

Toward the Human Community

La Guerre Sociale
1982

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I

The economic crisis and the threat of war are gradually undermining the capitalist world. What is at stake – and not only because of a handful of local wars – is the whole system of social order established on the basis of occupation zones and the relations of forces that emerged from the Second World War and which have persisted in a stage of capitalist prosperity.

We have now entered a stage of instability in which the political, economic, financial and military balance of forces is undergoing transformation, and in which class relations are being modified as well. Capital, which thought that it had put an end to economic crises, was unable to avoid the second great economic crisis of the 20th century. During an early stage of the crisis following upon the recession of 1974, most leaders and their propaganda have misconstrued the causes and the importance of the crisis. It was alleged to be a result of the oil shock; all that was needed was to carry out “economic restructuring”....

The persistence of the economic crisis and its lack of any promising political perspectives have undermined capital’s self-confidence. The electoral shift, the rise to power of Thatcher, Reagan and Mitterrand, who each in their own way are attempting to overcome the crisis, can by no means allow capital to think that it has finally discovered the solution to its crisis. Everyone knows that the neo-liberalism of the right and the statism of the left are equally incapable of even preventing the rise in unemployment and inflation. Even the economic advisors and government spokespersons, with their “indiscretions”, reveal their lack of confidence in the official optimism that they must nonetheless promote.

Unable to fool anyone about a brighter future or the prospect of real political change, the communications media and the politicians brandish the threat of war and exploit the prevailing atmosphere of doubt to call upon the population to join forces to confront the danger. Capitalism can always resort to the claim that it is the “lesser evil” of the two possible social systems. The battlefronts, whether in the West or the East, show every sector that things could be worse.

This real impasse in which capital finds itself and which it would like to present as an impasse for humanity as such, has not allowed for a reaffirmation of the hope

for a revolutionary transformation of the old world. What appears to prevail over any possible positive project is instead scepticism, a scepticism that is especially strong among the very people who reject the call to “join forces”.

And what about Poland? The strike movements, which have once again forced Stalinism to reveal its repressive and class-based nature, are a reaction to the specific difficulties of the countries of the East, as well as a reaction against the world economic crisis. The strength and the weakness of the struggle of the proletariat proceed hand in hand with the economic interpenetration of East and West, and with the political competition between liberal democracy and Stalinism.

However – and these two aspects are united – on the one hand the Polish workers have not successfully expressed their own class perspective against Stalinism, and on the other hand, their movement has remained quite isolated. Despite important revolts, especially in England, and despite real resistance on the economic plane on the part of the world proletariat, the struggle of the Poles has erupted amidst general passivity. Even in qualitative terms, it is also only relative.

Outside of Poland, the “support” for and commentaries on what has taken place in that country have only exceptionally been based on revolutionary perspectives. In the West, what has been denounced most of all has been the deprivation of democracy, and “popular support” in the West has been monopolized by the “professional saviors” and other conciliators, even though it often amounts to pure and simple charity.

On the basis of (and with respect to) what has taken place in Poland, revolutionary groups have only been capable of putting up a very weak fight against the reigning confusion. The exacerbation of the crisis has not increased the public influence of the revolutionary fractions, even if only by way of a numerical increase in the membership of the existing groups or by means of the emergence of new groups.

Must we once again resort to that explanation about the lack of coordination between the maturity of the objective situation that is ripe for revolution, and the subjective conditions (class struggle, consciousness, party, organization...) that we are still awaiting? We do not think so. The observation, made by the revolutionaries at the turn of the 20th century, that the working class still adhered to capitalist and reformist ideologies and movements despite its growing importance in a society that possessed and was squandering massive productive resources, led them to theorize an alleged underdevelopment of the subjective conditions in relation to the objective conditions. This separation expressed how hard it was for these revolutionaries to consider the question of the objective immaturity of communism. It was their own subjectivity that was unable to conceive of this immaturity and the social conditions, the relations among men and the relation of humanity and nature that favored or hindered the revolution.

Although it is the economic dynamism of capitalism itself that is its best means of social integration, economic stagnation and recession do not automatically provoke a social crisis, a systemic challenge to the legitimacy of this social order and an affirmation of the forces that seek to destroy it. Today, however, economic recession accompanies and reinforces social unrest, and leads to an increasingly wider gap between the aspirations of men and what society can attempt to offer them, a degradation of international relations, and a deterioration of the relation with nature.

