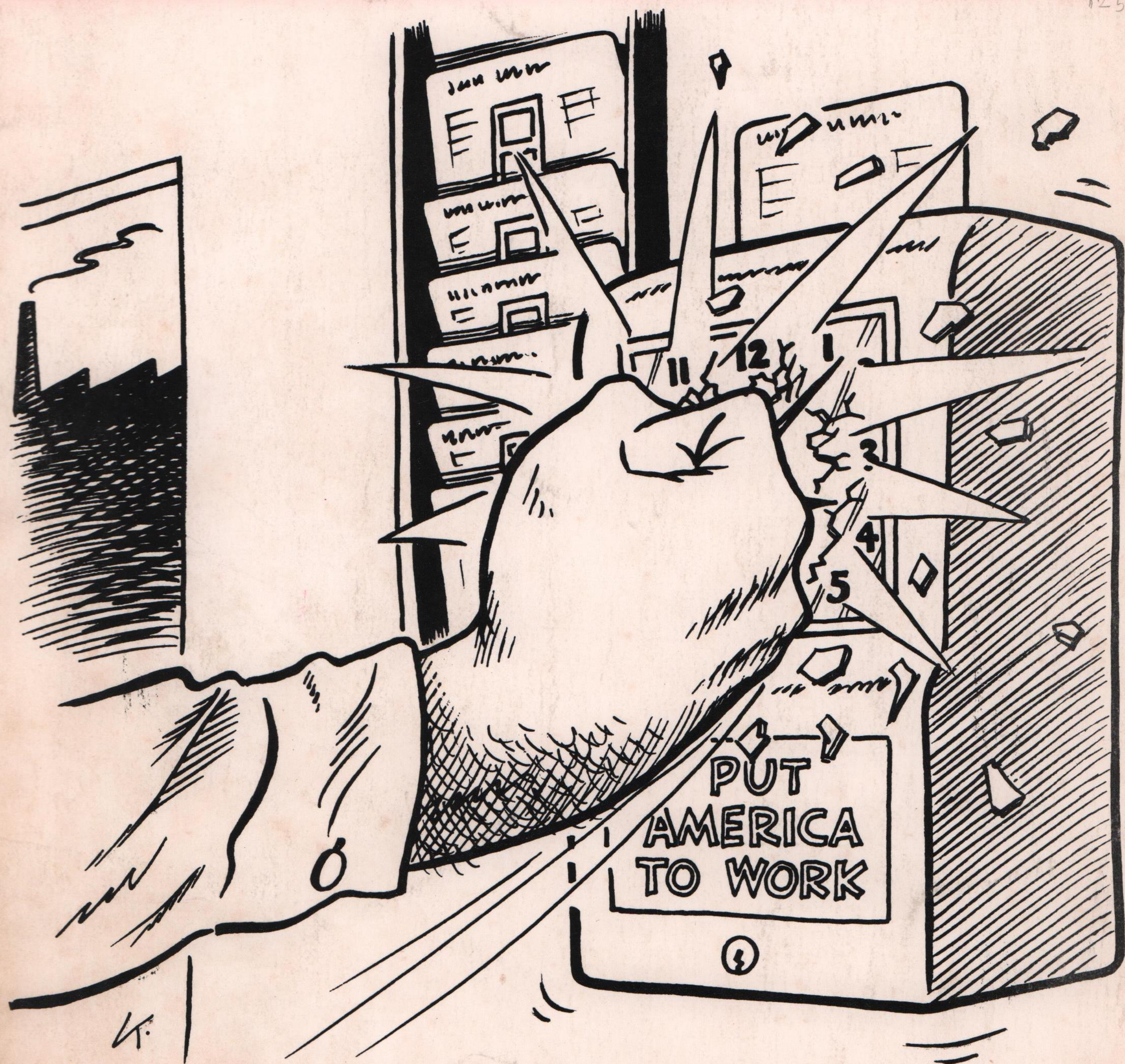


Red-eye



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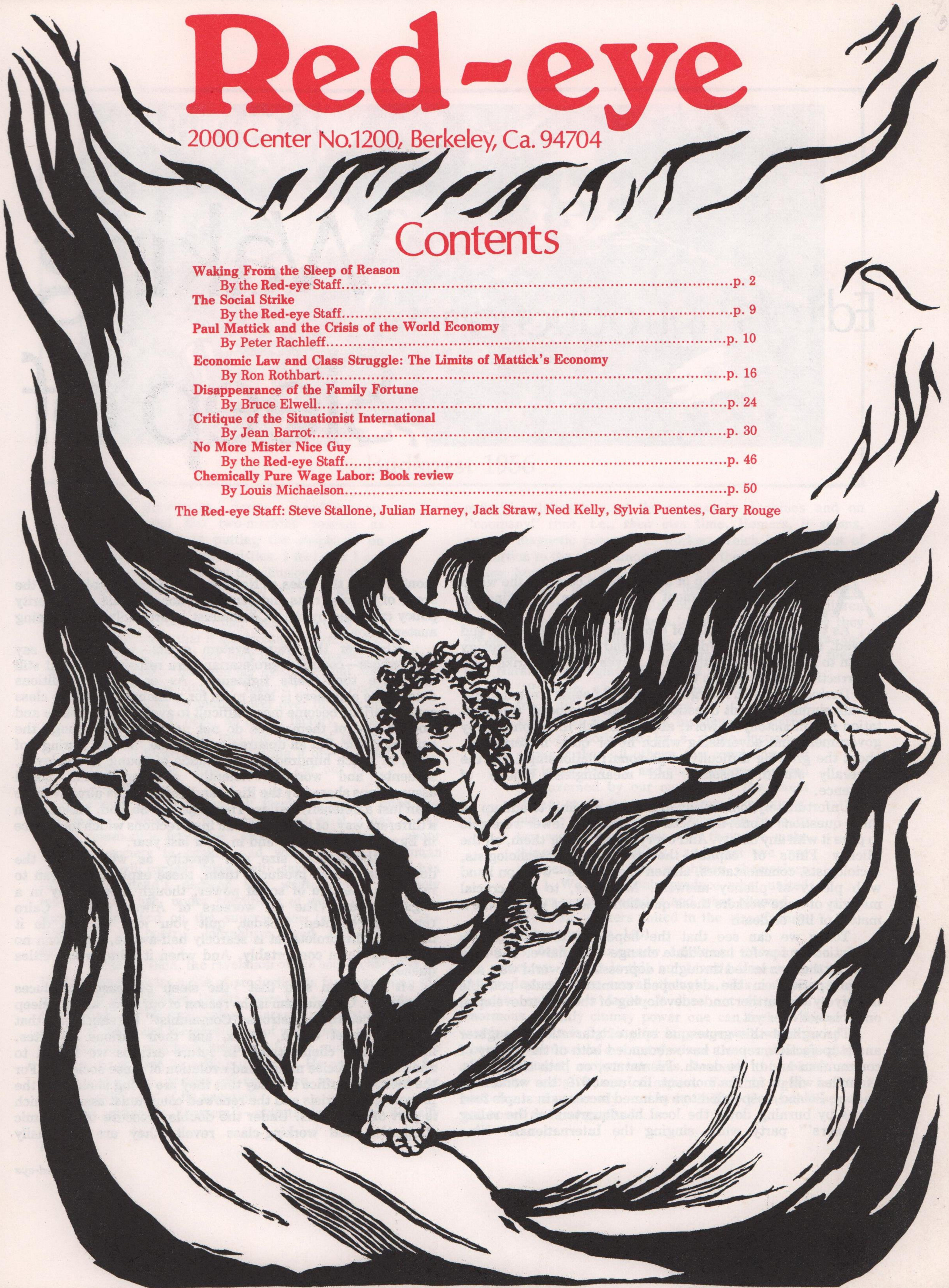
Red-eye

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Contents

Waking From the Sleep of Reason By the Red-eye Staff.....	p. 2
The Social Strike By the Red-eye Staff.....	p. 9
Paul Mattick and the Crisis of the World Economy By Peter Rachleff.....	p. 10
Economic Law and Class Struggle: The Limits of Mattick's Economy By Ron Rothbart.....	p. 16
Disappearance of the Family Fortune By Bruce Elwell.....	p. 24
Critique of the Situationist International By Jean Barrot.....	p. 30
No More Mister Nice Guy By the Red-eye Staff.....	p. 46
Chemically Pure Wage Labor: Book review By Louis Michaelson.....	p. 50

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Editors' Introduction:

Waking Sleep of

After a troubled sleep of almost half a century, the world revolutionary movement showed signs of waking up around 1967.

As the soothing rhythm of economic expansion jolted and slowed, the narcotics of democratic and "socialist" ideology began to wear off. For four years, waves of mass strikes and insurrections swept across the planet.

During these years, large numbers of people started to ask certain simple, difficult questions—about the speed, fragmentation and monotony of work, about the rich life promised by government and advertising which never quite materialized, about the growing difficulty of personal relationships, and the generally stupid, desolate and meaningless quality of existence.

Unfortunately, only a tiny minority were able to add up all these questions to one, the social question. Still fewer were able to pose it with any clarity. And everyone else? For them, all the Mickey Finns of capital—the politicians, psychologists, sociologists, commentators, admen and priests—were on hand with plenty of phoney answers. Moreover, to the crucial majority of wage workers these questions had not yet become a matter of life or death.

Today we can see that the hopes of the consciously revolutionary few for immediate change were naive. The long slumber that has lasted through a depression, a world war, and a "prosperity" in the developed countries made possible largely by the further underdeveloping of the underdeveloped ones, is not over yet.

Throughout this grotesque epic of starvation, slaughter and stupefaction, reports have abounded both of the victory of communism and of its death. Premature, on both sides. Two examples will do for the moment. In June 1976, the workers of Radom, Poland, responded to a planned increase in staple food prices by burning down the local headquarters of the ruling "Workers" party while singing the *Internationale*. Nine

months later, the cities of Northern and Central Italy were the scene of massive riots and demonstrations against an austerity policy criticized by the "Communist" party only for not being austere enough.

Wherever the wage system exists—which is to say everywhere—countless proletarians are refusing to stand still and have their belts tightened. As economic conditions deteriorate and there is less room for maneuver, head-on class confrontations become more difficult to avoid. True, strikes and riots in and of themselves do not necessarily challenge the existing order. But an upsurge such as the "Italian Spring" of 1977, in which hundreds of thousands of young unemployed, students and workers violently challenged the social assumptions shared by the Right and Left alike, is already more than just a defensive reflex. The same can be said, although in a different way, of the vast urban insurrections which took place in Egypt two years ago and in Peru last year.

By their sheer size and ferocity as well as by the desperation which produced them, these explosions began to raise the question of social power, though mostly only in a negative way. (The oil workers of Alwan outside Cairo reportedly chanted: "Sadat, quit your job, we can do it better!") The proletariat is scarcely half-awake, but it can no longer lie down comfortably. And when it stirs, whole cities quake.

It has been said that "the sleep of reason produces monsters". Communism is the reason of our time, and its sleep has produced the monstrous "Communist" bureaucracies that rule the Soviet Union, China, and their various satellites, imitators and client states. In future articles we intend to analyze the precise nature and evolution of these societies. For the moment, suffice it to say that they are being shaken by the present global crisis and the renewed communist assault which is part of that crisis. Under the double pressure of economic stagnation and working-class revolt, they are all busily

from the Reason



integrating themselves into the world market. This is not to deny the real structural differences between such regimes and the "mixed economies" of the West (although these differences are narrowing every day), nor to deny the enormous improvements in domestic social welfare brought about by some of them. (Compare the different paths of development followed by China and India—two countries of comparable size, population and levels of industrialization—since World War II.) But their role has been thoroughly and consistently counter-revolutionary from the suppression of the Kronstadt soviet in 1921, right up to the Chinese government's brazen support for the Chilean junta. The "Communist" regimes are particularly monstrous because they represent themselves as communist, because they help to disarm the revolutionary movement first and foremost by taking the words right out of its mouth.

True, the USSR has long since ceased to be a model for most aspiring revolutionaries, or even aspiring bureaucrats. The phenomenon of Euro-communism is sufficient demonstration if any were needed. But the People's Republic of China managed to keep itself wreathed in the incense of revolutionary purity for a good deal longer. This scented smokescreen has been largely dispelled, however, by foul winds from every quarter—from Chile; from Angola, where the "Gang of Four" regime openly supported the puppet forces of the CIA and the Union of South Africa; and from China itself, where the same "radical" Gang of Four used troops to put down the 1975 Hangchow strikes. The Teng leadership's full-scale opening to the West is the result of the conclusive failure of Mao's autarkic economic policy. The repeated crises of this policy were behind the "tilt" toward NATO which has in fact been going on for over a decade. For our part, we can only rejoice at the continuing collapse of the century's biggest lie, sometimes known as Stalinism.

Like the Soviet and Chinese regimes, the "socialist"

governments of "national liberation" have failed to escape the crisis. When "national liberation" governments take power today, they either have to be militarily propped up, like the Angolan MPLA, by the Soviet Union which uses them as diplomatic pawns, or else, like the Cambodian Khmer Rouge, they attempt an autarky which leads to the most horrific barbarism. Meanwhile, the older regimes of this type are following their Soviet and Chinese patrons into the world market; North Korea has incurred large debts to the Western banks, while the new Vietnamese Republic is trying to attract multinational investment at very reasonable terms. Their more ambitious projects for social reform are shelved until doomsday, and they start gearing up for World War III along with everyone else. It remains for their workers to free themselves from the grip of their particular local variant of Stalinism and join their counterparts elsewhere in the assault on world capital. The bitter—and bitterly repressed—strikes of the Angolan longshoremen since 1975 are a promise of what is to come.

The "socialist" countries now stand revealed to most people as nation-states like any other, competing with each other and the rest via the traditional weapons of diplomacy and mass murder. If human beings were the rational creatures of Enlightenment philosophy, this revelation would have wiped out the official Left a long time ago. However, despite severe damage, the loyal "socialist and revolutionary" opposition lurches on, grinding up potential revolutionary socialists as it goes. Still the same moth-eaten banners are upheld, the same tarnished articles of faith repeated—that nationalization of industry is a step toward socialism, that wage labor will have to go on in the "new" society for generations, that capitalism is merely the sum of its various unpleasant side-effects like hunger, unemployment, war, racism, imperialism etc.—and that workers are dumb but noble creatures who must be trained to carry the revolution (and of course, the revolutionary leaders)

From the Butcher of Berlin ...



Noske, "Socialist" Commander of the Freikorps, 1918

forward on their powerful backs. Worst of all, the Leftist sects have justified and continue to justify every kind of atrocity in the name of "historical necessity". Whenever this deity is invoked, it is incumbent on revolutionaries to ask: "Precisely what necessity?" In this journal we intend to undermine the ideological foundations of the Left's wretched little churches by posing just such questions. To the school of hard knocks which is historical reality, we aim to add some supplementary instruction, whose knocks will be no less hard for being balanced and analytical.

But the attack on capitalist and bureaucratic tendencies which bill themselves as revolutionary, while important, is only one aspect of a much larger task—to reassert the communist project in all its scope and depth, as the greatest adventure undertaken by human beings. The communist movement is not a simple reaction to capitalism any more than capitalism is just another form of class society like feudal Europe or ancient Egypt. As Rosa Luxemburg showed, capitalism is itself the "transitional stage" between all previous forms of society and the beginning of what Marx called "really human history"—the history of freely associated human individuals, infinitely rich in their diversity but beyond all divisions into classes and nations.

Since 1945, capital's domination has not only been extended to huge new populations and new areas of the globe, but has been intensified as well, in consumption as in production. Today's proletarians buy the goods and services they need not from peasants and artisans, but from giant industrial corporations and the state. They have mostly lost their links to the countryside and to the remaining small merchants in the town. The old survival networks based on family and ethnic loyalties, which helped so many to weather the depression of the thirties, have been eroded. This loss of such important reserves as elastic, interest-free credit and emergency food supplies has made proletarians more vulnerable to looting by inflation. By the same token, however, it has broadened the field of class struggle.

Side by side with the "degradation of work" into repetitive

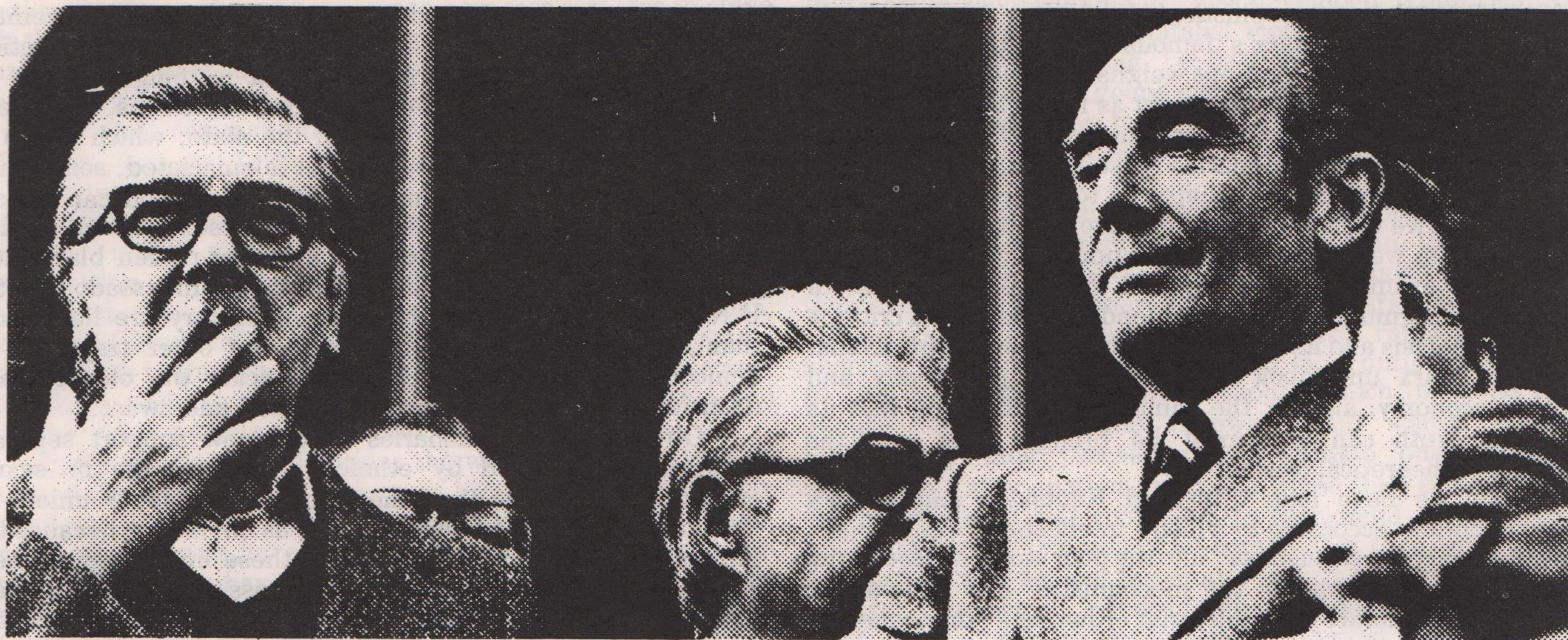
and meaningless tasks performed at an ever-faster pace, the industrialization of consumption has meant that the crisis of capital tends more to be perceived—correctly—as a crisis of the whole of life. When capitalist commodity relations mediate the simplest human needs, and when these relations start to break down, there is little choice but to violate them. Moreover, the generalized fusion of capital and state, especially in low-profit areas like transportation and public utilities, brings the violators quickly into confrontation with the authorities. This in turn means that even quiet small-scale defensive gestures often tend to acquire a subversive content. In various "disturbances" and strikes since 1970, one can see the first beginnings of communization.

These actions, such as the takeovers of food, gas, electricity, and transport services by Polish strikers in 1971 and by the Italian "self-reduction" movement, are not just a tactic but are a response to immediate necessity. People begin relating to each other directly, acting together in a community which can exist and develop further only by attacking capitalist relations. One can say the same of several phenomena grouped under the heading of "the revolt against work", including organized sabotage and organized absenteeism as well as wildcats. This revolt is not yet revolutionary because it has not yet posited a social alternative to "work" in the capitalist sense. Only when the attacks on work and on the commodity merge into an attack on work-as-commodity, on wage labor, will the second proletarian assault on class society have truly begun.

Nevertheless, the very appearance of these tendencies early on in the crisis, the decay of the ideology of work and its just reward, are important signs. Together with the decay of the Left they open up the possibility of a struggle against both employment and unemployment, against the obscene choice between being used and being useless.

This is in sharp contrast to the first great assault of 1905-1921. During this period the relative underdevelopment of capital even in the most advanced countries such as Germany forced the movement to concentrate almost exclusively on

to the Butcher of Bologna



Zangheri, "Communist" Mayor of Bologna, 1977

political and military tasks, which in turn caused a fixation on forms of organization (party, unions, councils, etc.) Today it is only Leftists who preserve this fixation in their ideology, fighting over the withered relics of past defeats like Catholics squabbling over bits of the True Cross. For our part, we can't wait to sweep away all this dead wood, if only for the benefit of those who still can't see the forest for the trees.

The organizational forms of the proletarian movement are broadly determined by the tasks it sets itself—as well as by its limitations and hesitations. If we are to make organizational prescriptions for the future, however tentative, we must therefore derive them closely both from the practical content which we foresee as necessary and simultaneously from the most advanced developments of the past and present. We are therefore interested in discussion on organization only insofar as it is consciously related to the economic, social and military tasks of the revolution before, during and immediately after the creation of the proletarian power.

More clearly than at any time since the end of the nineteenth century, the revolution now presents itself as an attempt to seize and transform all the stored up wealth of the ages. As the American poet Bill Knott put it:

The centuries like barges have floated
out of the darkness, to communism: not to be judged,
but to be unloaded.

We need only add that capitalism is the river on which they float—those same "icy waters" which Marx and Engels described in the *Manifesto*, and which have drowned all lesser forms of community in the blind, irresistible surge of global accumulation and competition.

Obviously this wealth which capitalism has both plundered and helped to create consists not only in the "means of production" considered narrowly as land, buildings, machines and so forth, but also the less tangible and more durable riches of knowledge and culture—of everything useful and/or enjoyable created under the rubrics of "art" and

"science", beginning with language. Yet perhaps the most splendid hoard that communism will appropriate—and which is indispensable to its goal—is the very **interconnectedness** of the human species which is half hidden inside the rotting flesh of the world market like a miraculous seed. It is not only that the global network of communications and data-processing equipment will make possible the rapid spread of the revolutionary process, and with it of communist planning. Even more important is the incalculable amplification of human creative power that will result from the possibility of instantaneous dialogue and universal travel. If, as Rilke put it, we are already "bees of the invisible", we will then be spreading the pollens of imagination further and wider than ever before. The mind will become visibly what it already was essentially—a social organ, greater than, yet subordinate to, the myriad individuals who compose it.

Once again, in our end is our beginning. Just like the communization of the means of physical life, the communization of the mind does not wait for the "seizure of power". It too is part and parcel of the revolutionary process. Needless to say, one of the immediate tasks along these lines is the recovery of the rich legacy of the communist movement itself—the legacy both of theoreticians like Marx, Luxemburg, Pannekoek and Pankhurst and of movements whose deeds spoke louder than their words, such as the Arbeiter Union and the Ruhr Red Army of Germany in 1920, the Seattle General Strike of 1919, the armed uprisings in Spain between 1934 and 1937 and of course the revolution in Russia. Perhaps more needful to say, this legacy like all the rest must be subjected to ruthless criticism in order to realize its usefulness in the present.

This is one area among several where we differ with communists who identify more closely with the "ultra-left" traditions of the first assault, and who tend to believe that the terrain for revolutionary practice was laid down once and for all in 1920. When they discuss the ignominious failure of that vast upsurge, the really crucial questions are generally evaded. Why, for instance, did the majority of German workers remain loyal, however half-heartedly, to the bankrupt Socialists and

Independents (and the hardly less bankrupt pro-Moscow CP) during the crucial period between the Armistice and the crushing the risings of 1921? When this one is asked (which is rarely) the cruder ultra-leftists will talk about the "treachery" of the Second and Third Internationals, the "mistakes" of the revolutionary minority and so on, all of which explains precisely nothing. Even the more sophisticated, however, can usually do no more than quote Marx's famous observation that "The tradition of the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living". Marx was right as far as he went (and in the 18th Brumaire he went further than most of the left has ever gone), but modern revolutionaries must go further still and ask once again *why* and *how* this happens to the proletariat. Like James Joyce, we want to awaken from the nightmare of history, but unlike him we know we have to understand it first. Hence we will be examining the work of that great historian of nightmares, Sigmund Freud. We intend to undertake a critique of psychoanalysis and its descendents in the same spirit as that in which Marx undertook the critiques of philosophy and political economy, and for the same reason; namely, that its kernel of truth can and must be brought over into the communist theoretical arsenal.

While we have long discarded Kautsky's and Lenin's arrogant notion, according to which "intellectuals" must inject "revolutionary consciousness" into the poor stupid masses from without, we reject equally the mechanistic and spontaneist theories which picture the proletariat either as a homogeneous, already revolutionary class or else (in more recent and trendy versions) as a mere "capitalist category" which must somehow abolish itself without first organizing, that is, *realizing* itself. The fact is that the proletariat, although greatly increased in size both relatively and absolutely since Marx's day, is at present fragmented along the lines of race, sex, occupation, income and culture—not to mention nationality. The unification of the class thus presents enormous problems, and nowhere more than in the United States. We should recognize that within the class, women, homosexuals, youth, old people and racial/ethnic minorities suffer specific kinds of oppression in addition to the usual miseries. Many white and/or male and/or heterosexual workers have been complicit in these special oppressions, but they do not originate them. In brief, what has happened is that social stratifications which began before capitalism (patriarchy, slavery) as well as those resulting from early capitalist development (colonialism, immigration) have been reproduced within the contemporary proletariat. The process by which this has taken place is too complex to go into here. Suffice it to say that these stratifications serve to fragment the class politically as well as to provide pools of cheap labor-power within the national economy.

This reality of special oppression has led to "civil rights" movements among such groups, i.e. movements which seek the righting of particular wrongs done them, and their incorporation into full capitalist citizenship. At times these movements have acquired a certain proletarian content (the Montgomery boycott, strikes by women and minority workers, etc.) However it is illusory to expect the capitalist system in this period to bring its huge stratum of low-paid workers and unemployed (60% of the U.S. labor force in 1970 according to Labor Department statistics) up to par with the better-off, mostly white male workers. The U.S., like any other nation, needs its second class citizens. Even at the height of the post-war boom in the mid-60's it could not afford to improve the conditions for minorities more than fractionally. Now it cannot afford to improve their condition at all, but can only worsen it. The reasons for the relative growth of U.S. female employment in the past fifteen years have been the proportional decline in the number of industrial jobs, the need for both partners in households to work because of declining real wages, and the

expansion of the unproductive sectors, like insurance, banking and advertising, which require an almost exclusively clerical workforce. And even the government does not try to pretend that most blacks are not as badly off as ever.

In the nineteenth century, when capital dominated only a minority of the world population and the proletariat was too weak to overthrow it, it made sense for the workers' movement to uphold struggles for civil and national rights as a tactical necessity. But this workers' movement no longer exists. Its organs, the mass parties and union confederations, have been absorbed into the swollen body of the state, which clings in grotesque symbiosis to a society that is emaciated, senile, and incapable of further genuine growth. What good can it do a weary typist to see a member of her sex seated on her company's Board of Directors, or a cancer-ridden black steel puddler to know that Andrew Young is ambassador to the U.N.? "Equal rights" at this point in history are little more than a cruel deception. Along with the other trappings of democracy, they exist chiefly to lubricate the obsolete and destructive machinery with further blood and sweat.

Obviously, revolutionaries cannot now support separate organizations defined by ethnicity, gender, age or sexual orientation any more than they can support labor unions or "national liberation" struggles. Just as obviously, because the proletariat really is broken up along these lines, regroupment will tend to begin within rather than across them. Already there exist dozens of ad-hoc action groups, study circles and so forth within which female, non-white or homosexual proletarians are trying to understand their particular situations from a global, historical perspective. The official Left, of course, is on hand, pandering to resentment, oozing democratic and pluralistic snake-oil. Like the less pretentious racketeers in dope or gambling, it feeds off the rage and frustrations of the super-poor. Unlike this Left, we have no interest in being popular at the expense of truth. Against it, we insist that, no matter which sector a group originates in, it has as its first task the development of a revolutionary class analysis. On this basis it must necessarily try to unify itself with other communist groups and intervene actively toward the unification of the class as a whole.

It may well also prove necessary for women, non-whites, gays or youth to band together *within* revolutionary organizations against prejudice from other members. It would be foolish to expect such prejudice to disappear completely, even among revolutionaries, before its material roots have been pulled up once and for all. But this in no way justifies maintaining separate organizations or tolerating disagreements on basic points within the same organization. It is the racists of the world who have always upheld the principle of "separate but equal". Let those who disagree ask themselves why the U.S. government poured money into the pockets of black nationalist demagogues during the late sixties, and why it now materially supports "International Women's Year". As Eugene McCarthy once observed, the American Revolution was not financed by matching funds from the British Crown.

Overlaid on these racial, cultural and sexual divisions, and partly following their contours, are the perennial splits between employed and unemployed, public- and private-sector workers. The latter split is particularly important in the U.S., where a huge campaign is underway to portray public workers as lazy, overpaid and redundant. The traditional American hostility to "big government" is being used to justify large-scale cutbacks and layoffs in "social services". This in turn exacerbates the split between the low-paid workers, unemployed and marginals who depend heavily on these services, and the better-paid ones who do not. And so on.

Meanwhile, it is not enough to say that the common interest of all these sectors and sub-groups is the communist

revolution. It is not even enough to say that the only way they will begin to discover this common interest in more than a fleeting and localized way—as for instance during a riot or a wildcat—is through massive rebellions which force capital and state to confront them as a visibly unified power. To preserve and deepen their understanding of this discovery, proletarians must be able to talk to each other as such. They must create a language which expresses the movement of their own needs and actions beyond the existing order, a language like a stream of bullets which shatters the capitalist Hall of Mirrors faster than it can be rebuilt. The revolution is first and foremost activity, but it is also imagination which feeds and is fed by this activity. Hence, in addition to publicizing communist theory, we will be putting to use the products and techniques of poetry and the visual arts, while reporting on similar experiments in music, theater, and film.

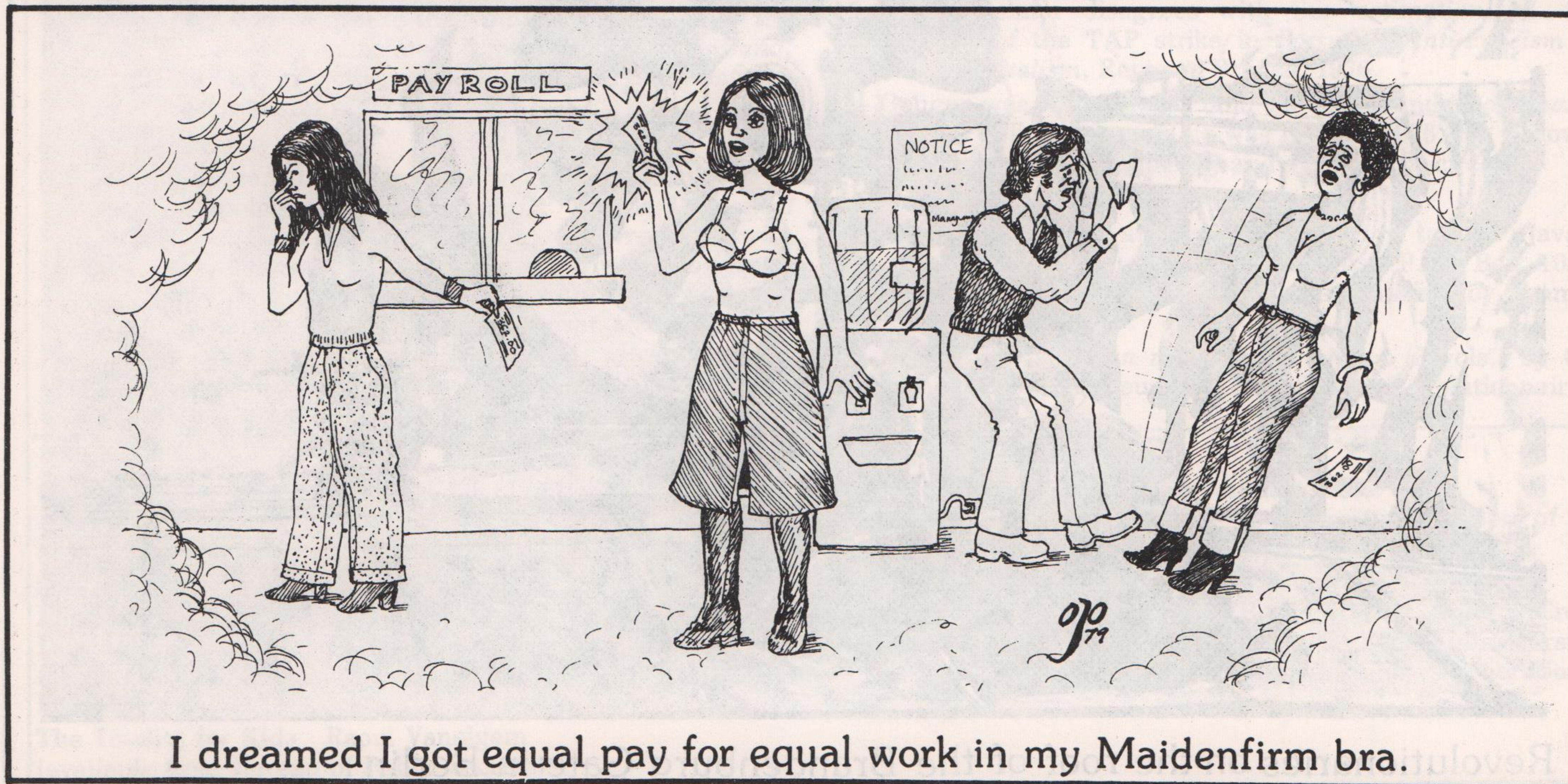
Don't get us wrong—we aren't resurrecting any dusty old horrors like "people's art" or "revolutionary art". What we have in mind is an activity which uses the means and methods developed by art, but only as a part of the project of dissolving it into the all-sided continuous creation of rich human existence. Revolutionaries have always defended the best of bourgeois culture from the bourgeoisie—but only as Marx defended classical political economy and Hegelian philosophy from the positivists, or as the Communards of 1871 defended Paris from the Versailles: in order to preserve it as a basis for something new and better. George Steiner once speculated that in developed communist society, "art will be once again what it is in Mozart—the laughter of intelligence." If we are successful, that wise laughter which ripples through *The Magic Flute*, as well as through the best improvisations of Charlie Parker, will echo among the hanging gardens, the squares and labyrinths of a city built by a race of lovers. We wish you as well as ourselves the good fortune of living long enough to hear it.

But the defensive aspect of the movement includes more than culture. Capitalism is a declining mode of production, and as such is becoming increasingly dangerous to the human species and the biosphere in general. Each day, workers all over the planet are forced into action by the relentless vampirism of capital, which is trying to drain from them every available drop of time and energy in its battle against the falling

rate of profit. And each day, four thousand people starve to death. These are perhaps luckier than the millions who still somehow survive, skeletal, brain-damaged and diseased, in the favelas, the poblaciones, the shantytowns and refugee camps—those whom capital can neither employ in its own way nor leave to till the land in theirs. The builders of Auschwitz and Vorkuta are laughing in their graves, because the image of what they built has been multiplied and spread across the globe. At the same time, the pincer movement of "scientific management" on one side and televised idiocy on the other—organized stupefaction at school, at work and at "leisure"—is destroying the creative capacities of the proletariat in the "advanced" nations.

To face all this horror squarely is to reject any certainty of victory, any simple reliance on "spontaneous" and unorganized revolt. The survival of each one of us now depends on an intricate social-reproductive net which binds together all the urban and most of the rural population of the world. At present, this net is being frayed and torn dangerously by the crisis, and even a large-scale conventional war would rip enormous holes in it—killing more people by plague and hunger than would die under bullets and bombs. There is, in short, a serious possibility that the vital preconditions for communist revolution—including especially our ability to think and fight—may be irreparably damaged before that revolution can get off the ground. While convinced, therefore, that the best form of defense is attack, we are also convinced, of the urgent need to develop a strategy of transition. Such a strategy alone can form the backbone of regroupment on an international scale. No single group or tendency, however clear-sighted and coherent, can develop it by themselves: it can only be the combined result of the experience and reflexion of people everywhere. But this doesn't mean that we can't start now—or rather we can't make public what has already been started. To this end, we are opening up a forum in which we encourage our readers to become contributors, debating with us and with each other the crucial questions facing our movement.

