

CLASS AND PARTY*

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It has often been said that one would seek in vain a theory of class or of the party in Marx. This is true; except for the fact that the problem of class is present throughout his work in such abundance and depth as to make possible the reconstruction of the theory which his analysis implies. The case is entirely different in regard to the party. This of course is not because the problem of the "organization" of the working class was ignored by Marx. He confronted that problem as soon as he lost his illusions—immediately after *The Holy Family* and *The German Ideology*—about the efficacy of exclusively intellectual action, divorced from concrete political action inside the working class;¹ and he reflected upon it between 1845 and 1848, while he was involved in the work of the secret societies and in the German workers' associations, and through his acquaintance with the Utopian Communist Weitling. None of these contacts—with the possible exception of the bonds of esteem and occasional action which linked him to Blanqui—led Marx to accept a definite "commitment": he already had a theoretical position which cut him off radically from the secret societies, with their nebulous programmes, and which also placed him in immediate opposition to Weitling. The question, for him, was a practical one: it was necessary to establish links with the workers, and the fact that the secret societies and their conspiracies tended in those years to assume a proletarian character was much more important for Marx than ideological quarrels with the societies. When the League of the Just was dissolved in 1847 and became the League of Communists, Marx was commissioned to write its Manifesto: all the ancient themes, which were dear to Weitling, were eliminated. What mattered to Marx—and this explains the nature of the Manifesto, which goes far beyond the task assigned to him—was to make the German proletariat immediately conscious not only of the possibility but of the necessity of fulfilling its historical role; and this obviously requires the passage from minority consciousness and clan-

* This text and the one which follows first appeared in the Italian journal *Il Manifesto*, no 4, which is edited by Rossana Rossanda and Lucio Magri. Both of them, as well as Aldo Natoli and Luigi Pintor were excluded from the Italian Communist Party at the end of 1969 for refusing to cease publication of the journal. The present translation is from the French version which appeared in the January 1970 issue of *Temps Modernes*.

destine activity to the widest possible organization, public and open to all. The accent was placed on *general* and *organized* action: it is not by chance that the old motto of the League of Communists, *All Men are Brothers*, became *Proletarians of all Countries, Unite!*

However, what separates Marx from Lenin (who, far from filling in Marx's outlines, oriented himself in a different direction) is that the organization is never considered by Marx as anything but an essentially practical matter, a flexible and changing instrument, an expression of the real subject of the revolution, namely the proletariat. The organization expresses the revolution, but does not precede it; even less does it anticipate its objectives and its actions. It was not only the restrictive and secret character of conspiratorial associations which had led Marx away from them, but also their conviction that they were able themselves to direct the revolutionary process *on behalf* of the proletariat. "One can understand", he wrote scathingly, "why these conspirators are not content to organize the revolutionary proletariat. Their occupation consists in anticipating the development of the revolutionary process, to push it deliberately towards a crisis, to make the revolution on the spot, without the conditions of revolution being present. The only condition for them is that the insurrection should be sufficiently organized. They are the alchemists of the revolution, and they share confused ideas with the alchemists of old. Obsessed by their own anticipations, they have no other aim but the next overthrow of the existing government and they have profound contempt for activity of a more theoretical kind, which consists in explaining to the workers what their class interests are. To the degree that *the Paris proletariat advanced directly to the centre of the stage as a party*, so did these conspirators see their influence wane." And Marx concluded: "The bombs of 1847 . . . finally dispersed the most obstinate and the most absurd of these old conspirators and precipitated their groups in the *direct proletarian movement*."² The italics are ours: between the proletariat and the party of the proletariat, the relationship is direct, the terms are almost interchangeable. For between the class as such and its political being, there is only a practical difference, in the sense that the second is the contingent form of the first. Moreover, Marx is convinced that the proletariat does not require a specific and autonomous mode of organization and expression, for it creates and destroys as it goes along its political forms, which are simple practical expressions, more or less adequate, of a consciousness which is synonymous with the objective position of the proletariat in the relations of production and in the struggle. Thus it is that Engels was able to write at the end of *On the History of the Communist League*: "Today the German proletariat no longer needs any official organization, either public or secret. The simple self-evident interconnection