Old illusions collapse: the cults of progress, of science and technology, of moral and traditional values.

Russia and the countries of the East are hardly capable of inspiring exalted feelings anymore. Nonetheless, this development has not fostered a generalization of revolutionary ideas. What have spread instead are feminism, environmentalism, and the demand for “human rights”, all mixing rapidly in the ideological sauce. It is not capital that is denounced in the countries of the East, but the lack of respect for those “human rights” that capitalism has always held in contempt. Rather than the exploitation of man by man, it is repression that is scandalous.

All of these observations point to a lack of revolutionary theory and organization. The first disadvantage of revolutionary theory is its Marxism. Its language causes it to be identified, whether it likes it or not, even when it denounces the “swindle”, with the ideology that justifies certain particularly unacceptable forms of exploitation and repression. Maybe, after all, the Marxist ideology is banalized and integrated by capital: everyone admits the predominance of the economy, the existence of the class struggle, and everyone would support a society without classes....

To overcome this obstacle presupposes a theoretical effort, a revitalization that would attempt to grasp the historical meaning of this dual process of integration and destruction of revolutionary ideas in the ruling ideology, without, however, having to abandon Marx.

Attempts have been made, here and there, to remedy Marx’s defects, most notably by means of the social democratic ideology, which claimed Marx as its teacher. These attacks, revisions and enrichments have stayed close to Marx, close to the critique of philosophy and of politics: there was nothing in Marx except an apology for economics, for politics, for historical necessity, for the proletariat, that is, an apology for capital against the capitalists.

Instead of carrying out a critique of the economy – that is, instead of understanding the economy as the disguise for social relations, the relations between classes – and instead of seeing how these relations between men present themselves as relations between things, since this relation of exploitation is reduced to an exchange relation, they say that the economy is not everything. In addition to economics you also have to address psychology, when what is required is an understanding of how the economy comes to dominate everything and how it must continually be exclusive in order to establish its “rationality”. This undertaking includes the various Freud-Marxist projects. Instead of revealing the critique of the economy in Marx and the critique of psychology in Freud, the tendency consists in correcting and completing the “economism” of the one with the “psychologism” of the other.

Regardless of our efforts, a powerful and organized revolutionary movement will not appear before major social changes have taken place. Unless capital is destroyed at its foundations, it preserves – by means of its intensive domination over all of social life – a great capacity for integrating and recuperating revolts and protests, and marginalizing revolutionary positions and attitudes. Although we must not rule out the possibility of sudden outbursts of the proletariat and opportunities for the revolutionaries to intervene, capital’s capacity for integration prevents revolutionary organization and ideas from being established as oppositional forces in society.

In a certain way, there is a totalitarianism of capital that occupies all of social life and holds, also thanks to its technical power, a monopoly over the representations and ideas that society has of itself. But there is no totalitarianism in the sense that capital will exercise full control over its own development and will overcome its contradictions. The latter weigh on ideology and cause the conditions to mature for a sudden and surprising reversal.

II

We are not the kind of people who think that, in the current period, the revolution can only be prepared for on the plane of ideas. It is possible that we can resist the usurpations of capital to the best of our abilities, wherever we may be, but without this activity, common to the proletarians, being able to reconnect with communist perspectives.

Theory must be accompanied by reflection on itself as practice. The elaboration and communication of theory cannot be carried out indifferently.

Not only must we support and participate in the basic struggles of the proletariat, but we must also devote just as much attention to attempting to ensure, as revolutionaries and to the greatest extent allowed by our presence and our ability, that we play a role in the orientation of these struggles. They, too, must be approached seriously, since it is possible to insist on this or that goal, this or that method, in opposition to other goals and methods.

This old world that is so solid, conceals certain cracks that determined men might use against it. It is a matter of discovering the opportunities to catch it by surprise by taking advantage of its weaknesses and its contradictions.

