

**Troploin Newsletter**

**# 4**

**April 2007**

# **WHAT'S IT ALL ABOUT ?**

## **QUESTIONS & ANSWERS**

*What's it all about ?*

*Anyone in doubt*

*I don't want to go until I've found it all out*

*N.S.U., Cream, 1966*

At the beginning of 2007, *Revolution Times* (Postlagernd, 23501 Lübeck, Germany, and [www.geocities.com/revolutiontimes](http://www.geocities.com/revolutiontimes)) sent us a questionnaire which covers so much ground that we've decided to translate it into French and English. *Revolution Times* will publish it in German. There are minor differences between the three versions.

**[1] Please let our readers know a little bit about yourself, your latest works and perhaps the discussion and activity you are involved in, and your plans for the future.**

Basically, we write what we'd like to read but nobody else writes, so we have to write it ourselves.

First, a few negative points:

There's little chance that a person who's never once felt the urge to blow anything up will write meaningful subversive stuff. But the same is true of a person who has never felt some derision when looking at bookshelves full of revolutionary books and archives, or at the infinite availability of similar books and archives on the Internet. There's no relevant theory without an awareness of the limits of words in general and theory in particular.

No theoretical revolutionary effort is a direct expression of proletarian revolutionary activity, let alone the only one or the best one.

No intellectual key opens the door unto a total comprehension of human evolution. Theory can only grasp fragments of reality, especially in fragmented times like ours. It's pointless to claim to build the party of the proletariat. It's equally pointless to go for an all-embracing understanding of past and present. The difference is that party-builders can hardly disguise their unsuccessful attempts at creating factory cells, whereas the inadequacy of grand theories is less plain to see.

Many revolutionary magazines re-write current events in Marxist language. We'd rather take the risk of a prospective approach. That includes looking in to the future, and this activity can often be faulty in its method and predictions. Still, better to be wrong than to publish texts where nothing is at stake.

Communist theory does not mean theorising the inevitable coming of communism. "I'd rather, once and for all, assign a distant future to revolution than have it forecast every day by *professional* revolutionaries that are proved wrong every day." (E. Coeurderoy, 1854)

Some comrades are never surprised by anything, and are always able to integrate any event within the framework of a dialectic that preordains everything. It's natural for them when a NATO armada takes on little Serbia. It's natural for them when ex-State capitalist China becomes a major economic power in fifteen years. Prophets of the past or recent past are never wrong. Unlike them, we on the other hand don't have an answer for everything. Theories that claim to explain everything explain in fact very little.

Denouncing the bourgeois, the intellectuals, the left, the leftists, the media, etc. is meaningless.

When the bourgeois claims life is getting or will get better, there is no point in retorting it is in fact getting worse and worse.

Before, this society used to say: capitalism is good for you. Now it says capitalism may be good or bad, but there's no other option, so let's make do with it. Before, revolutionary thought was obscured. Now "it's contained by overexposure" (K. Knabb), by a permanent self-castigating self-critique that puts the blame on everything but the essential. The "repressive tolerance" of the 1960s has turned into a constant transformation of criticism into an ever-flowing verbal Niagara that dilutes the potential subversive content of criticism. Revolutionary activity can't be exactly the same when *The Communist Manifesto* is only to be found in specialised bookshops, or when we buy it in paperback.

Consequently, our purpose is not to circulate information. Revolution is not a party affair : it's not an educational affair either, whether taught by an enlightened teacher-leader, or self-taught in a bottom-up approach.

The taste for polemics is usually proportional to an inability to act upon reality. We don't reproach anyone with this inability, just with the habit of making up for it through verbal violence.

When we spot a flaw in a group or a theory, obviously this leads to disagreement. But whenever we're interested in a group or a theory, it's because of its strong point, however debatable it can be. So theoretical discussion means pointing to *the strong point* of whatever we discuss. Political feuds do the exact opposite: they concentrate on the shortcomings of the opponent and fish out the most questionable quotes, because the aim is not to understand but to debunk.

In a more positive way:

We've dealt with themes as different as capital and labour today, the Kosovo war, "September 11", religion, child/adult relationships, justice, classes, US imperialism, crises, the 2005 estate riots in France... We'd like to write on the content of communism, war, the SI, democracy, primitivism, ecology, 1968, the Internet, the Jewish question and Palestine, Oaxaca, the lumpenproletariat, classes again, Turino in 1920 and 1969, the evolution of language..., and to review the history of the slave trade by O. Pétré-Grenouilleau, Jared Diamond's *Collapse*, utopias like Zamiatin's *We*, *Brave New World*, 1984 and *The Dispossessed*..., to publish articles from the "Italian" Left review *Bilan* (1933-38) and the French group GLAT (1959-76), as well as short texts by resisters, such as Antonin Artaud's letter to the Congress in Defence of Culture in 1935 and pages from Armand Robin.....

This is not a list of works in progress, nor a foretaste of future readings. Only a small part of our plans will see the light, partly because changing circumstances change our desires and priorities. We're only mentioning these items to show our attempt to contribute to what the Situationists called a *unitary critique*. The common ground of all these themes is the interest in the ways a proletarian community (and a future human one) emerges and asserts itself, is decomposed and then recomposes itself.

An inquisitive reader of revolutionary books, pamphlets and leaflets might wonder how capitalism can still be thriving, as most of these texts describe a system ridden with deep contradictions, erupting into one crisis after the other and causing worldwide revolts soon to turn into revolution. On the contrary, we've got to understand how this world goes through so many crises, and sometimes through revolutionary attempts, **and** overcomes them. How does capitalism hold out ? The negative forces that work upon society and the *positive* forces that keep it going are closely related: since they must address the same world, revolution and counter-revolution act upon the same reality. Bringing to light the strength of the positive, for instance the forms of freedom or universality permitted and promoted by capitalism, is necessary in order to grasp how this positive is heavy with contradictions that create revolutionary possibilities.

**[2] What is your opinion concerning the leftwing movement, and what is your relationship to it: to only criticise it, fight it, or use it like other possibilities to fight the system ?**

If *leftwing* means social-democracy and Stalinism, it's quite clear we have nothing in common with them.

Stalinism belongs to the past and today's Labour Party or SPD aren't the same as in 1930 or even 1960, but we'd be naïve to declare reform (and therefore reformism) dead...

...especially as anti-globalisation is a renewal of reformism (see our next answer). We have as much (as little) to do with it as we had with leftism in 1970. In those days, we did not publish long anti-Trotskyist or anti-Maoist pamphlets. Nowadays, taking on anti-globalisation ideas is as futile as would have been disproving the programme of the CP thirty years ago. Reformism does not call for refutation, but for the explanation of why it exists. Our "position" regarding reformism results from the general content of what we do and say.

It's impossible to use a trade-union or an election in a subversive way. But no principle forbids one of us to be a member of a union if he works in a firm where most workers are unionised.

More generally, fighting (even with peaceful and lawful means) for higher wages or shorter working hours is no obstacle on the road to revolution. The improvement of living conditions is not objectionable in itself. Reform is anti-communist when it binds together labour and capital. The criterion does not lie in numbers or fighting methods, but only in the historical function of the reform. A local strike (whether or not it ends in victory) for a 50 centime per hour rise can help the strikers get together and realise what they are and could do. On the contrary, when sit-downs involving millions of strikers, as in Europe and the US in the 1930s, reinforced the integration of labour into capital, via mass support for the New Deal, the new unionism of the CIO, Popular Fronts and parliamentary democracy, these strikes ended up being negative factors from the point of view of proletarian emancipation.

**[3] What do you think of movements like anti-globalisation ? What is your position ? On the one hand there are young people who hate capitalism and criticise parts of it. On the other hand political groups have their anti-globalisation campaigns in which these young people are merely possible recruits or a mass for political manoeuvres.**

Anti-globalisation is a by-product of a wider situation that appeared in the 1990s : labour's bigger and more conscious resistance to a defeat it has suffered since the second half of the 1970s. This defeat is now met with an active resistance on most continents : in countries that have gone through drastic market "modernisation" (the US, Britain, Australia, New Zealand...), in countries where modernisers are partly held in check (France, Italy...), in Latin America where wage earners' and peasants' actions combine, in ex-Third World countries (India, Bangladesh...), and in ex-State capitalist regimes (China). On a world scale, there's a lot more working class response than twenty years ago but, as it doesn't go beyond the present stalemate of the class struggle, it's unable to create a new social compromise as stable and as durable (but by no means eternal) as Fordism was, and unable to produce the political forms that would structure such a compromise.

So, we have a situation where a renewed worker militancy cannot not offset the globally downward trend of the workers' lot. That reaction goes together with a surge in opposition from various social groups on a wide range of issues: few of them are initially and finally antagonistic to capitalism, but they fuel discontent that's as inflammable as volatile. These are strange times when the largest ever peace demonstrations support big bourgeois States because they stand for peace (France and Germany, particularly) against others who go to war (the US and Britain). At the same time, the left turns liberal

in one way or other. So there is at present no real “reform party” as there nearly always used to be. Anti-globalisation stands in the middle of this predicament.

In the 1960s and 70s, leftism was political: it aimed at creating a party and vainly competed with already declining worker bureaucracies like the French, Italian or Spanish CPs or the left of the Labour Party. Antiglobalisation, on the contrary, claims to be first and foremost social: social movements, social forums, social centres... It wishes for the State to be by-passed, not conquered. Instead of building a new (popular or worker) State, antiglobalisers want to provide everyone with new rights to limit State power. Parties are out, NGOs are in. Whereas “moderate” antiglobalisers call for a (*strong*) State to implement a new Keynesianism, a sort of popular New Deal, “extreme” antiglobalisers act as if the State might die of its natural death. They nurture the illusion that the State could wither away on its own because social change would be happening everywhere, as is hoped by sub-comandante Marcos and theorised by J. Holloway: *Change the world without taking power*.