The development of a global strategic perspective must include not only the estimation of the balance of forces in each region as well as worldwide (difficult though such an estimation may be), not only draft plans for communist reconstruction, but



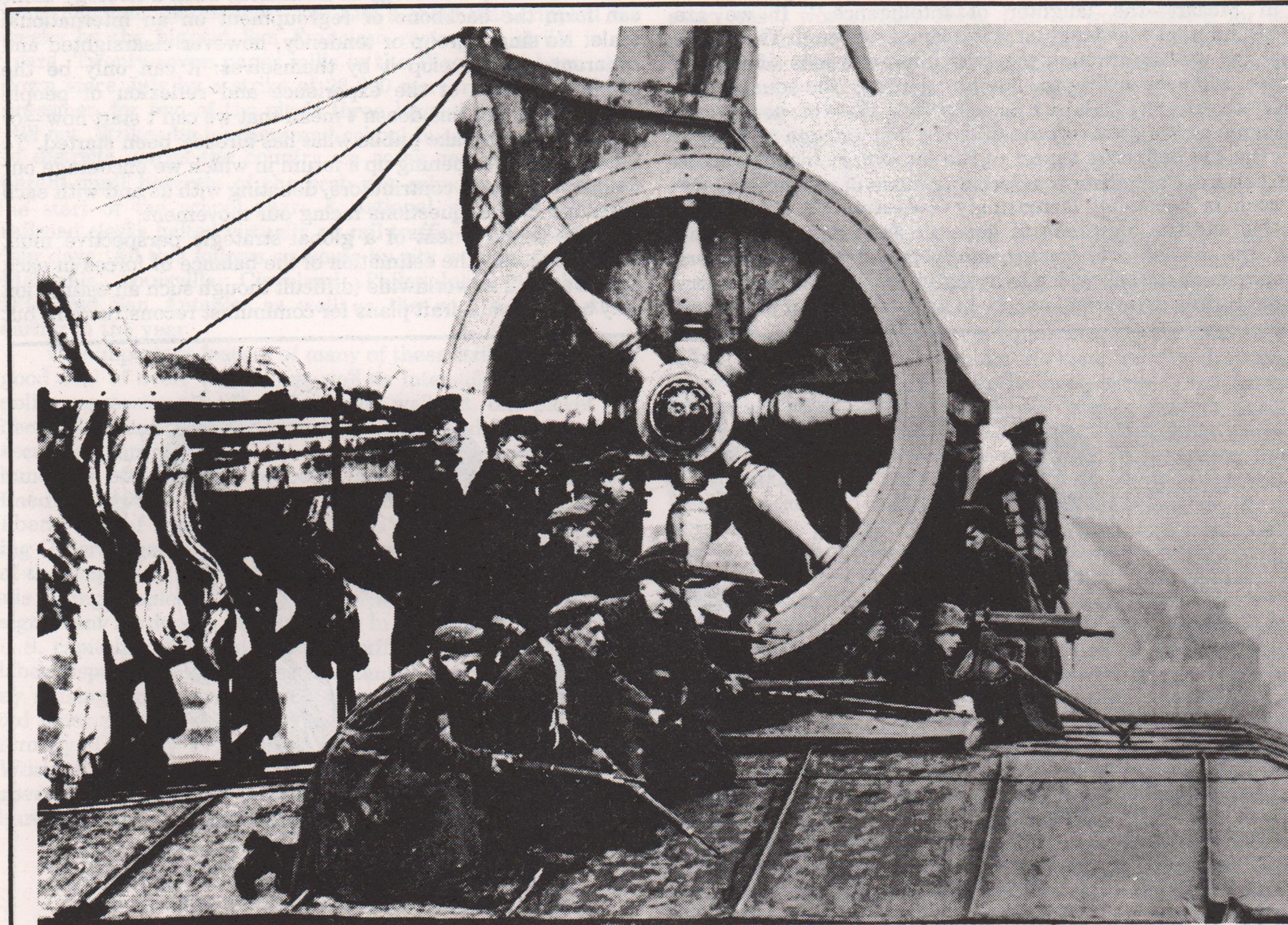
an ongoing debate on what can and should be done in innumerable specific situations. For instance, while the movement is too weak to outflank the trade unions, can we use their local organization for limited tasks? How can we help unemployed workers to join employed ones in an important strike? How will multinational strikes be organized? How best can we neutralize the armed forces? Is there a need for a political organization of revolutionaries distinct from the organizations of the class as a whole? We intend **Red-eye** to be one medium through which these questions will be asked and answered, preferably on the basis of first-hand knowledge, but also where necessary through research and intelligence work. When capital points a machine-gun at us we want more in our hands than a pointed stick.

While there are certain first principles for us, none of them are beyond discussion. When we state, for instance, that the **minimum** program of modern communism is the abolition of the wage system, the world market and national frontiers, this is not a chastity belt to defend our pure ideas from dirty old reality. It is a conclusion arrived at from past and present historical experience—one which must constantly be re-substantiated and made meaningful in practical, strategic terms. Or again, when we assert that the motor of revolutionary activity is not “ideals” but the real contradictions in the lives of proletarians, as well as their own deepest desires, this does not exempt our lives or our desires from criticism. We, like everyone else, carry the virus of the counterrevolution in our

bloodstream, ready to multiply at the first sign of weakness or self-deception. We are not interested in the endless repetition of “positions” and “lines”. Such entrenchments have a way of suffering the fate of the French defenses along the German border in 1940—and the counterrevolution is at least as fast and mobile as a Wehrmacht armored division. Let us leave mantra-mumbling to mystics and Maoists.

In his **Devil's dictionary** Ambrose Bierce defines “habit” as “a shackle for the free.” We are still slaves, but our habits, especially our “revolutionary” habits, are shackles nonetheless. If we conjure up the spirits of the past to our service from time to time, it's not to borrow their names, battle-cries or costumes, but to learn from their successes and failures in order to illuminate the present. The enemy is still the same, but he has kept up with the times: so must we. Readers who expect to be given instructions will be disappointed. We don't want your obedience, nor even necessarily your agreement, but your self-activity, your practical revolutionary **intelligence**.

It's already late for capitalism but it's early yet for us. We're not an organization (although we know we will need one and are trying to help create the basis for it). We've opened our eyes a little ahead of most people, and groggy as we are, we're going into Hell's Kitchen to fix us all some strong, black bitter coffee and something substantial to eat. On the menu will be burning questions, ice-cold analysis and biting criticism. If you're awake enough to know you're neither home nor free, and want to be both, you're invited.



Revolutionaries on the roof of the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin

Short-circuiting capital: The Social Strike

by the Red-eye Staff

Late last year, the bus drivers of Nantes, a large industrial city in northwestern France, staged a wildcat with a difference. Instead of walking off the job, they kept the buses rolling but "forgot" to collect any fares. The same thing has been done by public transit workers in other places in recent years—in Turin, Italy in 1972, in Hannover, Germany in 1973, and in Coimbra, Portugal in 1975, to name only three documented examples.

This phenomenon is by no means limited to transportation. During 1977 in France, striking workers in a number of hospitals provided health care without charge, auto mechanics repaired cars on the same basis, and checkers at a supermarket in Toulouse near the Spanish border let customers through *en masse* without ringing up their purchases.

Actions of this sort have been called "social strikes" because they avoid the inconvenience or actual hardship to fellow-workers which result from simple walk-outs in the so-called "service sector." Not only that, but they frequently achieve the opposite effect. They help mobilize support for a fight that would otherwise stay isolated and vulnerable to the hypocritical finger-wagging and crocodile tears of the capitalist media. As every proletarian knows, nothing brightens up the day like getting away with something without paying for it. And when the worker who's supposed to be taking your money turns it down with a wink or a sly grin, that's icing on a cake which you get to have and eat too.

For all these reasons, it's not surprising that social strikes have been a slowly spreading tactic during the 1970's in Europe—and that includes Eastern Europe. However, the U.S. is not completely immune either. When Teamsters in Cleveland blockaded the roads into the city with their rigs during a 1970 wildcat, they let private cars and shipments of food and medicine through, while turning back trucks carrying industrial goods and other (temporarily) non-essential items.

This last example highlights another trend in social strikes—the tendency to cut off the flow of goods and services selectively. In February 1978 a group of workers at EDF (the State-owned electric company) in St. Nazaire, frustrated by the failure of yet another union-controlled walkout, proposed shutting down power to the shipyards, the city's major industry, while keeping it supplied to the workers' apartment blocks.

The workers in question didn't mention it in the article they wrote for the French revolutionary journal *Front Libertaire*, but this one has actually been pulled off at least once, and in a place which some might find surprising. During the wave of strikes and riots that shook Poland in December and January 1970-71, the power workers of Szczecin near the Baltic coast cut off gas and electricity to the Party bureaucrats' plush suburb while maintaining the supply to the working-class districts.

In fact, social strikes have been most noticeable in the

context of massive upheavals in which hundreds of thousands of proles confront the State head-on. During the Szczecin events, for instance, the workers effectively took over the city for several days, organizing free distribution of food and medical supplies as well as gas and electricity, while fighting off the police and army with guns they had seized. The transit workers of Turin and Coimbra also provided their mass free rides during major, though less violent strike movements.

Such explosions have been less frequent in the "central" industrialized countries in the last two or three years, as capital there has been able, like Alice, to run almost fast enough to stay in the same place. But all indications are that a new wave of inflation-recession is on the way. It has already touched France, and if last year's actions in Nantes, Toulouse and elsewhere are any guide, we may be about to witness a resurgence, and this time on a higher level. In particular, it is foreseeable that "self-reduction"—organized refusal to pay newly inflated prices for goods and services—which became popular in Italy during 1975-6, may return, this time linking up with social strikes. An example of the splendid possibilities here is the action of electrical workers in the industrial districts around Milan and Turin in 1975, who refused to shut off power to apartment blocks where tenants were self-reducing their electric bills. If this kind of thing becomes widespread in even small-scale struggles, palms will be damp and mouths dry in boardrooms all over the world, and with good reason.

From the capitalist point of view, the social strike is alarming for two reasons. First, it brings the strikers organically together with other dispossessed people, both employed and unemployed, on a class basis. Second, it short-circuits the flow of capital by preventing the exchange value of the strikers' labor from being realized, while preserving the useful, "concrete" content of that labor. In other words, it simultaneously screws up business-as-usual and gives proletarians the experience of a subversive community.

In social strikes, especially during big ones like that fiery winter in Poland, one can glimpse a struggle not just between two classes but between two ways of life, two different societies as hostile to each other as matter and anti-matter. One of them is the society whose routine we live every day, a society of alienated labor and atomized consumption, of enforced boredom and enforced isolation, a society kept in line by a mixture of exhaustion, confusion, and open violence. The other society, whose outline becomes visible only in flickers and shadows during short-lived breaks in the routine, is one of freely-associated work and direct distribution according to need, a society which exists to satisfy its individual members. It cannot flower without spreading over the world, destroying States, national boundaries and money exchange as it goes. If and when it occurs on a large enough scale, the social strike begins the social revolution.

Paul Mattick and the Crisis of the world economy

Editors' Introduction

Only ostrich-like academics can any longer fail to see the implication of the mass of economic statistics compiled over the last several years: crisis times are here again. The two articles following present complementary views of what we consider to be an important formulation of crisis theory, the one put forth by Paul Mattick. Mattick was born in Germany, and participated in that country's communist movement in association with Karl Korsch. He came to the U.S. in 1926 and became involved in the movement here. He was the editor of *Living Marxism: New Essays*, and was a major participant in International Council Correspondence. He critically adopted the viewpoint of Henryk Grossman, who, in *The Law of Accumulation and Breakdown of the Capitalist System* (1929), once again presented the perspective of an inevitable capitalist crisis due to contradictions within capital as a mode of production. From the end of World War II to the late 60's, it was fashionable to think that capitalism had solved its economic contradictions. This was expressed on the left by people such as left Keynesian economists Baran and Sweezy, by Herbert Marcuse and by libertarian tendencies such as *Socialisme ou Barbarie* and the Situationist International. Practically, that viewpoint meant either giving up on the "bought off" workers in the advanced industrial sector, and focusing hopes on the Third World and marginals such as welfare clients (Baran, Sweezy and Marcuse), or to seeing revolutionary movements arising ahistorically out of subjective factors such as boredom with daily life or a repugnance for hierarchy (libertarians and situationists). Mattick's *Marx and Keynes*, published in 1969, and restated in

an abbreviated form in *Critique of Marcuse* (1972), represented a break with that viewpoint. His predictions of a renewed crisis have been borne out by the events of the last few years. Peter Rachleff's article is a summary of Mattick's analysis.

Some have viewed the Grossman-Mattick analysis as being too objective, neglecting the necessity of class struggle to achieve a revolution, as well as that struggle's role in bringing about a crisis. We feel Grossman and Mattick merely forecasted an inevitable crisis regardless of the proletariat's activity or inactivity, and explicitly rejected blind objectivism. It is true that the form and the intensity of the class struggle will strongly influence the way the crisis will manifest itself. In that light, Rothbart's article discusses the application of crisis theory to the battle of everyday life waged by the working class.

In our opinion, the Mattick analysis does have one deficiency: its failure to take sufficient account of the devaluation of existing means of production through technological progress. This devaluation counteracts the increasing organic composition of capital, slowing the fall of the rate of profit that follows that increase, but simultaneously results in the creation of value-seeking fictitious capital (the paper value of means of production is greater than their "true" value). This fictitious capital demands its share of surplus value, and therefore exerts a downward pressure on the rate of profit, a pressure relieved by higher commodity prices, i.e. inflation.

We feel it is important for the proletariat to understand the objective conditions it will be faced with in the coming years, conditions within which the class struggle will be waged. It is also important to demystify the critique of political economy so it becomes a tool of class struggle rather than another topic for academic posturing. We hope these two articles will help in both tasks.

by Pete Rachleff

The past five years have witnessed the demise of Keynesian economic strategy as a solution to the problems of the capitalist mode of production. The world economy has shown itself to be as unstable as it ever was, and the "prosperity" of the 1940s-1960s now stands out as a period of temporary stability, rather than the definitive supersession of crisis it was seen by many to be. The re-emergence of capitalist crisis demands that we search for ways of understanding it.

But it is not enough to say that capitalism is, always has been, and always will be an inherently unstable system. While certain crucial features of this system have remained the same over time, other new factors have also emerged in the twentieth century. We must both return to Marx for ideas and use our creative faculties to develop a new understanding, appropriate for our time. It is from within that collective project that this essay is offered, in the hopes of furthering discussion and debate over the sources of the present crisis.

A good place to begin the search for such a new understanding is with the work of Paul Mattick. Unlike many other self-proclaimed "Marxist" and "radical" political economists, Mattick has argued for the continued validity of the framework developed by Marx in *Capital*.(1) Building on that framework,

Mattick has developed an analysis of the limits of Keynesian strategy by carefully examining the role of the State in the modern capitalist economy.(2) This analysis is grounded in a close reading of *Capital* and an elaboration of the major points developed there by Marx—his theories of value, surplus-value, and accumulation.

A fundamental problem for every society was, and is, the allocation of social labor time. In feudal societies, this problem was solved directly by the lord of the manor, who required a certain number of days of free labor from his serfs. We can imagine, in a socialist order, decisions on this question being made directly by those who actually do the work. But capitalist society has developed a complex mechanism for this allocation, a process unique to this mode of production. Labor time is allocated indirectly, behind the backs of the producers, through the exchange of commodities in the market. In short, commodities, representing units of social labor time, exchange in definite proportions. These proportions, which may well vary from day to day, regulate the allocation of social labor time by alerting producers—after the actual act of production—whether they have devoted too much, too little, or the proper amount of social labor time to their production. There are thus two levels

to Marx's theory of value: (a) that human activity is regulated through the mediation of things, and (b) that the exchange of these things sets definite proportions to the exercise of social labor time.(3)

Capitalism is also a system which must expand or perish.(4) The source of this expansion, for every capital unit and for society as a whole, lies in the appropriation of surplus-value by the capitalist class. Surplus-value is embodied in the surplus product created by producers (and appropriated by capitalists), the output representing a value over and above the value paid out to the producers in the form of wages and that consumed in raw materials and machinery within the production process. Briefly, the working day can be divided into two parts: (a) the period in which workers create value commensurate to the value of their labor-power, and (b) the period in which they essentially work for free. Workers have little choice to avoid performing such free labor, for once they have sold their only commodity, their labor-power, to the capitalist, he is free to use it as he sees fit. While they may seek to strike a better bargain elsewhere, or to reduce the amount of free labor they perform through collective action, they will only find employment on the condition of performing some amount of it. The rate of surplus-value (s/v) is the expression of this relationship between unpaid and paid labor, or between necessary and surplus labor.

This surplus-value is the source of the expansion—or accumulation—of capital. It provides the only fund out of which additional constant capital (means of production and raw materials) and variable capital (labor-power) can be purchased. With the development of the system, and the growth in size of capital units, ever greater increments of surplus-value are necessary to obtain the same rate of return on invested capital. There is, therefore, a continual effort to increase it, to increase the unpaid labor in relation to paid labor.

There are two major ways that capitalists can do this: (a) They may try to extract additional "absolute" surplus-value through lengthening the working-day, which is, in reality, a lengthening of the period of surplus labor; or (b) they may try to extract additional "relative" surplus-value through altering the relationship between necessary and surplus labor within the working day. This can be done by cheapening the means of subsistence which are included in the value of labor-power, and/or getting workers to produce more commodities with the same amount of labor time (increasing productivity), thus spreading a given amount of value among a larger mass of commodities, decreasing the value congealed in each.

The labor process itself must be changed for this to occur. In material terms, fewer workers will be needed in relation to a given mass of means of production. In fact, "the productive-ness of a machine is measured by the human labor-power it replaces."(5) In value terms, the value of the variable capital will decrease relative to the value of the constant capital. This relationship Marx called the "organic composition of capital, the value composition (c/v) insofar as it is determined by its technical composition and mirrors the change of the latter."(6) Thus, a rising rate of surplus-value (s/v) tends to be accompanied by an increasing organic composition (c/v).

Thus, capital accumulation, which is dependent on the production of a sufficient amount of surplus-value, is a process of continual relative decrease of the variable capital, the very labor-power that creates surplus-value. However, as long as the rate of surplus-value increases more rapidly than the variable capital decreases, the mass of surplus-value will continue to increase. [mass of surplus-value = rate of surplus-value x number of workers ($s/v \times v$)] This is important, because the key need of capital is for a mass of surplus-value adequate to meet the demands made upon it.

What are these demands? Social surplus-value serves as

Labour theory of value?

Truth in Advertising

The State of New Jersey ran an ad in the January 4 New York Times to attract business to the state. Among the attractions listed, number one was "Profit from the highest worker productivity of any industrialized state in America! Value added per dollar of wages is a hefty \$3.76 vs. the national average of \$3.36. That's the only measure of labor cost that matters."

Keep that in mind next time you're involved in a wage dispute with the boss.

Weekly People

the fund out of which capitalists must (a) provide for their personal consumption, (b) pay for all unproductive expenditures, e.g., the costs of circulation, (c) purchase additional constant capital, and (d) hire additional workers. With the growing size of capital units, the increasing organic composition of capital, and growing unproductive expenditures, the pressure on available social surplus-value increases immensely.(7) Capital must increase ever more intensely the rate of surplus-value.

But this is not such an easy matter.(8) Although the rate of surplus-value does increase fairly steadily, increments in productivity tend to be reflected ever more slowly in increases in the rate—and mass—of surplus-value. In the *Grundrisse*, Marx pointed out:

...surplus value...does not grow in the same numerical proportion as the productive force. (p. 335)...The surplus value of capital does not increase as does the multiplier of the productive force, i.e. the amount to which the productive force...increases; but by the surplus of the fraction of the living work day which originally represents necessary labor, in excess over this same fraction divided by the multiplier of the productive force. (p. 339)...The larger the surplus value of capital before the increase of productive force, the larger the amount of presupposed surplus labor or surplus value of capital; or, the smaller the fractional part of the working day which forms the equivalent of the worker, which expresses necessary labor, the smaller is the increase in surplus value which capital obtains from the increase of productive force. Its surplus value rises, but in an ever smaller relation to the development of the productive force. Thus the more developed capital already is, the more surplus labor it has created, the more terribly must it develop the productive force in order to realize itself in only smaller proportion, i.e. to add surplus value—because its barrier always remains the relation between the fractional part of the day which expresses necessary labor, and the entire working day. It can move only within these boundaries. The smaller already the fractional part falling to necessary labor, the greater the surplus labor, the less can any

increase in productive force perceptibly diminish necessary labor; since the denominator has grown enormously. (9)

Thus, on the bases of Marx's model of capital accumulation—and we must remember that it is a model, at a certain level of abstraction—it would seem that capitalism cannot avoid generating crises due to a shortage of surplus-value, reflected in a falling rate of profit ($s/c+v$).

Is this model still useful in the current period? State intervention, along Keynesian lines—i.e., increasing State expenditures to prop up “effective demand”—appeared for years to have short-circuited the crisis cycle. Rather than the “full employment” and prosperity promised by Keynes and his followers, we now find ourselves in a situation where inflation and unemployment have increased together, while the rate of inflation appears unalterable save by severe increases in the rate of unemployment (the so-called mysterious “shift” in the Phillips Curve). Nixon-Ford-Carter were/are unable to develop other than a Keynesian strategy to solve the current crisis. But can such a strategy resolve the problems created by three decades of its application to an increasingly decadent capitalism?

The usefulness of Mattick's analysis is its ability to demonstrate why such a crisis was inevitable (indeed, he was predicting it in the midst of the Keynesian “prosperity” of the 1950s-1960s) and that such a strategy can no longer address the fundamental problems of capital accumulation—the inadequacy of social surplus-value when viewed in relation to the demands on it. Having covered Marx's analysis of the sources of this inadequacy, Mattick turns to an analysis of the role of the State itself.

Here we must begin with Marx's distinction between productive and unproductive labor within capitalism. (10) Productive labor is only that labor which creates surplus-value. The productive laborer “exchanges” his labor-power with the capitalist for variable capital, and it is expected that he will “produce commodities for the buyer of his labor-power.” (11) In other words, the products which he creates are then thrown onto the market by the capitalist. The surplus-value contained in these commodities becomes part of the social mass of surplus-value, out of which each capitalist receives his share for accumulation. The nature of the commodity produced matters little to the capitalist, as long as it has a use-value for some purchaser, enabling the capitalist to “recoup” his investment and reproduce and expand his capital.

Unproductive labor, on the other hand, is purchased for a very different purpose. The buyer of unproductive labor-power expects to receive an immediate service for his money, rather than a saleable commodity. Such an “immediate service” could even be embodied in a finished product. For example, if I wanted a piano and I bought all the necessary materials for its production, and then hired a workman to come into my home to make it, he would be an unproductive laborer. His finished product would be of use to me, but it would not have been created to be thrown onto the market in order to yield a surplus-value. The labor-power of an unproductive laborer is purchased not with variable capital, but “is exchanged directly against revenue.” (12)

The same labor can be productive when I buy it as a capitalist, as a producer, in order to create more value, and unproductive when I buy it as a consumer, a spender of revenue, in order to consume its use-value, no matter whether this use-value perishes with the activity of the labor-power itself or materializes and fixes itself in an object. (13)

In sum, it can be said that the performance of productive labor is the basis for the creation of surplus-value, while the performance of unproductive labor, being financed out of revenue, is an important form of consumption of surplus-value. Unproductive labor not only yields no surplus-value, it must use up some of what already exists.

In order to understand the economic character of government-induced production we should keep in mind this distinction between productive and unproductive labor and the fact that every capital, whether or not it is itself a producer of surplus value, shares in the total social surplus-value in proportion to its size. Government-induced production has appeared on an unprecedented scale in the last thirty years in response to the very problems of capital accumulation outlined in the opening pages of this essay, i.e., the inability of private capital to produce sufficient surplus-value to ensure continued accumulation and thus avoid the social problems created by crises. Mattick writes:

Capital stagnation, expressed as it is in effective demand, hinders an increasing number of capitalist entities from partaking in the social “pool” of surplus-value in sufficient measure. If their continued existence is a social necessity, they must be maintained by government subsidies. And if the number of unemployed constitutes a danger to social stability, they, too, must be fed out of the declining “pool” of surplus-value. Control of surplus-value becomes essential for the security of capitalism and the distribution of profits a governmental concern. (14)

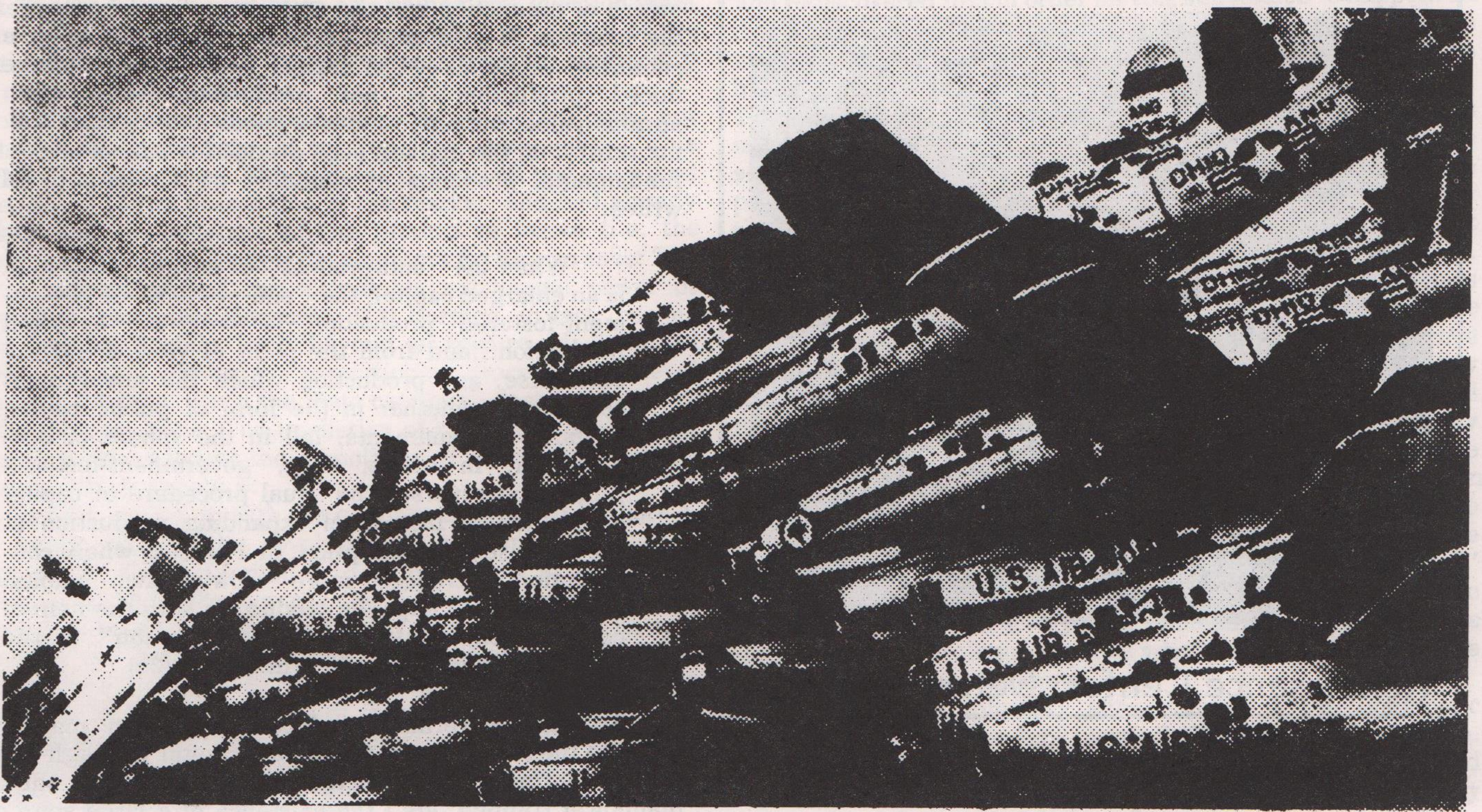
There are three major areas we must deal with: (a) What is the nature of government-induced production? (b) How is it financed? (c) What are its effects on the problem of capital accumulation?

State intervention is narrowly limited in the economic activities in which it can become engaged, if it is not to undermine the very basis of capitalist social relations. Above all, the products of state production cannot compete with the products of private capital. If the state were to become a competitor of private capitalists in the product market, it would only make their problems that much more severe.

If the government would purchase consumption goods and durables and give them away, it would, to the extent of its purchases, reduce the private market demand for these commodities. If it would produce either of these commodities in government-owned enterprises and offer them for sale, it would increase the difficulties of its private competitors by reducing their shares of a limited market demand. Government purchases, and the production it entails, must fall out of the market system; it must be supplementary to market production. It is therefore predominantly concerned with goods and services that have no place in the market economy, that is, with public works and public expenditures of all descriptions. (15)

It is of the utmost importance to note that none of this production is the production of commodities, products that are thrown on the market and whose sale thus results in the realization of surplus-value. Rather, they are produced under the control of their consumer, the State. Their production therefore cannot contribute to the mass of social surplus-value. Labor-power employed in the State sector must be unproductive labor.

Red-eye



Fighters outmoded by new missile technology are thrown on the scrap-heap.

This becomes even clearer when we examine how this production is financed. State-induced production is funded through taxes or deficit spending (deficits which must be repaid at some point, mostly by future taxes).(16) This is a process of an exchange of revenue for labor-power, not an exchange of variable capital for value-creating labor-power. Present or "future" surplus-value is appropriated from private capital by the State, in the form of taxes or loans, to pay for these expenditures.

In other words, the products which the government "purchases" are not really purchased, but given to the government free, for the government has nothing to give in return but its credit standing, which, in turn, has no other base than the government's taxing power and its ability to increase the supply of credit-money through the manipulations of interest rates by the Federal Reserve Board.(17)

As we have already seen, the products produced for the government do not function as commodities, and, hence, they cannot function as capital. They are produced directly for one consumer, never entering the commodity market. They are purchased with revenue, which, in reality, consists of surplus-value already produced (or to be produced, in the case of deficit spending) by private capital. State expenditures, therefore, cannot directly add to the mass of social surplus-value. Rather, they are a drain on this mass. David Yaffe writes:

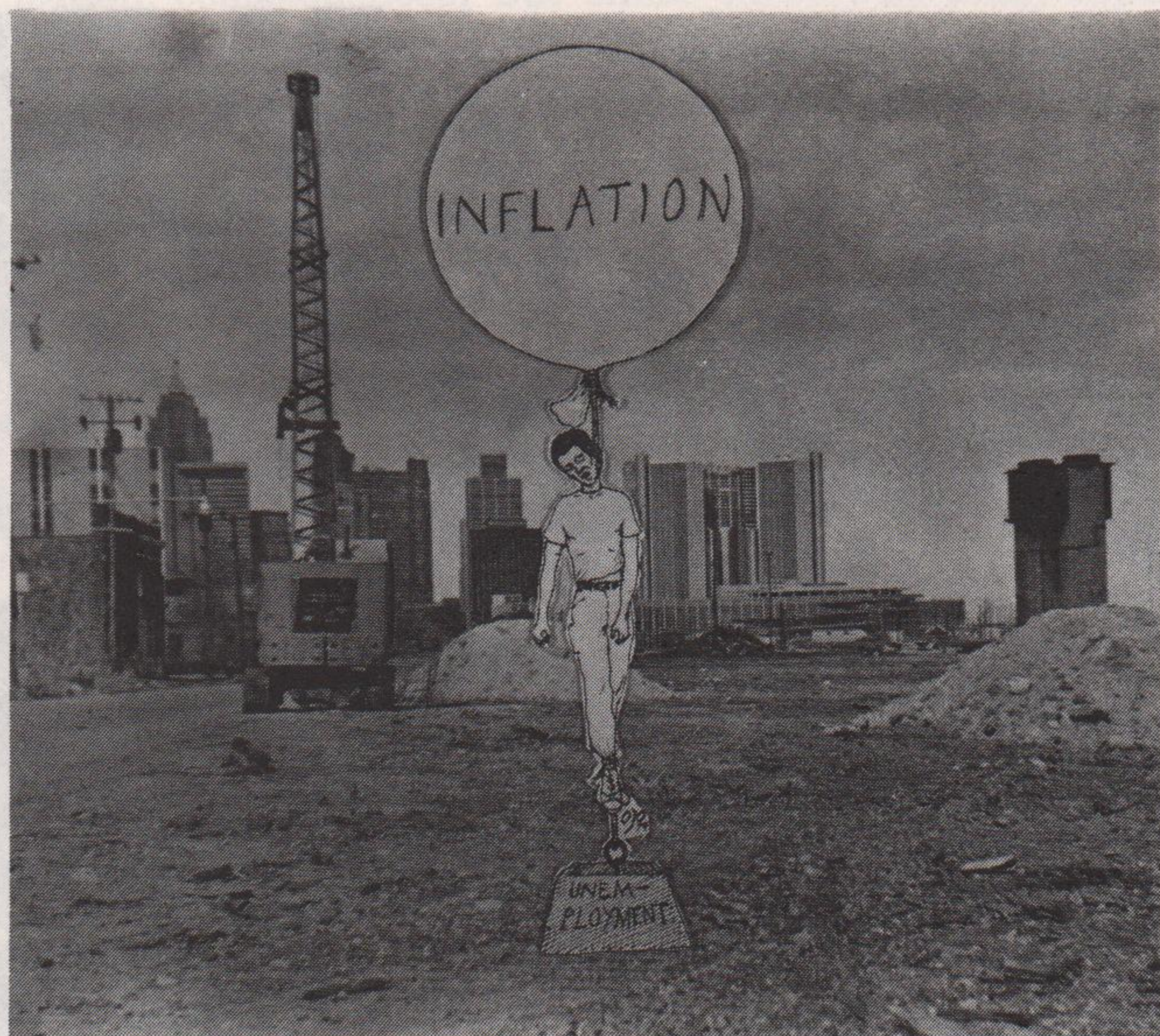
The individual private capitalist producing for the state quite clearly gets the average rate of profit and "surplus-value" is produced by his exploited workers. But from the standpoint of society, of total social capital, "unproductive" state expenditure constitutes a "drain" of capital. So the profit acquired by the individual capitalist producing for the state comes to him only out of a redistribution of the already produced surplus-value.(18)

Having examined the nature and financing of government-induced production, we must move to an examination of the relationship of state-induced production to private capital production and accumulation. "Generally," Mattick argues,

one can speak of the division of the economy into a profit-determined private sector, and a smaller, non-profitable, public sector. The private sector must realize its profits through market transaction. The public sector operates independently of the market; though its existence and its activities affect the private sector's market relations....

Although the economic role of government seems to divide the whole of the economy into a "public sector" and a "private" sector, actually there is of course just one economy, in which the government intervenes...(19)

We must not overlook the fact that government expenditures meet several crucial needs for private capital and the capitalist system as a whole. First of all, government-induced production makes possible the utilization of means of production that would otherwise lie idle, and the employment of workers who would be unemployed. Indeed, should government-induced production be eliminated or curtailed, widespread unemployment would occur. The government sector has grown so large that we cannot expect the private sector to pick up the slack overnight, should we see the government sector severely cut back. In fact, the reason for the growth of the public sector has been the inability of the private sector to accumulate capital quickly enough to provide for relatively full employment of resources and labor-power. Hence, government expenditures have grown steadily as a percentage of GNP, and government employment has grown fairly steadily as a percentage of total employment.(20) The following figures should give us an idea of the growth of the government sector.(21)



Renaissance Center, Detroit Red-eye graphic

GOVT. PURCHASES OF GOODS AND SERVICES AS % OF GNP

Year	%
1950	14%
1955	19%
1960	20%
1965	21%
1968	24%
1973	26% (22)

In sum, we can see that the government sector of the economy has grown tremendously, particularly in the last twenty-five years. It has picked up the slack of the private sector in utilization of means of production and employment of labor-power. Had this not occurred, we would probably still be in the throes of the Depression of the 1930s (unless, of course, there were to be a revolution). But this is not all the growth of governmental activity has done for the capitalist system.

Government expenditures are also used to create "infrastructure" for private capital—roads, airports, etc. Such activity lowers what Marx called the "costs of circulation" for many individual capitalists.(23) This helps speed up the "realization" of surplus-value which has been produced, and may indirectly increase the amount of labor available for value and surplus-value production. However, such spending is a very small part of all government expenditures, and its net effect on private capital formation and accumulation is relatively small.(24)

Now that we have examined the nature and financing of State-induced production, there are certain conclusions we can draw, relying on Marx's laws of capital accumulation and Mattick's application of these laws. There is no doubt that State intervention increases production and thus expands the productive apparatus, allowing the utilization of means of production which would otherwise lie idle and the employment of workers who would otherwise be out of work. However, since the major

problem of capitalist production is not just the utilization of means of production and the employment of labor-power, but the creation of a mass of surplus-value adequate to ensure continued accumulation of capital, and since government-induced production is not productive, does not yield surplus-value, but only produces goods and services which are not thrown on the market, such production cannot alleviate the fundamental problems of capitalist production. As Mattick writes:

While the "end-product" of capital production is an enlarged capital, the "end-product" of government-fostered production is only an enlarged production...and from the point of view of private enterprise, any production which the government commands, whether in the form of public works, welfare, or armaments, fall in the sphere of consumption. In effect, then, government-fostered production reverses the usual procedure of capital accumulation. Instead of expanding production at the expense of consumption, in a process where consumption increases more slowly than capital accumulates, it expands production with the help of consumption, though it is "consumption" in the form of public works and armaments.(25)

Although government-induced production may indeed increase the rate of profit for private capital (through expenditures for infrastructure, research and development, education, manpower training, etc.) the existence of a large state sector dependent on surplus-value in order to maintain itself can only constitute an overall drain on the mass of social surplus-value. The expansion of the State sector is a symptom of the problems of private capital accumulation.(26) As long as these problems persist—and we see no reason to believe they won't—the government sphere will have to grow.

The interventions themselves point to the persistence of the crisis of capital production, and the growth of government-determined production is a sure sign of the continuing decay of the private enterprise economy. To arrest this decay would mean to halt the vast expansion of government-induced production and to restore the self-expansive powers of capital production: in short, it implies a reversal of the general developmental trend of Twentieth-Century capitalism. As this is highly improbable, the state will be forced to extend its economic inroads into the private sector of the economy and thus threaten to become itself the vehicle for the destruction of the market economy.(27)

This potential threat posed by the ever-growing state sector can be understood thusly: it is highly unlikely that the state sector will cut back on its employment and economic activities. Rather, each year, government-induced production, not unlike private capital production, must begin at the point where it left off. It assumes a certain level of activity as a starting point, and grows from there. Although the state may initially appropriate only surplus-value which cannot be productively utilized by private capital, its own growth dynamic, along with a falling rate of profit in the private sector, indicates that it must eventually draw on funds which could have been employed profitably by private capital.

The present crisis thus marks the limit of the Keynesian strategy. A new phase of economic expansion can come from only two directions: (a) a war of major proportions which will

destroy much constant capital, or (b) a major attack on working-class living standards, which will allow capital to squeeze out the surplus-value which it desperately needs. From all appearances, we are in the midst of the latter strategy. Whether it will

be successful, however, can be answered by no economic theory, but only directly by those upon whose backs the capitalist system has always rested.