The individuals who publish *La Guerre Sociale* have not remained cloistered away in theoretical elaboration. We have participated, here and there, in the conflicts that disturb the established order and which concern us directly. We have tried to augment the importance of and increase the audience for revolutionary positions and, in addition to publishing our journal, we have distributed leaflets and posters. Our capacity for intervention has increased, but is certainly insufficient; too insufficient to claim to have a quantitatively significant impact on the scale of society as a whole. This quantitative aspect has its importance; in any event, the “annoying” nature of our interventions has allowed us to exercise some influence on certain occasions.

No one, with a little will, determination, or cleverness, or thanks to a systematic intervention, can incite the world to revolt. Capital ceaselessly manifests its power. It still has all the means of isolating all those who challenge it, of recuperating or distorting their words and actions and reorganizing itself with reference to the struggle and the criticisms leveled against it. It obstructs revolutionary activity and degrades it in bureaucratic routine, and it reduces critique to a commentary without force or impact.

It is important for us to understand every event in order to express the communist position.

We must be able to fully mobilize our forces when we feel the need to do so, and when we find ourselves in a position calling for “going all in”. In this we reject the militant tradition, passivity in activism.

The questions of intervention and organization, of the form in which they have traditionally been posed – as self-enclosed questions – lead us directly to what we want to denounce: politics. We perceive an inability to abandon politics and to understand the link between this world and the men produced by it and who want to do away with it.

By posing this question of intervention in a self-enclosed fashion, one necessarily falls into a double dissociation.

Taken as a whole, intervention is opposed to theoretical activity. On the one hand you have reflection, ideas (and possibly their dissemination in a publication).

On the other hand, you have action. Thus, arbitrarily enough, to write a text and to disseminate it via a journal will be considered to be a matter of theory, while the distribution of a pamphlet – the dissemination of ideas – falls under the heading of intervention. Likewise, there will also be a dissociation between society, which is the object, and the revolutionaries who must intervene. What is to be done?

Perhaps we will be told that it is precisely such separations that must be overcome: theory must be practiced and revolutionaries must prove that they can transform social life.

It is sometimes the case that one can establish a separation at the very same moment that one attempts, in a voluntarist way, to abolish it. It would undoubtedly be better to inquire concerning the nature of these separations and the conditions for their abolition.

Theory is a practice – a social practice – it is not the intervention of a spirit external to society. But a theory, depending on the era and its own quality, can be more or less adapted to a social movement, it can help spread it, comprehend it, it inflicts damage with it and is “annoying” with it (to a greater or lesser extent).

Our theory must have the ambition of intervening in social reality without being a mere critical commentary on that reality. If it does not have an impact and if it is not a reflection of a social practice by its integration into a more general movement, it will be a badly posed question however much interventionism is added to it. The important thing is to begin by determining what, in any particular era or theoretical practice – or in its relation – renders a theory inoperative.

A theory of a class practice and a revolutionary practice, our theory seeks to be indivisibly a theory of the entirety of human practice, of its evolution and its contradictions.

This is a comprehensive explanation that always prevents the emergence of a belief that everything is completely understood. Those who can barely crawl on all fours will irritably tell us that all of this is superfluous and irrelevant to concrete questions. Furthermore, this “megalomania” is dangerous and this aspiration to the totality must lead to totalitarian aspirations, which seek to regulate all of human life.

Making deductions from contingencies is a necessary precondition for historical efficacy. Man does not live on bread alone. He is rapidly discouraged when he is only busy with trivialities, petty tactical maneuvers and obtaining food. The turning points and advances of humanity are the consequences of material pressures, but they do not correspond with utilitarianism. These transformations have demanded and still demand the elaboration and development of an understanding of human destiny and the purposes of existence. First there was religion, then humanism, democratism, and positivism. Now it is the critique of religion and of rationalism and their communist supersession.

As individuals, revolutionaries are social products, individuals who want to destroy the society that produced them. Nevertheless, this society almost always successfully limits the number of such people and considerably reduces their capacity for intervention.

We could look at this question differently, and ask ourselves what conditions produce revolutionaries. Rather than ask ourselves the question, what is to be done?, we will ask ourselves about the relation between the elemental struggle of the proletariat and communism, a relation that undoubtedly exists but which is obscured by our era. The resistance against exploitation nourishes, in the normal conditions of the functioning of capitalism, reformism instead of revolution.