This is a mimic (some would say a “recuperation”) of the communist critique of politics and political revolution (see our next answer). The communist standpoint is that revolution does not take central political power, revolution destroys it – or there’s no revolution.

It’s no accident that the most openly radical and non-pacifist wing of the movement, the Black Bloc for instance, withdrew from the public eye after September 11, 2001. After the assault on Manhattan and the Pentagon, outright and justified violence was perceived by the vast majority of antiglobalisers and social forum participants as anti-democratic, as an attack upon the common people. Smashing bank windows or clashing with riot police seemed a (minor but ill chosen) equivalent of two planeloads killing thousands of people in the World Trade Centre. To us, violent means are not superior by nature to peaceful ones. But a movement that renounces violence renounces historical change, and contents itself with whatever doses of change the existing system will permit. A few months before “9/11”, the repression of the Genoa demonstrations in July 2001 had already proved that fun and peaceful civil disobedience are no match for a political power set upon crushing popular resistance under its iron heel : as far as the function of the State is concerned, the Italian police were better Marxists than the Tute Bianche.

There’s no point trying to oppose grassroots antiglobalisers to their leaders and thinkers, like the Trotskyists trying to play the workers of the CP against the Stalinist bureaucrats. The rank-and-file usually gets the leadership it wants and deserves. Antiglobalisation is not a screen that we should tear for revolution to appear in its true light. There will be a rupture between a number of antiglobalisers and the organisations they’re now involved in, but it will only happen in troubled times. Our best contribution to that future break is to be as clear as possible about the nature of antiglobalisation.

**[4] A leaflet that sums up our positions, *The Fight for the classless society*, gives this fundamental position : “The fight for the classless society is anti-political. Because any politics, whether *left*, *right* or *centre* means only the administration of capitalist misery: it is part of the organisation of want, dependence and alienation. “Revolutionary” politics is one of the varieties of power politics: it has done its duty to history. It did not only prove its true character in Russia 1917 and Spain 1936, it has also proved its inability to free humans from capitalism. As “revolutionary” politics is part of the problem, it can’t offer the solution.”**

**What do you think of this critique of politics ?**

Communism is indeed neither political nor a-political, but **anti**-political. Most schools of thought regard the “problem of power” as the Number One issue: old “liberals” like the English political philosophers of the 17-18<sup>th</sup> centuries and Montesquieu and Tocqueville wanted to avoid tyranny by checks and balances; democrats want to manage and moderate State power by election processes culminating in national representation; Leninists want to take the power; anarchists want it scattered everywhere so that its oppressive potentialities are neutralised. Marx’s early writings (particularly *The Jewish question* and *The King of Prussia and social reform*) are a critique of power as such and of politics as such. The State cannot be understood (and done away with) without an historical understanding of why power and politics have come to the fore and become an obsession.

In Russia, it’s the failure of the revolution that turned it into a process centred round the State. It’s not the Bolsheviks’ lust for power that destroyed the social movement: it’s the lack of social change that wore out this movement and left the Bolsheviks in charge. The content is always the prime factor, by its driving force, or by the exhaustion of that force.

Insurrections are doomed if they do not attempt to communise society. What happens depends on what the insurgents do and don’t do. Without communisation, revolution shrinks to mere proletarian power soon degenerating into bureaucratic power, as in Russia after 1917.

**[5] The question of antifascism is very important and controversial. People like us, with a strong critique of antifascist ideology and reality, are often confronted with reproaches like: we would sabotage the antifascist work, we would make Nazi horrors relative because we denounce and fight democratic horrors and the whole of the capitalist mode of production (from primitive accumulation and colonisation to today’s wars, destruction of nature, and plastic daily life), and so on. What do you think of these reproaches and what are your experiences ?**

**Some Bordigists say that antifascism is the worst product of fascism. What is your point of view concerning this statement ?**

Verbal traps are dangerous, but even more so when a faulty word happens to take its meaning from another faulty word. *Democracy* and *fascism* have been used for eighty years as the opposed poles of a couple that has come to define itself by this opposition. Since both terms are flawed, there’s no understanding of their relationship unless we question them both.

Calling modern parliamentary representation *democracy*, or autonomous and self-government procedures *direct democracy*, is verbal nonsense. In ancient Greece, democracy was born as a solution to organise the running of a specific society by the means of the rule of a specific *demos*, whose members were defined in a special and limiting way, and where each citizen (in principle and often in practice) **governed and was governed**. Using the same word for 19<sup>th</sup> or 21<sup>st</sup> century Western *representative* system is as relevant as calling Athens 500 B.C. a capitalist city. But this delusion has historical reasons. If the rising bourgeoisie looked for political models in ancient Greece (where the word “democracy” was not as frequent and obvious as is usually believed), it’s because the bourgeois needed that reference. If the word and notion have stood out for a couple of centuries, and are still alive and well, including in workers’ organisations and social movements in general, here again it’s

because they expressed and express some prevailing reality. A forthcoming text will try and sort out these contradictions. For the moment, let's just point this out:

Nobody can seriously equate democracy and dictatorship, nor democracy and fascism.

The point made by communists, from 1918 onwards, is *not* that dropping a ballot paper in the box (an act which is indeed a dispossession of oneself) would be the same as being sent to Dachau. The point made by Bordiga and Pannekoek alike is that the most open election system, with lots of debates, meetings, street demos, etc., has never prevented and will never prevent the creation of concentration camps. Every democratic country has had and can have its Dachaus in one form or other. Supporting democracy in order to avoid dictatorship just *doesn't work*. It never has and never will. Here lies the essential. To prove this essential, there is no need to relativise, minimise or deny the all too *real* horrors of fascism. In some (not all, of course) crises, democracy voluntarily commits "suicide" because it prefers law and order, however harsh and murderous, to disorder. Any good history book gives evidence of this process, which happened in 1922 as well as 1933.

Like "democracy", the word *fascism* is a hotbed of confusions.

Nazism was born out of the frustrations of parts of the petit-bourgeoisie, and grew into a mass movement through a trans-class posturing which mixed the most blatant demagoguery with the promise of solving everything thanks to the elimination of the Jews and the Marxists. These two targets were closely linked. The Nazis did not speak of the "Marxists" because of a special concern for the author of *Das Kapital*: that notion was necessary to include moderate socialists, Stalinists, genuine communists and union activists, in other words all brands of worker militancy. Hitler differed from Mussolini, but in both countries fascism-Nazism could not have existed if there had not been a workers' movement, reformist but active and perceived as a threat by the bourgeois. In 1933, the remnants of the German Left interpreted Hitler's coming to power as the last stage of the counter-revolution of 1919-21: fascism did not crush the proletarian wave, it finally confirmed its defeat.

On the one hand, Hitler's enemy *was* the working class : it's in the workers' districts that the Nazis unleashed their destructive energy before 1933 and immediately after they took power. Hitler only became useful and legitimate to the ruling class by his ruthless determination to eradicate workers' organisations, and by his ability to do it in the streets before January 1933 wherever the SAs were strong enough. On the other hand, as soon as it could, and as long as it could, including when it was losing the war, as late as Summer 1944, Nazism relentlessly killed all the Jews it managed to lay its hands on, with such method and coherence that it is absurd not to perceive this killing as an *essential* part of its programme. National-socialism can only be understood if we take into account those two complementary aspects, the conjunction of which caused its success and its genocidal evolution.

What is antifascism ? It doesn't just mean being *against* fascism. It means a particular way of fighting fascism, by giving this fight absolute priority, particularly over the fight against other political forms of bourgeois rule, and first of all the democratic forms. (Similarly, "anti-imperialism" does not mean fighting imperialism, but supporting national liberation movements against dominant imperialist countries.) Antifascism supports democracy in order to get rid of fascism. This support will often be partial, critical and provisional, and think of itself as anti-State. In Spain, 1936, quite a few people thought they were practising a "revolutionary" antifascism: they believed the armed proletarians could afford to neglect the democratic State for the moment and simply take the anti-Franco struggle into their own hands without bothering about a bourgeois police and army made powerless by the workers' insurrection. This was the position of many anarchists, Trotskyists and members of German and Italian left communist groups that went to Spain after the Summer of 1936 to join the anarchist or POUM militia. When *Bilan* told these comrades that they were in fact fighting Franco alongside the Spanish Republican army, and that no anti-Franco combat could be achieved without also combating the Republican State, because bourgeois democrats can't and won't give themselves the means to defeat fascist bourgeois, *Bilan's* stand appeared dogmatic, absurd, even close to desertion. In the light of what followed, the forced integration of the militia into the regular army, the demise and crushing of

proletarian autonomy, May 37, the destruction of worker and peasant collectivities, only to result in the inability of the Republican government to defeat Franco, this sequence of events rather points out to the opposite: by and large, *Bilan* was right. It was even proved right by the fact that many of the communists who'd been to Spain to take part in what they thought was a revolutionary process left the country within a year.

Sixty-eight years have passed since the end of the Spanish Republic, and sixty-two years have elapsed since the fall of the Third Reich. Fascism belongs to the past as much as Stalinism, and antifascism has only a political value as a slogan.

The 21<sup>st</sup> century antifascist is an orphan: a world without fascism leaves him just with a role, a part he plays as he can, and with difficulty. It's easy to smile at a cartoon of Le Pen costumed in a mock SA uniform, but no one turns up at an anti-Le Pen demo dressed like a *Rote Front* member. Contemporary antifascism is period acting without the costume.