of like-minded class comrades suffices, without any rules, boards, resolutions or other tangible forms, to shake the whole German Empire to its foundations. . . . The international movement of the European and American proletariat has become so much strengthened that not merely its first narrow form—the secret League—but even its second, infinitely wider form—the open International Working Men's Association—has become a fetter for it, and that the simple feeling of solidarity based on the understanding of the identity of class position suffices to create and hold together one and the same great party of the proletariat among the workers of all countries and tongues." This was written in 1885. But the concepts which underlie the idea of the proletariat's self-expression, and which are much broader than appears in Engels's text above, are particularly notable in those writings of Marx where he describes the development of the class struggle. The famous passage in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* may be recalled here: "But the revolution is thoroughgoing. It is still journeying through purgatory. It does its work methodically. . . . First it perfected the parliamentary power, in order to be able to overthrow it. Now that it has attained this, it perfects the executive power, reduces it to its purest expression, sets it up against itself as the sole target, in order to concentrate all its forces of destruction against it. And when it has done the second half of its preliminary work, Europe will leap from its seat and exultantly exclaim: Well grubbed, old mole!"

THE MODEL OF THE COMMUNE

Revolution, in this context, is nothing but the product, simultaneously, of a material situation (the confrontation between classes) its political translation (the crisis of the institutions of power) and the formation of a consciousness. This idea of revolution does not permit an interpretation of a mechanical and evolutionary type, since it sees the motor of the revolution in the irrepressible violence of the proletariat; nor does it permit the assimilation of the revolution to a subjective plan, to a design which anticipates the ongoing material circumstances, to a consciousness of history and of class which antedate both, and which are exterior to and separate from them. The distinction which Marx makes between *social being* and *consciousness* also establishes the close link between the two. In the *Eighteenth Brumaire*, it is this link—which is by no means easy to achieve, but is itself laboriously produced by the movement—which explains why, unlike the "brilliant" bourgeois revolutions, "proletarian revolutions, like those of the nineteenth century, criticize themselves constantly, interrupt themselves continually in their own course, come back to the apparently accomplished in order to begin it afresh, deride with

unmerciful thoroughness the inadequacies, weaknesses and paltriness of their first attempts, seem to throw down their adversary only in order that he may gain new strength from the earth and rise again, more gigantic, before them, recoil ever and anon from the indefinite prodigiousness of their own aims, until a situation has been created which makes all turning back impossible, and the conditions themselves cry out: *Hic Rhodus, hic salta!*". The accent seems placed here with particular emphasis on the objectivity of the confrontation which propels and compels the consciousness and subjective will of the class, when the latter, though the principal motor of future changes, it still affected by the inertia of the present. With Marx, the fusion between *social being* and *consciousness* (a question which, as we shall see, is at the core of the Leninist theory of the party) is obviously based upon *praxis*. In other words, the answer to the question of "how" the class become: conscious is: "By practice, in the fact of struggle." Lelio Basso acutely notes³ that the key to the question is to be found in the *Theses on Feuerbach*, particularly in the third thesis: consciousness is not the product of "education", but of a "being in movement", of an active relationship with nature or with society. A product of capitalism, the working class receives from it its configuration and its dimensions, and simultaneously, its alienated condition; it is therefore its real situation which leads it to reject capitalism. The class struggle has thus its material roots in the mechanism of the system itself; and revolution—meaning the process which is intended to transcend the system—is a *social* activity which creates, over time, the political forms which the class needs and which constitute its organization—namely the party. If the party and the proletariat sometimes appear as interchangeable in Marx, this is only so in the sense that the former is the *political* form of the latter, and constitutes its transitory mode of being, with the historical imperfections of concrete political institutions; while the proletariat remains the permanent historical subject, rooted in the material conditions of the capitalist system. It is not by chance that the proletariat is destined to destroy and overcome the traditional modes of political expression, including its own, insofar as they are something else than direct social rule; and it achieves this by that unique form of revolution and of a revolutionary society which Marx depicted: the Commune of 1871. In the Commune, revolutionary violence had not only smashed bourgeois power, but the latter's structures as well (from which Lenin deduced that the proletarian power could not use the apparatus of the bourgeois state but had to destroy it); direct democracy thus appeared not as an elementary form of proletarian power, but as its *specific* form. In the model of the Commune therefore, the revolution and the revolutionary society anticipated not only the withering away of the state, hut, even

more radically, the progressive disappearance of the *political* dimension as a dimension separate from (and opposed to) social being, reconstituted in its unity. The proletariat in struggle does not produce an institution distinct from its immediate being; and no more does it produce its own state, distinct from the immediate being of the new society. If, that is to say, one does not find a theory of the party in Marx, the reason is that, in his theory of revolution, there is neither need nor room for it.