Footnotes

1. For a critical assessment of Baran, Sweezy, Robinson, Steindl, and Kalecki, see Mario Cogoy, "Les Theories Neo-Marxistes, Marx et L'Accumulation du Capital," *Les Temps Modernes*, Sept.-Oct., 1972, pp. 396-427; translation being prepared by Root and Branch, Box 236, Somerville, Mass. 02143.
2. See in particular, *Marx and Keynes: The Limits of the Mixed Economy* (Boston: Porter-Sargent, 1969), and *Critique of Marcuse* (NY: Herder and Herder, 1972).
3. For a much fuller discussion of Marx's theory of value, see I.I. Rubin, *Essays on Marx's Theory of Value* (Detroit: Black and Red, 1972); Karl Korsch, "The Law of Value," in *Karl Marx* (NY: Russell and Russell, 1963); Mattick, "Marx's Labor Theory of Value," in *Marx and Keynes* (op.cit.).
4. See Barot and Martin Eclipse and Re-emergence of the Communist Movement, "Capitalism and Communism" Red and Black, Detroit 1974.
5. *Capital*, I (International edition), p.371.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 612.
7. cf. Mattick, "The Permanent Crisis: Henryk Grossmann's Interpretation of Marx's Theory of Capital Accumulation," *International Council Correspondence*, no. 2, Nov., 1934.
8. cf. Ron Rothbart, "Economic Law and Class Struggle," elsewhere in this issue of *Red-eye*, for a discussion of the possible impact of working-class struggle as a barrier to this process.
9. *Grundrisse* (Nicolaus translation), pp. 335-340. cf. David Yaffe, "The Marxian Theory of Crisis, Capital, and the State," *Bulletin of the Conference of Socialist Economists*, London, Winter 1972, pp. 25-26.
10. This is best summarized by Ian Gough in "Marx and Productive Labor," *New Left Review*, #76, Nov.-Dec., 1972.
11. Marx, *Theories of Surplus-Value*, I, p. 160.
12. *Ibid.* p. 160.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 165.
14. *Marx and Keynes*, p. 115.
15. *Critique of Marcuse*, p. 16.
16. *Marx and Keynes*, p. 140. "But as the deficit must be covered by private production, this amounts to no more than giving with one hand what the other hand takes, even though the process is stretched over a long period of time."
17. *Critique of Marcuse*, p. 19.
18. Yaffe, op.cit., p. 46.
19. *Marx and Keynes*, p. 151.
20. Mattick quotes from E. Ginzberg, *The Pluralistic Economy* (*Marx and Keynes*, p. 152): "The not-for-profit sector expanded relatively rapidly in the 1930s in response to the multiple problems created by the Great Depression and very rapidly in the first half of the 1940s in response to the challenge of war. While the late 1940s saw a dynamic expansion of the profit

sector, at the end of the decade the not-for-profit sector had grown relatively more over the ten-year period than the profit sector. The 1950s saw more of the same: the not-for-profit sector grew much more rapidly than the profit sector...It is clear that since 1929 the not-for-profit sector has grown relatively more rapidly than the profit sector in terms of the labor force directly employed and in terms of the national income produced."

21. These percentages are based on tables in the *Statistical Abstract of the U.S.*, 1971, pp.305-310. We cannot base our acceptance or rejection of the theory presented in this article purely on such figures. The ultimate verification, as Marx argued, comes in a crisis, when, as with the law of gravity, "a house falls about our ears." (*Capital*, I, p. 75) See two essays by Mattick for a further discussion of the "verification" of Marx's law of capital accumulation: "Value Theory and Capital Accumulation: Notes on Joseph Gillman's *The Falling Rate of Profit*," *Science and Society*, Vol. 23, No. 1, Winter 1959; and "Samuelson's Transformation of Marxism into Bourgeois Economics," *Science and Society*, Vo. 36, No. 3, Fall 1972.

22. This figure is an estimate from Mattick, made in a discussion with a *Capital* study group, May 1973. Also, *Marx and Keynes*, p. 163.

23. *Capital*, II, Chapter VI.

24. Private capital accumulation has not demonstrated any great increase since the onset of such government expenditures. Indeed, one might say that it has stagnated for the past twenty-five years. The following table from B.G. Hickman, *Investment Demand and U.S. Economic Growth* (Washington, D.C.: 1965), p. 135, gives us an idea of this stagnation.

% Distribution of National Products at Business Cycle Peaks

Component	1948	1953	1957	1960	1963
Govt. Purchases	13.3	22.7	19.5	19.8	21.4
Gross Private					
Domestic Investment	16.6	13.8	14.9	14.3	14.1
Personal Consumption	68.7	63.7	64.4	65.3	63.8
Net Exports	1.3	0.1	1.1	0.6	0.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Since 1963, Gross Private Domestic Investment as a percentage of GNP has hovered around 14-15%, according to data in the *Statistical Abstract*.

25. *Marx and Keynes*, p. 118.

26. See footnote 24 and the discussion of the growth of government production throughout this paper. Also, cf. Gabriel Kolko, *Main Currents in Modern American History* (NY: Random House, 1976).

27. *Marx and Keynes*, p. 150.

The limits of Mattick's economics

Economic law & class struggle

by Ron Rothbart

Mattick's virtue, his marxian approach, beside which Baran and Sweezy are revealed as quasi-keynesian (1), is at the same time his vice, or at least marks the limits of his perspective. From Mattick's point of view, the dynamics of capitalism can be comprehended by an understanding of the laws of capital accumulation. These laws ultimately lead the process of accumulation to an impasse, to a point where profits are insufficient for further accumulation. Far from resolving capitalism's classical contradictions, state intervention is only an admission that they persist. The contradictions reappear as a cancerous growth of unproductive expenditures. The "mixed economy", no less than the market economy, has limits, limits determined by its internal contradictions. Sooner or later these contradictions will become insurmountable. As a result, class struggle may well intensify and become revolutionary in character. The possibility of revolution hinges on the internal contradictions of the economy.

In this sort of analysis, the working class is only "tacitly present"; that is, its appearance as a revolutionary class is anticipated and even implied (given other assumptions about its subjective capacities) by the theory of collapse, but until that point its struggle is not seen as having a qualitative impact on the economy. The struggle over wages and working conditions takes place within the confines of the law of value. The laws of accumulation—specifically the law of the tendential fall of the rate of profit—which define the dynamic of the system incorporate this struggle as a struggle over the rate of exploitation, one of the variables of accumulation. The class struggle is, as it were, submerged by the "laws of motion" of the economy, and does not violate them.

An alternative theory which postulates *class struggle* as the dynamic of capitalism was developed in the late 50's and early 60's by Cornelius Castoriadis (A.K.A. Paul Cardan), principal theoretician of the French group *Socialisme ou Barbarie*. More recently, an American journal *Zerowork*, influenced by an Italian theoretical current, has come out with an analysis of the current crisis which bears certain similarities to Castoriadis' approach. Also, in Britain, Glyn and Sutcliffe, in their book *British Capitalism and the Profit Squeeze*, put forward a view of the British situation in the late 60's similar to that of Castoriadis and *Zerowork*. It is no accident that someone strongly influenced by Mattick, David Yaffe, has opposed their view. Although one could make reference to other tendencies and other authors, in what follows I will use Mattick as representative of one approach and Castoriadis and *Zerowork* as representative of an opposing approach. (2)

The issue of this opposition dates back at least to the 30's when Karl Korsch flirted with the notion—and then rejected it(3)—that after 1850 Marx's own theory turned progressively into a determinism which ignored class struggle. Korsch decided it was only a matter of a change in *emphasis* and that the Marx of class struggle and the Marx of a "contradiction between productive forces and relations of production" complemented each other. (4)

Castoriadis, however, portrayed Marx as a determinist, and argued that Marx's economic theories don't hold water. I'm not

going to try to deal here in full with Castoriadis' characterization of and arguments against Marx. Whether or not they are valid, the motivation for Castoriadis' anti-Marxism is important. He aimed to oppose what is generally, or popularly, considered to be "Marxism"—determinism and economic reductionism—with a "new" theoretical starting point. The crisis of society, he argued, is not a narrowly economic one, but a crisis of the whole social fabric; it has to do with everything men and women face in their everyday life. What is important, according to Castoriadis, is not the contradictions of the economic system—but whatever bears upon the radical transformation of society by the *self-activity* of people. "Self-activity is the central theoretical category," he says. A *sympathetic* reading of Marx would show that in fact self-activity and capital as its very negation, is a central category of his work. Castoriadis however, in his unsympathetic reading, *opposes* this category to the Marx of economic law.

According to Castoriadis, Marx's failure to take self-activity into account in his economic theories has rendered them obsolete. Contrary to Marx's expectation, the rate of exploitation (also called the rate of surplus-value) had not continually risen but instead, in the advanced capitalist countries, remained constant for some time.(5) What Marx hadn't counted on, said Castoriadis, was the power of the working class to achieve through struggle a continuous rise in wages. Moreover, in spite of this rise, capitalism had not collapsed, but had prospered. Through the expansion of an internal market and conscious intervention in the economy by the state, the system, though not free of recessions, was maintaining itself with no profound economic crisis; and, moreover, none could be expected simply on the basis of insoluble contradictions of the accumulation process. If the system were to fall into crisis, it would be due to contradictions arising from the bureaucratization of society, which for Castoriadis is the *essential* tendency of capitalism, and from class struggle, which for Castoriadis is the *real* dynamic of capitalism.

Discussing the current situation in his introduction to the 1974 edition of *Modern Capitalism and Revolution*, Castoriadis saw no reason to change his viewpoint. There he argues that the main cause of the rising rate of inflation has been the "increasing pressure... of all 'wage and salary earners' for higher incomes, shorter hours of work, and to an increasing extent, changes in their conditions of work." The international consequences of this rise in the rate of inflation due to social struggles, combined with other irrational factors he considers "extrinsic to the economy" (e.g. politically motivated decisions of a president), could result, he says, in a serious economic crisis, but this "would not have been the outcome of those factors which the marxist conception considers operative and fundamental."

At the end of 1975, the journal *Zerowork* came out with an analysis of the current crisis which, like Castoriadis', focuses on class struggle.

From the capitalist viewpoint every crisis appears to be the outcome of a mysterious network of economic "laws" and relations moving and developing with a life of its

own. . . Our class analysis proceeds from the opposite viewpoint, that of the working class. As a class relation, capital is first of all a power struggle. Capital's "flaws" are not internal to it and nor is the crisis; they are determined by the dynamics of working class struggle. . .

The contemporary Left sees the crisis from the point of view of economists, that is, from the viewpoint of capital. . . For the Left the working class could not have brought about the crisis; it is rather an innocent victim of the internal contradictions of capital, a subordinate element in a contradictory whole. This is why the Left is preoccupied with the defense of the working class. (6)

For *Zerowork*, Keynesianism was a capitalist strategy based on a new relation with the working class growing out of previous struggles. "Full employment" had been imposed on capital. Capital's counter-strategy consisted in recouping increasing wages by means of inflation, expanding the internal consumer market and instituting productivity schemes. The cycle of struggles of the late 60's and early 70's, characterized by the "refusal of work", an initiative tending to separate income from work (in which a strategic unity of the waged and the unwaged plays an essential role), imposes the new crisis on capital. In effect, continually rising income claims of all sectors of the working class combined with increased absenteeism, "crimes against property", high employee turnover, sabotage, opposition to productivity schemes, etc., tend to sever income from productivity and thus cut into capitalist profit margins. The working class ruins the Keynesian balancing act by making incomes rise faster than productivity. Capital responds with a strategy of planned crisis aiming to re-enforce the tie between income and work.

Zerowork's theses bring to the fore the rate of exploitation. They see active intervention on the part of the working class, reducing the rate of exploitation, as the initial cause of the current crisis. "The crisis is characterized by an unprecedented decline in the rate of exploitation." (7)

In Britain, where Glyn and Sutcliffe have tried to give evidence for a similar viewpoint, their thesis has been put into question by David Yaffe, who interprets the evidence differently.

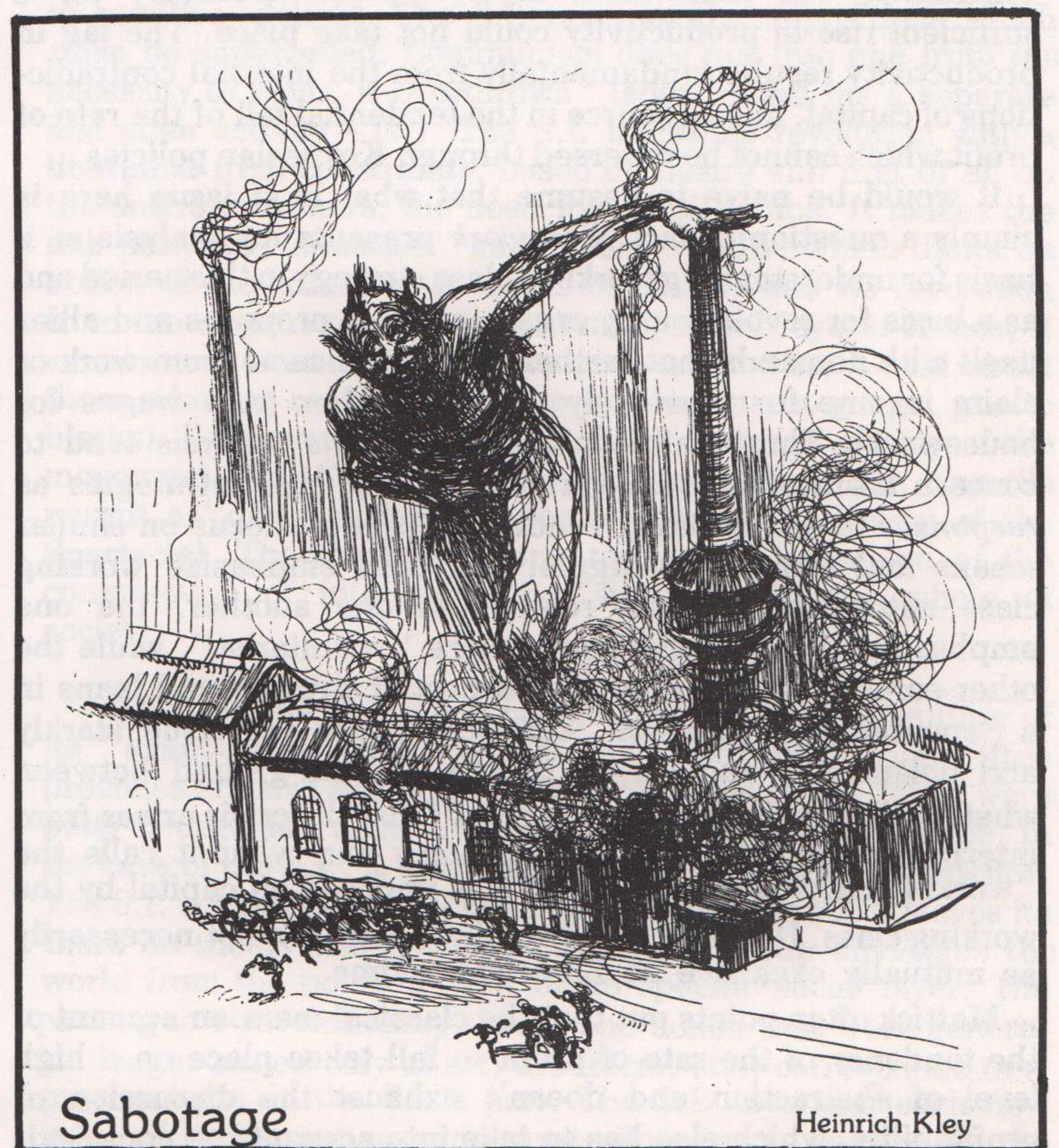
Glyn and Sutcliffe's and *Zerowork's* thesis is actually stronger than Castoriadis'. I must distinguish them before discussing Glyn/Sutcliffe and Yaffe. Castoriadis argued in 1974 that wage pressure (as well as demands for shorter hours and changes in working conditions) was inflationary and that hyperinflation had a destabilizing effect on the world economy. A change in workers' behavior during economic downturns had resulted in a world recession. "The decisive factor here is a secular change in the behavior of wage and salary earners who have come to consider as granted an increase in their real incomes, year in, year out. . ." whatever the state of the economy. Allowing unemployment to rise to catastrophic levels could do away with this expectation (indeed it has), but only at the cost of creating a potentially explosive situation. There is no talk here of wage increases cutting into profit margins. What is important for Castoriadis is "self-activity", the fact that workers ceased to behave as manipulable objects, moderating their demands in response to planned downturns. It is not necessary for Castoriadis' argument that wage pressure actually resulted in increased real wages, only that it started an inflationary spiral that led to international monetary instability, which had deleterious effects on world trade.

Zerowork's argument is similar in that its main purpose is to explore how the working class breaks out of the capitalists'

attempts to maintain it as a predictable "factor of production" and becomes a fighting unity. What Castoriadis calls a "secular change in behavior" *Zerowork* sees as the "political recomposition of the working class". Where *Zerowork* differs from Castoriadis is in emphasizing income pressure other than wage demands (welfare, shoplifting, self-reduction of transportation fares, meat boycott, etc.), and at least implying that income demands, combined with struggles which reduce productivity, are the cause of the profitability crisis. In this last matter, *Zerowork* resembles Glyn and Sutcliffe.

Glyn and Sutcliffe's argument is based on statistics which they claim show that in Britain between 1964 and 1970 profits fell while wages rose as a share of the national income. Yaffe attacks their use of the statistics and tries to show that in fact, there was in this period a decline in the share of net real wages and salaries (after tax) in national income. At the same time, productivity increased at a faster rate than real wages after tax. In other words, the rate of exploitation continued to rise. If this is correct, a Glyn and Sutcliffe/*Zerowork* type analysis fails to get at the source of the profitability crisis. It can't be due to a simple drop in the rate of exploitation, to real wages rising faster than productivity.

For Yaffe, there's a problem with the rate of exploitation, but it arises from modern capitalism's internal contradictions rather than from workers' militancy. Like Mattick, Yaffe sees modern capitalism creating a demand for surplus value that it can't adequately supply. Since progressively more capital is involved in state production, the total profits earned are drawn from a base of private capital formation which, relatively speaking, is dwindling. In this situation, the only way to maintain the general rate of profit is to raise the rate of exploitation faster than before. "In order that state expenditure can be financed out of surplus value produced in the private sector of the economy, the rate of exploitation must be increased faster than before to prevent an actual fall in the rate of profit and a faster rate of inflation."



Sabotage

Heinrich Kley

Yaffe's argument is based on an understanding that variable capital consists only of wages paid to productive workers, i.e. those workers involved in surplus value production. The rate of exploitation is not determined by the general level of wages but by the ratio of the total income of productive workers to the surplus value produced. Thus, a general rise in wages and a continued rise in the rate of exploitation are compatible if the number of productive workers remains relatively stable or decreases while productivity makes substantial gains. This is the theoretical basis for arguing that the rate of exploitation has continued to rise in Britain. However, more and more of the surplus-value produced has been allocated to unproductive expenditures, has gone not only into state production and social services but also finance and commerce. In other words, the productive sphere has been drained, or "looted," by the unproductive spheres. Though productivity has continued to rise, it has not risen fast enough to produce a mass of profit sufficient to meet all the demands made on the total surplus-value by both the productive and the unproductive spheres. The inflationary spiral is a result of the fact that the demand on the total mass of profit exceeds its supply. Workers certainly have been struggling, struggling to keep the price of their commodity, labor-power, up with other prices, but the basic cause of the inflation is increased unproductive expenditures, which in turn rise largely because of government attempts to keep up the level of production, and thus employment, in spite of chronic stagnation due fundamentally to the tendential fall of the rate of profit. At the present time, British capitalists are trying to hold down wages and restructure industry which involves laying off workers—in order to raise productivity and thus further increase the rate of exploitation. (8)

For both Yaffe and Mattick, the insufficient rise in productivity is primarily a result of and in turn a cause of declining profitability. Since the post-war recessions did not and could not result in classical capitalist expansion, but rather only in an expansion in state production superimposed on real stagnation, the investment in new plant necessary for a sufficient rise in productivity could not take place. The lag in productivity results fundamentally from the internal contradictions of capital, has its source in the tendential fall of the rate of profit which cannot be reversed through Keynesian policies.

It would be naive to assume that what is at issue here is simply a question of fact. *Zerowork* presents its analysis as a basis for understanding working-class strategy in this period and as a basis for revolutionary organization. It proposes and allies itself with demands that further separate income from work or claim income for previously unwaged labor (e.g. wages for housework). Those influenced by Mattick's analysis tend to concern themselves with various working class strategies as *responses* to deteriorating conditions. (9) Both focus on similar means and forms of struggle, and both emphasize working class autonomy. But, in relation to one another, the one emphasizes the offensive and is more "voluntarist", while the other emphasizes the defensive aspect of struggle and leans in a "spontaneist" direction. *Zerowork* poses the issue starkly and polemically and claims there's no mid-ground between what it calls the "capitalist viewpoint" that the crisis arises from internal contradictions of the economy and what it calls the "working class viewpoint" that it is imposed on capital by the working class. However, the two viewpoints are not necessarily as mutually exclusive as *Zerowork* claims.

Mattick often points out that the classical marxian account of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall takes place on a high level of abstraction and doesn't exhaust the discussion of profitability, which also has to take into account the complexi-

ties of real, concrete capitalism. Marx's analysis, after all, abstracts from competition and assumes the existence of only two classes in a purely capitalist environment. Also, for Marx, the famous tendency of the rate of profit to fall is only a *tendency*, a consequence and expression of the increasing social productivity of labor, which is counteracted by other tendencies: rationalization, shortening the time of capital turnover (through improved transportation and communication) opening up of new spheres of production that have a low organic composition and thus high rate of profit, devaluation of capital in crisis, importing cheap foodstuffs and cheap raw materials, opening up of new areas for profitable capital investment and *increasing the rate of exploitation*. A tendency of the rate of exploitation to rise is bound up with the tendency of the rate of profit to fall, these two opposed tendencies both following from the increasing social productivity of labor. But a conscious attempt of the capitalists to raise or maintain profits by raising the rate of exploitation through lowering wages and intensifying labor (speed-up) has a more immediate political impact. (10) These means of raising the rate of exploitation degrade and exhaust the laborers, leading them, in the classical conception, to overthrow the system. "The mass of misery, oppression, degradation, exploitation [grows]; but with this too grows the revolt of the working class." (11)

The tendency of the rate of profit to fall and these counter-tendencies form a dynamic which underlies and determines the character of capital accumulation, explains the crisis-ridden nature of capitalism, and is the context of the struggle, both among capitalists and between classes, over the division of surplus-value. For Mattick, following Henryk Grossman, the ultimate significance of a falling *rate* of profit is that it limits the growth of the *mass* of profit, and the mass becomes insufficient at some point for the profitable expansion of private capital.

Refutations and emendations of Marx, as well as defenses, often deal with the counter-tendencies to the fall of the rate of profit, both their power to preserve the system and their limits. Imperialistic expansion proved quite effective for capital up to a point; world war itself served to literally destroy capital, as Mattick argues, re-creating conditions for a period of expansion when growing monopolization hindered devaluation in crises; Taylorization of the labor-process is said to have allowed for increasing output and thus raising wages without decreasing the rate of exploitation, (12) and this in turn allowed for an expansion of the internal market; credit expansion has been another factor; state-intervention often involves rationalization; transportation and communications have improved phenomenally, cutting down the time of capital turnover.

Mattick concerns himself in part with the counter-tendencies to the counter-tendencies, their *limits*. For example, advertising costs, associated with an expanded internal market for the monopolistic consumer industries, are a drain on surplus value; "profits" made in state production are really a drain on surplus value. While Castoriadis rejects Marx's theory, claiming the rate of exploitation has not risen, and *Zerowork* claims the crisis is the result of the working class' *reducing* the rate of exploitation, Mattick reasserts the classical theory, pointing to the limits inherent in the means used to preserve the system and anticipating a point at which the *reaching of these limits* will provoke a *sharpening of the struggle* over the rate of exploitation.

Alan Jones tries to resolve the debate between Yaffe and Glyn and Sutcliffe this way:

At the onset of conjunctural crisis, notably when the process of accumulation falters, it is perfectly possible, indeed, inevitable, for direct struggle over the rate of exploitation to function as the cause of the onset of overt crisis. . . . There is nothing contradictory whatever in understanding that in the final analysis the reason for the decline in the rate of profit is the changes in the organic composition of capital and in understanding that in a particular capitalism, in a particular time, the dominant element in the crisis is played by a direct struggle between the working class and the bourgeoisie over the rate of surplus-value.

In fact, the rise in the rate of exploitation has slowed as "a result of May 1968 and the continued combativity of the working class. The rise in the rate of exploitation was thus slowed down by the resistance of the workers and therefore no longer exercised sufficient force to counteract the negative effect of the rise in the organic composition of capital". (13)

Such an approach seems to me most fruitful because it allows us to take into account both the economic system and the class struggle, without imagining that either is autonomous of the other or completely determined by the other. It allows us to recognize the working class as an active factor within the context of an economic system that has internal contradictions.

The working class does not merely arrive *post facto* to save the world from the misery which capitalism has wrought. If the crisis demonstrates that capitalism has not solved its internal contradictions and, as Yaffe argues, needs to raise the rate of exploitation faster than previously, it also demonstrates that the working class has not become an integrated, manipulable component of the system, but is capable of *self-activity*. Its combativity becomes an obstacle to the functioning of a system which has its own exigencies.

Because of the *different levels of abstraction* on which this discussion takes place—Mattick and Yaffe abstract and theoretical, Cardan and Zerowork more empirical—the relationship and possibly complementary character of the two views is obscured. In the 30's, Anton Pannekoek criticized the economic theories of Mattick's mentor, Henryk Grossman, for leaving out human intervention. Mattick answered:

Even for Grossman there are no "purely economic" problems; yet this did not prevent him, in his analysis of the law of accumulation, to restrict himself for *methodological reasons* to the definition of purely economic pre-suppositions and of thus coming to *theoretically* apprehend an objective limiting point of the system. The *theoretical* cognition that the capitalist system must, because of its contradictions, necessarily run up against the crash *does not at all entail* that the real crash is an automatic process, independent of men. (14)

Mattick does not remain on the level of abstraction that Grossman did in his crisis theory. He relates the pure model to phenomena of modern capitalism. But he does tend to deal with the economy in abstraction from class struggle. Mattick is well aware of the limits of Grossman's and by implication of his own approach, and accepts them as self-imposed limits for methodological reasons. All one can say on the basis of an analysis of the developmental tendencies of capitalism, he says, is that crises will occur and "offer the possibility of a transformation of the class struggle within the society into a struggle for another form of society." Economic theory can only "give consciousness of the objective conditions in which the class struggle must evolve and determine its orientation." (15)

Although, as a temporary methodological procedure, this separation of economic theory can be justified, still, any permanent hypostatization of economic theory must be questioned. As Geoffrey Kay, discussing Yaffe, puts it;

The conventional interpretation of the law (of the falling rate of profit) can be attacked. . . . for objectifying the economic process and thereby separating the class struggle from the accumulation of capital. . . . The proletariat remains in the background. . . . The law as conventionally understood. . . . cannot yield any real understanding of the death crisis of capital as the birth pangs of a new form of society. . . . can tell us nothing about the class that will make the revolution. . . . By objectifying economics and denying the proletariat any active and qualitative role in the creation of the crisis, Marxist economists have denied themselves any possibility for systematically analyzing the class struggle in its concrete forms, and lifting the problem of the political organization of the working class out of the limbo of ideological rhetoric. (16)

* * * * *

The approach which analyzes recent developments in terms of class struggle is commonly applied to Italy, since its post-war competitiveness was based in part on low wages. "It was above all cheap domestic labor which financed Italy's post-war economic recovery," say one set of commentators.

The export industrialists were thus able to sell their products at stable or falling prices while maintaining profit margins high enough to self-finance further industrial expansion. . . . Once the industrial workers demanded higher wages, the whole house of cards began to collapse. . . . For over a decade now it has been the class struggle, and especially, though not exclusively, the consequent rising cost of labor, that has determined Italian economic cycles. (17)

The Italian steel, automotive and chemical industries were developed after the war with advanced technology, which allowed Italy to take advantage of the post-war liberalization of trade. Repression of the labor movement guaranteed low wages.

In the late 50's and early 60's, various factors contributed to a heightening of workers' militancy. One was the increased parcellization of work and the process of de-skilling, which began to break down old hierarchies in the workforce. Another was the reduction of unemployment as a result of the "economic miracle." The new unity and strength of the working class manifested itself in the strike wave of 1962, which won a substantial wage increase.

In response, the capitalists first raised prices and then, in 1963, clamped down on credit to combat inflation. The rate of investment had already been falling. The credit squeeze further reduced investment and a three-year recession followed, during which capitalists restructured factories for greater productivity. Production rose while wages fell. A period of upswing followed, but it was based on labor discipline rather than increased investment. In general, the Italian economy has been stagnating since 1963. As another commentator observes,

The temporary weakness [of the Italian working class] allowed a further spurt of growth in 1966-68, but this was obtained essentially by speedup, with next to no investments in more modern technology. . . . Since 1963-64.

Italian capitalists have been investing very little, and the increasing technological lag has made Italian exports less and less competitive." (18)

The effects of rationalization on the conditions of work, as well as deteriorating urban living conditions, led to the "hot autumn" of 1969. As a response to speedup, workers struggled to gain more control over the organization and pace of work, as well as for higher wages. In order to do this they had to struggle against unions as well as employers and create autonomous organizational forms: general assemblies, factory councils and industrial zone councils. In this period workers won both substantial wage increases and some power to counter the employers' restructuring projects.

As usual, the capitalists then raised prices and tightened credit. However, the recession of 1970-72 did not bring about the hoped for reduction of militancy and wages continued to rise. Italy's problems then accelerated under the effects of economic instability on the global level. On top of rising labor costs and resistance to restructuring, Italian capital had to contend with world-wide hyperinflation and deteriorating market conditions. As the cost of imports, especially food and oil, rose, and markets for Italian goods contracted, Italy's trade deficit became insupportable and the country was forced to depend on unprecedented levels of international credit to avoid formal bankruptcy.

The current capitalist offensive involves increasing overtime, cutting out holidays, implementing speedups, and trying to impede the working of a sliding scale of wages. The attempt to link a new IMF loan to the subversion of the sliding scale was successfully resisted by workers in the spring of 1977.

Italian capitalism's long-term strategy is to destroy the degree of homogeneity attained by the working class struggle in recent years by decentralizing component operations and extending automation and to convert industry to capital goods production, which will require labor mobility and a long period of very high unemployment. Workers have responded with wildcat strikes, sabotage, autonomous organization, expropriations, self-reduction, etc.

What's apparent in all this is a progressively intensifying struggle over the rate of exploitation. At least since the war, the strength of Italian capital seems to have depended on a disciplined workforce. Every time the Italian working class began to break its bonds, economic expansion was retarded and the ruling class was forced to respond by tightening the screws. Every working class victory on the wage front was met with increased prices, managed recession and an attack on the labor process. In the face of deteriorating trade conditions and without a docile working class, the Italians had to turn to international borrowing. Domestic capital investment, lagging since 1963, was only available before that because of domestic cheap labor.

While this empirical account gives the intensification of the struggle over the rate of exploitation in Italy concreteness and specificity and indicates how it has been leading to direct action and autonomous organization, it doesn't really justify the conclusion that the Italian crisis is "caused" by working class activity. We are drawn back into asking why post-war Italian expansion necessitated low wages, into noting that it was based on investment in new industries in a period of post-war reconstruction and that after that no substantial investment was forthcoming. If the working class precipitated the Italian crisis, it was because Italian capital was so *vulnerable* to worker self-activity. We are dealing with a system that can't tolerate working class victories, a system with little room for maneuver.

Looking for "causes", we would be drawn back into the pre-war period and asking general questions about the crisis of capital between the wars and the means used by the capitalists to extricate themselves from this crisis, in other words asking the very questions Mattick tries to answer in *Marx and Keynes*.

It was Britain's chronic low investment, as well as the combativity of the British working class from 1910 on, that served as an impetus to Keynes' theories. And it is in Britain that Keynesian policies have been most extensively applied and that the limits of the mixed economy are most evident. An obsolete industrial plant, a constantly expanding state budget, relatively high social services expenditures, and a large and growing state industrial sector, are all a result of the long-term low profitability which has made Britain unattractive to private investors and uncompetitive on the world market. In 1976 the most sensational manifestation of these conditions was the steep fall in the value of the pound. In order to resolve its monetary problems, Britain would have to become competitive (preferably in a situation where world trade is expanding). And in order to do this it would have to decrease unit labor costs, i.e. increase productivity while restraining wage rates. In the 60's British industry tried to do so by tying wage increases to various organizational measures that would increase productivity, and by initiating an incomes policy. But this proved ineffective, both because of growing working class militancy, including a growing tendency to reject productivity deals, and because it has become apparent that large injections of capital are necessary to re-establish profitability.

One could say that the wave of struggles in the late 60's and early 70's plunged Britain over the brink into a more or less bankrupt state in which it is dependent on the IMF (at least until the expected oil revenues materialize). But this has to be understood in the context of chronic economic stagnation. (19) A 1973 article on Britain sums up the situation in this way:

British capital, handicapped by decades of low investment, requires a substantially increased share if it is to meet successfully the growing pressures of international competition. The unprecedented level of wage demands and wage settlements in the last five years . . . clearly accentuated this problem. Moreover, workers' readiness to cooperate, through productivity bargaining, in the more intensified exploitation of labor has to a large degree evaporated since the end of the 1960's. (20)

The global problem capitalist economists refer to as the "capital shortage" weighs heavily on Britain, as well as Italy.

Nowhere is the capital crisis more acute than in Britain and Italy. . . . Britain must invest some \$45-billion in new plant and equipment to become competitive with its Common Market neighbors and with such trade rivals as Japan. In fact, the British government estimates [in 1975] that investment in manufacturing will fall . . . (21)

So capitalist planners speak in terms of "correcting the balance between consumption and production," i.e. lowering wages and unproductive expenses in the hopes that this will make funds available for investment.

However, politicians must weigh the possibility of intensified class struggle, which cutting into wages and social expenditures and increasing unemployment could set off, against the insolvency that would result from continuing old policies. For example, in Britain, after the steep drop in the value of the pound, the Chancellor of the Exchequer said "that the

Red-eye

alternatives to going to the International Monetary Fund for a further loan would be 'economic policies so savage that they would lead to riots in the streets'." (22) Nevertheless, the IMF loan entailed further cuts in social service expenditures; full employment has become a relic of the past and the welfare state is being dismantled.

That the Chancellor wasn't being just rhetorical is substantiated by the fact that his scenario was quickly realized in Egypt, where in January a boost in government controlled prices of food and fuel — a measure taken to meet requirements of the IMF — actually did lead to riots in the streets. The Polish riots of 1976 were another version of this scenario; they were set off by price rises occasioned by Poland's loans coming due. Afterwards, in November, Brezhnev loaned Poland \$1.3 billion "when Polish leaders convinced him that without help the worker uprising of last August would be only a prelude to a repeat of the working class rebellion of 1956." (23) In general, capital now has to perilously expand credit beyond all previous norms where and when it feels its power to raise the rate of exploitation is limited and will run up against too much working class resistance.

Currently in Britain, some union leaders have been arguing that the fact that inflation has been rising since last summer, *despite* wage restraint, proves that wage increases do *not* initiate the inflationary spiral. Now pressure from the rank and file has subverted attempts at renewal of the agreement between the TUC and the Labour government on wage restraint, and the possibility of a new "wage explosion" threatens to throw the crisis-ridden British economy even deeper into crisis. (24)

The conditions in all other countries are, of course, not identical to those in Britain and Italy, but the dynamic is similar enough for us to generalize with regard to the issue under discussion. In the late 60's capital found itself in the position of having increased expectations without having surmounted the economic contradictions which limit its production of wealth. Since it could not generate profits sufficient for profitable expansion of private capital on the basis of a renewal of the productive plant, capital had to both expand the unproductive spheres and simultaneously endeavor to increase productivity through rationalization and increasing the intensity of labor. However, working class resistance to productivity schemes grew. Simultaneously, income demands grew. The re-assertion of capitalism's "internal contradictions" met the re-assertion of working class militancy. As a result, capital has had to completely change its ideological tune; "affluence" and "rising expectations" have given way to "zero growth" and "small is beautiful." And a social reality is being constructed to match the ideology.

On the empirical level what we find are individual capitalists or corporations or nations, each intent on maintaining its competitive position, primarily by raising productivity while keeping the lid on wage rates and other expenses it may consider flexible (such as social welfare programs). Internationally, the competition appears in the form of trade imbalances and ensuing monetary crises that put the now internationally interdependent economy in jeopardy. All of these matters, which the bourgeoisie understand as "economic", can be said to simultaneously express and mask both the class struggle and the contradictory process of capital accumulation. In a certain sense, a sense that doesn't invalidate the marxian viewpoint, it is *all* a matter of class struggle, since the capital



Dynamos

by Franz Masereel

accumulation process is based on historically specific production relations which were established and are maintained by a complex mix of physical and ideological manipulation and violence. However, the particular struggles of sections of the working class, and their relationship to the specificities of particular units of capital — all this develops not accidentally but, from the marxian perspective, in the context of an inexorable, contradictory capital-accumulation process which can be grasped theoretically on the basis of an analysis of the "total capital," i.e. on a level of analysis which abstracts from competition, if only to be able ultimately to work up to it by a series of approximations.

For the Marxist, the struggle between workers and bosses within various units of capital has to be understood in the context of the heightened international competition of the late 60's and the 70's. Heightened competition is characteristic of crisis conditions wherein capitalists struggle over a pool of surplus-value which is dwindling relative to their needs for profitable capital investment at the particular level of capital accumulation.