In this way we will be able to better understand the absence or the emergence of revolutionary fractions and what the revolutionaries must advocate or oppose. It is not a question of a specific intervention that could be added to the corpus of theoretical reflection in order to finally provide the latter with a meaning. If it is not to deteriorate into an ideology, theory cannot be founded upon the forgetting of our place in society, on the forgetting of the conflicts that permeate this society; these conflicts polarize our social practice as well as the totality of social practices. Theory can only be the understanding of social practices and relations, even though the latter are manifested in the disguise of extra-human necessities.

Man is a historical animal. His ways of life are not established once and for all by nature. They evolve; one follows another. And this history expresses a meaning. Communism is that meaning, the resolved enigma of human history, as Marx said.

Marx's contribution does not consist in the fact that he understood that humanity had passed through a succession of stages that led from "primitive communism" to "higher communism". Most of the utopian authors were sure that humanity had passed through stages, but the way they thought of this was somewhat as if humanity, playing a game of checkers, jumped from one square to another. Marx conceived that these historical stages, the "modes of production", are not only the framework, but also the result of human activity: production and class struggle. Oppressive social forms are made by men, although the former are incompatible with nature. Man's activity is split, it is opposed to itself and to nature, from which it cannot, however, escape. It becomes insane and nourishes the forms that have imprisoned it. This practical alienation is accompanied by a false and alienated consciousness.

Men make their own history but they do not know the history they make. They endure this history, without being able to intervene in its course, they belong to the ruled or to the ruling classes, except during brief revolutionary periods that have until now always led to a reorganization of class divisions and to subordination to the seemingly unavoidable necessities that appear to determine the destiny of individuals and society.

Communism, with the end of the division of society into classes, can only be the end of the opposition between human activity and the social forms that this activity nourishes; it can only be the permanent intervention of the human species in history. And therefore the end of history as the spectacle of an evolution and of needs from which men are separated.

The development of capitalism favors and, to a certain extent, proceeds from the eruption of the human masses in the course of history. Politics imagines that it is the expression of the will of the people, a will that is expressed by means of the democratic ritual. The economy, in this view, is the dominion of man over natural constraints. The sense of being subject to a divine or natural fate is liquidated. Capitalism survives, however, only thanks to the fact that it utilizes human activity and multiplies its effectiveness by preventing men from engaging in real activity, activity that finds in their own self-directed activity – and not in money – its meaning.

Capitalism gives the citizens the illusion – one that is increasingly recognized as such – of intervening in society by way of the magic of politics. Politics is presented as a sphere external to society, removed from the imperatives of social life and on the basis of which one knows how to and is capable of intervening in this social life. Political freedom is thus set up in opposition to economic necessity. Politics has the illusion of being external to the object, society, it seeks to act on the latter, concentrating in itself the principle and the quintessence of such activity. By doing so, politics plays its role of integration in a social order and destiny that assigned it to that role

in the first place.

The political illusion has its limits, but flourishes among leftists and leftism. Leftists think that politics can do everything. They desperately search for a point of reference outside of society: “consciousness”, “party”, “anti-party organization”, “radical subjectivity”, “revolutionary will”, that would allow them to incite society to revolt. Of course, unless they openly sink so low as to find religion, they will be forced to admit – although in an abstract way – that this radical and active principle itself has a social origin. The concrete thus appears as a kind of voluntarism that militates for the dissemination of consciousness, the strengthening of the party, and the perfection of the organization.

There are many people who participate in movement activities with the illusion that they are transforming the system when all they are doing is strengthening the political and trade union apparatuses that have become indispensable institutions for the system’s survival. They are far removed from, and even opposed to, those who, here and there, are content to resist exploitation.

The incitement to intervene and the incitement to break with the passivity that surrounds us have for some time been the Petri dish of opportunism. On the pretext of not waiting for the millennium – which will nonetheless come again – of not dreaming of a City of the Sun, and so that we may really influence reality, they reach a compromise solution. Except for a small minority that falls into terrorism.

Those who want action at any price, in an unfavorable situation, wear themselves out without any results and will not perceive the real opportunities to change the course of events. If such an opportunity should arise, and they become strong and think that they have an impact, the latter will perhaps be obtained at the price of concessions affecting both operational methods and goals. The fear of losing what has been won, of seeing the organization in danger, of losing some degree of influence, will prevent them from undertaking any subversive actions. They will accumulate their capital of militants and will continue to program their cadres.