LENIN'S HORIZON

The question and the theory of the revolutionary party only arise with Lenin. Their birth is historically specific: we are at the end of the epoch when Marx and Engels could anticipate a relatively near revolutionary conflagration at the heart of Europe; and a new phase is opening in which the revolution seems to require a strong subjective impulse which would, in a way, do violence to history. At the turn of the century, Lenin's horizon was delimited by two major facts: first of all, capitalism has entered in the imperialist phase, and its crisis reveals itself more complex than had been foreseen. Monopolistic concentration reaches gigantic proportions, while the most explosive contradictions move on to another terrain. "What has changed are the forms, the order and the physiognomy of each crisis, but crises continue to be an integral part of the capitalist system."⁴ The thesis of the inevitable "collapse" of capitalism will endure for a long time yet in the revolutionary wing of the working-class movement; but already Lenin, throughout his life, had to face the growing resistance of the system, and a capacity for action of the working class much inferior to what could have been foreseen in the first great revolutionary phase⁵ which extended from 1848 to the Paris Commune.

The years from 1872 to 1905 constituted, on the contrary, a long pacific phase, marked by the absence of revolution—the phase which ended, "paradoxically",⁶ with the revolution of 1905 and with the great awakening in Asia. The fact that this new revolutionary wave occurred on the margins of the capitalist world was not due to the attenuation of the class contradictions in the citadels of capitalism; it was due rather to what would today be called the mechanisms of "integration", foremost among which was the great "revisionist" current associated with the name of Bernstein, and the opportunism of the Second International culminating in the betrayal of 1914.

Hence two great questions arose which marked the revolutions of the 20th century and which are also characteristic of Leninism :

1. The capitalist and imperialist system was defeated in areas which, according to the Marxian schema, were not "ripe" for communism.

The theoretical implications of this fact were, to a certain extent, obscured by the thesis that "backward" countries must necessarily pass through the stage of the democratic revolution before arriving at the stage of the socialist revolution. This thesis predominated until, in the fifties, the Chinese Communists and some revolutionary currents of the "Third World" proposed the theory of "zones of revolutionary storm". Suffice it to emphasize, in relation to so complex a problem, that these movements or revolutions did not always have the proletariat as their protagonist.

2. In this context, the problem of political organization no longer presents itself in terms of the spontaneous formation, in the heat of struggle, of a vanguard of the class. The confrontation must be prepared: the more society lacks "maturity", the more important it is that a vanguard should provoke the telescoping of objective conditions with the intolerability of exploitation and a revolutionary explosion, by giving the exploited and the oppressed the consciousness of their real condition, by wrenching them out of ignorance and resignation, by indicating to them a method, a strategy and the possibility of revolt —by *making* them revolutionaries.

A vanguard of this nature may be external to the mass which it seeks to transform: it is as such an external vanguard that it has assimilated, and that it then transmits, the strategy of struggle. Thus, the revolutionary party is, paradoxically, the bearer of the analysis and the ideals of Marx, yet foreign to the process of struggle-consciousness which Marx had sketched out. It is always through this form of organization that the revolutionary wing of the workers' movement has manifested itself, so as not to be compelled to defer the revolution to the hypothetical moment when conditions would be "ripe"; even in Europe, where the objective conditions fitted better with Marx's hypothesis, the crisis of social-democracy and the incapacity to oppose to social-democracy a non-Leninist model (only Gramsci and Rosa Luxemburg made the attempt) rendered impossible a practical adherence to Marx's model.

WHAT IS TO BE DONE?