Antifascism is the politics of *lesser evilism*. It subordinates everything to the annihilation of an enemy that makes all other enemies look acceptable, even those hitherto deemed the most unacceptable. To get rid of Hitler, the most powerful weapons are welcome : the FBI, Stalin or the atom bomb.

Unfortunately for the antifascist, there's now an overload of lesser evils. What was simple in 1943 became fuzzy as soon as the war ended. Nazi Germany was the obvious super-evil. After 1945, what was to be targeted : those that napalmed Vietnamese villagers, or those that sent trainloads of people to Siberian concentration camps ? Logically, absolute evil has to be unique. When "fascism" is incarnated in a succession of bad guys and regimes, with figureheads changing according to political surprises and reversing alliances, when fascism takes on the form of De Gaulle in 1947 and later in 1958, of South African apartheid, of Greek colonels, of Argentinian torturers, of Serbian ethnic cleansers, of Swiss and Austrian "Alpine" populists, "fascism" loses its content. In 1948, millions of Stalinism-influenced workers throughout the world probably genuinely believed that Tito was a fascist in the pay of Hitler and then Truman. The antifascist's problem is not the lack but the profusion of (less and less credible) arch-enemies. Heider's party presence in the Austrian government was compared to January 30, 1933, but ended in the split of that party. Le Pen's electoral feats have not provided him with a position of strength in the street or in political life. The far right currently well entrenched in Northern Europe is no more than that : the extreme of the parliamentary right, and not a public and popular violent mass movement aiming at the restoration of State authority by giving it dictatorial means.

In the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, in spite of social uncertainties and troubles, no European country is blocked by the coexistence of an organised working class perceived as a threat and a bourgeoisie divided between itself. It's this deadlock that gave Mussolini and Hitler the opportunity to become heads of State, because both set out to smash this block. Nothing lasts for ever, but democracy now acts as a powerful solvent upon the alleged fascist menace. The French National Front is about as fascist as the French CP now is Stalinist.

In the worst of cases, as in France in 2002 when Le Pen scored more votes than the socialist candidate in the presidential election, contemporary antifascism is no more than sloganeering and false consciousness.

In the best of cases, it mystifies the indispensable resistance (by violent methods if needs be) to groups that specialise in anti-proletarian activity, especially against the most vulnerable proletarians, foreigners and migrant workers in particular, and that proclaim and *practise* oppressive attitudes and values. Reactionary principles and deeds are to be opposed as much as reformist ones. Those chauvinists, skinheads, white supremacists and self-proclaimed neo-Nazis that exist in Germany, in Italy, in Scandinavia, in Russia and in the US, and dream of themselves as the seeds of a future NSDAP, are to be fought. But fighting them implies treating them for what they are. There's no reason



to imitate them in ideology, nor to respect their self-image. Let's situate them in their real time, our time, not in some imaginary 1932. Confronting a group that is called or calls itself neo-Nazi in 2007 is not combating the SAs of a reborn Hitlerism, but an activity comparable to the struggle against the Pinkertons in the US a hundred years ago, bourgeois reactionary sport clubs in Buenos-Aires in 1919, the Shanghai Green Gang in the 1920s, Latin American *pistoleros*, strike-breaking hired thugs, or any of the many (sometimes paramilitary) squads that spring to life when the ruling classes are threatened, and act parallel to the official police. Here are issues we have to address. Today's anti-*fascism* is fighting the past.

**[6] In connection to the fascism/antifascism question, the relation to democracy as ideology and as a political form of capitalist rule is very important. We think the main weakness of so-called antifascists is their defence of democracy, and their inadequate or absent critique of the theory and practice of democracy as part of class society. We think it's possible and necessary to fight the Nazis without being antifascist, but impossible to fight capitalism without being antidemocratic in theory and practice, without a critique of the Declaration of human rights and civil rights. Strikes and riots for example aren't democratic. What do you think ? Isn't democracy the community of capital ? How does democracy relate to the *formal* and *real* domination of capital ?**

You're right about strikes and riots: few of them fit within any of the basic criteria by which democracy is usually defined. They are neither born nor organised according to majority rule, rights of the minority, decision-making assembly, precedence of debate over action, agreed-upon and respected procedures, etc. Yet most strikers and rioters would call their acts democratic, and claim to be realising the democratic ideal betrayed by parliamentarianism. Actually, when they speak of *democracy*, they mean something else, which is essential to them and to us: self-organisation, the ability to act as a community, to go beyond separations and divisions, to define themselves by their deeds and not by some pre-set identity, to produce their own leaders, in other words: autonomy. If we dare use a sadly devalued term, to them "democracy" means *freedom*. The problem is, this is more than a question of words, because speaking of democracy is not innocuous: it conveys the idea of democracy as a principle, as the *condition* of social change, it reinforces the privilege given to politics.

By the way, in times of crisis, antifascism *also* takes on a radical form and denounces *class* society. As it does so, it does not deny the contradiction between bourgeois and proletarians: it merely puts it aside, for the moment, and gives priority to another opposition: the one between democrats (i.e. nearly all proletarians, as many petit-bourgeois as possible, plus progressive bourgeois) and fascists (i.e. the most conservative bourgeois, quite a few petit-bourgeois, and a few misguided proles).

More basically, the difficulty is to hold both ends of the theoretical stick at the same time: there is a fundamental connection between capitalism and democracy, but capitalism **also** often disconnects itself from democracy (let's keep this inappropriate word for the moment).

Some *equality* between commodities (and between human beings inasmuch as they sell themselves) plus the *free circulation* of these commodities are necessary to the wage labour system: it needs the exchange between an *x* sum of money and a *y* item bought at its market price, and a relatively free encounter between a bourgeois and a wage earner: the former buys the labour power of the latter and pays him what he needs to renew this labour power and support a family. The democratic principle is perfectly adequate to that exchange: one man, one vote.

Yet, capitalist equality and freedom always go together with constraints exterior to the "equal" exchange properly speaking, and more often than not wage labour is exploited in conditions where the police have as much power as the market. Although the wage and profit system flourishes better in parliamentary democracy, and although dynamic capitalisms end up introducing bigger and bigger doses of political as well as economic competition, only a minority of countries on this planet now

enjoy a parliamentary or representative regime. Capitalism does better with democracy, but it often does without, at least for a while... that sometimes lasts for a long time.

You ask about *formal* and *real* domination of capitalism. Quite frankly, the return to (or the discovery of) that concept in the 1960s and 1970s has had nearly as many negative as positive effects on revolutionary thinking... We won't deny its importance. But it's concrete historical situations that cause the twists and turns of bourgeois political rule, the combination of parliamentary and authoritarian forms, the periodic transformation of democracy into dictatorship, and the evolutions the other way.

The distinction theorised in Marx's "Unpublished 6<sup>th</sup> Chapter" of *Capital* between formal and real submission of labour to capital does not mean that there would exist a phase when the proletariat could have been only reformist, and then another one (from 1914 onwards, according to the 3<sup>rd</sup> International, or now because of current globalisation, according to some comrades), when capital's domination would be so complete as to leave no other option to the proletariat but to be revolutionary. (This is developed a bit more in our forthcoming *In For a Storm*.)

Consequently, there is not a stage (formal domination) when democracy would be unavoidable, followed by another (real domination) when it would empty itself of its content and appeal, and stop mystifying the proletarians. As long as capitalism exists, it will breed reforms, and will periodically give birth to democratic aspirations and practices. Democracy is not a smoke screen that would be dissolved by a certain capitalist phase. As soon as something appears to be at stake (really when fascist or bureaucratic regimes crumble, or fictionally as in France, April 2002), democracy is revitalised.

First, the parliamentary system will never rule everywhere: in "rich" and apparently stable countries, inevitable social conflicts regularly push the State into a tougher stand; in weak and dominated countries, the free use of civil rights is often dangerous for the social order and the privileges of the ruling class, and are therefore regularly curbed or suppressed by political leaders or the army.

Secondly, because of what we've just said, and because the parliamentary system is suited to the inner logic of capitalism, it's possible for parliament, party life and civil liberties to come back on stage now and again (often as a farce, as in many African and Asian elections). Crowds are ready to die for "democracy", not because they believe in the intrinsic value of the polling booth or the honesty of the elected, but because voting seems to bring about some freedom and some improvement of daily life, which is often partly true, for a while. Whenever democracy reigns, it's for something else than its own merits. There's always some social element and hope behind the attraction of democracy.

Whether triumphant, trampled upon or mocked, democracy is inevitable in the merchant and wage labour civilisation. There will never come a time when it will appear in its nakedness, sheer bourgeois rule, devoid of meaning and appeal.

In the absence of social upheaval, the best radical demonstration of the true nature of democracy, of its class content, of the shallowness of its liberties, will never convince any democrat (no more than the most brilliant revolutionary tract has ever put anyone off reformism). Just as he is resigned to recurring crises and wars, the democrat knows all too well that his favourite regime sometimes yields to dictators: he just wishes these interruptions to be as rare and short as possible. And he will maintain (with some evidence to support his claim) that democracy does commit evil, but is the only system that acknowledges and restrains its evils.

Radical critique (of democracy as of everything else) is only meaningful if one believes in an utterly different world, and this belief only becomes historically real when masses start fighting for such a world.