Those who strengthen the social order start out by believing that one can abstractly escape from that order. Those who try to attack the social order, on the other hand, know that they are a part of this world whose contradictions they recognize. The revolution is engendered by the society that it seeks to destroy and revolutionary intervention can only be a relation of this society with itself.

This society is not immutable, nor is it a homogeneous and monolithic whole. It passes from stable periods of integration to stages in which it cannot even attain unity and in which more or less radical opposition can emerge.

In the complex game in which social forces confront one another, the action of very small fractions can sometimes play a decisive role, like one or another compound in a chemical reaction, but these fractions are still social products and cannot suddenly become powerful or acquire influence except as a result of the overall social reality.

The revolutionary fractions and the proletarian class – when it rises in insurrection – obviously must organize themselves to realize their goals. Organizational forms are not neutral, and the organization of a radical activity cannot be the same as the organization of political parties. The organization of the Stalinist parties can be characterized as the alliance of a parliamentary democracy (the congress) and a military hierarchy, which prevents “horizontal” contacts between subgroups. Everything must pass through headquarters. This is of no interest to us at all even if it is disguised with ultra-radical ideas.

Some revolutionaries, denouncing the bureaucracy, are compelled to define a form of organization, if not one that is ideal, at least one that would be a guarantee against the risk of bureaucracy. And this question tends, for these revolutionaries, to become the central question. It is by way of an organizational form – the workers councils, for example – that they will try to immunize themselves with respect to a process of degeneration that always looms over them. This is organizational fetishism, which forgets that the forms of organization are relations between men and not ways of correcting their defects.

The cause of bureaucratic degeneration does not primarily reside in the form of organization. And to rely on an organizational “key” to prevent such degeneration only shows that this degeneration is not a matter of the distant future. Centralize or decentralize, why not? But if one has to centralize in order to guarantee the unity of the movement, or decentralize to prevent bureaucratization, then one relies on false guarantees. And some kind of degeneration, whose profound causes will be ignored, will therefore be facilitated.

Proletarian uprisings ultimately led to a new arrangement and a reinforcement of the established order. Radical organizations have been integrated into the defense of this order. Subversive ideas have been reoriented against subversion. All of this weighs heavily on all those who nonetheless have the aspiration to begin the revolution again.

The revolution is not a bet. It is a result – and undoubtedly a starting point if things do not turn out too badly – of human evolution. We must undoubtedly rid ourselves of the idea that we can find guarantees to victory or surefire ways to prevent a movement from being isolated or favoring forces that turn against it. The movement is defined by what it does, and what it does, does not exclusively belong to it. If a movement of communication fails or stalls, power positions will then crystallize and they will become counterrevolutionary bodies. Our own theoretical efforts can be turned against us because of traces of bourgeois thought that they contain and which are therefore revealed. It would be vain to believe that it is possible to obtain such control over the results of our actions that we would be able to immunize ourselves against this danger.

It is not a matter of building an organization but of organizing a movement, a movement that exists but is weak, which cannot be achieved by proselytism for the party or for the (anti-party?) organization. We do not have to organize the organization but define and organize tasks.

Organizational fetishism seeks, by the alleged quality of the organizational form, to guarantee the quality of its content. It offers “instant” recipes and relieves men of the labor of organizing their own activity, to the point of excusing them from any need to think and even from the trouble of living.

This rejection of fetishism must not be understood as praise for either anti-organizational spontaneity or for that variety of permanent improvisation whose virtues are quite limited. Rules and respect for them are necessary, responsibilities must be delimited, agreements must be observed. We do not fetishize nor do we ignore the arbitrary character that certain rules can assume. For example, the mechanism for making decisions that agrees, when there is a deadlock, that majority rule will prevail can be utilized, but we cannot rely on it. The truth will never be guaranteed by becoming the opinion of the majority.

Any organization of revolutionaries can only be a particular organization, one that appears at a particular moment, with certain possibilities and a certain

theoretical level, and this is true even when these starting points must be transformed. The rules of the game, the functioning of such an organization, cannot ignore the fact that the individuals who compose it have distinct capabilities, various disagreements, they are many or few, geographically dispersed or concentrated. The relative, conjunctural character of these rules must never disappear.