Lenin gave a theoretical foundation to this model of the party in *What is to be Done?* It is impossible to read this text properly without taking into account the polemic against gradualism and economism, and against the ideological accoutrements of opportunism as practiced by the Second International. But it is equally wrong not to see how much the text, which was intended as a strict exegesis of Marx, constitutes in fact a radical revision of the relationship between class and party, class and class consciousness. On this point, as is well known,

Lenin adjudged as "profoundly true" the ideas of Kautsky, who argued against those who believed that "economic development and the class struggle create, not only the conditions for socialist production, but also, and directly, the consciousness of its necessity. . . . In this connection Socialist consciousness is represented as a necessary and direct result of the proletarian class struggle. But this is absolutely untrue. Of course, Socialism, as a theory, has its roots in a modern economic relationship in the same way as the class struggle of the proletariat has. . . . But Socialism and the class struggle arise side by side and not one out of the other; each arises out of different premises. Modern Socialist consciousness can arise only on the basis of profound scientific knowledge. Indeed, modern economic science is as much a condition for Socialist production as, say, modern technology, and the proletariat can create neither the one nor the other, no matter how much it may desire to do so. . . . The vehicles of science are not the proletariat, but the bourgeois *intelligentsia*: it was out of the heads of members of this stratum that modern Socialism originated, and it was they who communicated it to the more intellectually developed proletarians who, in their turn, introduce it into the proletarian class struggle where conditions allow that to be done. Thus, Socialist consciousness is something introduced into the proletarian class struggle from without (*von Aussen Hineingetragen*), and not something that arose within it spontaneously (*urwuchsig*). Accordingly, the old Hainfeld programme quite rightly stated that the task of Social-Democracy is due to imbue the proletariat with the consciousness of its position and the consciousness of its *tasks*."⁷ We know that Lenin went even further than this, by adding that the workers' struggle could never by itself go beyond simple economic demands (in virtue of which the spontaneity propounded by Rabotchaia *Mysl* was nothing but the ideological alibi for an objectively "trade-unionist", non revolutionary position); and that the workers' struggle would therefore, by its nature, be incapable of grasping the links between exploitation and the political structure of the bourgeois state, which were also links that served to explain the political contradictions between the autocracy and other classes. At that time, Lenin's objective was to liberate social-democracy from "economism", to bring the proletariat into the struggle against the autocracy, and to create the organizational means appropriate to the purpose. He did not therefore get bogged down in a philosophical discussion, but confined himself to denouncing and illustrating the insurmountable limitations of class instinct, and provided on the way a curiously idealist reconstruction of the birth of Marxism as a product of culture and of nothing else.⁸ From this follows a sudden break between material social being (the class, the proletariat) and the political struggle for socialism (a project expressed by culture, a generous theory

of man's emancipation in modern times); hence the justification of a vanguard, the bearer of the political project, separate from the class and external to it.

The Marxist dialectic, in which the subject is the proletariat and the object the society produced by the relations of capitalist production, thus moves towards a dialectic between class and vanguard, in which the former has the capacity of an "objective quantity", while the latter, the party, being the subject, is the locus of "revolutionary initiative". Whatever may be the consequences of posing the problem in this fashion, its idealist character is obvious. While it is true that one must guard against a "mechanical" application of Marx's thought, the question remains how it is possible to think in Marxist terms and yet maintain that consciousness has an origin other than social being—"it is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness"—and if the passage from social being to consciousness *in* the proletariat presents a theoretical difficulty, that problem becomes quite insoluble if, at the risk of falling back into Hegelianism, one deduces consciousness from consciousness—worse, if one does not fear *to make the consciousness of the proletariat the product of the consciousness of intellectuals* miraculously freed from their social being and abstracted from their class.

ROSA LUXEMBURG'S APPROACH

Rosa Luxemburg also attempted, theoretically and practically, to solve the problem posed by a revolutionary development of the European proletariat slower than Marx had anticipated; but the solution, in this case, was sought in accordance with the Marxian concept of class consciousness and not according to the Leninist thesis of an external vanguard. This led to Rosa Luxemburg being accused of "spontaneism", an ideological form of "left adventurism" rather than of opportunism. In reality, Rosa Luxemburg never maintained that the masses could do without an organized vanguard which, for her, was identified with the party. However, the need for the latter was not derived from the absence of a *political* dimension of working class struggles as such, but from the objective fragmentation of these struggles, which a unifying strategy could alone overcome. It is, in effect, the *directly political* needs of the class which require its strategic unification. Rosa Luxemburg firmly denies that the theory of class struggle can come into being independantly of that struggle itself: "The proletarian class struggle is older than social-democracy; as the elementary product of class society, it already manifests itself with the appearance of capitalism in Europe. It is not social-democracy which