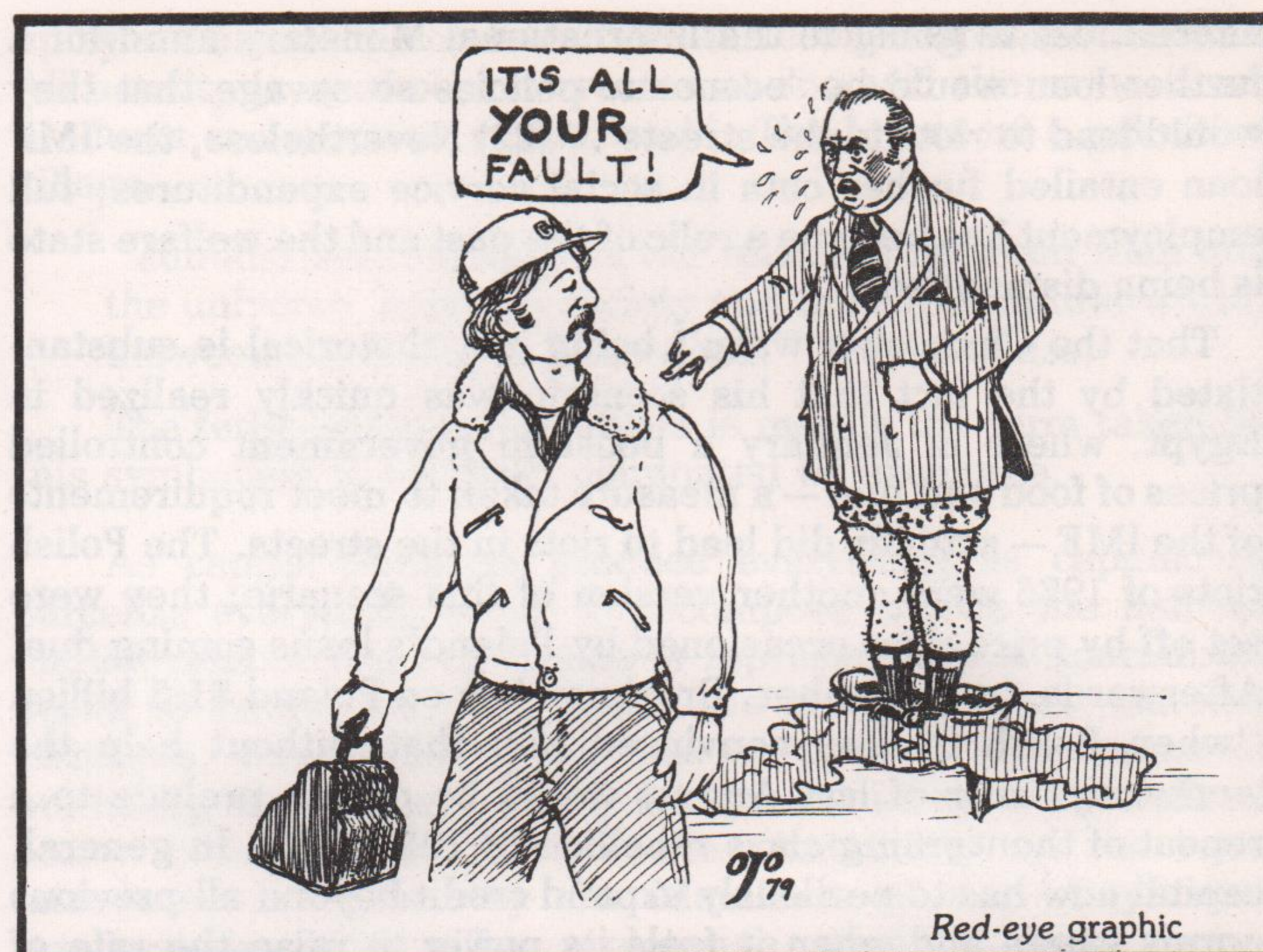
Particular nations jockey for a share of existing surplus-value sufficient to allow for further accumulation. But the crisis of capital is nothing but an insufficiency of the total surplus-value relative to the amount necessary for both productive investment and unproductive expenditures. As a result, in each nation, Britain more than others because of its poor competitive position, the struggle over the division of the existing surplus-value among its three functions — constant capital (plant,

equipment and materials), variable capital (wages of productive workers), and revenue (capitalists' income and unproductive expenditures) — intensifies.

If, for theoretical purposes, we treat as secondary the struggle between capitalists and workers over how much labor is actually supplied for how much income, we can uncover what Mattick calls "the objective conditions in which the class struggle must evolve and determine its orientation"; that is, in this case, the context of economic stagnation and the fact that state intervention, rather than solving this problem, turns it into a problem of cancerous growth of unproductive expenditures. Finally, if, following Marx, we trace the economic stagnation back to the tendency of the rate of profit to fall and the limits of the counter-tendencies, that is, back to the internal contradictions of capitalism, we can understand why the capitalist class is incapable of delivering the goods, of satisfying the demands of a militant working class, and why, on the contrary, it must periodically attack the living standards of the working class and endeavor to increase the amount of surplus-value it pumps out of each unit of labor-time.

As "objective" as this sort of analysis appears, in that it is developed in abstraction from class struggle, nevertheless it leaves room for the "subjective" in that it shows how the basis of relative class harmony must break down and aims to put into question the capital relation itself. It abstracts from class struggle in order to show that the crisis of profitability, the context in which the struggle develops, is *inherent* in the development of the capital-relation. There are limits to organizing production and thus, indirectly, all social life, by means of the capital-relation, by means of wage-labor. Such a system results in a multi-faceted degradation of work and life, including at times serious decline in many people's material well-being.

However, even if this objective approach holds up theoretically, its limits must be recognized. Capitalism, as it develops (and decays), transforms the labor-process and life in general, and, as a result, the character and forms of revolt change also. Strategy and organization are historically specific. The belief in or proof of capitalism's inability to surmount its internal



contradictions at best sets the stage for understanding the specific character of the present crisis, the specific character of present struggles and the relation between the two. If the crisis offers "the possibility of a transformation of the class struggle within the society into a struggle for another form of society", it remains to be shown how this possibility can become a reality. What we need to do is 1) show how the intensified struggle over the rate of exploitation can actually become, or is in the process of becoming, a revolutionary struggle overflowing the bounds of the capital relation, how it can turn into a struggle *against* wage-labor, and 2) participate in this transformation.

"Critique" . . . includes from the point of view of the *object* an empirical investigation, "conducted with the precision of natural science," of all its relations and development, and from the point of view of the *subject* an account of how the impotent wishes, intuitions and demands of individual subjects develop into an historically effective class power leading to "revolutionary practice." (*Praxis*, Jan., July 1977). (25)

Footnotes

1. Paul Mattick, "Marxism and Monopoly Capital," *Progressive Labor*, July-August, 1967, reprinted as a pamphlet by Root and Branch, Box 236, Somerville, Mass 02143; and Mario Cogoy, "Les theories neo-marxistes, Marx et l'accumulation du capital", *Les Temps Modernes*, Sept.-Oct., 1972, pp. 396-427.

2. Here I'm using Mattick as a paradigm of "the Marxist" and reserving questions about the full adequacy of his analysis of the "internal contradictions." Castoriadis' thesis is developed most extensively in *Modern Capitalism and Revolution*, available from Solidarity, c/o 123 Lathom Road, London E. 6. (also from P.O. Box 1587, San Francisco, Ca. 94101) *Zerowork* is available from: c/o Mattera, 417 E. 65th St., New York, N.Y. 10021. All reference is to issue #1; a second issue has just appeared. See Peter Rachleff's review of *Zerowork* in *Fifth Estate*, Nov., 1976. A very similar perspective can be found in *Les ouvriers contre l'Etat, refus du travail* (Martin Andler, B.P. 42.06, 75261, Paris Cedex 6). Also see Robert Cooperstein, *The Crisis of the Gross National Spectacle* (P.O. Box 950,

Berkeley, Ca.). Glyn and Sutcliffe's book is discussed by Yaffe in "The Crisis of Profitability: a Critique of the Glyn-Sutcliffe Thesis," *New Left Review*, #80, 1973.

3. Only later to break with Marxism.

4. Nevertheless, Korsch was quite critical of crisis theorists like Mattick's mentor, Henryk Grossman.

5. The rate of exploitation is the ratio of surplus-value to variable capital.

6. *Zerowork*, #1, pp. 2-6

7. *Ibid.*, p. 63.

8. In response, it could be argued that Yaffe presents the rise in unproductive expenditures as an "objective" economic development, following Mattick, but that in fact the rise in unproductive expenditures has occurred at least in part because

of past, present or potential working class struggle. The rise in social services and the increase in state production have occurred because the working class won through struggle the principle of full employment and basic social welfare. As Yaffe himself says, the main purpose of social services is to maintain social stability. "Unproductive expenditures," then, in large part, are the way that class struggle is obscured as a causative factor and becomes an "objective" economic category.

9. Cf. for example, Brecher and Costello, *Common Sense for Hard Times*, 1976.

10. Here the distinction and relationship between two meanings of "productivity" is important. For Marx, increasing productivity means increasing the product of a given amount of labor; for bourgeois economists it means increasing the product of a given amount of labor-time ("output per man-hour"). The importance of this is that the bourgeois concept does not distinguish between increases in output per man-hour due to improved technology and those due to speedup. In the 60's and 70's, generally speaking, the lag in productivity in the marxian sense has led capitalists to try to increase output per man-hour by intensifying labor, i.e. by getting more labor out of each unit of labor-time. Often the two are interconnected, as when the introduction of assembly-line methods not only increases the productive power of labor but forces workers to quicken their pace of work. However, where and when technological development lags, as in British and Italian industry in the 60's and 70's, the emphasis is placed on intensification of labor. See discussion below.

12 Taylor himself claimed that scientific management would make "high wages and low labor costs...not only compatible, but...in the majority of cases mutually conditional." Quoted in Yaffe, op.cit., from F.W. Taylor, *Shop Management*, 1903, pp.21-2.

11. *Capital*, Vol. I, p. 763.

13. Alan Jones, "Britain on the Edge of the Abyss," *Inprecor*, no 40/41, Dec., 1975, pp. 36-8. I don't mean to reduce social struggles to the struggle over the rate of exploitation. Although May 1968 did break a wage freeze, this is hardly its outstanding characteristic; indeed, the effect of May 1968 on wages was the result of the recuperation of struggles which went far beyond the wage issue.

14. Paul Mattick, "Zur Marxschen Akkumulation—und Zudsmmenbruchstheorie", in *Ratekokorrespondenz*, 4, 1934, quoted in De Masi and Marramao, "Councils and State in Weimar Germany", *Telos* No. 28, 1976. By Marramao, also see "Theory of the Crisis and the Problem of Constitution", *Telos*, No. 26, 1976, which discusses matters relevant to the issue at hand.

15. Paul Mattick, "Preface" to Henryk Grossman, *Marx, L'economie politique classique et le probleme de la dynamique*, Editions Champ Libre, 1975, pp. 24-5.

16. Geoffrey Kay, "The Falling Rate of Profit, Unemployment and Crisis", *Critique* no. 6, 1976, p. 75. In this article Kay sets out to discredit the theory of the falling rate of profit. I

should explain that I am neither convinced of the truth of all Marx's economic theories, e.g., the theory of the falling rate of profit, nor am I an opponent of those theories. I am concerned here not primarily with determining whether one or another theory of crisis is true or false but with comparing different approaches to the present historical conjuncture. I have no pretensions to be offering definitive conclusions.

Besides Kay's, another interesting critique of the theory of the falling rate of profit is Geoff Hodgson's: "The Theory of the Falling Rate of Profit", *New Left Review* #84, March-April, 1974. A group which defends the theory and economic perspectives close to Mattick's, is: Communist Workers Organization (address correspondence to: C.W.O., c/o 21 Durham St., Pelaw, Gateshead, Tyne and Wear, NE10 OXS, England).

In Geoffrey Kay's discussion of Yaffee, he suggests that the intellectual attractiveness of the classical marxian argument is reason to be skeptical of it. The same could be said of the political attractiveness of the view that the working class imposes the crisis. It makes the working class appear as powerful as we would like it to be. One political argument in favor of Mattick is that his view can be used in opposition to ruling class arguments that all will benefit in the long run if workers tighten their belts and work harder and give the capitalists a chance to restructure. For Mattick, such measures don't lead back to "Go"; capital is irretrievably in the "Jail" of low profitability. Even if workers' sacrifice kept things going for another cycle of accumulation, capitalism's problems would inevitably reappear and worsen.

17. J.B. Proctor and R. Proctor, "Capitalist Development, Class Struggle and Crisis in Italy, 1945-1975", *Monthly Review*, Vol. 27, no. 8, Jan., 1976, pp. 24-31.

18. Theleme Anarres, "Notes on Italy", *Solidarity*, vol. 8, no. 4, pp. 14-16.

19. Even this formulation is debatable. An article in *New Left Review* argues: "Neither the general rate of inflation (until 1971), nor the rate of increase in strikes was exceptional in the international terms, but the slow growth in productivity, real incomes and investment was. It was this weakness, the comparative weakness of British capital, not the relative strength of British working class, that constituted the real crisis point. . . . It is necessary to stress this (in opposition to) Glyn and Sutcliffe". *Class Struggle and the Heath Government*, *NLR*, Vol. 1973, p.27.

20. Richard Hyman, "Industrial Conflict and the Political Economy: Trends of the Sixties and Prospects for the Seventies", *The Social Register*, 1973, p. 112.

21. *Business Week*, Sept. 22, 1975, p. 96.

22. *The London Times*, Sept. 30, 1976.

23. Jon Steinberg, "Why a few dissidents are frightening leaders in the West as well as the East", *Seven Days*, vol. 1, no. 3, p. 10.

24. For an account of recent developments in Britain, see my article, "The Crisis of Wage Labor in Britain", in *Now and After* #2 (P.O. Box 1587, San Francisco, Ca.)

25. Karl Korsch, *Three Essays on Marxism*, Pluto Press, pp. 65-6

Disappearance of the family fortune

by Bruce Elwell

One morning in 1937, Len dropped a forty quart jug of milk on one of his feet, and thought nothing more about it as he went about his chores. When he went in for the evening meal, they had to cut the boot off. Leather, manure, work sock, and what had been a foot were composting away. Gangrene; death in a couple of days — diabetes plus the generalized insensitivity assured that much.

Sarah didn't pass away for another sixteen years, well after Ruth had got her Chevy. Ora, who'd always followed her mother around, didn't have much to live for then . . . and followed suit more or less quickly. Ruth, who had never married — although there were stories, and who even drank occasionally — was gone soon thereafter.

Thurman sat in his living room after retiring from forty-four years in the mill. He always insisted on wearing white shirts, and flat straw hats on his mostly bald head when he went out. And always tight black (coal-tar dyed) socks. One day, then, gangrene, from a toenail clipped to the quick or perhaps a corn rubbed the wrong way. Very soon the removal of a toe; then a foot; a leg; the other leg; still gangrene; finally cancer, the doctor said, and a terrible heart, which stopped soon enough. 1888-1960, R.I.P. His shoes (wing tips and a pair of white bucks) were passed on to a grandson with equally small feet.

Leon passed soon thereafter, mourned by none in the family outside of his direct issue. Roscoe was alone on the farm after Ruth's death. He got rid of the remaining cows (there was just no living in it anymore, certainly not alone), lived off renting fields and some small savings. He died in 1962. Cleaning out the house for sale, there was found a brand new .22 snub-nosed revolver and a few bullets; in the end there wasn't the energy to use them. Also a barrel, containing boxes and boxes of sugar hoarded during World War II. They should have played a "Blue Yodel" and "The Big Rock Candy Mountain" at the funeral; a more traditional Congregational fare was served.

The farm then passed to the nearest neighbors.

These are threads, very real and very strong that choke off what was said in the history and civic classes about Yankee enterprise and New England town meetings, dark cords that strangle the newspaper editors and ministers carrying on about self-sustaining farms and the good life in the fields; about what made this country great, son; about how simple and natural things used to be, before the war, or before The War. I'm really sorry you feel that way, you still feel that way, dad. Would you like to borrow my knife. You see, you're right: the war, or the War or the War did change everything. Some of the cords are nylon now.

Jonathan, the first recorded in the direct male line, appears in the Barnstable, Massachusetts records as a saloon keep in 1790. A saloon keep was an important person in the community then, second only in secular importance to the lawyer. An important person, but lowlife all the same. A son, born in 1775, christened George, was lost at sea in 1810; his widow Mehitabel survived him by forty-two years and never remarried. The reasons for this last fact are a matter for speculation, none being given among researched geneologies and none having survived in family folklore.

A son, also called George, was born a few months after the death of his father. This second George and his wife Nancy acquired land in West Gorham in southern Maine — 100 acres, 38 eventually cleared.

George lived on, patriarch of the farm until 1895, surviving Nancy by twelve years. At least as an old man, he positively loathed children, verbally abusing and beating them whenever he could. As an old man himself, his grandson Thurman (who had been seven years old when the tyrant died) still talked in horror of this grandfather who sought out children to beat them. Thurman was the second-born child and son of Len and Sarah. Ora, the third child and eldest of the two daughters, was what everyone called slow, or, in worse taste, feeble-minded. Perhaps as a result of Sarah having had German measles during pregnancy, although since the connection between the two was not then known, no evidence exists; perhaps for more horrible reasons still.

These people raised dairy cattle, at most fifteen head. The cleared acreage was devoted to pasture, hay fields and corn-fields (mostly for silage). A few vegetables were grown, really very few, and potatoes for winter. Some wood was sold to the sawmill a few miles away, over by the church and the graveyard. The milk was not peddled directly to townspeople, even at the turn of the century. They made their own butter, and always salted it, but otherwise very little milk was used on the farm. It was sold to a commercial dairy in Portland, some twenty miles distant. Rural electrification did not come to that area until well into the 20's: no electric milking machines or milk coolers before that. The morning milking started before dawn; much of the year it was dark again for the evening milking. Strained into forty-quart cans, the milk was stored on ice which had been cut from the pond in winter and put up with sawdust or hay in the icehouse.

A ceaseless labor performed by all able-bodied beings and a team of horses — plus isolation — means and breeds distortion. White flour and white sugar were, on the farm and seventy-five years ago, central to the diet. Sarah and Len and all five kids

proved to be diabetic: the condition was referred to as sugar diabetes or just sugar: *they had sugar*, it was said. Thurman drank his coffee in a huge cup, strong coffee with many teaspoons of sugar added, the cup then filled with inches of condensed milk (the tinned evaporated milk which has been sweetened along the way). Len was plain and lean and grizzled; Sarah and all the kids tended toward obesity.

A couple miles away was the corn shop, a cannery which had been there about as long as the family had been the area. Every summer, during the sweet corn season, every able-bodied woman in the area was hired to work there, canning creamed corn and some wild blueberries picked by the kids. For over ten months out of every year that ramshackle structure was unused. Sarah looked forward to working in the corn shop each year; it was a social life that otherwise didn't exist much beyond church on Sundays and going into Gorham village to buy provisions every week or two. Ruth, the fourth child, also worked there as a young woman. Ora, being feeble-minded, stayed home.

The neighboring menfolk in the fields (at their fences), discussing farming matters, gossiped and boasted. During the winters, families gathered on Saturday nights at one house or another for the men to play checkers (several games going at once, no money riding on them), the women to chat and darn socks and the younger kids to sleep on the floor. Masons were the political power in the townships, and these men were not Masons. The Grange was in the area, attempting a limited organization of the farmers' interests, but these people were not Grangers. There was hardly a book in the farmhouse.

Around the time of the Great War, both Thurman and his elder brother Leon married and got jobs in the S.D. Warren paper mill in the Cumberland Mills section of Westbrook. The pay was nine dollars a week, and stayed around that into the Great Depression, but Thurman managed to have built a six-room house; it was during the 20's, and goods were still cheaper than labor. Roscoe, youngest of the sons and the only one left on the farm, came down on weekends with the team of horses and the scoop to dig the cellar.

Ruth the younger daughter, also came to work at S.D. Warren; during the winters, when commuting from the farm often proved impossible, she boarded with Thurman's family. (Later in life she bought the farm's first car.) For them, the relationship established with the land had always been a capital, not a natural, one. Now it was a capital relationship that lured the children away. A few miles away. Papermaking was becoming big business, and the industry was in the process of converting from a dependence on rags (of which there was a relatively limited supply). Better living through chemistry has been coming for a long time. Warren Lustrecoat was on its way to a leading position in the high gloss market, and the little houses in Presumpscot River Valley between the mill and Casco Bay were on their way to turning black from the sulphur compound fumes rising off the river.

In Gorham village, there was an Academy, and by the nineteenth century, a Normal School. By the 50's the Normal School had become a four-year State Teachers College and still more recently a part of the University of Maine, Portland-Gorham. Not far from the College is the cemetery which has served Gorham since its name was changed from New Naragansett and the fort was abandoned when the last native Abnakis were exterminated and/or driven off. For many years there was a much larger population in the graveyard than there was of permanent (non-student) residents in the village proper. One particularly rainy spring in the late 50's, a bunch of eight-year olds ran up to a student teacher they knew, asking that she

come with them — the rains had opened up a grave in the South Street cemetery.

She arrived just in time to extract a child who was in the process of climbing down into the open crypt. It was a Civil War grave, containing four skeletons clothed in decomposed Union Army uniforms; there were no coffins, only six giant stone slabs, forming a large box, in which the stiff had been laid side by side. The top stone had slid away, revealing three skeletons in repose and a fourth over the others, stretching up the wall, its fingers gripping the top edge of the side stone.

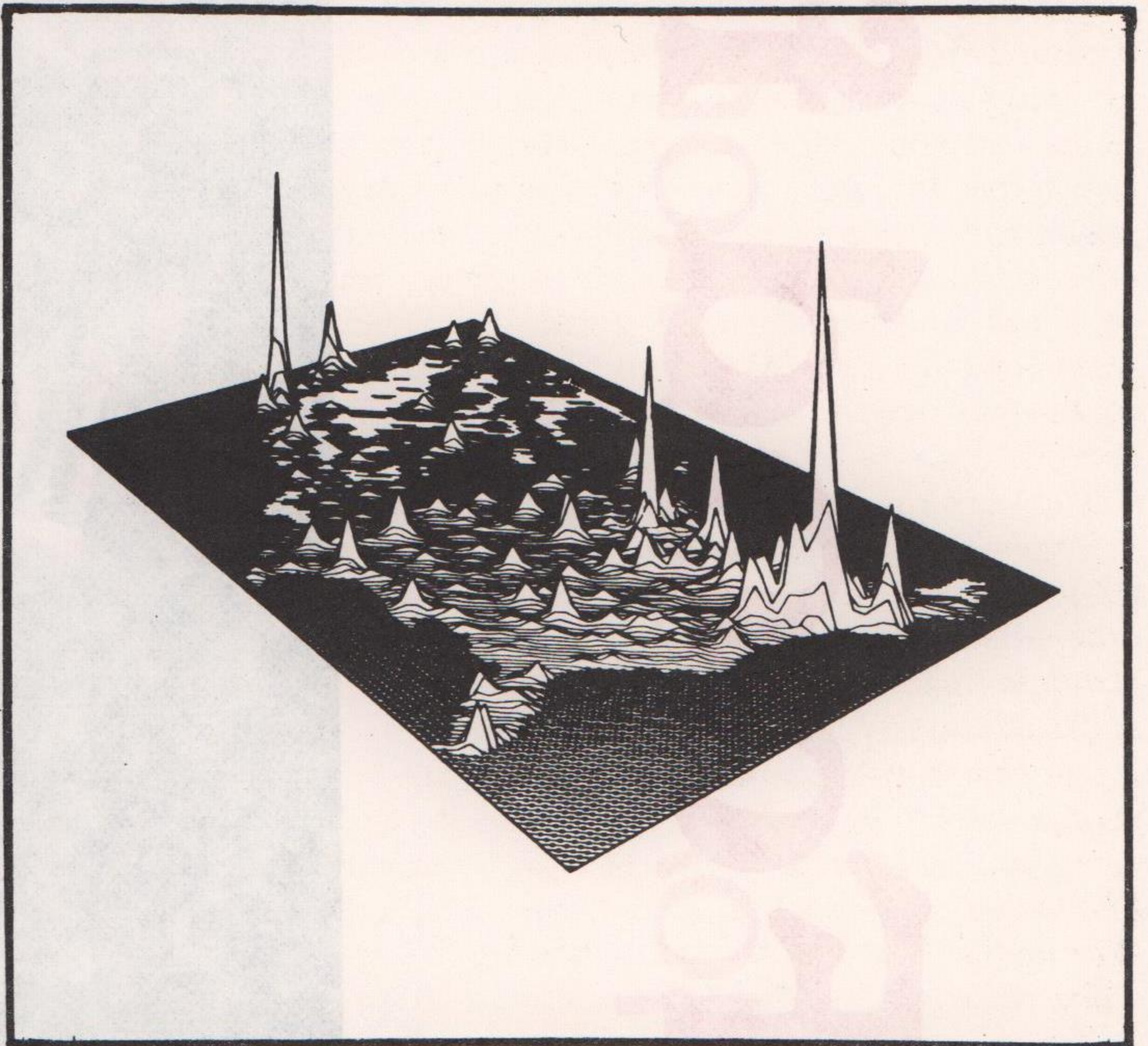
Doctors say this was a reasonably common occurrence — the burying of Civil War soldiers whose hearts had stopped but who were revived in the dank earth. How many in the rural hell-on-earth of 19th century America did not so come up short, at least for a moment, and realize they were buried alive?

II

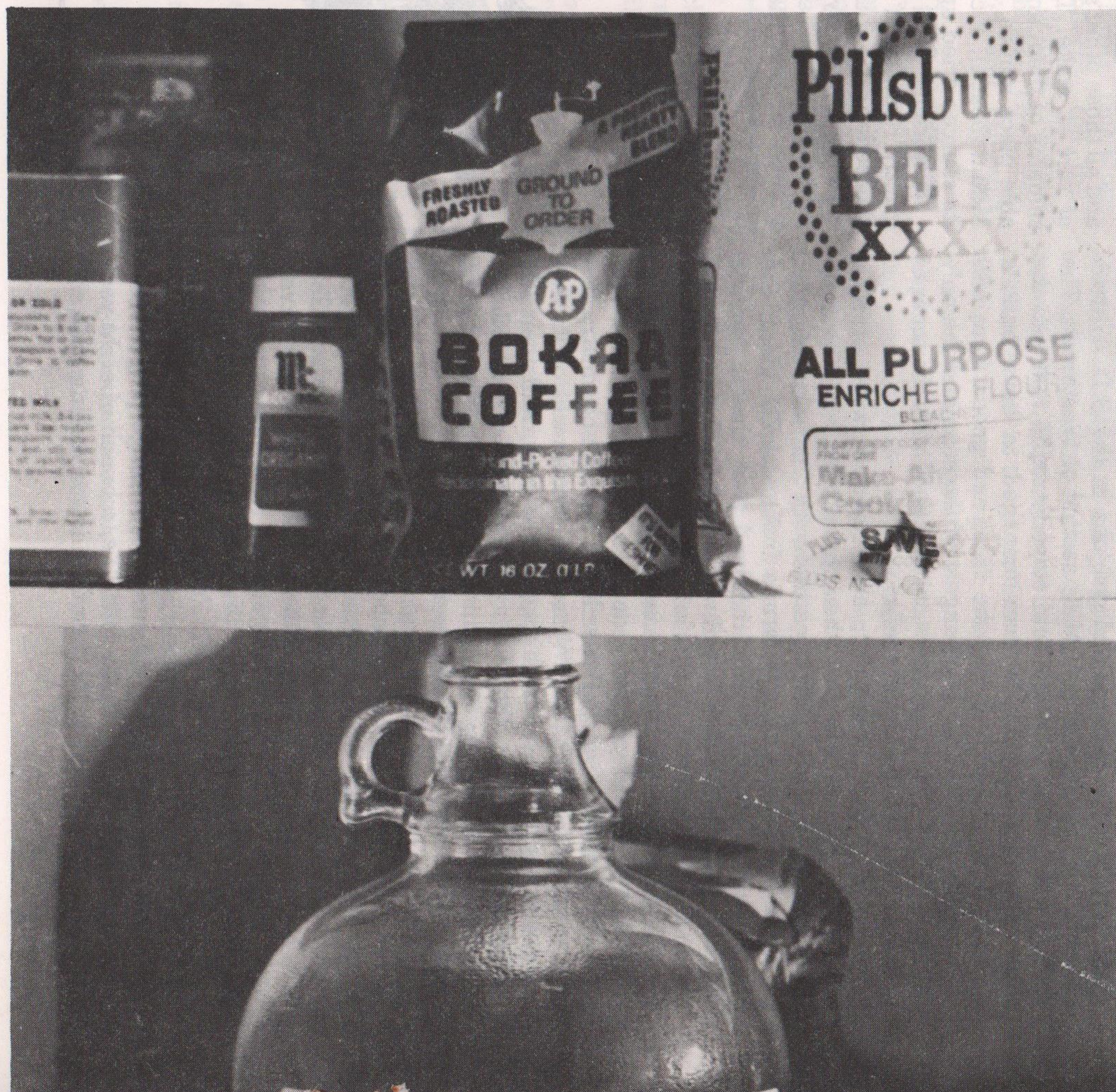
Slightly over my right shoulder, there burns the question: have matters gotten worse? It is there like the "perpetual" gas flames in modern cemeteries, like the Gideon Bible in the hotel room. The very question is a humiliation; given the weight of available evidence. Yes, things have gotten worse. Paranoid delusion diffuses, even as it gains greater (and grander) specificity. Some wonder if we are all turning into calcium propionate, and a few are already convinced of it. There can be no ignoring that capital is in crisis all the way from the family fight coming home from the beach to the changes in the upper stratosphere.

A damned thorough job was done, eradicating the Abnakis and all those other archaic cultures. It took time; there was a lot of turf at stake. These were land-based communities; what remains of them are a few fruits and vegetables and innumerable place names . . . Chicago, popcorn, Utah, pumpkin pie, Miami (beach), succotash, the Adirondacks. Blood flowed until its sources dried up.

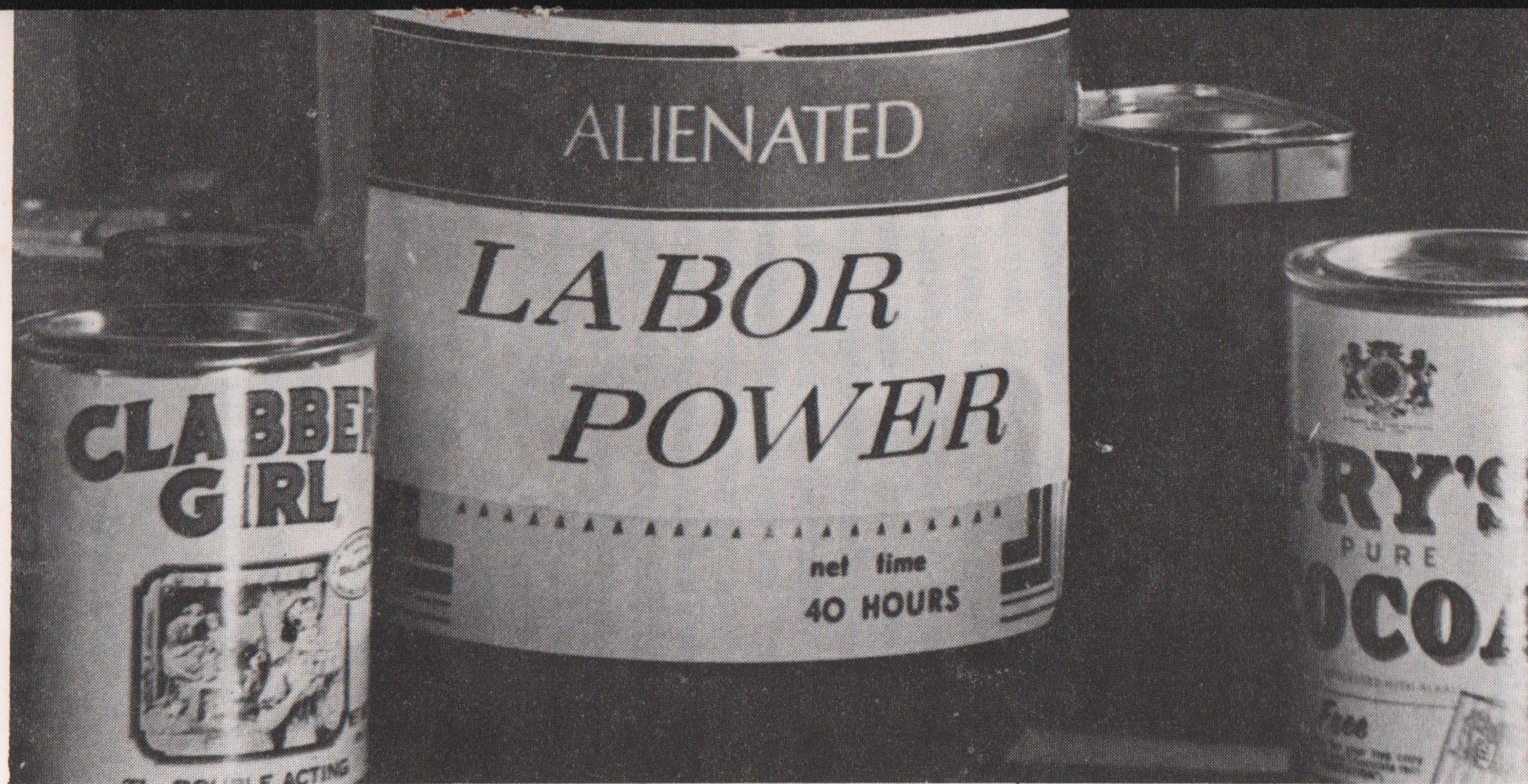
Historians, good and bad, are slowly coming to catalogue the grizzly realities of the small farm and small town life which succeeded the exterminated native community. There is nothing, absolutely nothing to be nostalgic about. The apples tasted better; butter was butter, and one choked, screamed or sobbed for less than apparent reasons. Michael Lesy, in his



Food for Thought



It is only when labor-power takes on the form of a commodity belonging to wage workers that all the other products of labor also take on the commodity form. A commodity is a mysterious thing because in it the social character of people's labor appears to them as an objective quality stamped upon the products of that labor. It is mysterious because the relation of the producers to the sum total of their own labor is



no longer visible to them as a relation between themselves, but instead as a relation between their products. A definite social relation between people takes on the fantasy form of a relation between things.

If you don't sell your life,
How can you buy back your survival?

conclusions to *Wisconsin Death Trip*,* maintains that, caught between the fluctuations of the market economy and the ravages of epidemic disease, the rural family reproduced two character types: success brought with it obsessive-compulsive behavior, and failure begat paranoia. The family as business, as competitive unit in the marketplace, was doomed even as it accomplished primitive accumulation and the capitalization of the land. In the market, one can never possess enough information, and ignorance of the law is no excuse. The organization of limited knowledge, of relative stupidity, became soon enough the production and maintenance of insanity.

Some, who were not driven to the factories and cities, sought to keep the pillage of the market and the ravages of nature at bay through voluntary enlargement of the survival unit, through the practice of what has come to be known as utopian socialism. Nineteenth century America was dotted with such communities. And many of them, given the pooling of capital and labor, were relatively successful compared to their neighbors on the family farms. The Shakers, born in the religious hysteria of an eighteenth century British woman, had prosperous community farms involving thousands of people scattered over the northeastern U.S. by the mid-1800's. They understood herbalism and animal husbandry as few others did; they were the first to package and market seeds and first to can and market fruits and vegetables; their grains and dried fruits were esteemed for their quality; and, of course, there was the furniture that bears their name.

The family would have torn this market prosperity to pieces, as it did in so many other social experiments. But the Shakers disallowed all sexual liaison, the women and the men being quartered in separate dormitories and children being taken in as orphans from the neighboring towns and farms. This erotic sublimation worked because, beyond their collective toil, they danced and sang. To turn, to turn shall be our delight. Not quite shake it, baby, shake it, but workable nonetheless. Of course, they were eventually outrun by the market and capitalist technology.

If you drive from Gorham around Sebago Lake to Gray and head from there toward Poland Springs, you will pass Sabbath-day Lake and soon enough come to the one remaining "active" Shaker community. You can count the survivors on one hand, and today survival is made through guided tours and a gift shop. Mother Anne, the founder, had prophesied that they would grow and prosper and then shrink; when they reached again the number of the original coterie, the Millennium would be upon us. That happened some time back. Close, Mother Anne, but no cigar . . . As you drive back toward Gray, you will pass a State Game Preserve wherein you will find one Maine moose; she, too survives off the tourist trade.

As they dwindled, as their capital and labor power shrank, the Shakers — just like their more "normal" neighbors — sold off parcels of land, eventually whole community tracts. Sometimes other farms resulted from the sales and foreclosures; sometimes the land went "wild" again awaiting its future exploitations by mineral, lumbering or power interests; often small parcels were broken off for housing plain and simple — maybe some vegetables, flowers, a dog and the kids, but no real cash crop. Outside jobs supported the family, even as they circumscribed it.

The urbanists are wrong to the man when they describe the particular suburban development which has covered North America as "urban sprawl", the spread of city over the countryside. In psychogeographic terms, in human terms, exactly the opposite has happened. It is the isolation and

*Lesy, Michael, *Wisconsin Death Trip*, New York, Random House. 1973.

despair of the petty bourgeois countryside which has constricted around the cities and industrial areas and which, to the south and west, has coagulated out of almost nothing. And it is the automobile, vehicle par excellence of familial isolation, which carried the intensification of this development. Caught between the Great Depression and a "natural" devastation caused in large part by one-crop farming, hundreds of thousands of families packed themselves into cars and struck off for greener, more golden lands: the stuff "concerned" movies and novels are made of; and for eventual war industry jobs and suburban bungalows: William Bendix and life of Riley. Depression and wars and even "prosperity" all served to kick and pull them off the farms. At the first possible chance (and often through repeated failure) most would attempt to reconstitute themselves on smaller and smaller plots of ground, over and against their effective proletarianization. By the 50's, this was a subsidized affair: VA and FHA loans.

In Maine dairying more or less collapsed after World War II; and from farm to farm an attempt was made to ride out the "prosperity" by switching to chickens — sometimes layers, more often broilers. It was a franchise deal. Giant poultry companies provided the chicks; you delivered the eggs or scrawny birds on contract. A barn that housed ten Holsteins or Guernseys could house tens, even hundreds of thousands of hens. There were automatic feeders and incubators. Antibiotics were in the feed you bought; for a while it also contained, amphetamines to speed the birds up. (This practice was largely discontinued when the birds started dying of heart attacks whenever there was a sudden noise; one turkey farm was entirely wiped out by a sonic boom.) This implied a lot of electrical wiring in some very old barns; you shut the door and the light stayed on . . . twenty-four hours a day. Fires continued to be the fear. The man who owned the largest single structure chicken house in the state (six stories, millions of birds) was convinced that someone was stealing his eggs. He was German, a post-war immigrant . . . One night he "caught" two employees and killed one of them with a shotgun. The charge was manslaughter, and they ran special phone lines into the state prison so he could continue to run his business.

In the suburbs it is the kids — be they five weeks or twenty-five years old — who get policed, harassed, victimized and most thoroughly ripped off. Just as the vagrant is treated as automatic threat in the rural backwaters, so is it that in the modern suburbs those whose time is *not occupied* are seen to threaten the non-productive pseudo-rural existence. And there amidst the dope busts and banal familial insanities, shopping malls and counseling, are reborn visions and projects of a return to "wilder" land and an extended, "perfected" family. And now there are the dreary immiserated "communes" dotting the countryside, the hippy farms and ashrams and guru agribusinesses. No doubt at some abstracted heart of this sewer there stands individual desire to live better, to live more — to change life. But this desire is born entwined with (1) the need of capital to evacuate all human needs in the rush to squeeze value out of all that lives or could possibly sustain life, to re-ruralize existence whenever and wherever the move turns a profit, and (2) the particular highly neurotic and often psychotic character structures which give birth to and reactively shape the visions and projects.