When an organization makes its own defense, its own reinforcement, or the preservation at any price of its structural apparatus, a principal goal and this replaces other tasks that are no longer emphasized, then the time has come for this organization to disappear.

III

The fear that a transformation of economic relations might not revolutionize all of social life seems to originate from the experience of the establishment of bureaucratic capitalism after a proletarian insurrection. An important economic modification – the abolition of private property and the expropriation of the bourgeoisie – is not enough to abolish social inequalities or the separation between those who decide and those who execute. The nation and the family still exist. Does this not prove, in refutation of an overly “mechanistic” conception of “Marxism”, the independence of customs and ideology? Does this independence not imply that these sectors must be transformed by some kind of “cultural revolution”? In its absence, these sectors will persist in eviscerating the transformation of the property relations of any meaning or favoring a return of the old relations.

This question is asked wherever the revolution has been carried out, but also where it has not. Where capitalism has not yet been abolished – when the “material” and economic conditions are obviously mature for its abolition – the cause of the persistence of capitalism resides in conservative customs and ideologies. Strictly speaking, the economic and political struggle is not sufficient and capital must be attacked on this level also. Reich believed that the workers movement, because it downplayed the importance of these questions or even because it demonstrated its conservatism on this terrain, left the door open to fascism. The latter knew how to recognize and satisfy, after a fashion, popular needs in such a way as to protect the ruling order. For Gramsci, the workers movement, in order to conquer political power, must first achieve cultural hegemony.

To what extent does the economic base determine the rest of social life? Just how independent is the latter? And to what extent can a development on the terrain of ideas or customs affect the economic base?

In the history of Japan, there is an era that indisputably resembles the feudal era in the West, and can even be characterized as feudal. Today, just as in the West, thanks to this feudal period and the emergence of a merchant bourgeoisie and to the independence achieved by the latter, Japan has become a totally capitalist country. But feudal Japan, just like capitalist Japan, has certain “cultural” characteristics that are quite distinct from those of the West (Buddhism is not Christianity...). While modern Japan has gradually provided itself with a democratic façade, democracy never formed a part and still does not form a part of its local “sensibility”, whereas elsewhere the democratic aspiration seems to accompany capitalist development. This same democracy was born in the hardly capitalist environment of ancient Greece.

If ideas are born from material development, they seem to become independent in relation to that same development. Christianity spread and persisted beyond the necessary conditions that led to its birth; was it not Islam that transformed the

societies that allowed themselves to be conquered so rapidly by the Arabs, rather than any material weaponry?

The relation between an economic structure, on the one hand, and certain social habits and world-views on the other, is not obvious. Nor is the systematic predominance of the economic and social organization over religions and other systems of ideas. It seems to be practically impossible to deduce the character of religious representations from the basis of economic relations, and vice-versa.

We shall not undertake to solve this old problem here. To do so would require us to engage in the criticism and precise definition of notions that seem to be self-evident like "economic base" and "idea". A few comments, however, are sufficient to destroy the illusion that ideas rule the world or that customs and ideas can be independent of their social and economic basis, something that is suggested by their dissimilarity based on the identity of the social and economic base of two societies.

Western feudalism and Japanese feudalism should be subjected to comparison. But we do not by any means discover an identity of economic and social base that we can oppose to the distinct customs, sensibilities and religions. The differences and the similarities are situated on distinct levels. It would be altogether too arbitrary to oppose or to distinguish an economic base and various social habits external to that base.

Ideas do not conquer the world, or part of the world, but rather social practices, favored by certain ideas, or which favor certain ideas. Religions, even those that do not aspire to organize this world, are not ideas about the world but practices that are more or less capable of replacing other practices.

All social activity and all social terrains only possess a relative independence with respect to the rest of society. This does not mean that this activity or this terrain cannot have its own characteristics, a history and an influence that go beyond that of the prevailing society, and which favor its development to a greater or lesser degree. We shall not separate the history of society into societies and modes of production that are completely foreign to each other with their particular constitutive elements. It is necessary to clearly delineate the fundamental problems of humanity and, on that basis, consider how various societies and activities form, upon what they are based and how they succeed one another. As a work of fiction concerned with what is reasonable and the affairs of everyday life, the novel is the consummate literary form associated with capitalism. The novel appeared, evolved and underwent further development, producing a multiplicity of works and genres, with the emergence of the capitalism. This indisputable relation between the novel and capitalism does not, however, apply to the *Tale of Genji* – written during the eleventh century in a Japan that was not at all capitalist – with its equally indisputable nature as a novel. If the novel, science, and democracy were able to develop in the secularized world of capital, and were capable of adapting to its needs, they had already encountered certain conditions that were favorable for their birth in other social contexts.