It will take no less than an attempt at communist revolution for Marx's critique of the rights of man (as exposed in *The Jewish question*, 1844) to become "a material force". Until then, what Rosa Luxemburg wrote in 1903 still remains true: "Marx [and others, we'd add] has outstripped us as a party of practical fighters. Our needs are not yet adequate for the utilisation of Marx's ideas." (*Stagnation and Progress of Marxism*)

**[7] Many people, especially on the left, reproach anti-political and anti-democratic communism with being hostile to theory, sometimes even hostile to practice and organisations as well. What do you think, and have you had similar experiences ? Don't these reproaches show the dogmatic and sterile attitude of those who can only imagine organisation and activity in their own way (i.e. unions, parties and campaigns), and who have a schematic view of theory/practice, spontaneity/consciousness, passivity/activity ?**

**What do you think we could concretely do against the system of wage slavery and capital ? What could and should our activities be ? How should people who hate the system of commodity, State and wage labour organise themselves, especially in these non-revolutionary times ?**

Only a developing social crisis can start to bridge the gap between theory and practice, among proletarians as among "revolutionaries". In 2007, communist activity is almost restricted to theory alone, and it's no easy task to define that "almost". Though we're not looking for glorious models, we don't pretend to do any better than some of our forerunners. Marx wrote in 1860 he'd known "next to nothing" about the *party* since 1852, since the dissolution of the Communist League, which was an "episode in the history of the party, which is spontaneously born out of the soil of modern society" (letter to Freiligrath, February 29, 1860). In the 1930s, Bordiga and Pannekoek stayed away from public activity for about ten years – which does not mean that they *did* nothing for those ten years. The present situation differs from 1967, for instance, when an event like the "Strasburg scandal" made it possible for a minority (small in numbers but largely exceeding the situationist milieu) to know and understand itself thanks to a shocking "coup", the symbolic and political impact of which (however we appreciate it) could not be denied.

It's quite difficult today to take part *as a communist* in a strike or an event like the anti-CPE movement in France. Saying "Nothing But The Revolution" would be meaningless. Watering down what we think to stay in touch with the masses has only meaning for those who indulge in politics.

It's equally pointless to tell strikers what they ought to be doing, and to tell them that what they're doing is leading them on the way to revolution without their being aware of it yet.

We're not lecturing the proles. We're not treating them as our teachers either.

Communists get organised, that is, they organise themselves: they don't organise others.

One of the worst illusions is the belief that all the conditions would be there for a revolution, all but one: organisation...

....or the information necessary for the proletarians to organise themselves. If the Renault workers keep on working while the Peugeot workers go on strike, it's not because they don't know what's going on in the Peugeot plants, but because the Peugeot conflict remains within the limits of an "industrial dispute" and does not bring into play something common to both firms and many others, something that would urge the Renault workers to put down their tools too. Circulating information is *necessary* : it's not a *condition* of the struggle or of its extension. Even in such a watertight place as a jail, any consistent strike or riot creates communication channels and spreads from one prison to another. Yet the propagandist always believes he will stimulate the workers by providing them with the indispensable counter-information.

**[8] Israel and Palestine: isn't it necessary to take sides, but what side ? Pro what, against what ? What about anti-Zionism and Zionism ?**

The minimum is to have a critique of both Zionism and anti-Zionism.

Thirty or forty years ago, just as he was pro-Vietnamese, the leftist was pro-Palestinian: he longed for the creation of a State he thought would liberate the local masses, a State that would rule over a reunified Vietnam, thanks to the defeat of the GIs in Indochina, and a State that would rule the whole Palestinian territory thanks to the failure of Israel to impose its will upon the Arab population. Today, nearly all antiglobalisers accept the existence of the Israeli State and only want it to coexist with a neighbouring Palestinian State, or to become bi-national. There's obviously a political regression in the 2007 leftist endorsing the 1947 proposal of... the United Nations. But most of all there's a continuity: the left and far left have never had any critique of the State, and have always expected political power to solve social conflicts.

As for us, we're no more opposed to Israel as a State than to all other States, French, Vietnamese, Egyptian, and Kurdish, Tamil or Palestinian if these are to exist one day. There's no reason to confer any privilege to the Israeli State, a positive privilege on account of the age-old persecution of the Jews and the murder of millions of them in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, or a negative one because it is supposedly the Number One enemy of all Middle East peoples.

The destruction of Israel *as a State* does not mean the death or expulsion of five million Jewish Israeli citizens, any more than the destruction of France as a State implies the elimination of a couple of millions of civil servants or their re-education in forced labour camps. Like any institution, central political power needs human beings to keep it going, but it is primarily made of structures held together by social relations, and it's those relations we've got to change to get rid of the State. It will probably be more complex by the Jordan River than on the banks of the Thames or the Spree, but basically the process will be similar.

We're not there yet. Until then, a prerequisite is to understand what Jewish *identity* consists of, not in order to say it does not exist, but to situate its existence in history.

In 1843, when Marx wrote *The Jewish question*, he thought he was dealing with a reality that was already on the wane, because capitalism itself was going beyond such communities as the Jewish community. He could reasonably believe that the Jew who lived in Vilnius, the one who lived in Trier and the one who lived in Tunis shared only traditions rooted in a religion that was about to be secularised just like Christianity, that was bound to become a private matter, and later to wither away like all other religious alienations because of human emancipation provided by proletarian revolution. In Marx's eyes, dealing with the Jewish question helped clear the way for the *real* issue, the social question.

What was believable in 1843 was already less so in 1890 or 1910. Even in Marx's time, it became clear that capitalist development was not only causing the rise of the bourgeoisie and of the proletariat, but also breeding forces that challenged the liberal ascendancy. Technical progress was going along with new cultural, intellectual and political regressions. Science was not replacing religion. Bourgeois rationality was not erasing superstition and racial prejudice. Science was even called upon to justify this novelty: modern anti-Semitism. In Russia, where most European Jews lived, since Poland belonged to the Tsarist empire, anti-Semitism was fierce. As shown by the evolution of the Bund, Jewish worker militancy was not being fused into the general all-Russian workers' movement. At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, from Paris to Vienna, Europe witnessed the rise of new forms of mass anti-Semitism. Today, about a hundred and fifty years after Marx's essay, capitalism has not blended Jewishness among the rest of capitalist realities. Modernity has not come to terms with Jewishness as it has "digested" and secularised Christianity. On the contrary, it has consistently given Jewish identity a new life, mainly by a widespread and finally genocidal anti-Semitism that was a major (or maybe the decisive) factor in the development of Zionism, until this renewed Jewishness created what socialists

(and then communists) thought absurd and impossible: the foundation of a specific Jewish State. The failure of proletarian revolution has produced what looks like a practical refutation of Marxian and Marxist critiques of the Jewish question.

The victors are always right, Mao once said (and he was an expert on proletarian defeats, since his success was based on one). This is probably why Marx's critique, after falling on nearly deaf ears in 1844, had only a few pages published again in 1881, then the whole text in 1902 and 1927, without ever being able to influence the course of events in Europe or the Middle East. To say the least, here again, our "needs" have not been "adequate for the utilisation of Marx's ideas".

It's not the social question that solved the Jewish question, it's pre-capitalist realities that survived to the extent of producing nations where they were the least expected. The undeniably universalising impetus of capitalism also creates and recreates differences and boundaries. In the case of the Jews, a previously mainly religious link turned national: the Law got incarnated in a land. True, this settlement happened at the expense of another population, but this can't be solved now by having two States instead of one, by completing the Jewish homeland by a second Palestinian one.

A Palestinian political power would be devoid of reality in the circumstances that prevail and show no sign of change. Suppose two million Ashkenazim Jews, two million Sephardic Jews and one million Russian Jews (if one wishes to regard these categories as valid) all peacefully and voluntarily resettled in Texas: the Palestinian masses would only win the possibility to be poor in their *own* home, like the Algerians after 1962, or the Blacks in Zimbabwe and South Africa since the end of apartheid. The emergence of Israel has only been an aggravating cause of the misery of the Palestinian proletarians. The social and geopolitical conditions that determine the (partly artificial) economic sustainability of Israel are not material objects, like railway tracks, orchards or high tech factories, that the Palestinians could use for their own benefit if the Jews left : they are more than things, they are social relations, and they exist only because the Jewish settlers brought the conditions (and not just money) that made and makes these railways, cash crop orchards or advanced technology locally and internationally viable.

"The people's right to self-government" has deprived many peoples of their rights. Once we understand that, what is to be done ? Here again, the *Nothing But The Revolution* attitude is valid as a statement of principle : if the principle is correct, the statement remains until now ineffectual, but there's no other way we can now contribute to the (very small) communist movement that exists in the Middle East.

**[9] For us revolution is a possibility, not a certainty. There's no historical automatism. But some Marxists come forward with theories of the breakdown of the capitalist mode of production, in which social revolution happens at a certain point of the development of the capitalist productive forces. History has produced many theories of that sort, but capitalism still exists today. These theories leave no place for the individual: so the people are the fulfiller of a historical mission. We think it's necessary to have a certain development of the productive forces AND the will of great parts of the masses to destroy this destructive and totalitarian capitalist power. What do you think ? Wasn't Pannekoek nearer to the possible reality when he wrote in 1934: "The self-emancipation of the proletariat is the breakdown of capitalism" ?**

That quote is profound indeed. It's significant it should come as a conclusion of *The Theory of the breakdown of capitalism*, which studies how this system "naturally" breeds crises (in the interpretation of which Pannekoek agrees with Grossmann and disagrees with Luxemburg – by and large, we share Pannekoek's view). So the same text that is a reflection on the inner contradictions of capitalism declares that only proletarian activity will get rid of that system. This duality requires some explanation.