Today the Shakers — those few remaining old women gathered in New Gloucester, Maine — could no doubt find many, young and old, who either are or feel themselves to be orphans, who would love to be taken into a coed monastic existence with tradition galore. They don't do it, probably having enough contact with reality to fear that after they were dead

(and that will be soon) power struggles and ideological schisms would erupt. Some upstart Elder with a drug-fried brain would have a vision calling for sexual libertinage and clear sights on the real property and its wealth. Through the life of capital the communes and intentional communities today are by and large related to nineteenth century utopias (or even peasant millennial movements of the late Middle Ages) in much the same way senility in the individual resembles the exaggerations of childhood.

If it is Bonapartism that stalks the theater of global politics, it is surely countless Little Caesarisms which haunt the recesses of life. Cattle rustling is on the increase. The stench of decaying religiosity is being repackaged and marketed by all the rackets, big and small. Patent medicine cure-alls for modern conditions complete with ludicrous home remedies. And everywhere the preparations for war, civil or not at all. Strip mining so excites popular opposition not so much because of the objective insanity of the scale planned, but more because it's such a modern metaphor for what capital is doing to life. Way back in 1965, before the inflationary "takeoff" of the past few years, it

was the proletarians of the bungalows of Watts who announced, and in no uncertain terms, the return of the crisis of capital. The spectre of communism, thankfully, haunts everything.

The black flies are terrible, and the trout aren't biting anyway. We will go away from all this. Follow the smells . . . yes, they lead in my direction. The trees are bending slightly to the left as we pass. No, we must step over the bodies. It's all humus soon. And tree ears. You do remember the time, don't you, when I turned to you rather drunkenly and asked with mock profundity, "What, my dear, is beyond value?" "We are," you responded in kind. Well, sometimes we are or feel ourselves to be, but we must become so all the time. We just must. I know you're getting hungry; and the bark of that damned hound is getting louder, closer. Stick out your thumb; I declare this a road out of here.

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Critique of the Situationist International

TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION TO "CRITIQUE OF THE S.I."

This text was written as a chapter of a much longer work, as yet unpublished, which is essentially a critical history of revolutionary theory and ideology, beginning with the work of Marx. The chapter's subject, the Situationist International (S.I.) existed in Europe (and briefly the U.S.) between 1957 and 1971. Particularly since 1968—which year marked its essential disintegration—the S.I. has exerted a profound influence on the post-war generation of revolutionaries in Europe. This influence, as the following text indicates, has been far from purely beneficial. Certainly the work of the S.I. has become known in the U.S. largely through its epigones, the 'pro-situ' groups which flourished briefly in New York and on the West Coast during the early '70's. Such groups continue to exist and to come into being, here and in Europe. However, the older ones are vitiated of almost all content and significance by their persistent attachment to the most superficial and ideological aspects of the S.I. The newer ones tend either to disintegrate very rapidly or else evolve towards a communist perspective—often, regrettably, without retaining some of the best aspects of the S.I.'s thought which are absent from more orthodox revolutionary perspectives. By these I mean first of all the S.I.'s visionary quality, its attempt to bring the revolutionary project up to date with the post-war development of productive forces such as telecommunications, electronic data processing and automation. I also mean the S.I.'s restoration to this project of the critique of alienation and the concern with the freeing of individual powers and needs which were so prominent in the work of Marx and other communists during the mid-nineteenth century. These aspects were reflected in the S.I.'s assaults on art and urbanism, and in its persistent assertion of the revolution as inaugurating a new way of life, a complete transformation of human activity, as well as a new mode of material production.

In the meantime, some original texts of the S.I., such as Debord's *Society of the Spectacle* and Vaneigem's *Treatise on Living for the Use of the Young Generation*, have achieved a limited U.S. circulation as privately-printed editions, often very badly translated. In the last two years a not particularly representative sampling of the S.I.'s French-language journal (*Internationale Situationniste*) has appeared in English under the title of *Leaving the Twentieth Century*, poorly rendered and with an execrable commentary by an ex-member of the British section of the S.I. In spite of this dissemination, the S.I.'s contributions have either been ignored or recuperated by the Left, which was briefly forced to acknowledge its existence during the late sixties because of its importance in the most coherent and aggressive wing of the French student movement. (This judgement regrettably also applies to most U.S. anarchists and "libertarian socialists" who denounce the S.I.'s "abstractness" while remaining trapped in a precisely abstract,

because superficial, critique of capitalism and the Left. For all its faults, the S.I. at least tried to grasp the laws of motion of these phenomena; and without such a grasp, "libertarianism" leads easily back into the stifling embrace of social-democracy.)

The significance of the text which follows for U.S. readers lies not only in the acuteness of its criticism of situationist theory and practice, but also in the historical context which it provides for the S.I., the tracing of the influences which formed and deformed it. The S.I., like any other historical phenomenon, did not appear in a vacuum. An appreciation of the S.I.'s much-vaunted originality is here balanced by a critical revelation of the currents, notably *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, which were decisive in its evolution—and conversely, of other currents, such as the classical "Italian" communist Left, which it ignored to its own disadvantage. In fact, in the book of which this text forms a chapter, the critique of the S.I. is preceded by analyses of both *S ou B* and the Italian Left. Since I have not seen these two chapters, I cannot provide a summary of their content here. However I will attempt to provide from my own knowledge and viewpoint a brief introduction to both currents.

Socialisme ou Barbarie was a journal started by a small group of militants who broke with mainstream Trotskyism shortly after World War II. The grounds for this break were several. Firstly, there was the fact that the post-war economic crisis, and the war itself, had failed to provoke the revolutionary upheaval predicted by Trotsky. Secondly, there was the situation of the Soviet Union, where the bureaucracy had survived and had consolidated itself without the country having reverted to private capitalism. This also ran counter to Trotsky's predictions—as did the extension of Soviet-style bureaucratic rule to the rest of Eastern Europe. Thirdly, there was the miserable internal life of the so-called "Fourth International" which by now constituted a mini-bureaucracy of its own, torn by sectarian rivalry and also thoroughly repressive.

From this practical and historical experience, *S ou B* commenced a profound questioning of "marxism"—that is, of the ideology which runs through the works of Kautsky, Lenin and Trotsky, appears as a caricature in the writings of Stalin and his hacks, and has part of its origin in the late work of Engels. Out of this questioning, *S ou B*'s leading theoretician, Cornelius Castoriadis, writing under the pseudonyms first of Pierre Chaulieu and later of Paul Cardan, derived the following general conclusions:

- (i) that the Soviet Union must now be regarded as a form of exploitative society called state- or bureaucratic-capitalist;
- (ii) that in this the Soviet Union was only a more complete variant of a process that was common to the whole of capitalism, that of bureaucratization;
- (iii) that because of this the contradiction between propertyless and property-owners was being replaced by the contradiction between "order-givers and order-takers" [*dirigeants et exécutants*] and that the private bourgeoisie was itself

evolving via the concentration and centralization of capital into a bureaucratic class;

(iv) that the advanced stage this process had reached in the Soviet Union was largely the result of the Leninist-Bolshevik conception of the Party, which seizes State power from the bourgeoisie on behalf of the workers and thence necessarily evolves into a new ruling class;

(v) that capitalism as a whole had overcome its economic contradictions based on the tendency of the rate of profit to fall, and that therefore the contradiction between order-givers and order-takers had become the sole mainspring of revolution, whereby the workers would be driven to revolt and achieve **self-management** only by the intolerable boredom and powerlessness of their lives, and not by material deprivation.

This theory, which undoubtedly had the merit (not shared by Trotskyism since the War) of internal consistency, was strongly reinforced by the Hungarian uprising of 1956. Here, without the intervention of a Leninist "vanguard," workers' councils formed throughout the country in a matter of days and assumed the tasks of social management as well as those of armed resistance to the Russian invasion and the AVO military police. S ou B took the view that "...over the coming years, all significant questions will be condensed into one: Are you for or against the action and the program of the Hungarian workers?" (Castoriadis, "La Revolution proletarienne contre la bureaucratie," cited in Castoriadis, "The Hungarian Source," *Telos*, Fall 1976).

Here the views of S ou B converged sharply with those of the remaining theorists of the German communist Left, such as Anton Pannekoek, whose *Workers' Councils* (1940) had reached very similar conclusions some fifteen years earlier (although it must be said in Pannekoek's defense that he would have taken a much more critical view of the **program** of the Hungarian councils, which called for parliamentary democracy and workers' management of the **national** economy, than did S ou B). At any rate, out of these two currents came the ideology of councilism, which dominated virtually the entire theoretical corpus of the revolutionary minorities between 1945 and 1970. I will not here attempt a critique of councilism or S ou B; this has been done quite ably by Barrot himself in *Eclipse and Reemergence of the Communist Movement*, and also by other groups such as the International Communist Current. Suffice it

to say that Castoriadis went on from the conclusions outlined above to reject the whole of marxian theory (which he persisted in viewing through the distorting lenses of Kautsky and Lenin) and to re-found the revolutionary project entirely on the subjective discontent of workers, women, homosexuals, racial minorities, etc., who no longer form a class (the proletariat) opposed to the "order-givers" (capitalists and bureaucrats) but merely a mass of oppressed **individuals**. The revolution which they will carry out on this basis will be a matter of creating new organs of management which will federate and organize **commodity exchange** between themselves while supposedly "transforming" society. The similarity of these views to both American New Leftism of the SDS-Tom Hayden-Peoples' Bicentennial Commission variety and certain types of classical anarchism will be readily apparent: their disastrous political consequences will be even more so.

The "Italian Left" presents at first sight merely the thesis to which the radical anti-"marxism" of S ou B was the antithesis. Far from rejecting Lenin's theory of the Party, it has defended it more vigorously than almost anyone else. From its contemporary manifestations, notably the "International Communist Party" (ICP), it would seem to be the last word in sectarian Leninist dogmatism, distinguished from the more

hard-nosed varieties of Trotskyism only by its insistence on the capitalist nature of the USSR, China et al. This appearance, however, is deceptive. In order to understand the real significance of this current it is necessary first of all to understand its historical origins.

The "Italian Left" was born out of the revolutionary wave which swept Europe from 1917 to 1920. This places it in sharp contrast to both Trotskyism and S ou B, which came into being as attempts to comprehend and combat the **counterrevolution** which followed that wave. The "Left" began as a few hundred of the most resolute and clear-sighted members of the Italian Socialist party (PSI) who came together in response to their party's vacillations vis-a-vis the World War and the crisis of the workers' movement in general. They formed themselves into the "Abstentionist Communist Fraction" of the PSI around positions very similar to those of the German Left. These were basically that capitalism had entered a severe crisis in which the reformist tactics of the pre-war period would no longer work (particularly participation in electoral politics hence the label "Abstentionist") and in which revolution had become the order of the day. The Left's "abstentionism" at once set it apart from Lenin and the Bolsheviks, who attacked it as well as its German counterpart in the infamous pamphlet "**Left-Wing**" **Communism: An Infantile Disorder**. It was also distinguished from the Bolsheviks by its insistence, against Antonio Gramsci and the *Ordine Nuovo* faction, that the new communist party must be from the beginning constituted entirely of theoretically coherent militants who would make no concession to the backwardness of the rest of the class, and who would therefore make no alliances with the Social Democracy, whether Right, Center or Left. This also gave it a commonality with the German Left, which insisted (cf. Gorter's *Reply to Lenin*) that the proletariat was now alone in its struggle and could no longer rely on even temporary alliances with the peasantry and the petty bourgeoisie or with so-called "workers' parties" which repressed strikes and shot workers in the name of democratic Order. However, unlike the German Left, the Italian communists had no real critique of the labor unions, which (like orthodox leninists) they regarded as being merely badly led. Nor did they make any distinction, at least much of the time, between the party, the political organizations of the consciously revolutionary minority, and the class organs like workers' councils which according to the German Left's conceptions would actually hold power in the proletarian dictatorship. For the Italian Left, at least as it emerged from Mussolini's completion of the Italian counterrevolution, the organ of this dictatorship was the party and it alone.

But these crucial weaknesses aside, the Italian Left was distinguished from its German counterpart in positive ways as well. For one thing, it had a critique of democracy that was more sophisticated than that of the Germans who formed the KAPD. To be sure, this critique tended to be expressed in a rigid authoritarian centralism within the party as well as in a rejection of parliamentarism. But it did preserve the Italian Left from errors of the councilist type; as early as 1918 the Abstentionists were criticizing the *Ordine Nuovo* faction for its equation of socialism with workers' management. They insisted from the start that the goal of the communist movement was the **suppression of wage labor and commodity production**, and that this could only be done by destroying the separation between units of production as enterprises. This makes them virtually unique among the revolutionary tendencies of the period. Such a clear view of the communist program emerges only rarely in the work of the rest of the "lefts" (e.g. in Sylvia Pankhurst's 1920 critique of the newly-formed Communist Party of Ireland)

The Italian Left is thus revealed as a profoundly contradictory tendency, combining a rigorous and coherent grasp of marxian theory in the abstract, and a principled position on practical questions like parliamentarism and frontism, with an extreme voluntarism and substitutionism of the classic leninist variety. If the revolutionary wave had managed to advance further and establish a proletarian power in Germany, it is probable that the Italians would have overcome these confusions, just as the necessity of carrying out communist measures would have forced the German revolutionaries to abandon any vestiges of councilism and federalism. Instead, however, the majority of the European proletariat failed to break decisively with Social Democracy. Following the Bolshevik-assisted degeneration of the Comintern and the expulsion of the KAPD, the "Lefts" both German and Italian were reduced to tiny groups which attempted to maintain their theoretical coherence under the tremendous pressure of the counterrevolution. Here and there a few, like the French section of the international Communist Left around the journal *Bilan*, managed to preserve a considerable degree of clarity. Elsewhere the twin fetishisms of party and councils took hold. The elements of a theory which had never been fully united were further fragmented and turned into ideologies.

It was this wreckage that the S.I. confronted when it began its attempt to recover the legacy of the 1917-21 period. Under the circumstances it was perhaps understandable that the S.I. gravitated toward the councilist modernism of S ou B rather than attempting to penetrate the decidedly unattractive surface of the ICP or its by-products in order to mine them for the still-valuable elements of the Italian Left tradition. Ironically, it was only after the S.I. had already reached an advanced stage of decomposition in late 1968 that other tendencies began to emerge which reclaimed the best aspects of the Italian Left and attempted to synthesize them with the German Left's complementary contributions (e.g. *Revolution Internationale* and the journals *Le mouvement communiste* and *Negation*, both now defunct). By this time the S.I.'s theoretical inadequacies had themselves already merged into an ideology, "situationism," which prevented the Situationists from comprehending the very crisis they had predicted years earlier. This process and its further evolution are well documented by Barrot in his critique.

In conclusion, it must be said that I am by no means in complete agreement with everything Barrot says about the S.I. or even its veterans and successors such as Sanguinetti and Semprun. I particularly consider Vaneigem to have been underestimated. However I support the general argument of the critique—and most of its particular conclusions—wholeheartedly.

—L.M.

CRITIQUE OF THE SITUATIONIST INTERNATIONAL

by Jean Barrot

IDEOLOGY AND THE WAGE SYSTEM

Capitalism transforms life into the money necessary for living. One tends to do any particular thing towards an end other than that implied by the content of the activity. The logic of alienation: one is an other: the wage system makes one foreign to what one does, to what one is, to other people.

Now, human activity does not produce only goods and relationships, but also representations. Man is not *homo faber*: the reduction of human life to the economy (since taken

up by official marxism) dates from the enthronement of capital. All activity is symbolic: it creates at one and the same time, products and a vision of the world. The layout of a primitive village

"summarizes and assures the relations between Man and the universe, between society and the supernatural world, between the living and the dead." (Levi-Strauss)

The fetishism of commodities is merely the form taken by this symbolism in societies dominated by exchange.

As capital tends to produce everything as capital, to parcelize everything so as to recombine it with the help of market relations, it also makes of representation a specialized sector of production. Stripped of the means of their material existence, wage-workers are also stripped of the means of producing their ideas, which are produced by a specialized sector (whence the role of the "intellectuals," a term introduced in France by the *Manifesto of the (dreyfusite) Intellectuals*, 1898). The proletarian receives these representations (ideas, images, implicit associations, myths) as he receives from capital the other aspects of his life. Schematically speaking, the nineteenth century worker produced his ideas (even reactionary ones) at the cafe, the bar or the club, while today's worker sees his on television—a tendency which it would certainly be absurd to extrapolate to the point of reducing to it all of reality.

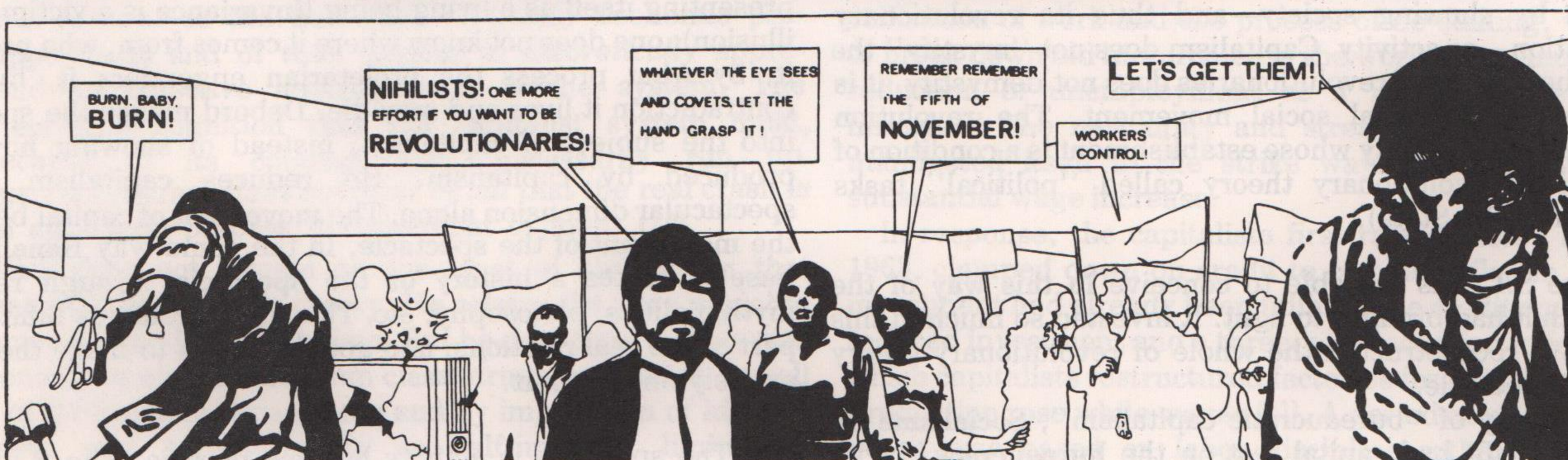
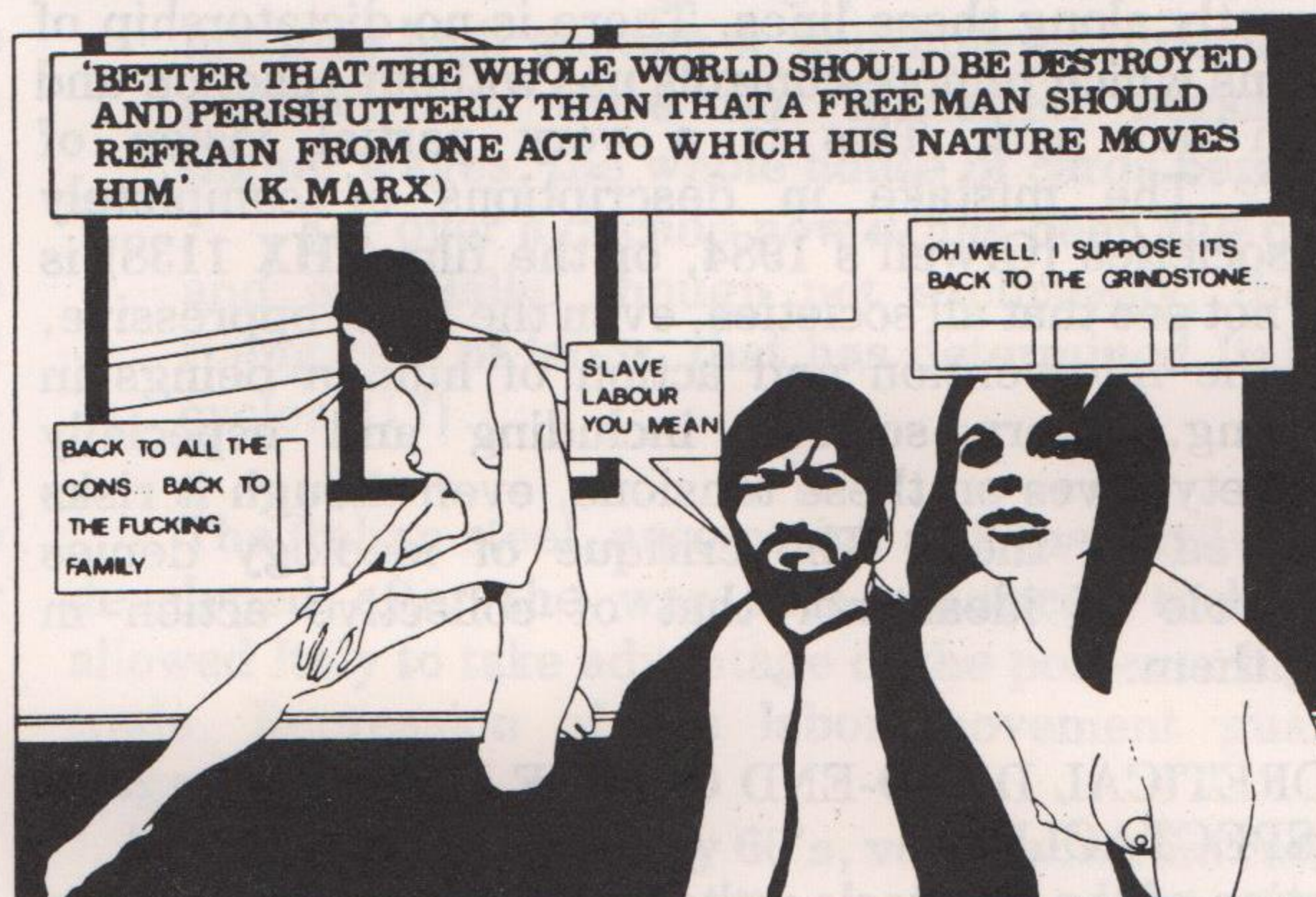
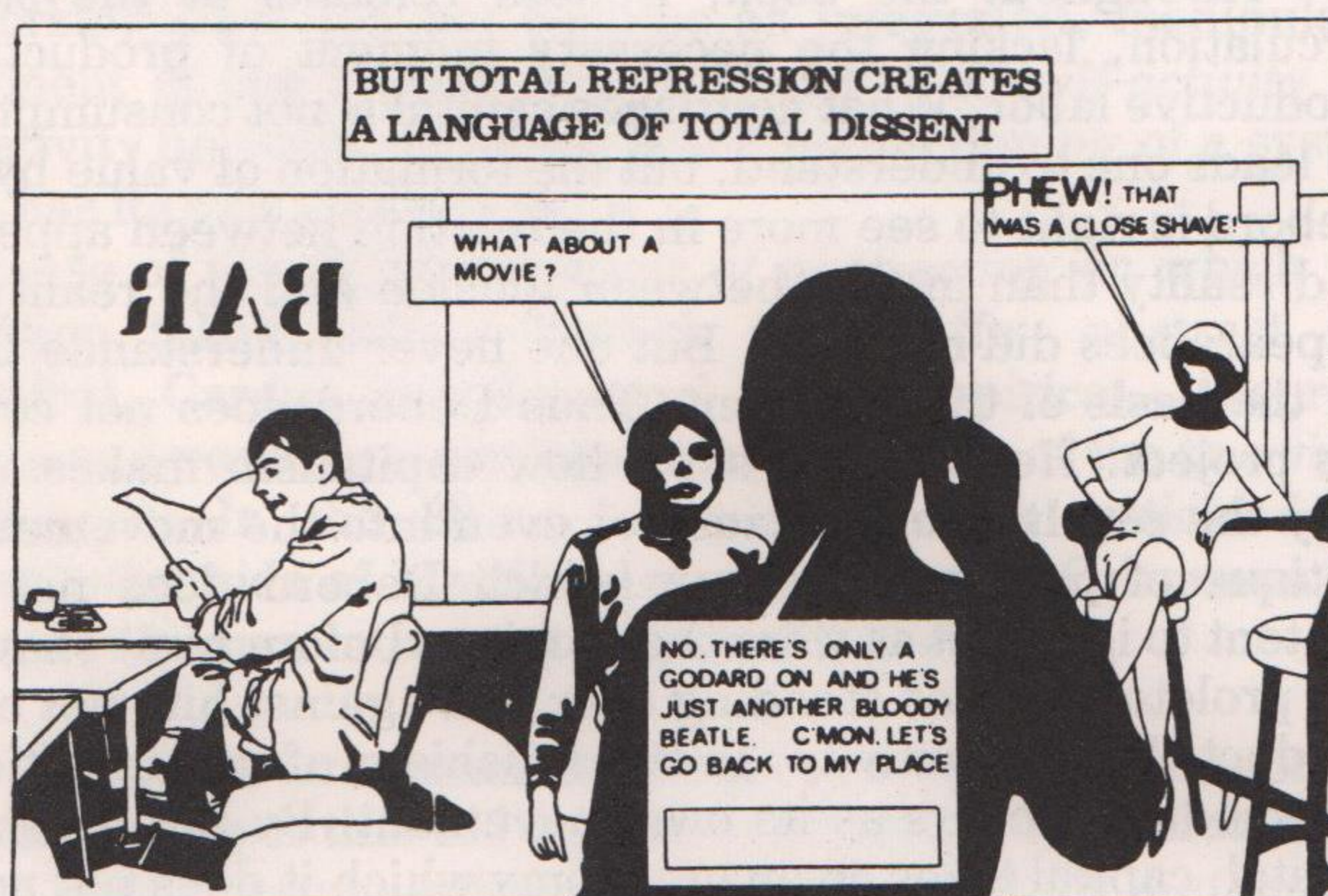
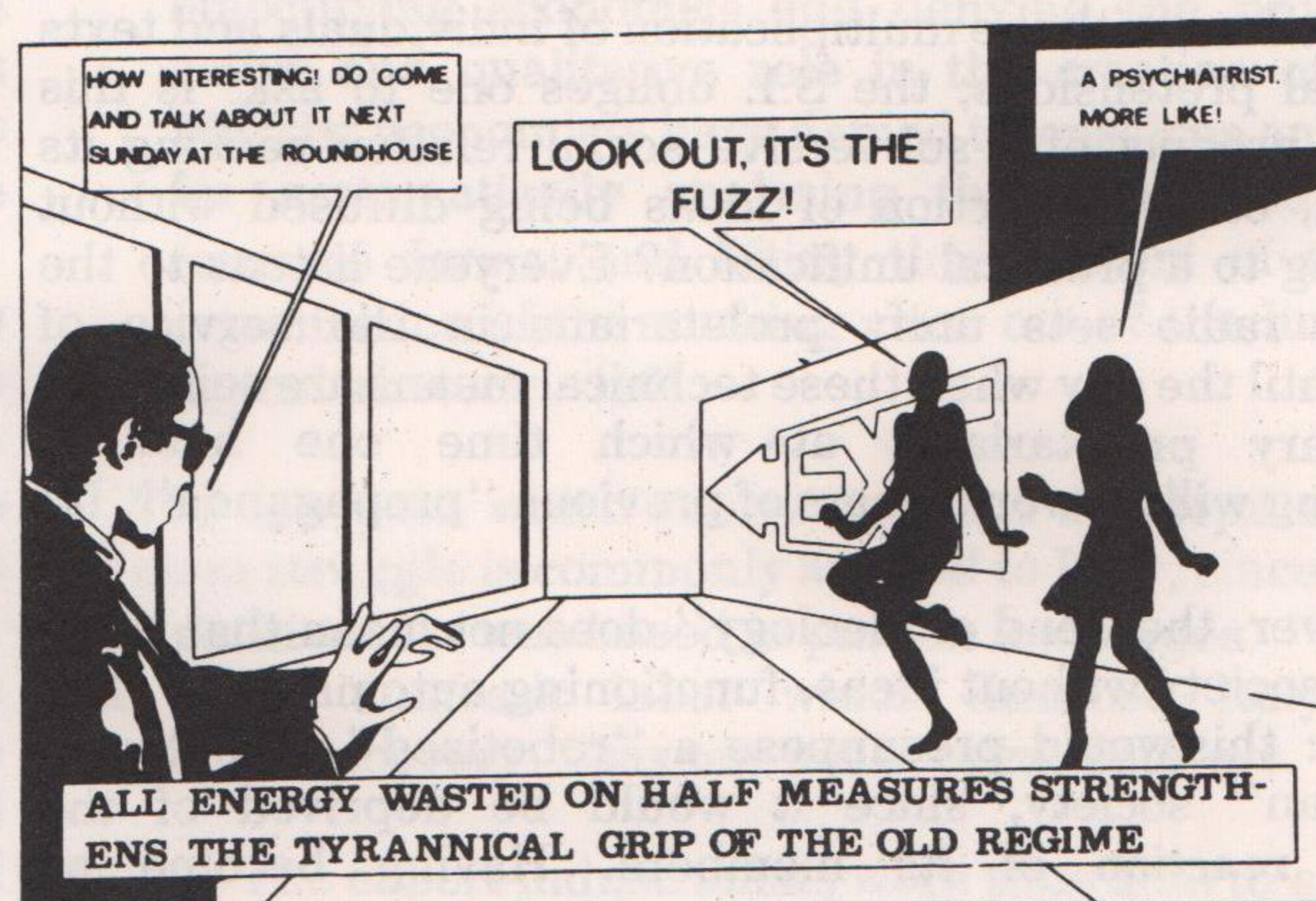
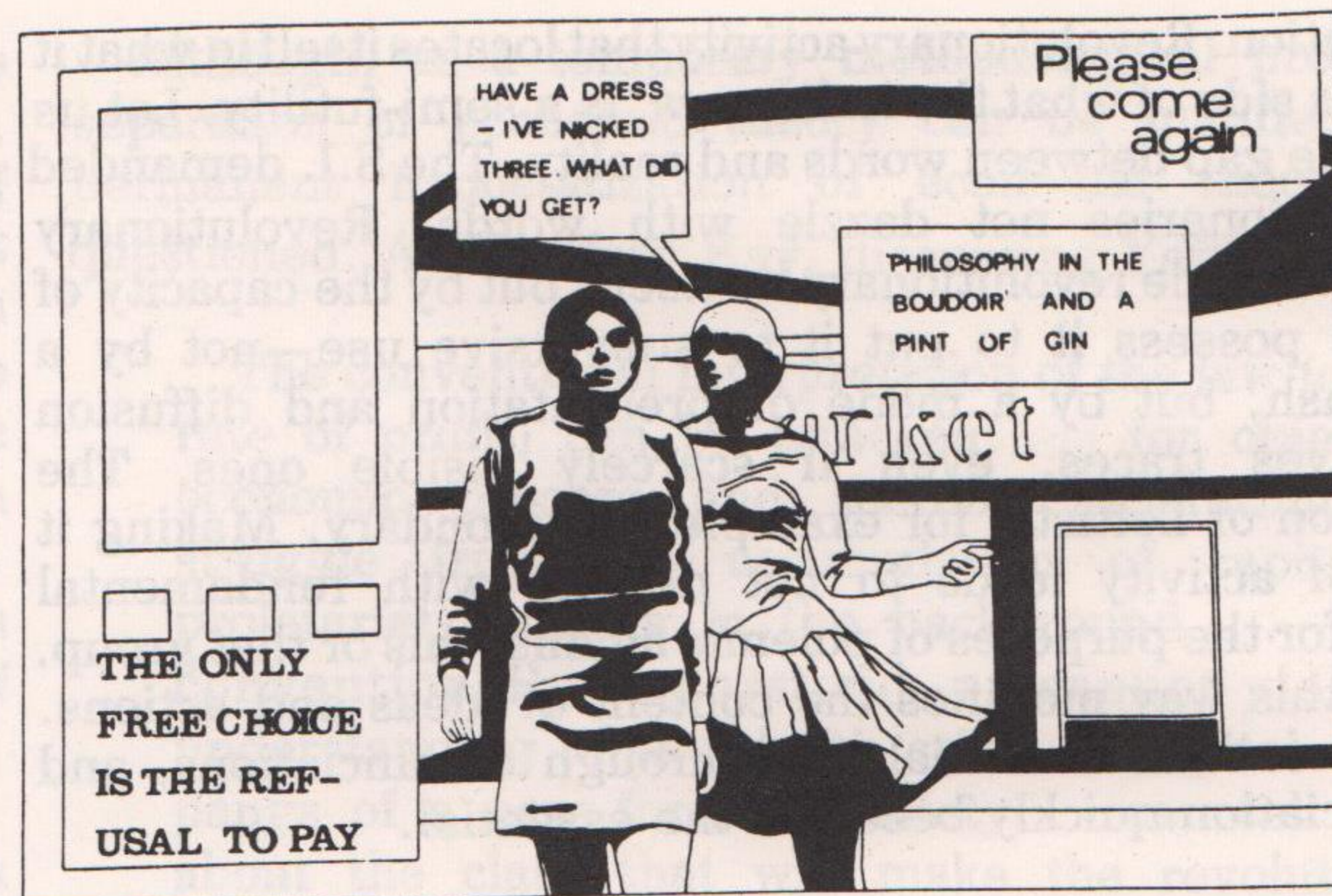
Marx defined ideology as the substitute for a real but impossible change: the change is lived at the level of the imaginary. Modern man is in this situation as extended to every realm. He no longer transforms anything except into images. He travels so as to rediscover the stereotype of the foreign country; loves so as to play the role of the virile lover or the tender beloved, etc. Deprived of labor (transformation of environment and self) by wage-labor, the proletarian lives the "spectacle" of change.

The present-day wage worker does not live in "abundance" in relation to the nineteenth-century worker who lived in "poverty." The wage-worker does not simply consume objects, but reproduces the economic and mental structures which weigh on him. It is because of this, contrary to the opinion of *Invariance*(1), that he cannot free himself of these representations except by suppressing their material basis. He lives in a community of semiotics which force him to continue: materially (credit), ideologically and psychologically (this community is one of the few available). One does not only consume signs: the constraints are as much, and first of all, economic (bills to be paid, etc.). Capital rests on the production and sale of objects. That these objects also function as signs (and sometimes as that above all) is a fact, but this never annuls their materiality. Only intellectuals believe themselves to be living in a world made purely of signs(2).

TRUE AND FALSE

What are the consequences for the revolutionary movement of "the function of social appearances in modern capitalism" (I.S. no. 10, p. 79)? As Marx and DeJacques(3) put it, communism has always been the dream of the world. Today, the dream also serves not to change reality. One cannot content oneself with "telling" the truth: this can only exist as practice, as relationship between subject and object, saying and doing, expression and transformation, and manifests itself as tension. The "false" is not a screen which blocks the view. The "true" exists within the false, in *Le Monde* or on television, and the "false" within the true, in texts which are revolutionary or which claim to be. The false asserts itself through its practice, by the use which it makes of the truth: and the true is so only in

Red-eye



Situationist comic circa 1968

transformation. Revolutionary activity that locates itself in what it says on this side of what the radio says, is a semi-futility. Let us measure the gap between words and reality. The S.I. demanded that revolutionaries not dazzle with words. Revolutionary theory is not made revolutionary by itself, but by the capacity of those who possess it to put it to subversive use—not by a sudden flash, but by a mode of presentation and diffusion which leaves traces, even if scarcely visible ones. The denunciation of Leftists, for example, is secondary. Making it the axis of activity leads to not dealing with fundamental questions for the purposes of polemic against this or that group. Acting in this way modifies the content of ideas and actions. One addresses the essential only through denunciations, and the denunciation quickly becomes the essential.

Face to face with the multiplication of individuals and texts with radical pretensions, the S.I. obliges one to ask: is this theory the product of a subversive social relation seeking its expression, or a production of ideas being diffused without contributing to a practical unification? Everyone listens to the radio, but radio sets unify proletarians in the service of capital—until the day when these technical means are seized by revolutionary proletarians, at which time one hour of broadcasting will be worth years of previous “propaganda”. (4)

However, the “end of ideology” does not mean that there could be a society without ideas, functioning automatically, like a machine: this would presuppose a “robotized” and thus a non-“human” society, since it would be deprived of the necessary reaction of its members. Having become an ideology in the sense of *The German Ideology*, the imaginary develops exactly along these lines. There is no dictatorship of social relations which remote-controls us, without reaction and reflection on our part. This is a very partial vision of “barbarism”. The mistake in descriptions of completely totalitarian societies (Orwell’s 1984, or the film THX 1138) is that they do not see that all societies, even the most oppressive, presuppose the intervention and action of human beings in their unfolding. Every society, including and especially capitalist society, lives on these tensions, even though it risks being destroyed by them. The critique of ideology denies neither the role of ideas nor that of collective action in propagating them.

THE THEORETICAL DEAD-END OF THE NOTION OF THE “SPECTACLE”

The notion of the spectacle unites a large number of given basic facts by showing society—and thus its revolutionary transformation—as activity. Capitalism does not “mystify” the workers. The activity of revolutionaries does not demystify, it is the expression of a real social movement. The revolution creates a different activity whose establishment is a condition of what classical revolutionary theory called “political” tasks (destruction of the State).

But the S.I. was not able to conceive in this way of the notion which it had brought to light. It invested so much in this notion that it reconstructed the whole of revolutionary theory around the spectacle.

In its theory of “bureaucratic capitalism”, *Socialisme ou Barbarie* (S ou B) had capital rest on the bureaucracy. In its theory of “spectacular commodity society”, the S.I. explained everything from the spectacle. One does not construct a revolutionary theory except as a whole, and by basing it on what is fundamental to social life. No, the question of “social appearances” is not the “key to any new revolutionary endeavor” (I.S. #10, p. 79).

