cit.*
27. For an analysis of factory councils in the advanced industrial societies, see Adolf Sturmthal, *Workers' Councils* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1964), chs. 4-6.
28. These developments are examined by Murray Bookshin, "Reflections on Spanish Anarchism", *Our Generation* vol. 10, no. 1, Fall, 1975, pp. 24-35, and Daniel Guerin, *Anarchism* (New York: Monthly Review Press), pp. 139-143.
29. Castoriadis, *op. cit.*, pp. 7-14. He argues: "Thus, like the few weeks of the Paris Commune, for us the Hungarian events are more important than three thousand years of Egyptian history because they constituted a radical break with the inherited philosophies of politics and work, while prefiguring a new society." *Ibid.*, p. 14.
30. This tendency was more pronounced in the U.S. than in Europe, where the strong presence of Marxism tempered the extremes of new left spontaneism. For example, commitment to the goals of workers' control and self-management — more or less taken for granted by the European extraparliamentary movements — received little attention in the U.S. See James Weinstein, *The Ambiguous Legacy* (New York: New Viewpoints, 1975), ch. 7.