From the 1840s onwards, unlike "utopian socialists" that appealed to morals, to bourgeois good will or to worker idealism, communism has wanted to found itself on the historical grounds created by capitalism, because this system gives "modern" proletarians the ability to make a revolution that formerly the exploited could not and would not make. At the same time, as they repeatedly said that the emancipation of the workers would only be carried out by the workers themselves, the communists ruled out a revolution that would result from the automatic interplay of the productive forces unleashed by capitalism. On the eve of 1914, when Luxemburg set out to prove the inevitability of a final crisis, she did not expect revolution to derive from this crisis, as an effect inevitably follows its specific cause: capitalism was heading towards destruction and war, but not to its *self*-destruction. The author of *The Accumulation of capital* saw the overthrow of capitalism as a result of the conscious action of the exploited. About twenty years later, as Pannekoek was writing in the midst of a world crisis on a scale hitherto unknown but which led to few revolutionary endeavours (on the contrary, it coincided with the triumph of Hitler and Stalin), he made it clear that capitalism brings about the possibility of human emancipation, not its certainty.

If Marx never completed the "Magnus Opus" that was supposed to be his life's work, only published the first volume of *Capital* and wrote manuscripts for the next two, instead of the six he'd planned, it's not just because of perfectionism, illness or lack of time. It couldn't escape him that communism had no real need for such a big treatise. Those that came after his death have found more food for thought in apparently more circumstantial, more personal, or unfinished texts like some of his early articles, the first part of *The German Ideology*, the *1844 Manuscripts*, his book against Proudhon, the *Manifesto*, the 1857-61 and 1861-65 manuscripts, his defence of the Paris Commune, his letters (like those on Russia), etc., which include many texts Marx himself had discarded. Revolutionaries find more inspiration in the *Grundrisse* than in volumes II and III of *Capital*. The closer communist theory gets to "science", the less communist it becomes.

Subjective and objective levels do not stand in opposition to each other like black versus white, nor do they fade to grey. Communist revolution will never be just the product of free will. Capitalism is the mutual involvement of capital and labour, and the stages and crises of that involvement give the general framework of the proletarian movement. Not everything is possible at any given time. Revolution is neither the fruit of long-cultivated undermining action, nor of will power. It was off the agenda in 1852, in 1872, or in 1945 (although some mistook the end of World War II for the dawning of a new Red October). Critical moments give opportunities: it depends on the proletarians, it depends on us to exploit these capabilities. Nothing guarantees the coming of a communist revolution, nor its success if it comes. In chess, the theory is the reality: not in history. Class struggle is not to be understood with the mind of the chemist analysing molecular reactions. Communism is not to be proved.

**[10] Where do you think the strength and the weakness of Bordigism, council communism, situationism and operaism lie ? We believe that these theories, together with much (not all !) of the intellectual work of Marx, as well as the experiences and fights of the working class, are the main sources of anti-capitalist thought and action. What do you think are the achievements and the failures of these theories and movements ?**

As the answer is partly to be found in *The Story of our Origins (La Banquise # 2, 1983)*, available at [www.geocities.com/~johngray](http://www.geocities.com/~johngray), we'll concentrate on the *positive* contribution made by those schools of thought, bearing in mind that the first two did much more than produce theory: they were active historical forces, albeit minority ones, but for a short while sizeable ones.

The "German" Left (in the broad sense, including a lot of Dutch people, not forgetting remote cousins, some of them forgetful of their ancestors, like *Socialisme ou Barbarie*) emphasised revolution as self-activity, and self-production of their emancipation by the exploited. Hence a rejection of all mediations: parliament, parties or unions.

The "Italian" Left (here again, it went beyond the borders of one country, and developed particularly in Belgium) reminds us that getting rid of wage labour means doing away with money in all its forms, with value accounting, with the firm as a separate entity, with the economy as a specialised field of human activity. (We'll only mention here the analysis of fascism and antifascism, since this was already dealt with in answer 5.)

What Bordiga and the Bordigists understood as a programme to be realised once bourgeois political power is smashed, can only succeed, according to the situationists, by the withering of commodity exchange, of the wage system, of the economy, by a transformation of all aspects of daily life. Although this cannot be achieved in a week or a year, it must start from Day One if it wants to have any chance of completion.

In a nutshell, the German Left helped to see the form of the revolution, the Italian Left its content, and the SI the process that is the only way of obtaining that content.

*Operaismo* does not lie on the same level as the other three: among other reasons, because it was originally uncritical of State capitalist countries which it perceived as "socialist" (such was the attitude of the *Quaderni Rossi* (1961-66), one of the founding fathers of that current). Operaism underlines the centrality of wage labour (inside and outside the workplace), sees the working class as a major factor (if not *the* major factor) in the history of capitalism, divides this history in periods according to the successive forms of organisation of labour by capital, and the successive forms of labour's rebellion against this organisation, and thereby suggests a prospective analysis.

It may be difficult to admit that at least the first three contributors are opposed yet converging. The German Left bases its theory on the proletarian experience, Bordiga on the future and the Situationists on the present: "hot ice and wondrous shape now. How shall we find the concord of this discord ?" (*A Midsummer's Night Dream*) Some people obviously regard our joint interest in the German and Italian Left as a form of mental cross-dressing. However, in spite and because of their contradictions, these contributions help us understand revolution as *communisation*: a destruction of State power which is at the same time a transformation of the whole of social relations, each moment of this double process consolidating the other one.

**[11] At the moment of writing, the Volkswagen workers in Belgium are striking for jobs that are their means of surviving under capitalism. Apart from their importance as an experience for the workers, aren't such fights without perspectives, and finally more frustrating ? Their situation is bad, it wasn't good before and it won't get any better, whether the outcome is a "success" for the unions or for VW. What should the perspective of such strikes be, and what could our contribution be to give them a perspective ?**

Is it possible to "give" a perspective ? When a struggle breaks out, the best theory or strategy can hardly suggest to the participants a higher form of action than the one they are experiencing. Neither you nor we are leaders or advisers. Radicals don't radicalise. Only a time of deep crisis is capable of providing a transition from "bread and butter" demands to a potential antagonism to the existing social order.

Reformism is counter-revolutionary only when it ossifies itself into institutions, politics, parties and theories. Otherwise, there's nothing negative in itself in trying to sell one's labour power instead of living on (or without) dole money. Few unemployed are happy social critics. Those that are usually were so before they lost their jobs, and they're now able to become full time critics of society : only a handful of jobless will have the means to achieve that. Long term loss of work drains proletarian energy at least as much as (and often more than) having to clock in every morning.

**[12] Isn't there a danger of *self-management* in these struggles, as at LIP in the past or today Zanon and Brukman in Argentina ? How can the workers move from the terrain of class society, from the fight for higher wages and better working conditions, i.e. from fighting as workers for their existence as workers, to a higher level, i.e. one that reaches the human community ? Could you tell us something about the concept of *communisation* ?**

In the full sense of the word, long term self-management is impossible in this society, but nothing prevents workers from trying to implement it, especially when the firm goes bankrupt or the boss runs away for financial or political motives. This has happened quite a few times, even on a large scale as in Portugal 1974-75 or Argentina after 2001. Self-management is the utmost possible worker autonomy within a company that *is not questioned* as a company. So the "risk" of self-management will always exist.

As regards the transition to a higher level opposed to self-management, there's no secret recipe, and it does not depend on anybody's (or our) intervention. Your question seems in contradiction with the perfectly right statement on historical non-automaticity in your question 9. Any big event (and even more so a social crisis) contains elements that are irreducible to analysis. Nobody had foreseen 1968.

About communisation, please see our answer 10. In any case, it has nothing to do with social-democratic style "socialisations". When after 1918 the Austro-Marxists in office in Vienna socialised parts of the economy, they naturally put union and party experts in charge, and also kept these firms *as firms*, as poles of value accumulation competing with other poles (whether or not they were really competitive is another matter). Wage labour and commodity, and therefore capitalism, continued. If bourgeois power on the shop floor was somehow limited... by bureaucratic power, nothing diminished the political power of the bourgeoisie, which maintained its direct or indirect hold on the police, the army and the judiciary, as was proved a few years later when worker protest was suppressed in successive bloodbaths. Every socialisation, in France and Italy after 1945 for example, followed that pattern. Communising is *not* collectivising the industry and the countryside while leaving intact the central State machine. Social transformation does not replace the destruction of political power: it strengthens that destruction. Each aspect must go along with the other, or both will fail.



**[13] We (and people who share our critiques and positions) are often called incorrigible dreamers or utopians, and it is suggested we should be realistic. Are you “dreamers”, “utopians”, are you “unrealistic” ?**

Man's exploitation of man is documented in most (though not all) past and present societies, capitalism is still here, and the history of modern communism has been read by some like the definitive manual of failure. In that sense, one can call us dreamers.

Nevertheless, we (and you, no doubt) take reality more into account than the “realists”.

The 20<sup>th</sup> century and the early 21<sup>st</sup> century offer ample proof of the catastrophic course that radical critique had predicted would be the fate of capitalism. Contrary to what it promised (and still promises for an ever-receding future), this civilisation has not put an end to war, oppression and exploitation. Stalin's and Mao's tens of millions of victims were sacrificed to the primitive accumulation *of capital*. True, the wage and money system is only indirectly responsible for “ethnic” killing in Rwanda and “religious” slaughter in Indonesia. But the worst massacres, from the mere point of view of the number of casualties, happen at the heart of the industrial world, as is shown by the heaps of corpses in 1914-18 and 1939-45.