The traditional revolutionary groups had only seen new

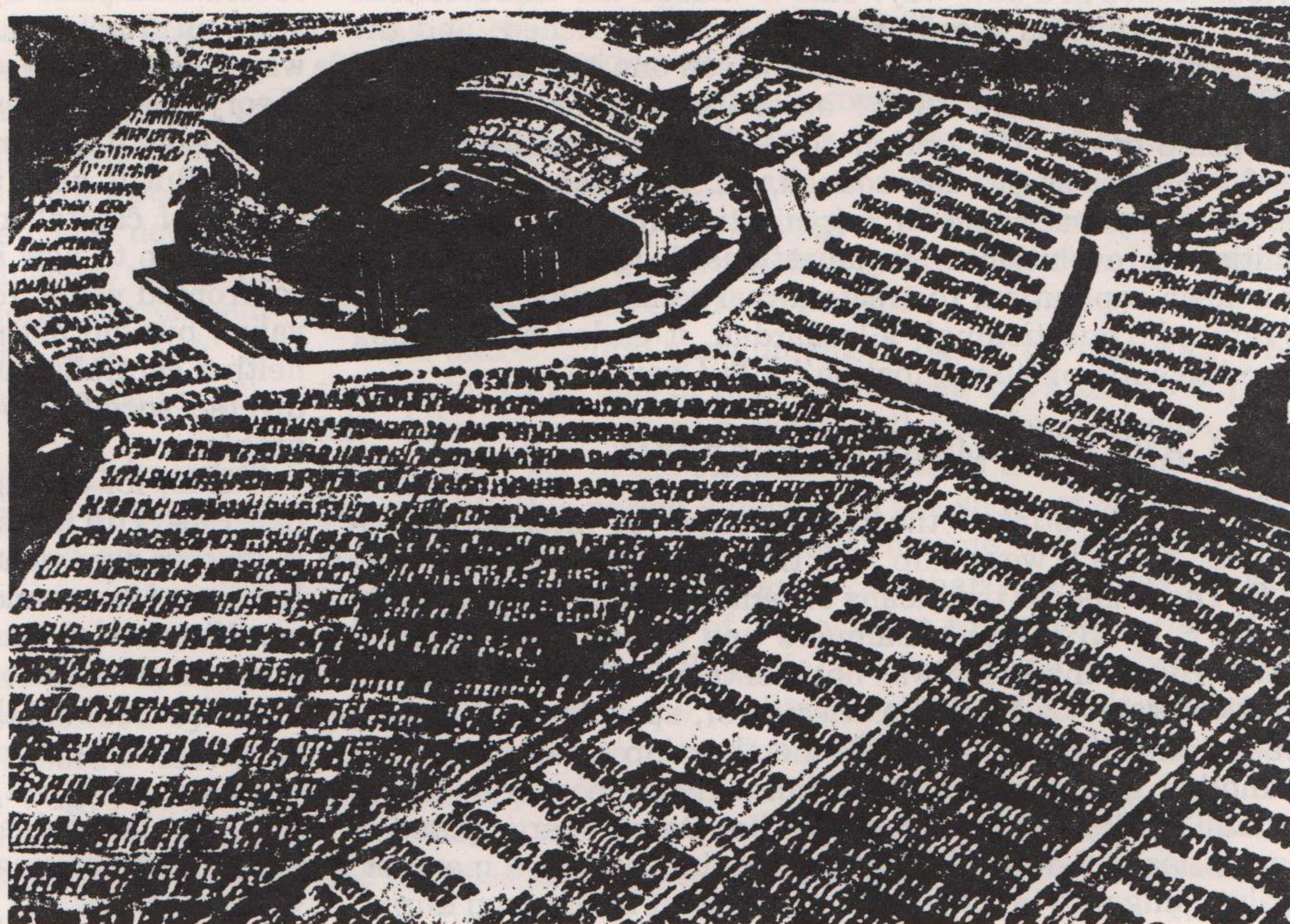
means of conditioning. But for the S.I., the mode of expression of the “media” corresponds to a way of life which did not exist a hundred years ago. Television does not indoctrinate, but inscribes itself into a mode of being. The S.I. showed the relationship between the form and foundation, where traditional marxism saw nothing but new instruments in the service of the same cause.

Meanwhile, the notion of the spectacle elaborated by the S.I. falls behind what Marx and Engels understood by the term “ideology”. Debord’s book *The Society of the Spectacle* presents itself as an attempt to explain capitalist society and revolution, when in fact it only considers their forms, important but not determinant phenomena. It robs the description of them in a theoretization which gives the impression of a fundamental analysis, when in fact the method, and the subject being studied, remain always at the level of social appearances. At this level, the book is outstanding. The trouble is that it is written (and read) as if one were going to find something in it that isn’t there. While S ou B analyzed the revolutionary problem by means of industrial sociology, the S.I. analyzes it starting out from a reflection on the surface of society. This is not to say that *The Society of the Spectacle* is superficial. Its contradiction, and, ultimately, its theoretical and practical dead-end, is to have made a study of the profound through and by means of the superficial appearance. The S.I. had no analysis of CAPITAL: it understood it, but through its effects. It criticized the commodity, not capital—or rather, it criticized capital as commodity, and not as a system of valuation which includes production as well as exchange.

Throughout the book, Debord remains at the stage of circulation, lacking the necessary moment of production, of productive labor. What nourishes capital is not consumption, as he leads one to understand, but the formation of value by labor. Debord is right to see more in the relation between appearance and reality than in that between illusion and the reality, as if appearances did not exist. But one never understands the real on the basis of the apparent. Thus Debord does not complete his project. He does not show how capitalism makes what is only the result into the cause or even into the movement. The critique of political economy (which Debord does not make, content to ignore it as were the utopians before him) shows how the proletarian sees standing over and against him not only his product, but his activity. In the fetishism of commodities, the commodity appears as its own movement. By the fetishism of capital, capital takes on an autonomy which it does not possess, presenting itself as a living being (Invariance is a victim of this illusion): one does not know where it comes from, who produces it, by what process the proletarian engenders it, by what contradiction it lives and may die. Debord makes the spectacle into the subject of capitalism, instead of showing how it is produced by capitalism. He reduces capitalism to its spectacular dimension alone. The movement of capital becomes the movement of the spectacle. In the same way *Banalites de base*(5) makes a history of the spectacle through religion, myth, politics, philosophy, etc. This theory remains limited to a part of the real relations, and goes so far as to make them rest entirely on this part.

The spectacle is activity become passive. The S.I. rediscovered what Marx said in the *Grundrisse* about the rising-up of Man’s being (his self-transformation, his labor) as an alien power which crushes him: facing it, he not longer lives, he only looks. The S.I. brought a new vigor to this theme. But capital is more than passivization. It needs the intervention of the proletarian, as S ou B (6) said. The S.I.’s overestimation of the spectacle is the sign that it theorizes on the basis of a social

The social space of leisure consumption. The dark circular area at the top of the photo—Milwaukee sports stadium—is occupied by the 18 members of two baseball teams. In the narrow strip surrounding it there are 43,000 spectators. They in turn are surrounded by a vast carpark filled with their empty cars.



vision born at the periphery of society, and which it believed to be central.

THE SPECTACLE AND THE THEORY OF ART

The theory of the spectacle expresses the crisis of the space-time outside labor. Capital more and more creates a realm outside of labor according to the logic of its economy: it does not develop leisure to control the masses, but because it reduces living labor to a lesser role in production, diminishes labor-time, and adds to the wage-worker's time of inactivity. Capital creates for the wage-workers a space-time that is excluded, empty, because consumption never succeeds in filling it completely. To speak of space-time is to insist on the fact that there is a reduction in the working day, and that this freed time also occupies a geographical and social space, in particular the street (cf. the importance of the city and of the *derive*(7) for the S.I.).

This situation coincides with a dual crisis of "art". Firstly, art no longer has meaning because Western society doesn't know where it's going. With 1914, the West lost the meaning and direction of civilization. Scientism, liberalism and apologetics for the "liberating" effect of productive forces went bankrupt like their adversaries (Romanticism, etc.). From then on, art was to be tragic, narcissistic, or the negation of itself. In former periods of crisis, one sought the meaning of the world: today, one doubts if it has one. Secondly, the colonization of the market and the vain and frenzied search for a "direction" enlist the artist in the service of consumption outside of labor.

The S.I. is conscious of its social origin. *Sur le passage de quelques personnes...* (1959), one of Debord's films, speaks of people "on the margin of the economy." On this terrain, like *S ou B* on the terrain of the enterprise, the S.I. understood modern capitalism tends to exclude people from all activity and at the same time to engage them in a pseudo-participation. But, like *S ou B*, it makes a decisive criterion out of the contradiction between active and passive. Revolutionary practice consists of breaking "the very principle of the spectacle: non-intervention" (I.S. No. 1, p. 11). At the end of the process, the workers' council will be the means of being active, of breaking down

separation. Capital endures by the exclusion of human beings, their passivity. What moves in the direction of a refusal of passivity is revolutionary. Hence the revolutionary is defined by "a new style of life" which will be an "example" (I.S. #6, p. 4).

The realm outside labor rests on bonds that are more contingent (cf. the *derive*) and subjective than wage labor, which belongs more to the necessary and the objective. To the traditional economy, the S.I. opposes "an economy of desires" (I.S. #7, p. 16); to necessity, it opposes freedom; to effort, pleasure; to labor, the automation which makes it unnecessary; to sacrifice, delight. The S.I. reverses the oppositions which must be superceded. Communism does not free one from the necessity of labor, it overthrows "labor" itself (as a separate and alien activity—Tr.). The S.I. identifies revolution with a liberation from constraints, based on desire and first of all on the desire for others, the need for relationships. It makes the link between "situation" and "labor" badly, which limits its notion of the situation. It thinks of society and its revolution from the context of non-wage-earning social layers. Hence, it carries over onto the productive proletariat what it said about those who are outside the wage system (street gangs, ghetto blacks). Because it was ignorant of the center of gravity of the movement, the S.I. moved toward councilism: the councils permit a "direct and active communication" (Society of the Spectacle). The revolution appeared as the extension of the construction of inter-subjective situations to the whole of society.

The critique of the S.I. passes through the recognition of its "avant-garde artist" aspect. Its sociological origin often provokes abusive and absurd interpretations of the "they were petty-bourgeois" variety. The question is clearly elsewhere. In the case of the S.I., it theorized from its own social experience. The S.I.'s artistic origin is not a stigma in itself; but it leaves its mark on theory and evolution when the group envisages the world from the point of view of its specific social layer. The passing to a revolutionary theory and action that were general (no longer aimed only at art, urbanism, etc.) corresponds to a precise logic on the S.I.'s part. The S.I. says that each new issue of its journal can and must allow one to re-read all the

previous issues in a new way. This is indeed the characteristic of a theory which is growing richer, being enriched, and the opposite of *S ou B*. It is not a matter of: on one side the general aspect of the S.I., and on the other its more or less critical relationship to art. The critique of *separation* was its guiding thread. In art, as in the council, in self-management, in workers' democracy and in organization (cf. its "Minimum definition of revolutionary organizations"), the S.I. wanted to break down separation, to create a real community. While the S.I. refused "questioning" à la Cardan, it ended by adopting the problematic of "participation" à la Chaulieu.

THE S.I. AND SOCIALISME OU BARBARIE

In order to attain "the transparency of inter-subjective relations" the S.I. wound up with the councilism supported by *S ou B*. The council is the means of rediscovering unity. Debord met the *S ou B* through Canjuers and joined it for several months. His membership was not mentioned in the S.I. journal. On the contrary: *La Veritable scission* (8), speaking of Khayati, excludes on principle "a double membership (in both the S.I. and another group) which would immediately border on manipulation" (p. 85). However that may be, Debord participated in the activities of *S ou B*, throughout the time he was a member, notably taking part in the team that was sent to Belgium during the great strike of 1960. At the end of an international meeting organized by *S ou B*, which was at once deceptive and revealing of the lack of perspectives, and which concluded with a pretentious speech by Chaulieu on the tasks of *S ou B*, Debord announced his resignation. Not without irony, he declared that he was in accord with the vast perspectives outlined by Chaulieu, but that he did not feel equal to so immense a task.

I.S. #6 (1961) adopted the idea of the councils, if not councilism: in any case it adopted the thesis of the division between "order-givers" and "order-takers". The project which the S.I. set for itself in I.S. #6, comprising among others "the study without illusions of the classical workers' movement" and of Marx, was not to be realized. The S.I. was to remain ignorant of the reality of the communist left, particularly Bordiga. The most radical of the revolutionary movement would for it always be an improved *S ou B*. It saw theory through this filter.

Vaneigem's *Banalites de base* cheerfully bypasses Marx and rewrites history in the light of *S ou B*, while adding to it the critique of the commodity. The S.I. criticized *S ou B* but only in terms of degree: for the S.I., *S ou B* limited socialism to workers' management, while in fact it meant management of everything. Chaulieu confined himself to the factory, Debord wanted to self-manage life. Vaneigem's procedure is close to that of Cardan. He looks for a sign (evidence): no longer the shameless exploitation of workers on the shop-floor, but the misery of social relationships, there is the revolutionary detonator:

"The feeble quality of the spectacle and of everyday life becomes the only sign."

La Veritable scission... would also speak of a sign of what was unbearable. Vaneigem is against vulgar marxism, but he does not integrate marxism into a critique. He does not assimilate what was revolutionary about Marx that established marxism has obliterated. In I.S. #9 (1963), the S.I. still acknowledged that Cardan was "in advance" of it.

Like *Society of the Spectacle*, *Banalities de base* situates itself at the level of ideology and its contradictions. Vaneigem shows how religion has become the spectacle, which obliges

revolutionary theory to criticize the spectacle as it once had to start out from a critique of religion and philosophy. But in this way one obtains only the (pre) condition of revolutionary theory: the work remains to be done. The S.I. at first hoped for a lot from Lefebvre (9) and Cardan, then violently rejected them. But it kept in common with them the lack either of a theory of capitalism or a theory of society. Toward 1960, it opened up to new horizons but did not take the step. The S.I. confronted value, (cf. Jorn's text on political economy and use value) but did not recognize it for what it was. Its theory had neither centrality nor globality. This led it to overestimate very diverse social movements, without seeing the kernel of the problem.

It is, for example, incontestable that the article on Watts (#9, 1964) (10) is a brilliant theoretical breakthrough. Taking up in its own way what might have been said about the exchange between Mauss and Bataille, the S.I. posed the question of the modification of the very substance of capitalist society. The article's conclusion even takes up once again Marx's formulation about the link between Man and his generic nature, taken up at the same time by Camatte in the P.C.I. (11) (cf. #1 of *Invariance*). But staying at the level of the commodity, the S.I. was incapable of differentiating between the levels of society, and of singling out what makes a revolution. When it writes that

"a revolt against the spectacle situates itself at the level of the totality..."

it proves that it is making the spectacle into the totality. In the same way its "management-ist" illusions led it to distort the facts concerning Algeria after Boumedienne's coup d'état:

"The only program of the Algerian socialist elements is the defense of the self-managed sector, not only as it is, but as it ought to be." (#9, 1964, p. 21)

In other words, without revolution, that is to say, without the destruction of the State and key transformations in society, the S.I. believed that there could be worker's management, and that revolutionaries should work for its extension.

POSITIVE UTOPIA

The S.I. allows the recognition at the level of revolutionary activity of the implications of the development of capital since "1914", already recognized by the communist left insofar as this development involved reformism, nations, wars, the evolution of the state, etc. The S.I. had crossed the path of the communist left.

The S.I. understood the communist movement and the revolution as the *production* by the proletarians of new relations to each other and to "things". It rediscovered the Marxian idea of communism as the *movement* of self-creation by men of their own relations. With the exception of Bordiga, it was the first to connect again with the utopian tradition. This was at once its strength and its ambiguity.

The S.I. was initially a revolt which sought to take back the cultural means monopolized by money and power. Previously the most lucid artists had wanted to break the separation between art and life: the S.I. raised this demand to a higher level in their desire to abolish the distance between life and revolution. "Experimentation" had been for surrealism an illusory means of wrenching art out of its isolation from reality: the S.I. applied it in order to found a positive utopia. The ambiguity comes from the fact that the S.I. did not know exactly whether it was a matter of living differently from now on or only of heading that way.

"The culture to be overthrown will not really fall except

Red-eye



5th Conference of the I.S., at Goteborg, in 1961

along with the totality of the socio-economic formation which upholds it. But, without further ado, the S.I. proposes to confront it throughout its length and breadth, up to and including the imposition of an autonomous situationist control and experimentation against those who hold the existing cultural authority(ies), i.e. up to and including a **state of dual power within culture**...The center of such a development within culture would first of all have to be UNESCO once the S.I. had taken command of it: a new type of popular university, detached from the old culture; lastly, utopian centers to be built which, in relation to certain existing developments in the social space of leisure, would have to be more completely liberated from the ruling daily life...would function as bridgeheads for a new invasion of everyday life." (#5, 1960, pp. 5 & 31)

The idea of a gradual liberation is coherent with that of a self-management spreading everywhere little by little: it misunderstands society as a totality. Besides this, it grants privilege to "culture", the "center of meaning of a meaningless society" (#5, p. 5).

This exaggeration of the role of culture was later to be carried over into workers' autonomy: the "power of the councils" was supposed to spread until it occupied the whole of society. These two traits have deep roots in the origins of the S.I. The problem, then, is not that the S.I. remained too "artistic" in the Bohemian sense, lacking in "rigor", (as if the "Marxists" were rigorous) but that it applied the same approach throughout.

The projects for "another" life were legion in the S.I. I.S. #6 (1961) dealt with an experimental town. At the Goteborg conference, Vaneigem spoke of "constructing situationist bases, in preparation for a unitary urbanism and a liberated life." This speech (says the account of the proceeding) "met with no opposition." (#7, 1962, p. 27)

One makes an organization: revolutionary groups "have no right to exist as a permanent vanguard unless they themselves

set the example of a new style of life." (#7, p. 16) The over-estimation of organization and of the responsibility of living differently now led, obviously, to a self-overestimation of the S.I. Trocchi declares in #7:

"We envisage a situation in which life is continually renewed by art, a situation constructed by the imagination ...we have already gone through enough experiences in a preparatory direction: we are ready to act." (pp. 50 & 53)

A significant fact: the critique of this article in the following issue did not pick up on this aspect (#8, pp. 3-5). Trocchi was to realize this program in his own way in "Project Sigma": the S.I. did not disavow it, but only stated that Trocchi was not undertaking this project in his capacity as a member of the S.I. (#9, p. 83)

The ambiguity was brought to a head by Vaneigem who in fact wrote a "treatise on how to live differently" in the present world while setting forth what social relations could be. It is a handbook to violating the logic of the market and the wage system wherever one can get away with it. *La Veritable scission* has some harsh words for Vaneigem and his book. Debord and Sanguinetti were right to speak of "exorcism":

"He has said so as not to be" (p. 143).

No doubt. But the critique is belated. Vaneigem's book was a difficult work to produce because it **cannot be lived**, threatened with falling on the one hand into a marginal possibilism and on the other into an imperative which is unrealizable and thus **moral**. Either one huddles in the crevices of bourgeois society, or one ceaselessly opposes to it a different life which is impotent because only the revolution can make it a reality. The S.I. put the worst of itself into its worst text. Vaneigem was the weakest side of the S.I., the one which reveals all its weaknesses. The positive utopia is revolutionary as demand, as tension, because it cannot be realized within this society: it

becomes derisory when one tries to live it today. Instead of hammering away at Vaneigem as an individual, **The Real Split** could have drawn up the balance sheet of the practice which had produced Vaneigem; but there was no such balance sheet (see below).

The reformism of the everyday was later transferred to the level of work; arriving late for work, writes Ratgeb, (12) is the beginning of a critique of wage labor. We are not seeking to make fun of Vaneigem, unhappy theoretician of an art of living, "la radicalité." His brio only succeeds in giving the **Treatise** an empty pretension which makes one smile. **The Real Split** is ill-inspired to mock the attitude of Vaneigem in May 1968, when he left for his vacation as planned even though the "events" had begun (he quickly returned). This personal contradiction reflected the theoretical and practical contradiction sustained by the S.I. from its beginnings. Like every morality, Vaneigem's position was untenable and had to explode on contact with reality. The S.I. in denouncing his attitude gave itself over also to a moralistic practice: it judged acts without examining their causes. This revelation of Vaneigem's past, whether it troubles or amuses the radicalists, has besides something unpleasant about it. If Vaneigem's inconsistency in 1968 was important, the S.I. should have drawn conclusions from it, as it did not fail to do in a host of other cases, and should not have waited until four years later to talk about it. If Vaneigem's default was not important, it was useless to talk about it, even when he broke with the S.I. In fact the S.I., to use its own expression, exorcised the impotence of its morality by denouncing the individuals who failed in upholding this morality, thus saving at one blow both the morality and itself as the S.I. Vaneigem was the scapegoat for an impossible utopianism.

MATERIALISM AND IDEALISM IN THE S.I.

Against militant moralism, the S.I. extolled another morality: that of the autonomy of individuals in the social group and in the revolutionary group. Now, only an activity integrated into a social movement permits autonomy through an effective practice. Otherwise the requirement of autonomy ends up by creating an elite of those who know how to make themselves autonomous. (13) Whoever says elitism also says disciples. The S.I. showed a great organizational idealism, as did Bordiga (the revolutionary as "disintoxicated"), even though the S.I. resolved it differently. The S.I. had recourse to an immediate practical morality, which illustrates its contradiction. Every morality puts on top of the given social relations the obligation to behave in a way which runs counter to those relations. In this case, the S.I.'s morality requires that one be respectful of spontaneity.

The S.I.'s materialism is limited to the awareness of society as intersubjectivity, as interaction of human relation-

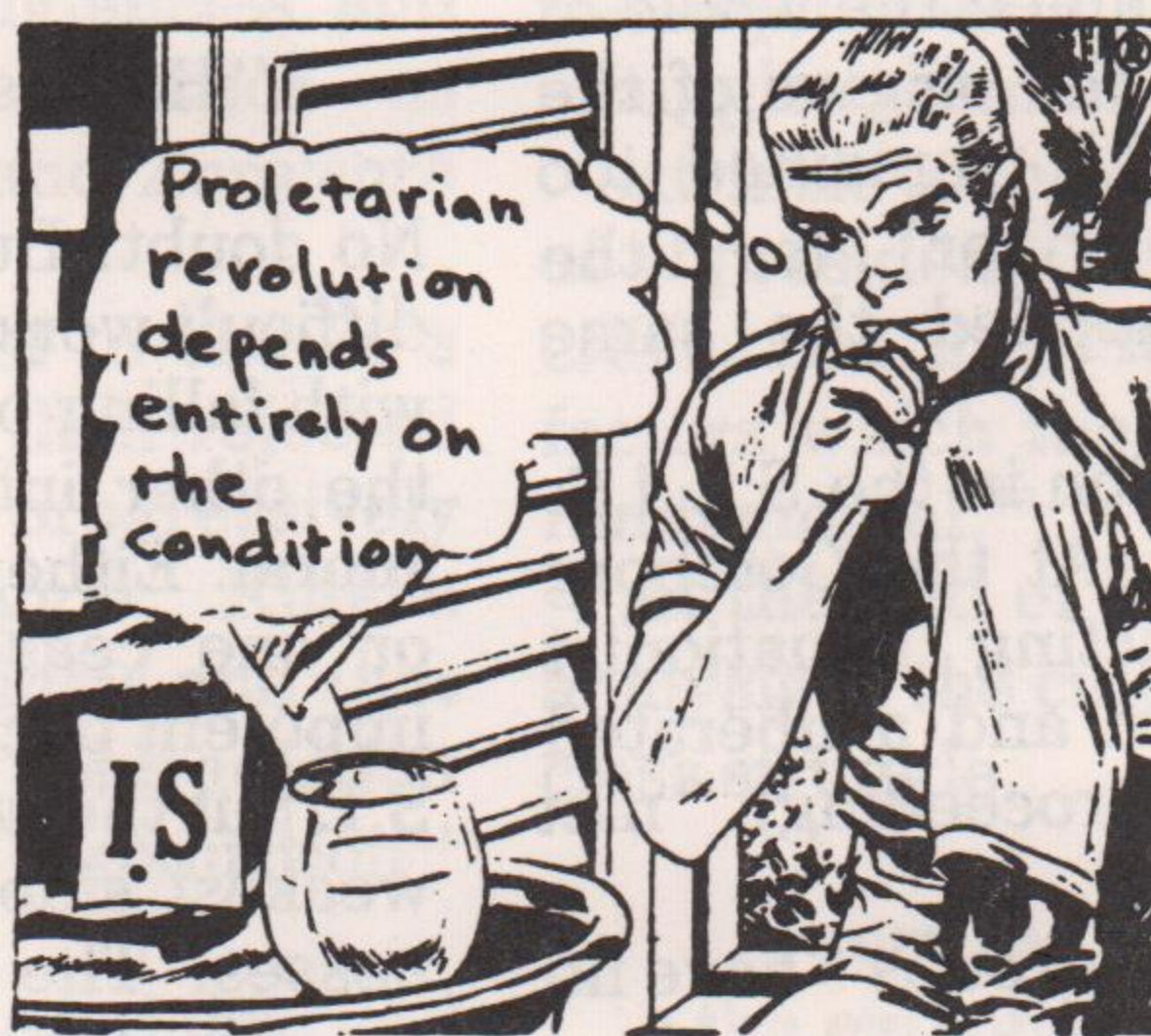
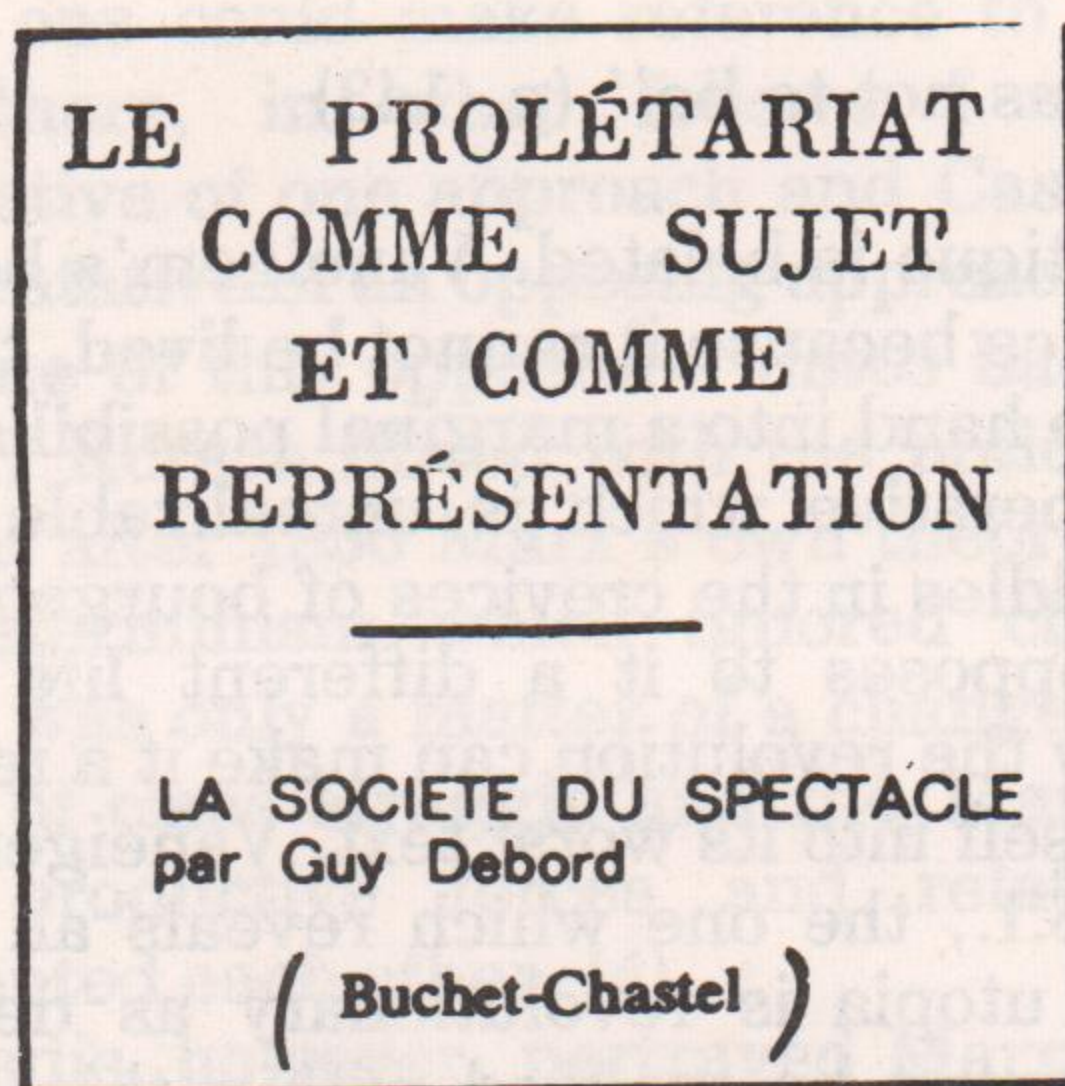
ships on the immediate plane, neglecting the totality: but society is also the production of its own material conditions, and the immediate relations crystallize into institutions, with the state at their head. The "creation of concrete situations" is only one facet of the revolutionary movement. In theorizing it, the S.I. does indeed start out from the real conditions of existence, but reduces them to intersubjective relations. This is the point of view of the subject trying to rediscover itself, not a view which encompasses both subject and object. It is the "subject" stripped of its "representation." The systematization of this opposition in **The Society of the Spectacle** takes up again the idealist opposition characterized by its forgetting of Man's objectifications (labor, appropriation of the world, fusion of Man and nature). The subject-object opposition is the guiding thread of Western philosophy, formed in a world whose meaning Man sees escaping him little by little. Already Descartes was setting side by side the progress of mathematics and the stagnation of metaphysics. Mercantile Man is in search of his role.

The S.I. was not interested in production. It reproached Marx for being too economic, but did not itself make a critique of political economy. Society is an ensemble of relations which assert themselves by objectifying themselves, creating material or social objects (institutions); the revolution destroys capitalism by a human action at the level of its objectifications (system of production, classes, state) carried out precisely by those who are at the center of these relations.

Debord is to Freud what Marx is to Hegel: he founds what is only a materialist theory of personal relationships, a contradiction in terms. Instead of starting from the ensemble of social relations, the notion of the "construction of situations" isolates the relation between subjects from the totality of relations. In the same way as, for Debord, the spectacle says all there is to be said about capitalism, the revolution appears as the construction of situations expanded to the whole of society. The S.I. did not grasp the mediations on which society rests; and foremost among these, labor, the "fundamental need" (William Morris) of Man. As a consequence of this, it did not clearly discern the mediations on the basis of which a revolution can be made. To get out of the difficulty it exaggerated the mediation of the organization. Its councilist, democratic and self-management-ist positions are explained by its ignorance of the social dynamic.

The S.I. insisted on forms of organization to remedy the inadequacy of the content which escaped it. Practicing "the inversion of the genitive" like Marx in his early work, it put things back on their feet: inverting the terms of ideology so as to understand the world in its reality. But a real understanding would be more than an inversion: Marx was not content to turn Hegel and the Young Hegelians upside down.

The S.I. only saw capital in the form of the commodity, ignoring the cycle as a whole. Of **Capital**, Debord only retains the first sentence, without understanding it: capital presents



itself as an accumulation of commodities, but it is more than that. The S.I. saw the revolution as a calling into question more of the relations of distribution [cf. the Watts riot] than of the relations of production. It was acquainted with the commodity but not with surplus value.

The S.I. showed that the communist revolution could not be only an immediate attack on the commodity. This contribution is decisive. Although the Italian Left had described communism as the destruction of the market, and had already broken with the ideology of the productive forces (i.e. the ideology which glorifies their development for its own sake: Tr.) it had not understood the formidable subversive power of concretely communist measures. (14) Bordiga, in fact, pushes social communization back beyond a seizure of "political power." The S.I. viewed the revolutionary process at the level of human relations. Even the State cannot be destroyed strictly on the military plane. The mediation of society, it is also (but not solely) destroyed by the demolition of the capitalist social relations which uphold it.

The S.I. ended up with the opposite mistake to Bordiga's. The latter reduced the revolution to the application of a program; the former limited it to an overthrow of immediate relations. Neither Bordiga nor the S.I. perceived the whole problem. The one conceived a totality abstracted from its real measures and relations, the other a totality without unity or determination, hence an addition of particular points extending itself little by little. Incapable of theoretically dominating the whole process, they both had recourse to an organizational palliative to ensure the unity of the process—the party for Bordiga, the councils for the S.I. In practice, while Bordiga depersonalized the revolutionary movements to the point of excess, the S.I. was an affirmation of individuals to the point of elitism. Although it was totally ignorant of Bordiga, the S.I. allows one to develop Bordiga's thesis on the revolution further by means of a synthesis with its own.

The S.I. itself was not able to realize this synthesis, which presupposes an all-round vision of what society is. It practiced positive utopianism only for the purpose of revelation, and that is without doubt its theoretical stumbling block.

"What must happen... in the centers of unequally shared but vital experience is a demystification." (#7, p. 48)

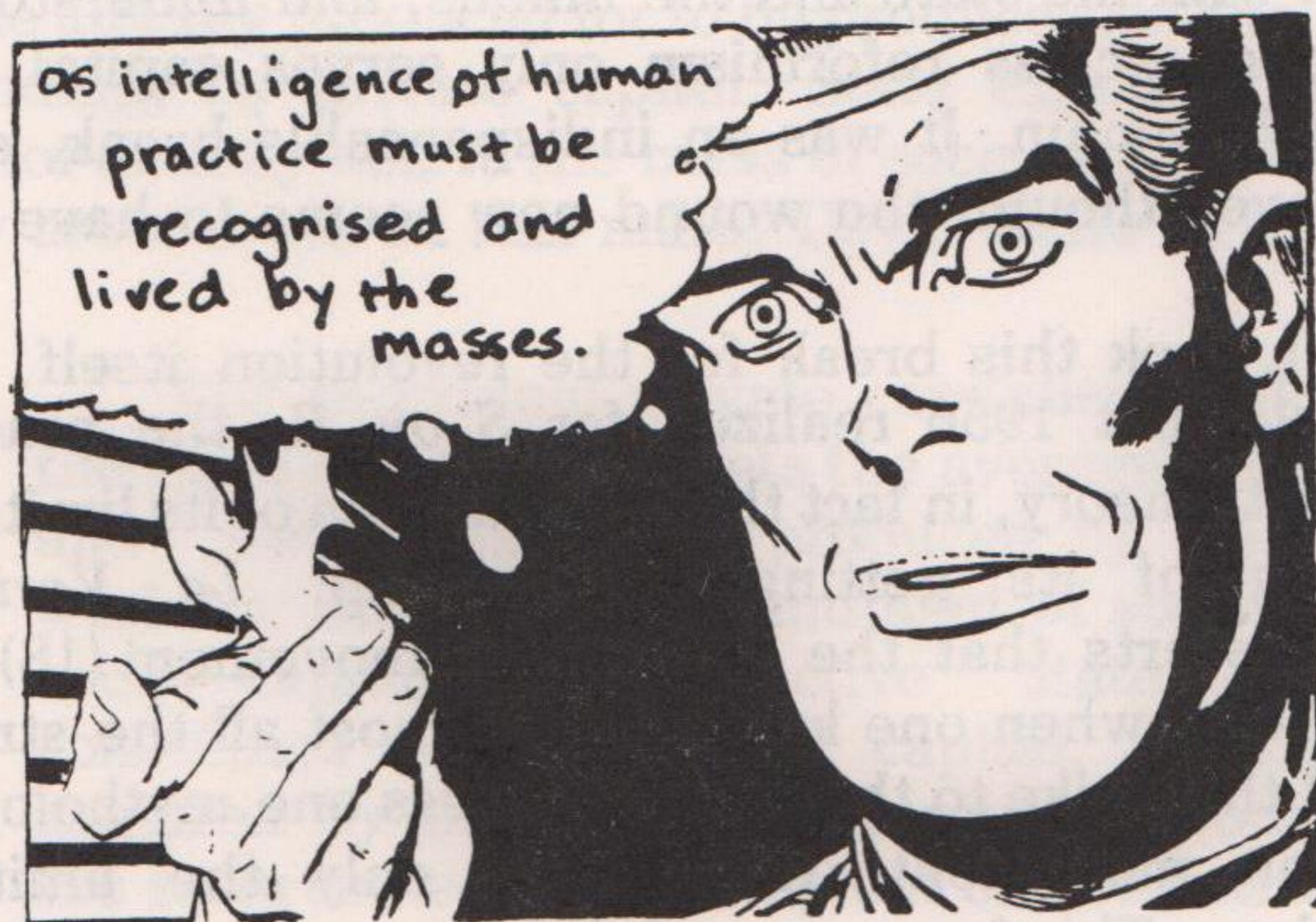
There was a society of "the spectacle", a society of "false consciousness", as opposed to the supposedly classical capitalism of the 19th century: it was a matter of giving it a true consciousness of itself. The S.I. never separated itself from Lukacsian idealism, as is shown by the only critique of the S.I. which has appeared up to the present: *Supplement au no. 301 de la Nouvelle Gazette Rhenane*. (15) Lukacs knew (with the help of Hegel and Marx) that capitalism is the loss of unity, the dispersion of consciousness. But, instead of concluding from this that the proletarians will recompose a unitary world view by means of their subversive practice (concluding in the

revloution), he thought that consciousness must be re-unified and rediscovered first in order for this subversion to happen. As this is impossible, he too fled back into magic and theorized the need for a concretization of consciousness which must be incarnated in an organization before the revolution is possible. This organized consciousness is the "party". One sees immediately that, for Lukacs, the justification of the party is secondary: what is primary is the idealism of consciousness, the primacy accorded to consciousness of which the party is only the manifestation. What is essential in his theory is that consciousness must be incarnated in an organization. The S.I. takes up in an uncritical way Lukacs' theory of consciousness but replaces the "party" with the S.I. on one side and the Councils on the other. For the S.I. as for Lukacs, the difference between "class in itself" and "class for itself" is that the latter possesses class consciousness. That this consciousness would not be brought to it by a party, but would spring spontaneously from the organization of the workers into councils is quite secondary. The S.I. conceived of itself as an organization destined to make the truth burst forth: it made revelation the principle of its action. This explains the inordinate importance which the S.I. have to the tendency toward "total democracy" in 1968. Democracy is the perfect place for consciousnesses to elucidate themselves. Everything is summed up in the S.I.'s definition of the proletarian as one who "has no control over the use of his life and who knows it."