There is no society that develops independently and in which a unique social experience is transformed by its own power and its own dynamic, one stage following another necessarily, in a linear development. Every society is also the result of influences, the confluence of disparate social practices that more or less successfully merge and undergo a transformation so that they constitute themselves as a totality and to safeguard themselves from external threats.

In capitalist society, economic concerns assume a preponderant role. It is as if economic motives cause men to act. The state's management of society increasingly

assumes the appearance of management of the economy. Previously, human existence and social organization were certainly dominated by material needs (food, for example), but these needs, however overwhelming they may have been, did not appear as independent and did not constitute either the center or the goal of existence. The latter obtained its meaning and was experienced in the form of war or religion.

These needs, however, that now orient human existence are perceived as more external than ever before. External not to this or that social layer that is removed from production, but to the producers themselves, when all social layers are integrated and defined by their direct participation in the economy. The “economic base” is external to social relations; it is a foundation lying outside of real social life. Paradoxically, the economy is considered as determinant, but it is thought that the transformations take place first outside of, and only later would act on, the economy.

Power and representation do not define the nature of society. This is what the Situationists believe, who, with their concepts of “power” and “spectacle”, prioritize and above all reify the effects of capital and substitute them for capital itself. They attempt to identify – with a simplistic opposition between “life” or human activity, and its opposite – the problem of the alienation of humanity in the proletarian condition and of capitalism as an expression of this humanity.

Marx has been reproached for his tendency to eternalize the economy as an independent sphere in its opposition to and its domination over other the other spheres, politics and ideology. But it is true that pre-capitalist, capitalist and communist human history is based on the reproduction of the conditions of material life and not on the phenomena of domination or representation that seem to be autonomous and try to pass themselves off as the motor forces of development.

The economy, far from being the domain of things as opposed to the domain of men, is fundamentally a relation among men, between classes. With the growing predominance of the economy – as a sphere of production and of material interests and as a particular social relation that intensifies material production – every social structure falls under its domain. The economy is a social force, even though it effectively appears to possess its own particular, independent logic that is external to the social relations that it is destroying, colonizing and transforming.

The communist abolition of economic relations is nothing but a social transformation that is carried out on the basis of the economy; by destroying it, it is proven that the economy is nothing but a historically determined relation of humanity with itself and of humanity with nature. This revolution cannot be a mere juridical transformation and replacement of one power with another, even if this is carried out after a proletarian uprising, as was the case in Russia.

Can we conclude that the abolition of economic relations is enough to revolutionize social life as a whole? The formulation of this question could lead one to believe that the extra-economic or extra-productive part of social life will change automatically, without human intervention or struggle; that the “superstructural” transformation will be the repercussion of an economic change and not the result of human action. It could even be assumed that the economic change itself will be the automatic result of the contradictions of the economy....

The economy is perceived precisely as the part of society that escapes man’s control. It is not this aspect that causes the revolution to be conceived as an economic transformation because the economy is not conceived as the expression of a set of social relations and revolution as human intervention. Economic needs, whether

they are invoked to preserve the social order or as the motor force of the revolution, replace the old natural or divine fate, in the alienated consciousness that humanity conceives of its alienation.

Communist theory reverses this point of view: the revolution is the intervention of man in his own history. His intervention transforms the separations and defends all social life, which then becomes totally social. The revolution is also the recognition that human activity is the extension of natural needs and processes.

In this reversal, theory integrates the understanding of the conditions that limit and channel human activity and which are nonetheless the result of that activity.

The communist revolution cannot be a sum of specific struggles, launched by Zulus or any other specific social group, against various particular oppressions that weigh upon them. Capital unifies humanity in oppression, inequality and competition. It produces a class that finds itself in the heart of a unified process of production and exploitation.