Let's leave these extremes to look at places which are fortunate to enjoy capitalism with a human face. A Norwegian once prided himself on his country having done away with *great* poverty. Well, Oslo might be a nicer city than Chicago. But what are we to think of a system that after a century of social-democracy has failed not to eliminate exploitation (social-democrats weren't aiming at that), but simply to get rid of poverty, and satisfies itself with having just *little* poverty ? There is a lack of decency and reality in such a success.

When people accuse us of dreaming instead of acting, what they mean is *we don't belong*, and they're right. We are in this world, not of this world: “(..) what's most real is what is only true *in another world*” (Baudelaire).

So, what is it we're doing ? Theory, or more simply the expression of ideas with revolutionary ambitions, does not try to lead, to enlighten or to inform the proletarians. Its main function is probably to help a minority not go under, to help radicals know each other and establish links that could prove useful one day. Until then, our leaflets and posters (even those made by comrades more productive than us) don't carry much weight compared to the billions of conservative and reformist words and ideas daily churned out by school, media, politics and the Internet. The only validity of what we're doing depends on the coming of a time that will tip the scales and give historical reality to what is now an often silent minority.

**[14] For us, 9/11 was a big media manipulation. Every day, thousands die because of ignorance, organised want, because of the force and pressure of the capitalist mode of production, and nobody speaks of them. But the victims of 9/11 are on TV, and provide wars and politics with official legitimacy. Democratic society shows us more and more its real face, not the liberal tingle-tangle Welfare State, but the face of the totalitarian dictatorship of capital, not only through Big Brother politics or wars, but also through the pressure to sell yourself as a wage slave.**

Nobody should be surprised the 3500 dead bodies of the World Trade Centre weigh much more in public opinion and speech than thousands of other dead bodies in Afghanistan, Irak or the Congo. The ruling dead are the dead of the ruling countries.

However, we'd rather use the phrase *totalitarian dictatorship* for regimes such as Hitler's or Kim Jong-il's, not Bush's or A. Merkel's. In today's US, Italy or France, capitalism influences all aspects of daily life, but it maintains a political, ideological and cultural competition that is necessary to its fundamental economic competition, and therefore this form of capitalism is more aptly defined as a democracy than a dictatorship.

Neither State propaganda nor the media can impose anything they choose. Even Goebbels was forced to admit that Stalingrad was a defeat and that bombs were setting German cities on fire. In the West nowadays, nobody seriously believes that no plane crashed on the Pentagon, or that the Mossad masterminded the attacks upon Manhattan. Those that believe it, in some Muslim circles or countries, are ready to be gullible because they wish to think of Israel as an all-powerful manipulator behind the scenes.

September 11, 2001, certainly did not herald a new era. What was new about it was the exposure of the vulnerability of a system that regards itself as omniscient and invincible, in a highly symbolic place: for the first time, the flag bearer of the capitalist epic was struck at its heart. Manhattan is not Pearl Harbor. The media only played upon that unheard-of reality.

Besides, the notion of a manipulation has the disadvantage of minimising the contradictions exacerbated by the fall of the Twin Towers. The September 11 attacks allowed the US to increase social and police control in its own country, but also encouraged it to embark upon military adventures with overall negative results. The "War on Terror" certainly reunites the public under the protective strong arm of the State, not just in America, elsewhere as well, in Britain for example after bombs went off in the London subway. Yet the revealed fragility of US superpower also breeds more challenges, very few of them with a communist content, but which relativise the notion of a manipulation. There is no *invisible hand* pulling the strings, but a multiplicity of hands and heads. When the Spanish right put the blame for the bombing in the Madrid train stations upon the ETA (which clearly had nothing to do with it), the ploy backfired, and the exposed lie contributed to the victory of the left in the elections that followed. Only Stalin could force the press to publish any piece of news that the readers had no choice but to swallow - or to pretend to. We don't live in Orwell's *1984*. "Real" capitalist domination is polycentrist: the State concentrates an amazing power without being obliged to use it every day and in every sector, because it controls the essential, and keeps the means to expand its hold upon society in times of acute crisis.

Another word seems to be inadequate: *wage slave*. It often happens for wage earners to be treated like slaves, in bureaucratic capitalism as in many aspects of "market" capitalism. But slavery is one thing, wage labour is another, and a very different one, where selling one's labour power implies some amount of freedom, some disposal of oneself.

If we'd rather avoid phrases like "dictatorship", "totalitarianism" or "slavery" in cases when we think they're inadequate, it's not out of a desire to be subtle and full of nuances. Whoever wishes to

change the world always runs the risk of appearing provocative (see our answer 21). It's just that it's vital to assess where and when the specificity and strength of capitalism really lie.

**[15] What do you think of the riots in the *banlieues* in October and November 2005 ? There've been riots in French *banlieues* all over the years. Did these reach a new level ?**

It's doubtful the 2005 riots went further than those that have occurred in France for over twenty years. For instance, their ability to go beyond the causes of their eruption, to get other targets than the police and their immediate environment, to spread outside their own estate, to combine with other social groups, to find "allies", that ability was not bigger in 2005 than in previous riots, and may indeed have been smaller. For example, unlike some previous revolts, this one remained limited to young males, and did not develop into "popular" looting. We certainly don't dismiss those events. But they had no more universal reach than for example a few strikes have had. Let's face it, some comrades keep a much more critical eye (and often, rightly so) when analysing workplace struggles than when analysing estate riots. Clashing with the police does not in itself convey a subversive content. Facts do not simply speak for themselves. Nothing is radical in itself, neither anti-cop violence, nor the fact of arousing media and bourgeois hatred, nor a marginal life on the outskirts of wage labour, nor gratuity, nor an ungovernable country, nor autonomy, nor community when it closes in on the group. Not every chaos is a creative one. Violence exercised by the oppressed is not automatically subversive.

Present wage labour struggles are often militant and yet generally defensive, "reformist" and... often defeated. But far from superseding these limitations, the 2005 *banlieue* riots completed them by adding their own fragmented separate moment. All these parts do not interplay or intermingle, do not cross-fertilise, do not incite each other to transcend their own origin and to produce some common ground. In the Spring 2006, when large sectors of high school and university youth took to the streets against the *Contrat Première Embauche* (a step forward in casualisation) and eventually forced the government to withdraw its bill, their action was very loosely connected with the outcasts of the school system who had rioted a few months before, and their action also had very few ties with people at work. All these movements are indeed the effects of a single cause: the casualisation, the downsizing and intensification of work. But resistance takes the form of parallel oppositions with little opportunity or desire to meet up, at least up to now.

Those in a workplace still ask for something positive: a job, a protection, a better (or non-lowered) wage (none of these claims is negligible, and the ability of labour to press them is a sign of healthy militancy). Those outside work act negatively. Nothing wrong with that. Revolution implies negativeness. But there won't be any revolutionary process as long as negative and positive action stay apart. The social pacifism often practised by those wage earners who've got a job and are afraid to lose it, is echoed by a violence which only knows its enemies, not its friends.

**[16] It seems that many leftists have lost contact with the young and the people in the *banlieues*. This time there were no demands opposed to the State as in the years before. Is this because the young have no more illusions about the French Welfare State or capitalism itself ? Were the riots as destructive as capitalism is ? Were there any tendencies like in Britain in the 1980s, in Toxteth for example when some youngsters shouted "Longer chains, bigger cages" at left-wing politicians asking for jobs and more welfare ?**

The separations we summed up in the previous answer are reflected in the sociological divisions within the left and the leftists. Although the CP has declined a lot, it still has strongholds, notably in local government and in its traditional (yet decreasing) power base among blue collar workers, especially where the CGT union is still strong. In those sectors, it suffers from competition from the Trotskyist group *Lutte Ouvrière*, which tries to take over from the CP in the piecemeal and peaceful

defence of the decent common people, and rejected the 2005 rioters as exterior to the “real” working class that won’t burn cars. But what LO won’t do, antiglobalisers can’t do. Their influence lies mainly in middle class elements, and they’ve proved as unable as everyone else to cash in on those young people who (whether “White”, Arab or Black) ask for nothing, no job, no union, no political organisation, no vote, and only (so far) show a capacity for refusal.

Assessing the 2005 events does not mean dismissing them, but realising that, in the present situation, such a conflagration could only produce itself. That’s a lot, but nothing comes out of it. It’s more of a symptom than a “recomposition” of the proletariat, to use the autonomist term. We’re not nostalgic, but thirty or forty years ago, the fathers of those youngsters of (North or Black) African origin managed to go on strike with their assembly line “French” work mates.

The English riots, in 1981 and the following years, came close to a convergence between a critique of work by those that work rejects, and hardline demands by wage earners. (See *Like a Summer with a Thousand Julys*, available at [www.geocities.com/cordobakak/blob](http://www.geocities.com/cordobakak/blob)). We’re not quality controllers of the class struggle, but the 2005 rioting remained within the sociological and geographical confines of their focal point. This is not saying that it will always be so.

If we go for a broader picture and look at the whole dispossessed population of these estates, it’s doubtful that illusions have decreased. Some illusions have indeed diminished, about the Welfare State and the reforming capacity of the left. Others are on the increase, for example about the possibility of civic action and civil rights, with more people determined to make use of their right to vote. If there were fewer anti-State slogans than before, it’s not because the local proles no longer expect much from the State: it’s more to do with the movement (November 2005 and Spring 2006) not reaching the stage when rejecting the State would start to be on the agenda. People still expect a lot from politics, not from the State as it is now, but from a State that would be renovated nobody knows how.