Art is today voluntary alienation; in it the systematic practice of artifice renders more visible the facticity of life. Shutting itself in its idea of the "spectacle", the S.I. remained a prisoner of its origins. The Society of the Spectacle is already a completed book. The theory of appearances turns back on itself. Here one can even read the beginnings of currently fashionable ideas about capital as representation. Capital "becomes image...the concentrated result of social labor... becomes apparent and submits the whole of reality to appearance."

The S.I. was born at the same moment as all the theses about "communication" and language and in reaction against them, but it mostly tended to pose the same problem in different terms. The S.I. was formed as a critique of communication, and never departed from this point of origin: the council realizes a "true" communication. In spite of this, unlike Barthes and his ilk, the S.I. refused to let the sign turn back on itself. It did not want to study apparent reality (the study of "mythologies" or of the "superstructures" dear to Gramsci's heart) but rather reality as appearance. Marx wrote in 1847:

"Human activity = commodity. The manifestation of life, active life, appears as a mere means: appearance, separate from this activity, is grasped as an end in itself."



to fetishism in fixating itself on *forms*: commodity, subject, organization, consciousness. But unlike those who today repeat its ideas while conserving only the flashy parts and the mistakes (*utopia*, etc.), the S.I. did not make it a rule to confuse language with society. What was for the S.I. a *contradiction* became the *raison d'être* of modernism.

NO THEORETICAL SUMMING-UP

Nothing is easier than a false summing-up. One can even do it over, like the famous self-criticism, every time one changes one's ideas. One renounces the old system of thought so as to enter the new one, but one does not change one's mode of being. The "theoretical summing-up" can be in fact the most deceitful practice while appearing to be the most honest. *The Real Split* . . . succeeds in not talking about the S.I. and its end, except so as not to grapple with its conceptions — in a word, it talks about it non-theoretically. Denouncing (no doubt sincerely) triumphalism and self-sufficiency in relation to the S.I. and in the S.I. but without a theoretical critique, the book ends up presenting the S.I. as a model. Debord and Sanguinetti don't get to the point except with the pro-situs, who inspired them to some good reflections, but still at the level of subjective relations, of *attitudes*. Theory is always seen from the standpoint of attitudes which incarnate it; an important dimension, certainly, but not an exclusive one.

There is no self-analysis of the S.I. The S.I. came, 1968 announces the return of the revolution, now the S.I. is going to disappear so as to be reborn everywhere. This lucid modesty masks two essential points: The authors argue as though the S.I.'s perspective had been totally correct: they do not ask themselves whether there might not be a link between the sterility of the S.I. after 1968 (cf. the correspondence of the *Orientation Debate*) and the insufficiency of that perspective. Even on the subject of the pro-situs, Debord and Sanguinetti fail to establish any logical relation between the S.I. and its disciples. The S.I. was revolutionary with the aid of a theory based on attitudes (which would later prove to be a brake on its evolution). After the phase of revolutionary action, the pro-situs retained *nothing but* the attitude. One cannot judge a master solely by his disciples: but he also has, in part, disciples he has called forth. The S.I. accepted the role of master involuntarily, through its very conceptions. It did not directly propose a *savoir-vivre*, but in presenting its ideas as a "savoir-vivre" it pushed an art of living on its readers. *The Real Split* . . . registers the ideological use to which I.S. was put, its being turned into a spectacle, says the book, by half the readers of the journal. This was partly inevitable (see below on recuperation) but in part also due to its own nature. Every radical theory or movement is recuperated by its weaknesses: Marx by his study of the economy in-itself and his radical-reformist tendencies, the German Left by its councilism, etc. Revolutionaries remain revolutionaries by profiting from these recuperations, eliminating their limitations so as to advance toward a more developed totalization. *The Real Split* . . . is also a split in the minds of its authors. Their critique of Vaneigem is made as if his ideas were foreign to the S.I. To read Debord and Sanguinetti, one would think that the S.I. had no responsibility for the *Traite*: Vaneigem's weakness, one would think, belongs to him alone. One or the other: either the S.I. did indeed take his faults into account — in which case why didn't it say something about them? — or else it ignored them. The S.I. here inaugurates a practice of organization (which *S ou B* would have qualified with the word "bureaucratic"): one does not learn of the deviations of members until after their exclusion. The organization retains its purity, the errors of its members do not affect it. The trouble

comes from the insufficiencies of the members, never from on high, and not from the organization. As the eventual megalomania of the leaders does not explain everything, one is obliged to see in this behavior the sign of a mystified coming-to-consciousness of the group's impasse, and of a magical way of saving it. Debord was the S.I. He dissolved it: this would have been proof of a lucid and honest attitude if he had not at the same time *eternized* it. He dissolved the S.I. so as to make it perfect, as little open to criticism as he was little able to criticize it himself.

In the same way, his film *Society of the Spectacle* is an excellent means of eternizing his book. Immobilism goes side by side with the absence of summing-up. Debord has learned nothing. The book was a partial theorization: the film totalizes it. This sclerosis is even more striking in what was added for the film's re-release in 1976. Debord replies to a series of criticisms of the film, but says not a word about various people (some of them very far removed from our own conceptions) who judged the film severely from a revolutionary point of view. He prefers to take on *Le Nouvel Observateur*. (16) More and more, his problem is to defend his past. He runs aground of necessity, because all he can do is re-interpret it. The *S.I.* no longer belongs to him. The revolutionary movement will assimilate it in spite of the situationists.

AN EXERCISE IN STYLE

Otherwise serious, Sanguinetti's book *Veridique Rapport* (17) is still a mark of his failure (*echec*). We will not judge the book by its public, which appreciates it as a good joke played on the bourgeoisie. These readers are content to repeat that the capitalists are cretins, even that they are contemptible compared to "real" ruling classes of the past; if we wanted to, they say, we could be far bigger and better bourgeois. Elitism and scorn for capitalism are derisory enough as reactions, but reassuring when revolution does not appear any longer to be an absolute certainty. But complacency in the denunciation of bourgeois decadence is far from being subversive. It is shared by those (like Sorel) who scorn the bourgeoisie while wanting to save capitalism. The cultivation of this attitude is thus absurd in anyone who has the slightest revolutionary pretensions. Let us admit in any case that Sanguinetti scored a good shot.

The problem dealt with by almost none of the commentators (and for good reason) is to know whether he puts forward a *revolutionary* perspective. If he does not, he has only succeeded in letting off a firecracker within bourgeois politics and the game of the parties. The proof of the pudding is in the eating. His analysis of past events is *false*, and so is the revolutionary perspective he proposes.

First of all, there was no "social war" in Italy in 1969, nor in Portugal in 1976. May 1968 in France was the upsurge of a vast spontaneous workers' organization: on the scale of a whole country, and in hundreds of big enterprises, proletarians partook at the same moment of the "proletarian experience", of confrontation with the state and the unions, and understood in acts that working-class reformism only serves capital. This experience will remain. It was an indispensable break, and a lasting one, even though the wound now seems to have been closed again.

But the S.I. took this break for the revolution itself. 1968 realized for it what 1956 realized for *S ou B*: the practical verification of its theory, in fact the confirmation of its limits and the beginning of its getting tangled up. *La Veritable Scission* . . . asserts that the occupation movement (18) had situationist ideas: when one knows that almost all the strikers left control of the strike to the unions, unless one mythologizes the occupation movement, this shows only the limits of situationist ideas. This ignorance of the state on the part of the

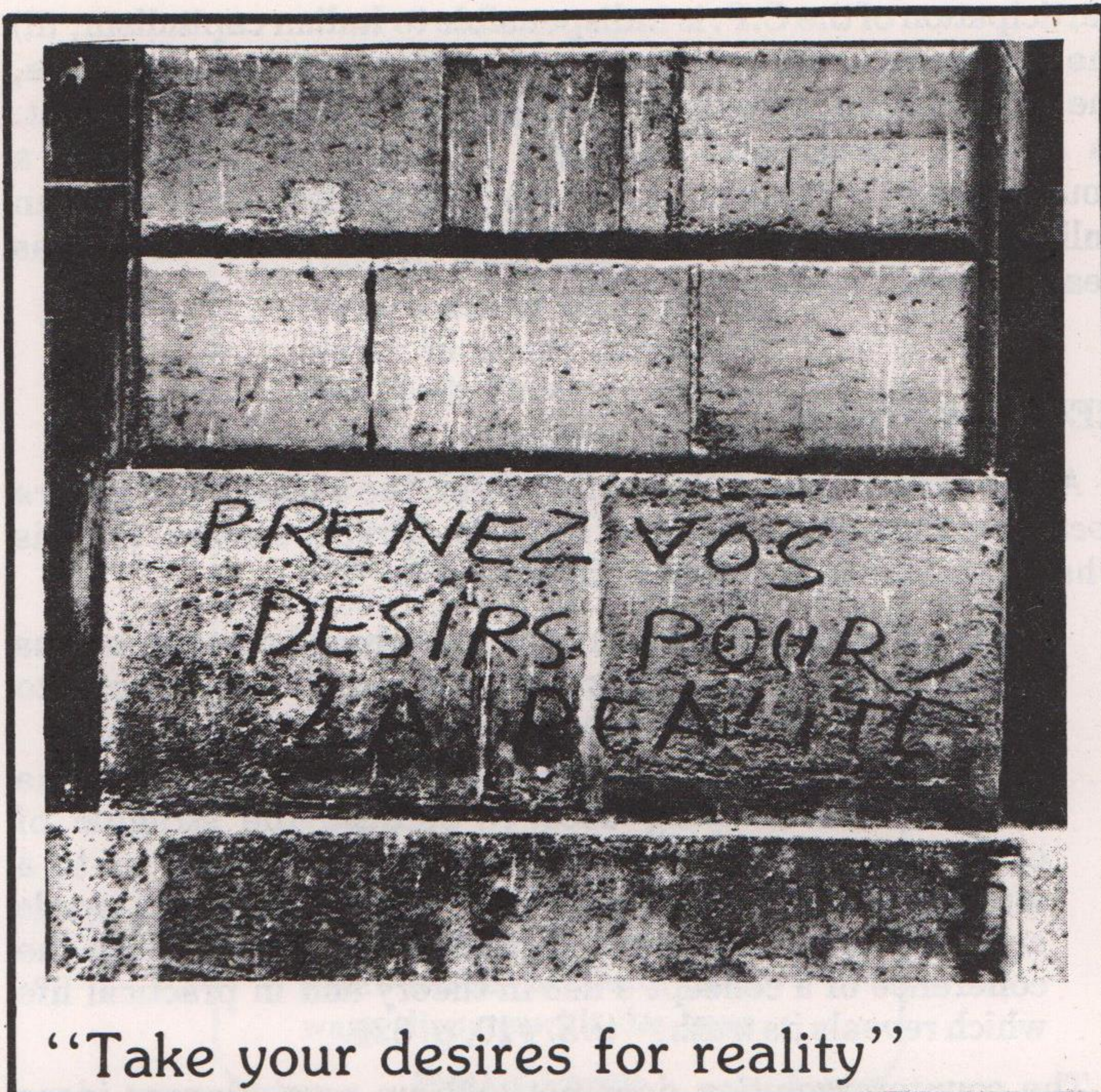
movement was not a supersession of Jacobinism, but its corollary, as it was in the Commune: the *non*-destruction of the state, its simple democratization, went side by side in 1871 with an attempt by some people to create a dictatorship on the model of 1793. It is true that — looking at 1871 or 1968 — one would have to show the strength and not the weakness of the communist movement, its existence rather than its absence. Otherwise the revolutionary only develops a superior pessimism and an abstract negation of everything which is not “the revolution”. But the revolutionary movement is such only if it criticizes itself, insisting on the global perspective, on what was missing in past proletarian movements. It does not valorize the past. It is the state and the counter-revolution that take up the *limits* of past movements and make their program out of them. Theoretical communism criticizes previous experiences, but also distinguishes between proletarian assault as in Germany in 1918-21, and attacks that were immediately bogged down by capital as in 1871 and in Spain in 1936. It is not content to describe positive *movements*, but also indicates the *ruptures* which they had to effect in order to make the revolution. The S.I. did the opposite. Moreover, starting in 1968, it theorized a rising revolution. But above all it denied the question of the state.

“When the workers are able to assemble freely and without mediations to discuss their real problems, the state begins to dissolve.” (*The Real Split*, p. 33)

All of anarchism is there. Far from wanting, as one would expect, to demolish the state, anarchism is most precisely characterized by its indifference to it. Contrary to that “Marxism” which puts foremost and above all else the necessity of “taking power”, anarchism in fact consists of a *neglect* of the question of state power. The revolution unfolds, committees and assemblies form parallel to the state, which, emptied of its power, collapses *of its own accord*. Founded on a materialist conception of society, revolutionary marxism asserts that capital is not only a social force spread out thinly everywhere, but that it is also concentrated in institutions (and first of all armed force) which are endowed with a certain autonomy, and which never die by themselves. The revolution only triumphs by bringing against them an action at once generalized and concentrated. The military struggle is based on the social transformation, but has its own specific role. The S.I. for its part, gave way to anarchism, and exaggerated the importance of workers’ assemblies (in 1968, *Pouvoir Ouvrier* and the *Groupe de Liaison pour l’Action des Travailleurs* were also preoccupied essentially with calling for democratic workers’ assemblies).

In the same way, to say that in Portugal the pressure of the workers hindered the construction of a modern capitalist state, is to have only the viewpoint of the state, of capital. Is capital’s problem to develop in Portugal, to constitute a new and powerful pole of accumulation there? Wasn’t the objective of the “revolution of the carnations” to channel confused popular and proletarian aspirations toward illusory reforms, so that the proletariat would remain quiescent? Mission accomplished. It is not a matter of a half-victory for the proletariat, but of an almost total defeat, in which the “proletarian experience” was almost non-existent, because there was not, so to speak, any direct *confrontation*, any alignment of proletarians around a position opposed to capitalism. They never stopped supporting the *democratized state*, even at times against the parties, which they accused of “treason” (19).

Neither in Italy in 1969, nor in Portugal in 1974-5, was there a “social war.” What is a social war if not a head-on struggle between classes, calling into question the foundations of society — wage labor, exchange, the state? There was not even the beginning of a confrontation between classes, and between



the proletariat and the state in Italy and Portugal. In 1969, the strike movements sometimes spread into riots but not every riot is the beginning of the revolution. The conflicts born of demands could become violent and could even provoke the beginning of a struggle against the forces of Order. But the degree of violence does not indicate the *content* of the struggle. In battling the police, the workers continued to believe no less in a left-wing government. They called for a “real democratic state” against the conservative forces supposedly dominating it.

Explaining the failure of the “social war” by the presence of the C.P.s is as serious as attributing everything to the absence of the party. Should one ask whether the German revolution miscarried in 1919 because of the S.P.D. and the unions? Or should one rather ask why the S.P.D. and the unions existed, why the workers continued to support them? One must begin from inside the proletariat.

Certainly, it is comforting to see a book which presents the C.P. as one of the pillars of capitalism undergo a wide distribution. But this success is ambiguous. If capital no longer has any all-encompassing thought, or even no thinkers at all (which is in any case incorrect), the S.I. thinks well enough in its place, but badly for the proletariat, as we shall see. Sanguinetti finishes by reasoning in capitalist terms. In fact, he has constructed an analysis such as a capitalist who had assimilated vulgar marxism would have. It is the bourgeoisie who speak of revolution where there is none. For them, occupied factories and barricades in the streets are the beginning of a revolution. Revolutionary marxism does not take the appearance for reality, the moment for the whole. The “heaviness” of marxism is preferable to a lightness without content. But let us leave the readers to choose according to what motivates their reading.

The S.I. has succeeded at an exercise in style: the final verdict for a group that mocked the cult of style in a style-less world. It has come in the end to play capitalist, in every sense of the word. Its brilliance is unimpaired, but it has nothing else left but brilliance. The S.I. gives good advice to capitalists and bad advice to proletarians, to whom it proposes nothing but councilism.

Vendique rapport contains two ideas: (i) the governmental

participation of the C.P. is indispensable to Italian capitalism; (ii) the revolution is the workers' councils. The second idea is false, the first one true; capitalists like Agnelli have also expressed it. In a word, Sanguinetti manages to grasp the totality as a bourgeois and *nothing more*. He wanted to pass himself off as an enlightened bourgeois: he has succeeded all too well. He has beaten himself at his own game.

RECUPERATION?

At the same moment, Jaime Semprun, the author of *La guerre sociale au Portugal*, published a *Precis de recuperation*. Here is what the S.I. once said about "recuperation":

"It is quite normal that our enemies should come to use us partially. . . just like the proletariat, we do not pretend to be unexploitable under present conditions." (I.S. #9, p. 4)

"The vital concepts undergo at one and the same time the truest and most lying uses. . . because the struggle of critical reality against apologetic spectacle leads us to a struggle over words, a struggle the more bitter as the words are more central. It is not an authoritarian purge, but the coherence of a concept's use in theory and in practical life which reveals its truth." (I.S. #10, p. 82)

The counterrevolution does not take up revolutionary ideas because it is malign or manipulative, let alone short of ideas, but because revolutionary ideas deal with *real* problems with which the counterrevolution is confronted. It is absurd to launch into a denunciation of the enemy use of revolutionary themes or notions. Today, all terms, all concepts are perverted. The subversive movement will only re-appropriate them by its own practical and theoretical development.

Since the end of the 19th century, capitalism and the workers' movement have engendered a fringe of thinkers who take up revolutionary ideas only so as to empty them of their subversive content and adapt them to capital. The bourgeoisie has by nature a limited vision of the world. It must call on the vision of the class, the proletariat, which is the bearer of another project. This phenomenon has been amplified since marxism has been officially recognized as having public usefulness. During the first period, capital drew from it a sense of the *unity* of all relations and of the importance of the economy (in the sense in which Lukacs rightly said that capitalism produces a fragmented vision of reality). But to the extent that capitalism comes to dominate the whole of life, this vision — broadly speaking, that of old-fashioned economic vulgar marxism — is inadequate to its complexity and to the extension of conflicts to all its levels. During the second period, the one we are living in today, determinist orthodox marxism has been rejected by the bourgeoisie itself. At the universities, it was good form to shrug one's shoulders at *Capital* fifty years ago: around 1950, it became permissible to find "interesting ideas" in it, the more so as they were being "applied" in the U.S.S.R. . . . To be in fashion today, it is enough to say that *Capital* is in the rationalist and reductionist tradition of Western philosophy since Descartes, or even since Aristotle. The new official marxism is not an *axis*; instead one puts a little bit of it everywhere. It serves to remind one of the "social" character of all practice: the "recuperation" of the S.I. is only a particular case.

One of the natural channels of this evolution is the university, since the apparatus of which it is a part backs a considerable part of the research on the modernization of capital. Official "revolutionary" thought is the scouting party of capital. Thousands of appointed functionaries criticize capitalism from every direction.

Modernism expresses the social crisis of which the crisis of the proletariat is only an aspect. Out of the *limits* which the subversive movement encounters at every step, modernism makes its *objectives*. It serves in particular to justify immediate reformism at the social level. In fact, traditional working class reformism no longer needs justification inasmuch as it has become the rule. The reformism of customs and daily life still needs to be theorized, both against the revolutionary movement from which issues the bias toward it, and against backward capitalist fractions which reject liberties that are nonetheless inoffensive to capital. Modernism thus gets developed because it helps capital to free itself from the fetters on capitalist liberty (sic). The reformism of the everyday is still in its ascendent phase, as economic and working class reformism was seventy years ago.

The common trait of all modernism is the taking up of revolutionary theory by halves; basically its approach is that of "marxism" as against Marx. Its axiom is to call, not for revolution, but for liberation from a certain number of constraints. It wants the maximum of freedom within the existing society. Its critique will always be that of the commodity and not of capital, of politics and not of the state, of totalitarianism and not of democracy. It is by accident that its historical representative, Marcuse, came from a Germany forced to turn away from the radical aspirations revealed in 1917-21?

It is conceivable to denounce deformations in revolutionary theory in order to make things absolutely precise — on the condition, however, that there is more than just a *denunciation*. In Semprun's book, there is not an ounce of theory to be found.

Let us take two examples. In his critique of G. Guegan (20) Semprun shows what he considers important. Why demolish this personage? To demarcate oneself, even with violent language, has no meaning unless one puts oneself at a higher level. Semprun spreads Guegan's life over several pages. But if it is really necessary to talk about Guegan, there is something that must be got straight concerning *Cahiers du futur* (Future Notebooks), the journal he edited. If the first issue was uselessly pretentious, the second, devoted to the counter-revolution, is particularly detestable. It presents the fact that the counter-revolution feeds off the revolution as a paradox, takes pleasure in pointing out the mixup without explaining anything, as something to revel in amid complacently morbid drawings, and sends everybody into a tailspin. This (intentional?) derision for all revolutionary activity mixes in a little more and fosters a feeling of superiority among those who have understood because they have been there: "That's where revolution leads. . ." (read: "That's what I was when I was a militant. . .") One can only dream of what the S.I. in its prime might have written about this.

Semprun also shows how Castoriadis (21) has innovated in taking it upon himself to "recuperate" his own past revolutionary texts, striving to make them unreadable by heaping them with prefaces and footnotes. This is amusing at first sight, but becomes less so when one knows what the S.I. owes to *Sou B.* Semprun even shows condescension toward Chaliou's "marxist" period. This ultra-left was indeed dry as dust: but not enough to stop Debord from joining it. Whether one likes it or not, this is falsification: one amuses the reader while making him forget what the S.I.'s bankruptcy owes to Chaliou before he went bankrupt himself.

In these two cases as in others, individuals are judged by their *attitude*, not by their theoretical evolution, from which one might profit. Semprun presents us with a gallery of moral portraits. He does not analyze, he *judges*. He pillories a number of assholes who stole from the S.I. Criticizing these attitudes, he is himself

MAY 17 1968 / POLITBUREAU OF THE CHINESE COMMUNIST
 PARTY GATE OF CELESTIAL PEACE PEKING SHAKE IN YOUR
 SHOES BUREAUCRATS . THE INTERNATIONAL POWER OF THE
 WORKERS COUNCILS WILL SOON WIPE YOU OUT . HUMANITY WILL
 ONLY BE HAPPY THE DAY THAT THE LAST BUREAUCRAT IS
 STRUNG UP BY THE GUTS OF THE LAST CAPITALIST . LONG
 LIVE THE FACTORY OCCUPATIONS. LONG LIVE THE GREAT
 PROLETARIAN CHINESE REVOLUTION OF 1927 BETRAYED
 BY THE STALINISTS. LONG LIVE THE PROLETARIAT OF CANTON
 AND ELSEWHERE WHO TOOK UP ARMS AGAINST THE SO-CALLED
 POPULAR ARMY . LONG LIVE THE WORKERS AND STUDENTS OF
 CHINA WHO ATTACKED THE SO-CALLED CULTURAL REVOLUTION
 AND THE BUREAUCRATIC MAOIST ORDER . LONG LIVE
 REVOLUTIONARY MARXISM . DOWN WITH THE STATE .
 OCCUPATION COMMITTEE OF THE AUTONOMOUS AND POPULAR SORBONNE

nothing but an attitude.

Like every moralistic practice, this one leads to some monstrosities. The most striking is the aggravation of the practice of organization already mentioned in relation to *The Real Split*. . . As Debord's new bodyguard, Semprun settles accounts with former members of the S.I. Reading these works, the uninitiated wouldn't think that the S.I. was ever much of anything. Busy with his self-destruction, Debord now unleashes a sectarianism which reveals his fear of the world. Semprun's style can thus only insult everything that comes within its scope and which is not Debord. He is nothing but a demarcation. He does not know either how to approve or to scorn. Of radical criticism, he has retained only the contempt.

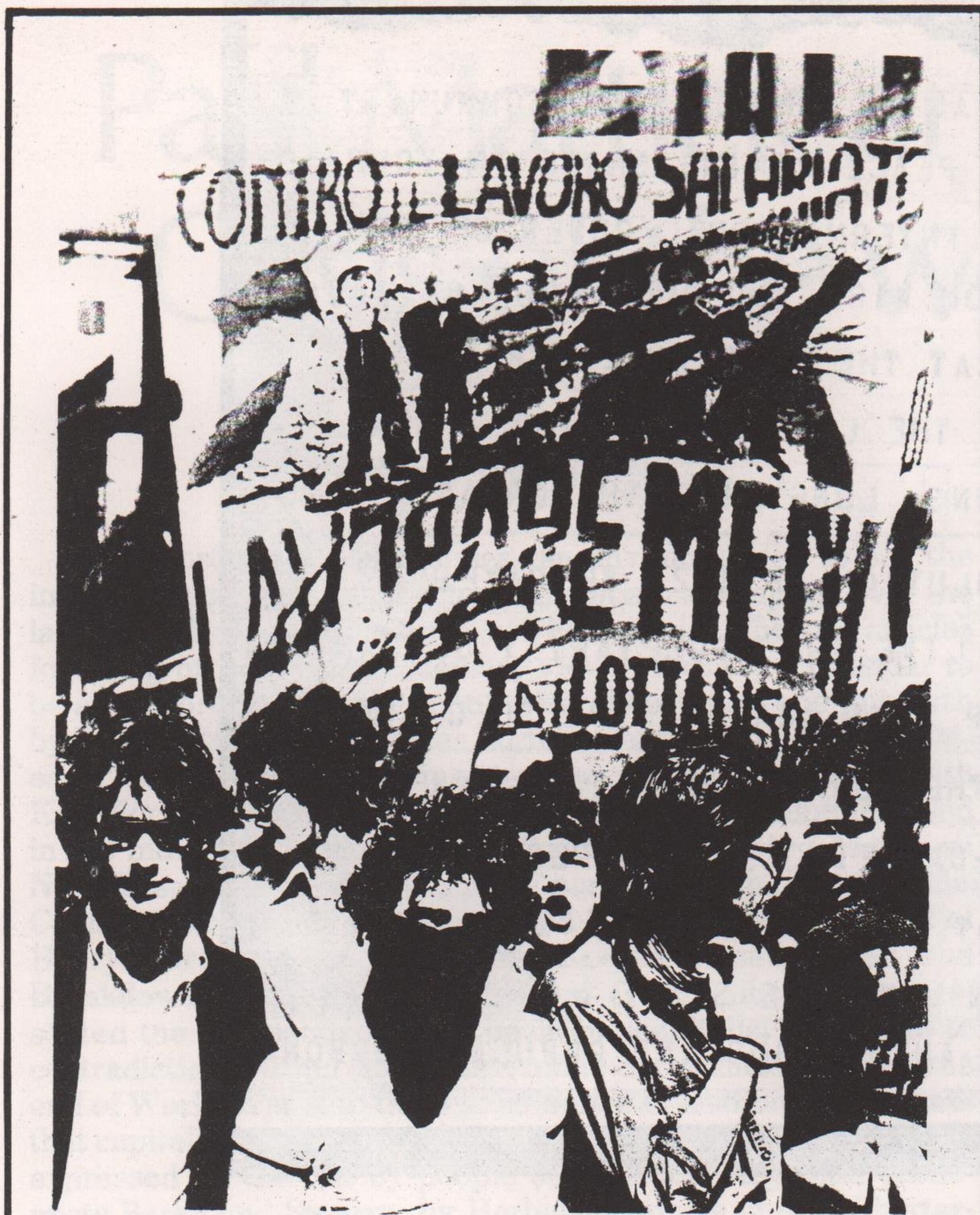
SPECTACLE

The S.I. always valued its trademark and did its own publicity. One of its great weaknesses was wanting to appear to be without weaknesses, without faults, as if it had developed the Superman within itself. Today it is no more than that. As a critique of traditional groups and of militantism, the S.I. played at being an International, turning politics into derision. The rejection of the pseudo-serious militant who achieves only the spirit of the cloister today serves to evade serious problems. Voyer(22) practices derision only to become derisory himself. The proof that the S.I. is finished is that it continues in this form. As a critique of the spectacle, the S.I. shows off its bankruptcy by making a spectacle of itself, and ends up as the opposite of what it was born for.

For this reason, the S.I. continues to be appreciated by a public in desperate need of radicality of which it retains only the letter and the tics. Born from a critique of art, the S.I. winds up

being used (despite and because of itself) as a work of literature. One takes pleasure in reading the S.I. or its successors, or the classics which it appreciated, as others take pleasure in listening to the Doors. In the period when the S.I. was really searching and self-searching, when the practice of derision clothed real theoretical and human progression, when humor did not serve merely as a mask, the S.I.'s style was much less fluid and facile than that of these current writings. The rich text *resists* its author as well as its readers. The text which is nothing *but* style flows smoothly.

The S.I. contributed to the revolutionary common good, and its weaknesses also have become fodder for a public of monsters, who are neither workers nor intellectuals, and who *do* nothing. Barren of practice, of passion, and often of needs, they have nothing between them but *psychological* problems. When people come together without *doing* anything, they have nothing in common but their subjectivity. The S.I. is necessary to them; in its work, they read the ready-made theoretical justification for their interest in these relations. The S.I. gives them the impression that the essential reality resides in immediate intersubjective relations, and that revolutionary action consists in developing a *radicality* at this level, in particular in escaping from wage labor, which coincides with their existence as *declasses*. The secret of this radicality consists of rejecting everything that exists (including the revolutionary movement) so as to oppose to it whatever seems farthest away from it (even if this has nothing revolutionary about it). This pure *opposition* has nothing revolutionary about it but the words. The lifestyle has its rules, which are just as constricting as those of the "bourgeois" world. Most often, bourgeois values are inverted in apologetics for not working, for marginal existence, for everything that seems to transgress. Leftism makes apologetics for the *proletariat* as something *positive* in this society: the pro-situs



The S.I.'s inheritors: unemployed youth, Rome 1977. The banner reads: AGAINST WAGE LABOR

glorify themselves (as proletarians) as pure *negation*. As for the ones who have some theoretical substance, their watchword is always the "critique of the S.I.", a critique which is impossible for them because it would be also the critique of their milieu.

The vigor of the S.I. was not in its theory but in a theoretical and practical exigency which its theory only partially recovered; which, rather, it helped to locate. The S.I. was the affirmation of the revolution. Its rise coincided with a period when it was possible to think that there would be a revolution soon. It was not equipped to survive past that period. It was successful as the self-critique of a social stratum incapable of making the revolution by itself, and which denounced this stratum's own pretensions (as represented, for example, by leftism which wants workers to be led by "conscious" drop-outs from the middle class).

RADICAL SUBJECTIVITY

The S.I. had in relation to classical revolutionary marxism (of which Chaulieu was a good example) the same function, and the same limits, as Feuerbach had in relation to Hegelianism. To escape from the oppressive dialectic of alienation/objectification, Feuerbach constructed an anthropological vision which placed Man, and in particular love and the senses, at the center of the world. To escape from the economism and factory-fetishism [usinisme] of the ultra-left, the S.I. elaborated a vision of which human relations were the center, and which is consonant

with "reality", is materialist, if these relations are given their full weight, so that they include production, labor. Feuerbachian anthropology prepared the way for theoretical communism such as Marx was able to synthesize during this own time, via the transition of the 1844 *Manuscripts*. In the same way the theory of "situations" has been integrated into a vision of communism of which the S.I. was incapable, such as is shown today in *Un monde sans argent* (23).

For the same reason, Debord read Marx in the light of Cardan, considering the "mature" Marx to have been submerged in political economy, which is false. Debord's vision of communism is narrow in comparison to the whole problem. The S.I. did not see the human species and its reconciliation with Nature. It was limited to a very Western, industrial, urban universe. It located automation wrongly. It spoke of "dominating nature" which also bespeaks the influence of *Sou B*. When it dealt with material conditions, in relation to the organization of space, it was still a matter of "relations between people." *Sou B* was limited by the enterprise, the S.I. by subjectivity. It went as far as it could, but on its original trajectory. Theoretical communism is more than a revolutionary anthropology. The 1844 *MSS* assimilate Feuerbach's vision by putting Man back into the totality of his relations.

The S.I. owed a great deal to the texts of the young Marx, but it failed to see one of their important dimensions. While other communists rejected political economy as a justification of capitalism, Marx superseded it. The comprehension of the proletariat presupposes a critique of political economy. The S.I. had much more in common with Moses Hess and Wilhelm Weitling, with Feuerbach and Stirner, the expression of a *moment* in the emergence of the proletariat. The period which produced them (1830-48) greatly resembles the one in which we live. Putting forward a radical subjectivity against a world of commodity objects and reified relationships, the S.I. expressed an exigency which was fundamental, yet had to be superseded.

Becker, a friend of Weitling's, wrote in 1844:

"We want to live, to enjoy, to understand everything . . . communism concerns itself with matter only so as to master it and subordinate it to the mind and spirit . . ."

A large part of current discussions reproduce these pre-1848 debates. Like *Invariance* today, Feuerbach made *humanity* into a *being* which permits the breaking of isolation:

"Isolation signifies a narrow and constricted life, while community, by contrast, signifies an infinite and free one."

Though he conceptualized the relation between Man and Nature (reproaching Hegel for having neglected it) Feuerbach made the human species into a being over and above social life: "The unity of I and Thou is God." The 1844 *MSS* gave the *senses* their place in human activity. By contrast, Feuerbach made sensualism (sic) into the primary problem:

"The new philosophy rests on the truth of feelings. In love, and in a more general way, in his feelings, every man affirms the truth of the new philosophy."

The theoretical renaissance around 1968 renewed the old concept within the same limits. Stirner opposed the "will" of the individual to Hess's moralism and Weitling's denunciation of "egoism", just as the S.I. opposed revolutionary pleasure to militant self-sacrifice. The insistence on subjectivity testifies to the fact that proletarians have not yet succeeded in *objectifying* a revolutionary practice. When the revolution remains at the stage of *desire*, it is tempting to make desire into the pivot of the revolution.

Footnotes

1. *Invariance*: journal published by a group which split from the International Communist Party, itself the most dogmatic and voluntarist byproduct of the "Bordiguist" Italian left. After several years of obscure, though occasionally brilliant theoretical involutions, *Invariance's* editor Jacques Camatte arrived at the position that capital has "escaped the law of value" and that therefore the proletariat has disappeared. For a presentation in English of his views, see *The Wandering of Humanity* published by Black and Red, Detroit. (Tr.)
2. The term "sign" is used in structuralist writing to mean a signifier (representation) that has become separated from what it originally signified (a phenomenon in the world). A "sign" thus implies a representation which refers only to itself, i.e. is "tautological." One example of a "sign" would be the credit extended in ever greater quantities to bankrupt nations by large banks, credit which cannot possibly be repaid: it is a representation of commodities which will never be produced. (Tr.)
3. Joseph Dejacque: French communist artisan active in the 1848 rising. A collection of his writings is available under the title *A Bas les chefs* (Champ Libre, Paris 1974).
4. Translator's footnote: The struggle over Radio Renascença in Portugal during 1975 bears out this point.
5. Appeared in English as *The Totality for Kids*: see bibliography.
6. In a series of articles in *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, it was shown how capitalist industry needs the *active and creative cooperation* of workers in order to function. The most telling example of this is the British rank-and-file workers' tactic of the "work to rule" in which all jobs are carried out precisely according to union contract and employer specification. This usually results in a decline in output by anywhere up to 50%. (Tr.)
7. This concept was central to the "unitary urbanism" of the early S.I. Loosely translated it means *drifting around*, usually on foot, in a city, and exploring and analyzing the life of the city thereby. (Tr.)
8. see bibliography
9. Henri Lefebvre: at one time the most sophisticated philosophical apologist for the French CP (cf. his *Dialectical Materialism*, Cape Editions, London). Lefebvre broke with the Party and during the late '50's and early '60's began to construct a "critical theory of everyday life." His work was important to the S.I. although he never transcended a fundamentally academic and sociologistic viewpoint. The S.I. denounced him after he published a text on the Paris Commune which was largely stolen from the S.I.'s earlier "Theses" on the same topic. (Tr.)
10. Published in the U.S. as *Decline and Fall of the Spectacular Commodity Economy*.
11. Internationalist Communist Party (founded in 1943). Their English journal is *Communist Program*.
12. "Ratgeb": pseudonym used by Vaneigem for his book, *De la greve sauvage a l'autogestion generalisee* Editions 10/18, Paris, 1973.
13. This fetishism of "autonomy" developed into a nasty little game among the "pro-situ" groups. They would solicit "dialogue" from people who "saw themselves" in one of their texts. When naive sympathizers responded, they would be encouraged to engage in some "autonomous practice" so as to prove that they were not "mere spectators." The most sincere among them would then attempt this. The result would *invariably* be savagely denounced by the pro-situ group as "incoherent," "confusionist," etc. and relations would be broken off. (Tr.)
14. Such as the subversive effect of the mass *refusal to pay* and the free distribution of goods and services carried out by the Italian "self-reduction" movement. Naturally, in a full-fledged revolutionary situation, this would go much further and would include the immediate communization of key means of production both to provide for the survival of the proletarian movement and to undermine the resource base of the remaining capitalist forces. (Tr.)
15. Published in 1975. Distributed by Editions de l'Oubli, Paris.
16. A left-wing intellectual French weekly.
17. *Veridique rapport sur les derniers chances de sauver le capitalisme en Italie*.
18. i.e. the movement of occupation of workplaces and campuses during May '68.
19. The translator disagrees with this estimation; cf. the account of the TAP strike in *Portugal; Anti-Fascism or Anti-Capitalism*, Root and Branch, 1976.
20. Geugan was the manager (and the real founder) of *Champ Libre* Publications until he was fired in 1975. He is now a fashionable figure in library and avant-garde circles.
21. Cardan-Chaulieu's real name.
22. Jean-Pierre Voyer, author of "Reich: How to Use" (available from Bureau of Public Secrets, P.O. Box 1044, Berkeley, Ca. 94701) and other texts published by *Champ Libre*.
23. *Le communisme: un monde sans argent* (3 vols.) by Organization des Jeunes Travailleurs Revolutionnaires, Paris, 1975.

S.I. Skeleton Bibliography

On the Poverty of Student Life (available from Bureau of Public Secrets) Pamphlet distributed during the notorious Strasbourg scandal. An excellent introduction to situationist ideas.