The position of these Zulus and others like them is determined by capital and the oppression that weighs upon them is integrated in a general oppression whose subject is capital. The relation that destroys it is the one that is likewise capable of attacking these oppressions at the root. When today, and at the point of unification that we have reached, the struggles of such groups – or the alleged struggles since not everyone can fight like the Zulus – are launched, they are only characterized as changes in the oppression that are utterly incapable of hindering capitalist development but become integrated into it. What is presented as the result of struggle is actually the result of economic development and determination.

It is therefore as proletarians, or as people who are threatened with proletarianization, that the Zulus et al. can, for themselves and for everyone else, resist capitalism and put an end to it, along with all other oppressions, old and new, that capitalism reproduces.

Only in an illusory way can one fight against particular oppressions and transform customs without destroying economic relations. This need to wait for revolution to be able to change anything might be disturbing to some. We shall not wait. There are always occasions, on every level of our existence, to oppose oppression. But from now on, this oppression is reinforced if one does not oppose it as a proletarian, or as a human being, rather than on the basis of a specificity – and an increasingly more illusory one – that must be preserved or defended. The worst thing that can be done is to make this specificity the depository of a capacity for revolt.

The poverty and vulgarity of current customs have reached a level that is unprecedented in the history of humanity. What generally used to take place in a hidden way (petty crime, prostitution) or in the catacombs (religion), has now emerged into the full light of day, and we are overwhelmed and poisoned by it. The transformation of customs and the clearing of the air are urgent matters. However, the prevailing ideology of the transformation of customs and the environmentalist ideology – rather than a revolution, or, instead of a revolution that is deemed to be impossible, distant, or even disastrous – are in full agreement: it is not a communist transformation that they propose. Only penguins could confuse these two things.

Self-management can always define itself arbitrarily as one thing or another, as partial or generalized. When the revolution is identified with self-management, this reduces, in the same movement and restrictively, capitalism to a mode of management, when it is primarily a mode of production.

The division between leaders and led, between a minority of managers and a mass of men who execute their orders, is a characteristic of capitalism (the production of exchange values, wage labor) and other class societies. Nevertheless, the specificity and dynamism of capitalism cannot be explained in terms of domination and management. The opposition between the ruling class and the ruled class cannot be confused with the opposition between those who manage and those who are excluded from this management function.

In times of revolt, even outside of periods of simple social disorganization, the proletarians throw out their employers or replace them. By doing so, they do not challenge either the enterprise, or money, or wage labor. This is, however, the only way to assure the "self-activity of the masses".

When the workers participate in the management of enterprises, the antagonism between the interests of the wage workers and the interest of the enterprise persists. This management proves to be precarious and the conflicts of interest become oppositions of distinct social groups.

The goal of the total unity of capitalist production and exchange is valorization, the reproduction and expansion of invested value. During an entire "progressive" period, this problem of capitalism was conceived as a problem of its capacity and its freedom to produce. Gradually, the problems of management have risen to the first rank, manifesting the saturation of capital and of conflicts in society. This unity does not derive from the fact of production but from a specific occupation. Activity must not only be clear about its goal, but it must at the same time focus on itself in order to control itself, to avoid conflicts and disturbances.

The questions addressed in this text deserve more attention, but reflection can only be fertile if it ceases to content itself, for the millionth time, with calculating the importance of the reciprocal influences of the economy, politics and ideology. It is necessary to engage in a study of this paradox that humanity makes its own history by continuing, up to now, to alienate itself from that history; that humanity must, on the one hand, transform nature (economics) and on the other hand, unify itself, and manage itself as a society full of contradictions (politics), and which can only conceive itself by way of false consciousness. Every human group has its myth of its origins and its idea of the basis of the social order, but man has not yet really considered himself to be a historical subject and an element of a natural evolution. He looks at himself and deceives himself with religion, philosophy, politics....

It is by means of politics that the problem of the intervention of humanity in its own history is falsely posed and provisionally resolved; and it is by means of economics that the problems of his alienation, his adaptation to natural imperatives and his transformation is falsely posed. The critique of economics and the critique of politics have been outlined by Marx and buried by Marxism (a tendency that was already present in Marx). We have to take it up again and thus, leaving behind a false way of posing these questions, we can create favorable conditions for revolutionary unification and therefore our practical impact on society.