**[17] We heard that one Islamic organisation had a *fatwa* against the rioters. What was the role of the mullahs and the Islamic groups in the rioting ? Is religion a big problem and are there counterparts in the *banlieues* ?**

There was indeed a *fatwa* against the rioters, with very little or no effect: Islam neither inspired the revolt nor was able to stop it. At least that’s a relief : so much for the media fuss about growing Islamic *political* indoctrination among *banlieue* youth. Unfortunately, in the areas with lots of people from North or Black Africa, Asia and Turkey, Islam certainly plays a conservative role, not directly political, but with more influence than twenty or thirty years ago. The jobless son of the ex-unskilled Algerian or Moroccan automobile worker is more concerned by the Koran than his father was when he worked in a Citroën plant. (This should help us grasp that the de-socialisation caused by the decline of big factories is not enough to produce a mobile, rootless and volatile, potentially universal “new” proletariat, ready for a social critique that the former blue collar worker entrenched in the fetters and myths of work was supposedly incapable of.)

However biased the religious critique of society in general and of capitalism in particular can be, it is based on a form of community that can only be superseded by a larger higher form of community, a proletariat and then a human community, that still has to prove its historical validity. Until then, religion is here to stay, or even to develop, as we argued in *The Continuing Appeal of Religion*.

**[18] Some people did not wait for these banlieue riots to explain that the notion of class is no longer relevant. Some say that the working class is integrated (as indeed it was said before May 68) through the Welfare State, and has internalised the order, the economic coercion and the requirements of capital. They say there are no more classes, only parts of capital, because labour itself is part of capital, and reproduces the labour/capital relationship more and more. What is your point of view ?**

Every time the proletariat leaves the stage, the theory of its non-existence comes up.

Although in France one wage earner out of three can be called a worker, the *workers' movement* as it used to exist in the US, in Europe and Japan until the 1970s, and later in Solinarnosc's Poland, has lost its social reality. It has started getting a new one with the (re)industrialisation of countries like China, but seems absent in old capitalist centres. So it's a temptation to look for a new revolutionary subject, more all-encompassing, less entangled in the social reproduction process, less inclined to be caught up in the work ethic and the glorification of industry. The former supposed springboard for historical change – the factory worker – is now regarded as an obstacle. Instead of depending on proletarians defined by their part *in* production, social change is said to be based on the radical nature of all those who stand *outside* production, because capitalism casualises them, makes them redundant, or even keeps them out of work nearly all their life. Most of all, instead of being centred round the struggle against exploitation, the revolutionary movement, according to some, has no longer a centre. In this vision, it develops out of a multipolar resistance against all forms of *domination*: the revolt of the wage earner against his boss, of course, but just as much the revolt of a member of an ethnic minority against white superiority, of a woman against a sexist, of the child against the adult, of the school kid against the teacher, of the sexual non-conformist against the straight, of street culture against “dead white male” literature, of the rank-and-filer against the leader, of the co-operative against the corporation, of autonomy against hierarchy, of the ordinary citizen against the government.

The defect of that perspective is not to be based on false realities, because nearly all of them do exist, but to pile up a set of phenomena, the addition of which does not explain how society functions, changes, and could be revolutionised.

The domination theory can be accurately described as a new form of anarchism. This word is not an insult. Anarchism has its merits, and this basic flaw: it interprets history as the age-old conflict of freedom versus authority, the individual or the self-defining group v. power, the order receiver v. the order giver, the commune v. the State, the bottom v. the top, and finally democracy v. bureaucracy.

Actually, it seldom happens that domination goes without exploitation. The dominant group usually gets material benefits. Domination is a condition of exploitation, and wherever the economy rules, exploitation is central. We do not live in a world of dominations, where capitalism is one discrimination among others, the biggest maybe, but no more important than dominations based on “gender”, sex or ‘ethnic’ origin. Although the most important domination phenomena (private property, family, religion, the State) were born a few thousand years before the industrial revolution, it's capitalism that structures them now.

The accumulation of capital (by putting proletarians to value-productive labour) lies at the heart of our world, in a different way of course in Dakar, Berlin and Bombay, and different in the various districts of Dakar, Berlin and Bombay, and differing also according to the various moments of the life of the same inhabitant of one of these cities. The Senegalese lorry driver can rebel as a wage earner in his work place, only to turn into a sexist Muslim father and husband at home. The Bombay computer expert can work with an open “modern” mind in the morning, and at midday refuse a packed lunch brought by the hands of a member of the “wrong” caste. The double necessity, for the proletarian to sell himself, and for the bourgeois to get as much value as possible from the work capacity he's bought, that dual necessity does not explain everything, but without it nothing is understandable.

What's theoretically at stake, and Marx was fully aware of it, is to acknowledge at the same time that this class structure drives the modern world **and** that neither in Berlin nor in Bombay or Dakar can the world be reduced to it.

Our position does not consist in reaffirming the existence of classes, nor of a class struggle. In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, the best bourgeois historians were lucid enough to interpret the French revolution as a nucleus of class conflicts, as Marx admitted in his letter to Weydemeyer, March 5, 1852. The persistence of class struggle (or its exacerbation) does not depend on us. Our "problem" is not that it exists or not, but that it could *end*, by a communist revolution that has to arise in a society shaped and torn by the interaction of proletarians and bourgeois. It's no use regretting history has not given us "better" conditions for the emancipation of humankind : those are the only conditions we've got. (For some developments on classes, see the beginning of *The Call of the Void*, and the opening sections of our forthcoming *In For A Storm*.)

**[19] Do you think the superfluous masses of the unemployed, the people of the *banlieues*, the ghettos, the Third World, etc., play an important role in the development of capitalist society, and what could therefore be their role in its destruction ?**

Semi- or under-proletarians have always played an important part in the birth and evolution of capitalism. I. Wallerstein even interprets the overseas exploitation of semi-proletarians as the main motive of colonialism, and as a major source of profit today: these proletarians supplement their wage by other sources of income, so capital does not have to pay in full the reproduction of the labour power it's bought. Though he overstates his case, Wallerstein has a point.

However, those who now theorise the worldwide advent of masses of *informal* proletarians as a new revolutionary subject are looking for a surrogate proletariat, a substitute supposed to be more numerous, and above all less "integrated" than yesterday's "privileged" blue collar workers.

True, wage earners assured and satisfied of a job and an income will never set about changing themselves and the world. But no revolution will be launched by people that are definitively kept outside wage labour. A revolution that questions capitalist wealth as well as poverty, consuming as well as deprivation, alienation as much as exploitation, work and unemployment, money and lack of money, can only be initiated by proletarians with an experience of *both*, now and in their past, personally or via their family and friends. People without any prospect of ever entering the wage system will rebel: they won't start to communise what is around them.

In history, the essential is never sociological, even less in a revolution, still less in a communist one: any movement that can be divided in and interpreted through sociological strata proves its weakness or downward course. There will only be a revolution when the separations between work and non-work, workplaces and the rest of society, worker and outcast, break up, but only those who've (directly or not) known wage labour will be able to take the initiative.

This is not to say that factory workers in so-called industrialised countries would have any revolutionary privilege or "birthright". About thirty years ago, we wrote that Japan or the US were not nearer to communism than Cameroon or Laos, because of the extent of deconstruction and disaccumulation that revolution would have to undertake in over-industrialised countries. But Laos and Cameroon will not trigger off a world communist process. Yet, once this process is on its way, they will take part in it, and their contribution will be *qualitatively* as vital as that of old industrial areas.

We now hear a lot about the emergence of a *precariat*. Either it underlines an obvious fact: proletarian condition is by nature precarious. Then there's no need to invent a new notion, which only takes into account *one* of the elements that constitute the proletariat, and leaves out the other equally

important element : the proletariat valorises capital. (However stimulating the situationist phrase “The proletarian is the one who has no control over his life, and who’s aware of it” can be, it is misleading.)

Or the whole purpose of a *precariat* is to bring together vast crowds, more numerous of course than factory workers, but also than wage earners, so vast that thanks to globalisation they’re about to include nearly all human beings. In that case too, the concept masks the specificity of capitalism. It goes for a broad definition that in fact reduces capitalism to an oppression more oppressive than its predecessors, a domination so total that it can only result in a mass rising just as total in quantity (because nearly everyone is concerned), and most of all in quality (because capitalist dehumanisation reaches the core of human nature). Obviously such a tidal wave cannot fail to sweep away oppression once and for all... The novelty of capitalism would be to create impoverished masses infinitely larger than ever before, and better unified than in former mainly peasant society. This more up-to-date and more open version of the “final crisis” theory has the same appeal and defect as the other versions.

**[20] For some revolutionaries and Marxists, the reference to human needs and wants is individualistic, petit-bourgeois or anarchist. We think that these needs and wants are a main motivation for people today to hate their existence as wage slaves in a society made for commodities, a society hostile to humans, their lives and desires. What role will the people’s needs and wants play in a coming revolution and what role do they play today ?**

The purpose of revolutionary activity is not to develop the productive forces, nor even to liberate mankind just for mankind’s sake. Everyone involved in activities like ours or yours is individually and collectively dissatisfied with his life, and he becomes part of a social movement where his “self” gets united with other selves without their union erasing his “self”. Anyone who does not feel a personal urge for revolution, and would only make it for others, is a potential bureaucrat. In times of social crisis, subjective and objective levels combine without either of the two totally absorbing the other. (“Fusional groups” have the same fatal charm as fusional love.) In such moments, desire and reality, idealism and materialism, come as close as can be. Anyone who’s been involved in a militant strike, in the occupation of a public building or in the construction of a barricade has experienced the constitution of a community that does not abolish the individual.

That being said, capital *also* satisfies needs, and promotes new ones, which it fulfils, frustrates, fulfils on a higher level, frustrates again, and so on. This contradiction fuels consumerism. Mercantile abundance means scarcity: the  $n$  number of DVDs on my shelves only matters in regard to the  $n + 1$  DVD I’ll be buying this week end. That logic applies to everything. The more vital a necessity is, like sleeping or eating, the more socially and historically determined it is.