Society of the Spectacle Guy Debord

Black and Red/P.O. Box 9546/Detroit MI 48202

Decline and Fall of the Spectacular Commodity Economy

(available from: Bureau of Public Secrets/P.O. Box 1044/Berkeley CA 94701)

The Totality for Kids Raoul Vaneigem

(available from Bureau of Public Secrets)

La veritable scission dans l'Internationale

Editions *Champ Libre*. Documents by various members of the S.I. concerning the splitting and dissolution of the group.

The Revolution of Everyday Life Raoul Vaneigem

Practical Paradise Publications/Box LBD 197 King's Cross Rd./London WC1 England. The only published English version of the *Traite de savoir-vivre a l'usage des jeunes generations*.

Behind the strike wave—and beyond it

No more Mr. Nice Guy

by the Red-eye Staff

In the instant disposable museum of "news commentary," 1978 will no doubt be enshrined as "the year of the tax revolt." But it has also been the year of "Take This Job and Shove It," of the first nationwide strike wave in the U.S. since the beginning of the decade.

At the time of writing, the West Coast warehousemen of four major supermarket chains are still on strike after two-and-a-half months, and Teamster truck drivers are still honoring their picket lines. The Zim's chain was crippled for weeks by the biggest San Francisco restaurant strike in 35 years. Twenty-seven paper mills in the West have been shut down since July by a strike of 28,000 workers. In New York, pressmen for two of the city's three largest newspapers are still out. Strikes by teachers and school bus drivers in dozens of districts across the country, in some cases supported by parent-pupil boycotts of the scab-run schools, have delayed the start of the school year. A national strike by 300,000 railroad clerks halted virtually all rail traffic in the country for four days. All this follows walkouts by city workers in Detroit, Memphis, Louisville, Cleveland, Philadelphia, Washington D.C. and San Antonio, as well as the coal miners' strike earlier in the year.

One important feature of many of these strikes has been a good deal of overt violence as well as intensified judicial and police repression. In the supermarket walkout, one picket has been killed and several injured by scabs and heavily-armed security guards. In the city workers' and teachers' strikes, hundreds of pickets have been beaten by cops, jailed and fined. Judges at all levels of the court system have made liberal use of injunctions and "TROs" (Temporary Restraining Orders) against strikers. This, as well as the intransigence of the employers (for instance, Safeway published newspaper ads urging people to "Shop Where The Pickets Are!") shows a significant **hardening** of class lines in the United States. The U.S. capitalist class can no longer afford to be "nice" about labor disputes—and it is less reluctant to start these disputes by making aggressive inroads on workers' past gains. Even old labor pimps like Doug Fraser have been startled by its ferocity. On July 17, Fraser, President of the United Auto Workers, resigned from the Labor-Management Group, a government-sponsored think tank of top executives and union bureaucrats. In his letter of resignation he said:

"The leaders of the business community, with few exceptions, have opted for waging a one-sided class war in this country—a war against the working people; the unemployed, the poor, the minorities, the very young and the very old, and much of the middle class of our society."

In fact, even more than most strikes, the walkouts of the last few months have had an entirely **defensive** character. They are often provoked by ferocious speed-up, as at the Safeway distribution center in Richmond, CA., where management initiated a computerized "efficiency plan" designed to force fifty percent more work out of the warehousemen. In other places, the assault takes the form of layoffs while keeping up the old level of production. But in every case, workers are being told to work harder for less money. The Post Office contract rejected in August offered 19.5% over three years when inflation in consumer goods is running at over 10% per year; and the new settlement, imposed by a Federal "mediator," provides for 21.3% but takes away the job security clause won in 1968 from workers with less than **six years'** continuous service. Most of the contracts accepted by other public workers have not even been as good.

This massive attack by the U.S. capitalist class and its state is the inevitable result of the further weakening of the national economy by the global crisis. For American workers, the remote fetishistic dance of currencies on the international market has acquired concrete meaning not only as accelerating inflation and cutbacks in public services but as drastically intensified exploitation. At a world level, there is not enough new value being produced over and above what is needed simply to reproduce existing machinery and continue current expenditures on wages and raw materials. In particular, there is not enough being produced to invest in further large-scale mechanisation and automation. And so capital in its old age returns to the primitive methods of its youth, to the extraction of absolute surplus value by means of harder work and longer hours for lower real wages. Nothing better exemplifies the decay of the existing mode of production than this.

The grand irony that Marx foresaw in the *Grundrisse* has finally been realized. The very development of automation and mechanization, which could be used to lower the necessary worktime of everyone to a few hours a week, has led to an intensification of labor for virtually every worker on the planet. The same vast productive powers that could easily abolish hunger and privation worldwide have thrown capitalism into a crisis which is producing social misery on an unprecedented scale.

Capital in the developed countries has only been able to stay ahead of the crisis lapping at its heels by increasing labor productivity in great surges of technical innovation, forcing up and up the amount of value extracted from an hour of work of given intensity. But with each of these surges, the quantity of new, living labor contained in commodities has declined—and

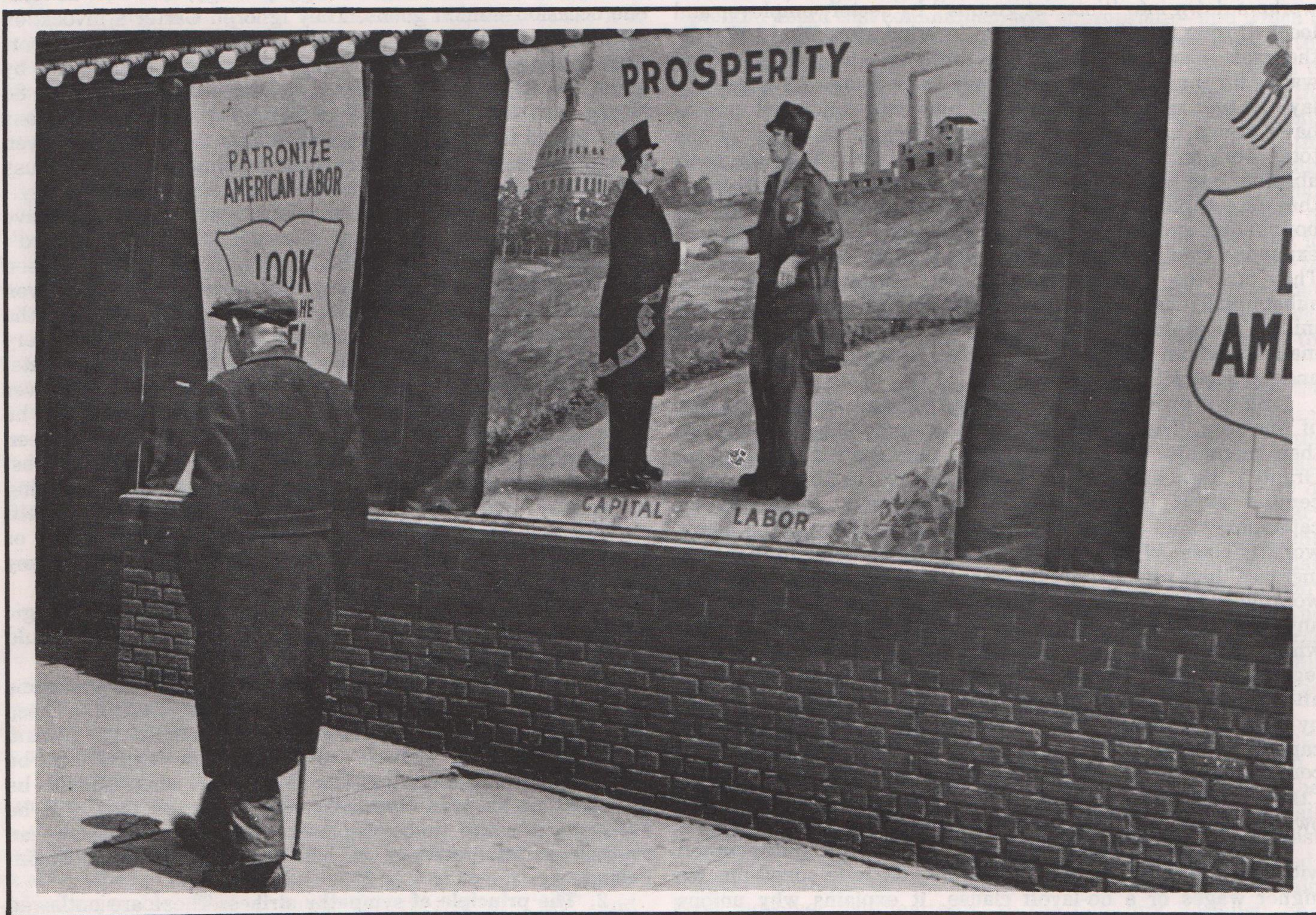
therefore the ratio of new capital to overall investment has also declined. This is nothing other than the tendency of the rate of profit to fall, which the capitalist class and its intellectual apologists both Left and Right thought they had cured forever. Now this dreaded disease reappears in what may be its terminal form. The old remedies like mergers, nationalization and credit expansion help less and less to stave off the symptoms; in the little-more-than-short run, they only make the patient sicker. So the capitalists of the major industrial powers turn to the workers of their own countries with the same command they have already given the workers of Africa, Asia and Latin America: "More for less!"

To the latter, this command has already come to mean three-digit inflation, unemployment rates of up to thirty percent, infant mortality rates of up to fifty percent, malnutrition, starvation, and State terror. These workers have responded with mass strikes, riots, workplace occupations, seizures of land and armed uprisings. They are already fully **proletarians** in the classical sense. They are without reserves, they have nothing to lose but their wretched survival—and they are more numerous than ever.

In the most powerful nations the warped boom of 1945-65 allowed the majority of workers a limited material comfort based on "consumer durables" and easy credit to buy them on. These reserves have softened the impact of the crisis on their lives, just as have the reserves of surplus value held by their capitalists. This has lent them a hint of the conservatism of the real "middle class"—the layers of small business people and semi-independent professionals. But this middle class does not strike against employers, because it employs itself. The workers of Britain, France, and U.S. and even

Sweden and West Germany have continued to strike, throughout all the years since 1945. Today they are buffeted by successive waves of crisis and capitalist assault and they begin to resist, at first to defend their gains over and above subsistence. But although the struggle is not yet life-and-death, their resistance differs only in quantity and intensity from that of wage workers in "less developed" countries. And the same is true of the capitalist violence which meets their resistance. In Philadelphia, Leeds or Nantes the workers face police clubs, company goons and court injunctions. In Jaipur, Lima and Szczecin they face CS gas, automatic weapons fire and torture. But both confront the same enemy in essentially the same way.

In particular, both confront the not-quite-dead weight of the unions. The current wave of strikes in the U.S. has revealed the role, if not the nature, of the unions more clearly than ever to their members. In the supermarket walkout, the Teamsters Western Regional Conference refused a strike sanction to the wildcatting Richmond local until it was forced to give one by the "sympathy lockout" which the other three chains staged alongside Safeway. This same Regional bureaucracy then proceeded to negotiate one "tentative settlement" after another, each one worse than the last. Even the International was compelled to reprimand it! The postal unions dragged their weight so heavily that they were able to forestall a strike against the proposed July settlement until the Federal "mediator" imposed the new one—and then they used their ponderous mechanism of "union democracy" to prevent the more militant workers from voting with their feet. The railroad clerks' union, having waited months before calling out more of its membership in support of the striking



local at Roanoke, VA., caved in before a court order after only four days of national strike. And so on.

Many rank-&-file union members, as well as almost all Leftists, believe that the problem with unions is "bad leadership." But again and again for the last half century unionists have voted out corrupt or "soft" bureaucrats and elected reform candidates, many of whom have been self-proclaimed "socialists." What happens? The reformers are faced with the choice between giving in to the employers or having the union destroyed by lawsuits and injunctions. Take Arnold Miller, elected to the presidency of the UMW in 1972. Within five years, Miller was doing everything in his power to force down the miners' throats a contract that took away all they had won in four decades of often brutal fighting.

While most union militants have nothing but contempt for their national leadership, they often support honest and "gutsy" local leaders. But these leaders are caught between the international union and the employers on one side, and the rank and file on the other. In the crunch they either knuckle under, or their locals are put in trusteeship by the bureaucracy, as happened to the restaurant workers' Local 2 in San Francisco only a few weeks after the leftist MacDonald slate took it over. Nor is going it alone, as the Richmond warehousemen's local tried to do, any answer in the long run. Without massive outside support, rebel locals are crushed in isolation.

No matter how good their intentions, union reformers are trapped by the National Labor Relations Board and the whole system of labor law, collective bargaining and binding arbitration. This system, and the very structure of unions, are designed to prevent the spread of job actions. They break the workers down into "interest groups" by sector, employer and local. During the "reconstruction" period after World War II, the most powerful unions were able to win increased real wages for their members—but only in exchange for accepting lay-offs and speedup. Meanwhile new, non-unionized sectors have grown up around them, decreasing their share of the total workforce, even where layoffs do not yet erode their absolute numbers. Now, when they reluctantly permit a strike, they face capital concentrated into vast units across national boundaries and a legal arsenal that has been reformed and expanded over a leisurely thirty years since the Wagner Act. They face the non-unionized majority, most of which earns substantially less money. And they face a pool of over fourteen million unemployed for whom they have done nothing, and for many of whom unions appear as an obstacle between them and a "decent" job.

But the problem goes deeper still. Unions today are a part of business. They negotiate the best price they can get for their members' labor power, while taking a cut off the top. Granted, this was just as much the case in the nineteenth century as it is now. But in those days an expanding capitalism could afford to make real concessions to the whole working class. Workers' resistance made it more profitable to increase their productivity by technical means than to keep on working them to death, or trying to. This is no longer true: if anything, the reverse is becoming true. Lasting gains for the whole class are no longer possible. And since the unions, as legal, established institutions, have their interests to look after, they cease to be organizations of the working class and by the same token turn against it. Most have substantial capital investments of their own—sometimes in the same company with which they have labor contracts. They defend "their" workers to a limited extent only so as to defend their own existence, which is based on membership dues.

This explains why the unions are mostly unconcerned with working conditions and are willing to trade speed-ups for higher wages or a no-layoff clause. It explains why unions

have such an interest in the "national economy," why they call on the government to control imports and strengthen the defense industry. It explains why they are quite ruthless in suppressing small-scale actions which go beyond the boundaries of the contract and the law, as the UAW crushed the 1973 occupation of Detroit's Mack Avenue Chrysler plant with a "flying squad" of 1000 union staffers wielding baseball bats. For all these reasons, and especially because of their increasing weakness and dependence, the unions are being integrated not only into business but into the government apparatus. (The logical outcome of this process is the role of unions in so-called "socialist" countries.)

At the most fundamental level, unions by their very nature are bound to a society where people accept a wage in exchange for the use of their time and energy—and thereby give up the power to determine how production and distribution will be organized and to what end. Although they have made themselves autonomous to some degree from their members, the root of their power is workers' acceptance, however grudging, of the wage relationship. Conversely, when workers are forced by the crisis and the misery it brings to break the law, they also find themselves challenging the wage relationship and therefore the union as well as the company and the government.

In fact, the only way some workers have been able to hold any ground against the capitalist assault is precisely by going outside the union framework and defying the courts and the Federal bureaucracy. Earlier this year, the miners spread their strike by means of roving pickets in car caravans. They blockaded the roads into the mines. They used guns to fight off cops, armed scabs and company thugs, and—on at least one occasion—union goons. They ignored Carter's invocation of the Taft-Hartley Act. Also, they won more active support from other workers than has any other strike since 1945, by going directly to locals of other unions in basic industry. So strong was the groundswell of solidarity that these unions were forced to donate millions of dollars to the UMW—even though much of this money wound up being used to sell lousy contracts to the membership instead of going into strike pay.

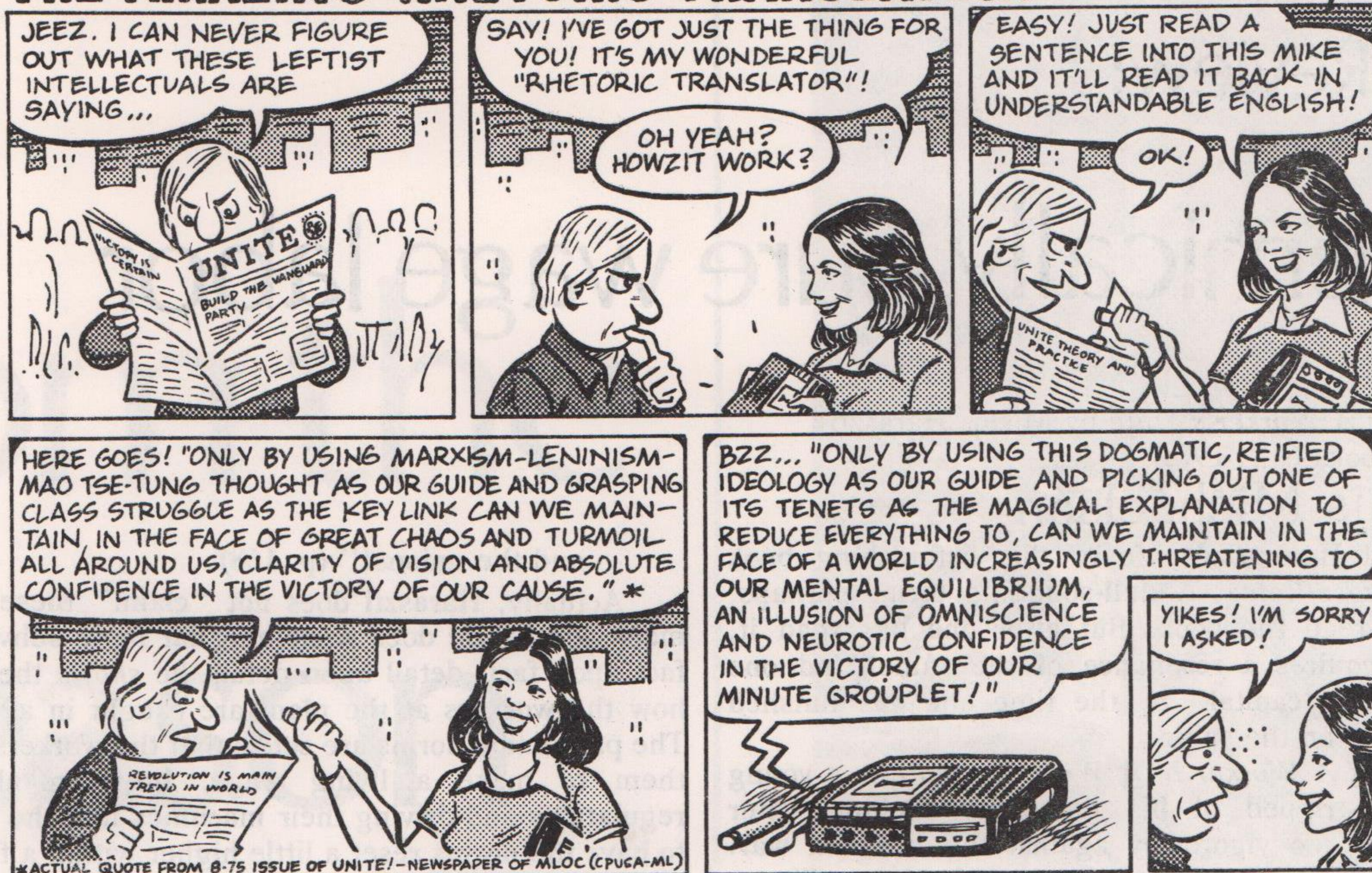
By contrast, most of the walkouts in the recent wave have stayed within the terms of the union and the "hard" conventional strike. About the most radical tactic has been mass picketing by schoolteachers and other city workers. Even the sporadic counter-violence of some strikers, such as the Teamster drivers and warehousemen, has remained very limited and largely under the control of local bureaucrats. None of the contracts won have even equalled the 37% over three years for which the miners settled. Probably it will be some time before the majority of U.S. workers have been sufficiently stripped of their economic reserves—their houses, their savings, their access to credit—that they will be willing to employ even the same level of violence and self-organization as have their counterparts in Italy, Spain or France. In this country, the movement toward class autonomy has only just begun.

This said, however, there remain some basic strategic points which revolutionaries within the class can and should emphasize in their intervention.

1. **The linking-up of strikes already in progress by means of rank-&-file committees outside union control.** These committees should remain directly responsible to general assemblies of the strikers; their function would not be "leadership" but coordination. Moreover, they should be dissolved as soon as the strikes are over, or they will be absorbed into the union-employer machine and become an obstacle to later actions, as has happened in Italy, Spain, Poland, etc.

2. **The principle of sympathy strikes.** These are outlawed

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in the U.S. under the Management-Labor Relations Act. But given the sheer size of enterprises in the U.S., and the ease with which production can be rerouted around localized walkouts, they have become an absolute necessity for workers' self-defense in many cases. More important in the long term, they open up in practice the perspective of class against class.

3. **The development of solidarity between employed and unemployed.** In the U.S. the scale of unemployment has been concealed and its political effect muted by its disproportionate concentration among non-whites and other marginalized sectors like youth. As the crisis advances, however, "privileged" white workers come to bear more of the brunt of unemployment. This will gradually weaken the social barriers between these two groups within the working class, barriers which (as last year's events in Italy demonstrated) are one of the most important weapons at capital's disposal. The unemployed can throw their weight behind strikes, while employed workers can use their social leverage to force concessions to the unemployed, such as increased benefits.

4. **Imagination in tactics.** Once the conditioned fear of illegality begins to dissolve, the range of possibilities is enormous. The technical complexity of many modern work processes makes sabotage all the easier. Even in labor-intensive situations like food service, there are things that can be done—as when the plumbing of one Zim's restaurant was mysteriously filled with quick-setting cement during the night. It is useless to formulate such recipes in advance, but the extension of tactics like self-reduction and "social strikes" (see "Short-Circuiting Capital" in this issue) to the American terrain is worth thinking about. Herein lies the profound truth of Bakunin's famous observation that "the urge to destroy is also a creative urge." The energy involved in dreaming up new ways to jam the machinery of exploitation is the same energy that may one day construct a new world.

It is tempting to use the old metaphor of the giant stirring in its sleep to describe the strikes of 1978. But the metaphor grows false as it grows stale. The workers of the United States are part of a collective historical subject, a world class—but they are also thinking, feeling individuals, prone to longing, anger, fear, confusion. At this moment these individuals are

undergoing a painful, difficult process. They are discovering, gradually and with many false starts, that this society which from every side promises them comfort and happiness can no longer give them either; and that it is taking away from them what little of both they have been able to win from it. At the same time the scale and violence of their response to this dispossession, the level of creativity, initiative and collective effort involved in defending themselves, will tend to open up to them the possibility of taking their lives into their own hands. "Behind every strike lurks the hydra of the revolution," said Lenin, and this is all the more true in a society which has even less justification for its existence than it did when he was alive—in Leningrad as in San Francisco, Cleveland or New York.



Book Review:

Chemically pure wage labor

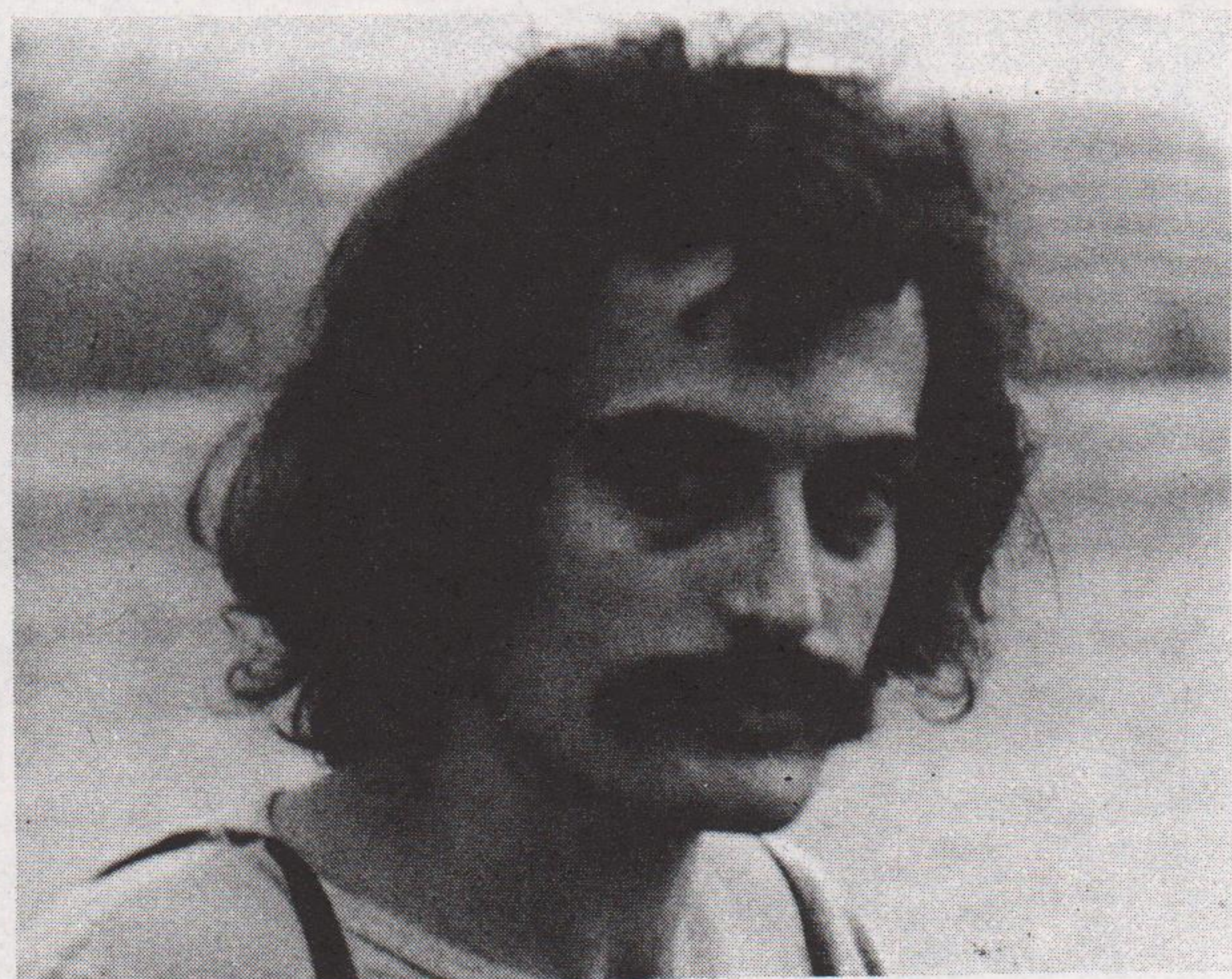
A Worker In A Worker's State by Miklos Haraszti
(Universe Books N.Y. 1978)

by Louis Michaelson

The original Hungarian title of this astonishing book means simply *Piece-Rates*. A dull-sounding term, perhaps, before one has read the book. But after one has read it, "piece-rates" acquires a resonance of the same kind one hears in the word "capital" by the time one has finished Marx's little essay on the subject.

The author of *A Worker In A Worker's State* is a young poet who was stripped of his university diploma after protesting a little too vigorously against the Vietnam war. Placed under "police control," a mixture of close surveillance and partial house arrest similar to "banning" in South Africa, Haraszti went to work at what was then the Red Star Tractor plant on Csepel island in Budapest. His aim was to make a publishable study of industrial working conditions in contemporary Hungary. The manuscript was rejected by the State publishers who had commissioned it on the grounds that it was "hostile." It is hostile—hostile to alienated labor and therefore to the Hungarian state which, like all other modern states, rests on alienated labor. One is therefore not surprised to learn that Haraszti was arrested in 1973 merely for circulating a few copies of the manuscript to acquaintances. The Prosecutor's summing-up at the trial was in places painfully clear:

"The author claims that there is antagonism between the workers at the factory and the management. He claims that the management exploit the workers and systematically humiliate them, with the support of the Party



Miklos Haraszti

and the unions!" (p. 168)

Actually, Haraszti does not "claim" these things in so many words. He does something far more subversive. Piling fact upon fact, detail upon detail, he *shows* them. He shows how the workers at the plant are caught in a vicious circle. The production norms are set so that the workers must exceed them to make a living wage, breaking all the safety regulations and driving their machines into the ground—only to have the norms reset a little higher within a few months so as to match the new speed they have squeezed out of themselves. He shows how the piece-rate system, "this chemically pure form of socialist wage labor," atomizes the workers, making each one in his quest for "loot" drive up the norm and thereby increase the burden on all the others. He shows how the union acts as an arm of management, side by side with the foremen, the inspectors, and the rate-fixers, even more openly than in Western countries. He shows how vainly the managers attempt to gloss over the class conflict between themselves and the workers with oily talk about "our common interest" and "socialist emulation."

If this were all Haraszti had done with his book, he would still have done the revolutionary movement an inestimable service. Aside from anything else, he has demonstrated to anyone who is not ideologically blinded and deafened that Hungarian society is regulated by the same essential laws, rests on the same relationships, as any Western capitalist country. The translator, Michael Wright, asserts without evidence in his biographical preface that Haraszti "does not believe, for instance, that East Europe is capitalist in character." Curious, then that Haraszti should write these lines:

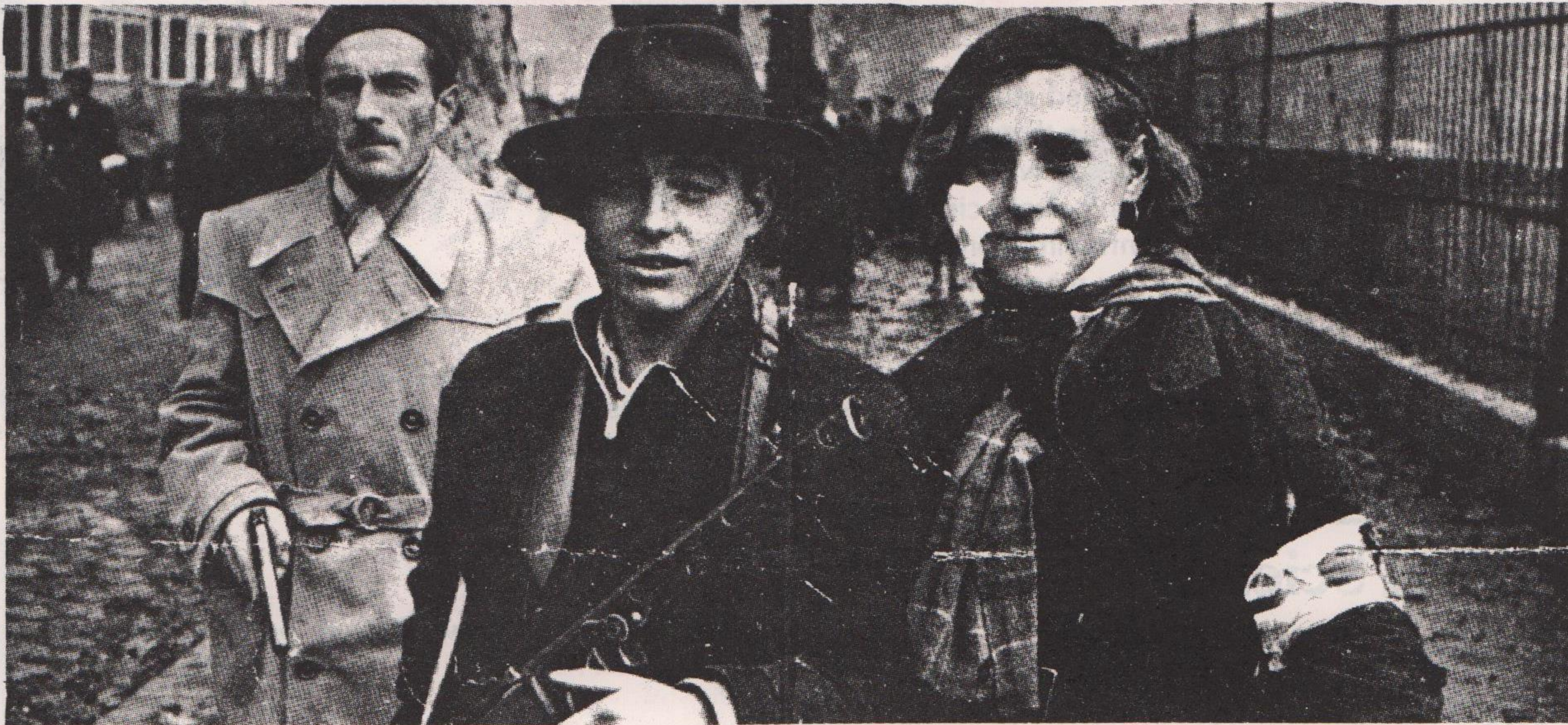
"But if piece-work is, in the final analysis, payment based on time...then the workers involved should rid themselves of the illusion that they are paid according to their output, and should ask themselves the same question as those workers who are paid by the hour: what happens to the vast difference between the *value* that they produce during a minute (or an hour) and the payment which they are given for a minute (or an hour)?"

(p. 38; emphasis added)

Karl Marx gave us the definitive answer to that question over a century ago. But for those who still shy away from the naked evidence, who proclaim that the wages and profits in "socialist" countries are "mere forms," a convenient way of dividing up the social product, try this:

"...I myself can only write about wage-

Red-eye



Budapest 1956

labor, piece-rates, norms, supplementary wages, and the two-machine system as outrages. But in putting the emphasis on their specific characteristics, I feel that I am guilty of maintaining the illusion that these are contingent forms which can be reformed. It seems to me that, right up to the blank page in front of me, money proves the onnipotence that it has already demonstrated in the factory. It not only has the capacity to guarantee or threaten my existence, but also that of censuring my tongue [...]. Money exercises an absolute power over the terrain of objectivity: here, as in the factory, it has the power to exile into the realm of poems those who dream of abolishing it or—which comes to the same thing—to cut out their tongues.”

It is difficult to restrain myself from starting to mine the extraordinary wealth of this passage, of what it has to say about commodity fetishism, about separate “art,” about capitalist society in decline and what it does to human creativity. I will content myself with saying that Haraszti has fulfilled Rimbaud’s demand that writing be “absolutely modern.” He has, under conditions of great difficulty and danger, embarked on the supersession (and therefore the synthesis) of poetry, journalism, and the critique of economics.

Clearly, then, the revelation of the social character of Hungary through its mode of production is far from being the only merit of *A Worker*. By the sheer force of his honesty and the brilliance of his imagination, Haraszti penetrates deep into the psychology and the *physiology* of wage labor in a way that will produce sympathetic tremors of rage and joy in anyone who has to survive by selling their life. He penetrates so far that in one tiny gesture of resistance to the system he discovers the seed of its negation.

This gesture is “homers”—objects the workers illegally

make for themselves on the company’s machines and on “company” time, i.e., *their own* time. Homers, it seems, exert a magnetic power over workers which is quite out of proportion to the small amount of value they could get back by selling them. In fact, they often leave them in the factory after they quit the job. On these little things—key holders, ashtrays, knives, counters in stainless steel to teach children arithmetic, and so on—workers lavish all the creativity they are denied in their regular work. The passion for homers, and the way workers cooperate in designing and making them, lead Haraszti to imagine “The Great Homer;”

“Precisely what is senseless about homers from the point of view of the factory announces the tranquil insistent affirmative of work motivated by a single incentive, stronger than all others: the conviction that our labor, our life, and our consciousness can be governed by our own goals. The Great Homer would be realized through machines, but our experts would subordinate them to two requirements, that with them we make things of real utility, and that we are independent of the machines themselves [...]. We would only produce what united homer-workers needed and what allowed us to remain workers united in the manufacture of homers.” (p. 145)

In the first draft of this review, I followed this quotation with the comment: “What is this but Marx’s ‘free association of the producers’?” On second thoughts, this comment, while accurate enough, is facile. It does not do justice to the enormous, slightly clumsy power one can feel in Haraszti’s words. Here he is fighting for language with which to speak about communism in a country where the terminology of the old communist movement has become the bland and poisonous verbal Muzak of capital. For this fight, for the victories he has already won in it, Miklos Haraszti deserves our honor and our gratitude.

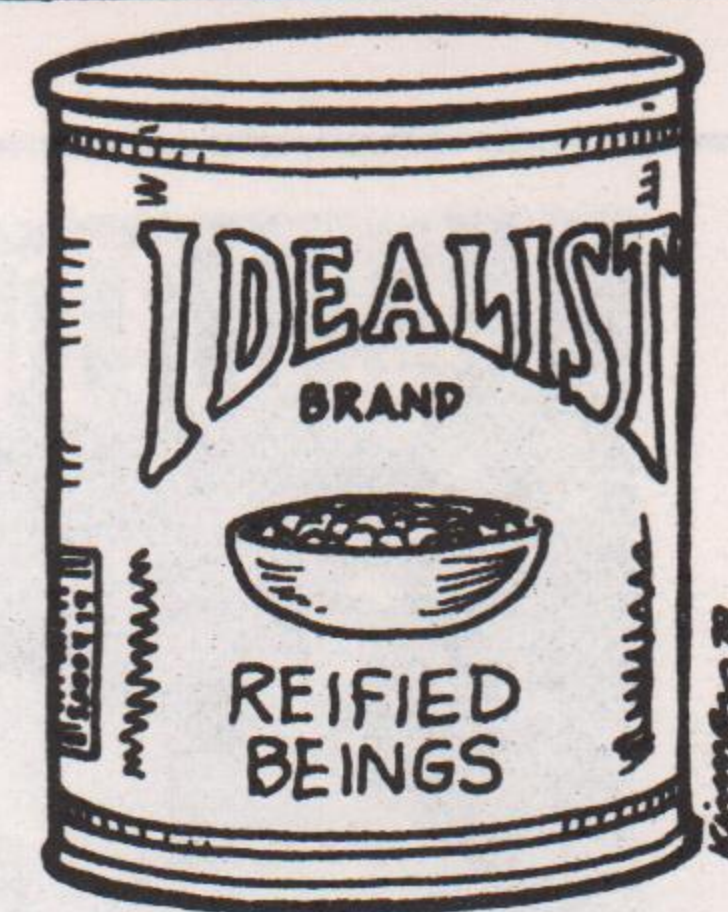
Food for thought

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- a) an illicitly distilled stimulant
- b) a tactical weapon that zeroes in on hot spots
- c) what you wake up with after a Leninist party
- d) a dirty word in certain circles
- e) a visionary inflammation
- f) a revolutionary magazine

A. all of the above

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If we are successful, that wise laughter which ripples through *The Magic Flute*, as well as through the best improvisations of Charlie Parker, will echo among the hanging gardens, the squares and labyrinths of a city built by a race of lovers.