If, for instance, as Marx wrote in the *1844 Manuscripts*, the need for *others* is a powerful revolutionary factor, every society, including the most oppressive, has to fulfil it, and capitalism is no exception. The demand to go beyond one’s particular self finds some realisation in the use of a cell phone and the communal feeling of football supporters, as well as in religion or insurrection. Revolutionary action is a vehicle for our potential universality: so are communication gadgets. We might be tempted to draw a line between an “authentic” need and a “false” need, but in practice both function as social links, and both have strong historical impact. Let’s not look for *non-integrable* needs that would be so deeply human (or natural) that they would force us to create a “true” community, the communist community. Here again, no guarantee.

**[21] You wrote in *La Banquise* # 1: “The concentration camp is the hell of a world whose heaven is the supermarket.” Because of this statement and of your publishing *La Banquise*, you’ve been attacked by many people. What’s the situation today and what do you think now of the positions of *La Banquise* ?**

Nazi Germany deliberately killed millions of Jews and a lot of them in gas chambers. These are historical facts. Since the end of the 1960s (but not immediately after 1945), this genocide has been interpreted in Europe and the US as the major landmark of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, an event absolutely different from all others, as it inaugurated an entirely new epoch in human history. Auschwitz has been taken out of its historical context.

Social critique can and must question this interpretation. This does not mean disputing the materiality of the *real* empirical evidence upon which the interpretation is based. (These facts are well documented in R. Hilberg’s *The Destruction of the European Jews*, and in a synthetic form in the 6<sup>th</sup> chapter of R. Paxton’s *Anatomy of Fascism*.) What we have to do is put Auschwitz *back into history*, and in what dominates the history of the 19<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries: capitalism.

This is asking for trouble, because capitalism won’t account for its horrors. However the New Deal is interpreted, it is considered as a part of the history of capitalism, and many people will credit capitalism for these reforms. Yet when it turns Nazi, capitalism is no longer regarded as capitalism, but just as Nazism. According to common wisdom, Roosevelt was an intelligent capitalist leader, but Hitler was not an enraged capitalist leader: he was just an enraged Nazi.

We’re guilty of going against this common wisdom. There lies the root of the scandal.

We never denied the Nazi genocide of the Jews, nor supported those who deny it. But it’s no use trying to prove we didn’t. We’ll never convince people who prefer to know of us and judge us by ten quotations that have been selected as proofs of our “negationism”.

In this matter, reactions to us fall into three categories.

A number of people (journalists, academics or passers-by) have never had and still don’t have any interest whatsoever in what we do and say in general, and their curiosity is only roused inasmuch as we are said to be negationists. We obviously have nothing to say to them. Our alleged negationism is only to be discussed (if it is to be) with people who share more in common with us than the negationism/ant negationism discussion.

Secondly, in the revolutionary milieu (let’s use that awkward phrase for convenience’s sake), some individuals and groups, who did not care much about us in general, nor about *La Banquise* when it came out in 1983, discovered thirteen years later how disreputable we’d been for a long time, most likely as early as the 1970s. When their daily paper informed them how bad we were, they realised we were not to be associated with, and they now act as if some dubious destiny had returned to claim us. But they never associated with us anyway. If now some people want any quote from us, or the mere mention of one of our names, to come with a reminder of our shady past, like government health warnings on cigarette packets, well, let it be.

Thirdly and fortunately, those with an interest in (and possible disagreement with) our past and present activities do not let our bad reputation put an end to their interest.

If we ever deal in depth with the matter, one of the conditions will be to inquire into the exact nature of the notion of “negationism”, which deserves as much critical assessment as for example “terrorism”. (A very helpful book in that respect is P. Novick’s *The Holocaust and collective memory*.) For the moment, we’ll just reproduce our 1999 comment on the sentence you quote. This is enough to show the difference between our approach and that of the accusers and insinulators.



*“The concentration camp is the hell of a world whose heaven is the supermarket. (La Banquise, # 1, 1983)* Clearly for us there exists neither heaven nor hell. A horrible reality created its infernal representation. Modern consumerism produces its heavenly images. In both cases, the expression used by *La Banquise* dealt with images and did not compare the realities upon which either is based, far less deny their existence.

*The “normal” regime of exploitation does not have a different picture from that of the camps. The camp is simply a clearer picture of the somewhat veiled hell where so many people live around the world. (Robert Antelme, Pauvre-Proletaire-Deporté, 1948)* Of course the final solution is not specifically referred to in this statement, as Antelme is talking about concentration camps rather than extermination camps. But who would accuse Antelme of minimising the atrocity of the camps ? (He was no ultra-leftist, rather a radical humanist, who joined the French CP in 1946 and was expelled a few years later.)

The concentration camps are the hell of a world whose heaven is the supermarket. Why is this phrase unacceptable ? Why does the leftist, forgetting everything we’ve just said, forgetting even Antelme whom he may have read, understand this as an odious comparison between a gas chamber and people queuing at Tesco’s ? Because, although he does not love supermarkets, he sees no horror in them. Just as he would like a democratic society with reduced wage differentials, he dreams of a consumer-friendly shopping centre, with bicycle lanes, linking together the local community, displaying more educational CD-Roms than Barbie dolls, selling organic food and “fair” priced Bolivian coffee. In other words, commodity with a human face. For those who have no critique of the supermarket as a concentration of market relations and a place of overall deprivation, *La Banquise*’s turn of phrase sounds weirdly paradoxical, even abominable.

For us, just as much as for our accusers, it is how we view the supermarket (and society) which determines how we view the camps, not the other way round. So it would be a hopeless task to try and disarm our prosecutors by defending our position on Auschwitz when what matters is to attack them on the supermarket question. The central issue has never been an analysis of Nazism or of genocide, rather a question of how we relate to this society here and now.” (*The X-Files*, 1999)

**[22] It's quite common in Germany to talk and dream of some French "specificity", because of the alleged abundance and superior level of social movements your side of the River Rhine, with 68, rioting in the *banlieues*, the anti-CPE movement, etc. What would you say ?**

Ironically, it could be the other way round. One could argue that it's in Germany 1919-21 and later in Spain (and Italy 1919-22, to a lesser extent) that an insurgent working class went the farthest in Western Europe in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

We'll answer your question indirectly, and the following remarks will help understand what we mean by *communisation*:

Although Italy clearly did not implement communisation in the 1970s, it came closer to such a process than any other country. Italian factory struggles were very different from the Turino sit-downs in 1920, or those in Europe and the US in the 1930s. Worker demands went with a deep disrespect for the company's interests and for the strikers' own immediate interests and, up to a point, for work itself. The separation between work and non-work, between illegality and normality, withered. There were a myriad of grassroots self-organisations in worker and popular districts, as well as an outright attack against political parties and unions. Nowhere in Europe did the CP and the unions come under such determined rejection as around 1977. There were few attempts to do away with money on any large scale, but mercantile relations were questioned all through the 1970s in Italy.

We can't analyse those tendencies and endeavours from the point of view of their final failure. Fail they did, because the proletarians did not cross the Rubicon. So the manifold aspects of the movement lost their critical edge, and turned into piecemeal transformations. Women's action just became feminism. Armed violence disconnected itself from social disturbances. The workplace was the scene of a neo-unionism. The critique of the party led to the creation of small parties, and ended in rank-and-filism. Rebellious marginality got integrated into acceptable street culture. The critique of daily life later gave birth to cyber-individualism. Instead of anti-war and anti-army actions, we now have consensual pacifism. Once again, "counter-revolution" pays its tribute to defeated revolutionary efforts.

**[23] In Germany, the "68 generation" is in power in the government and in the economy. What do you think of the French May 68 now ? Is there still something present from these days in French society ?**

It all depends on what we mean by "the 68 generation". Hardly any of the participants in the 1968 events that we happen to know personally has made up his way up to a position of power. But a *low* level Maoist leader like S. July did possess all the prerequisites to rise to the *top* and become the boss of the daily *Libération*. The emblem of May 68, for us, is not Cohn-Bendit, but the Wonder factory woman worker who refused to go back to work in June, and figures as the anonymous "heroin" of the film *Reprise*. May-June 68 made history as the biggest general strike ever, not as the heyday of leftism.

Forty years later, what remains of it is only what a minority of proletarians wish to keep in mind, whether they experienced the events or not. What was left of the Paris Commune in 1900 ? or of the June 36 sit-downs a year before 1968 ? Unlike that of a computer, human memory is selective and social, and even more so in the case of historical memory. In 1965, only a handful of German proletarians (and radicals) had heard of Gorter, O. Rühle and the KAPD: a few years later, a whole social upheaval, in Germany and elsewhere, was reviving the anti-union and anti-parliament communists of 1920, because fifty years after 1920, similar actions were giving a renewed reality to a period that until then had lost its meaning in the memory of the living. The present only revives the past it needs.

**[24] Are there any of your positions that have changed through all these years, and are there others which historical developments have proved true ?**

An important point has been confirmed by the last twenty or thirty years: “crisis” and impoverishment aren’t enough to cause revolutionary attempts. Another point has been proved wrong: unlike what we expected, the world growth of the wage system does not necessarily entail proletarianisation. Because of the increased industrialisation of ex-under-developed countries, from Mexican *maquiladoras* to Chinese sweatshops, there are more and more proles, but without the emergence of a proletarian movement. Theory can only understand change. Being part of a “vanguard” means being as little behind as possible.

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