began the education of the modern proletariat but, on the contrary, it is the proletariat which brought it into being for the purpose of embodying the consciousness of the goal to be reached and co-ordinating, in time and in space, the episodic and local actions of the class struggle.¹⁰ The history of past revolutions shows that violent popular movements, far from being the arbitrary, conscious work of so-called 'leaders' and 'parties' . . . are rather absolutely primary social phenomena which have their origin in the class character of modern society. The birth of social-democracy has so far made no difference to this fact, and its role does not consist in prescribing laws for the historical development of class struggles but on the contrary in submitting to its laws and in that very manner to bring them under its control.¹⁰ The strong link between spontaneity and organization thus resides in the laws of historical development of the class struggle, that is to say of the material base. This cannot be assimilated to the immediate consciousness which the mass has of itself, since the latter "like Thalassa the eternal sea always harbours within itself every latent possibility : the mass is always what it *must* be by the force of circumstances and is always quick to become something entirely different from what it appears to be".¹¹ Nor, on the other hand, can it be considered as the pure product of culture, of that "ideology of socialism", independent of the material historical development, which Lenin opposed in *What is to be Done?* to "bourgeois ideology".

Rosa Luxemburg's position was condemned by the International at a time when it had already been condemned by the failure of the German and the European revolution, i.e. of the only revolution in relation to which it was historically plausible. This condemnation had profound organizational consequences, for theory always surrounds a practical kernel, namely the question of leadership. When, that is to say, the *subject* is located *inside the class* (however great the complexity may be between being and consciousness), the political organization, the party, appears as a simple instrument, always liable to control. When, on the contrary, the subject is embodied in the *external political vanguard*, the latter bears within itself a principle of legitimacy and self-regulation, and requires the class to submit to it.

Lenin had an extremely clear awareness of this problem; and in fact—once the battle against the right had been won and the revolutionary party had been created—his initial conception of "induced consciousness" was contradicted by the thesis "all power to the Soviets"—the Soviets being the direct expression of the class obviously possessed of consciousness to the point of being able to direct the new society. The word "contradicted" is used here not only because, in practice, the relationship between Soviets and party found a brief and fragile equilibrium; but also because that equilibrium revealed, in Lenin, a

leap between the theory of the seizure of power and the theory of revolution, in the sense that the subject of the former would be the political vanguard, and that of the latter the class. The difference of contexts explains the partial character of the positions, shows the complexity of the relation between the class and its organization and the rapidity with which the emphasis changes from one to the other in the concrete historical development.

GRAMSCI'S ITINERARY

In Gramsci's thought, the polarity is obvious. All of the Gramsci of the "councils", with his Soviet and anti-Jacobin orientations, has a Luxemburgist emphasis, to the point where he finds in the network of councils, seen as the locus of the self-government of the producers, the essence of political organization, the Italian reality of the Communist International.¹² This extreme position must no doubt be viewed in the context of the debate inside the Italian Socialist party; but it is certain that the Turin experience of Gramsci is altogether based on the hypothesis of the growth of the class as the direct political subject. The party, in this perspective and as is affirmed in the famous passage on the Russian revolution, is only the ideological point of reference, a centre of coherent elaboration, an intellectual and moral vanguard, an instrument, but not the only one, of political expression. That political expression does not require mediations; in the factory councils, in the achievement by the class of its consciousness of being a revolutionary alternative, a new society is already coming into being in the heat of battle. Ten years later, in the Notes on Machiavelli, the emphasis changes: the accent is placed on the vanguard, on "the prince", alone capable of interpreting reality by releasing reality's yet imprecise potentialities. Without its intervention, reality cannot manage to take shape, to become recognizable. The autonomy of the political moment, which is precisely Machiavelli's "discovery" has large implications if it is accepted as a principle which is also valid for a revolutionary party: for that autonomy explicitly detaches the party from its material base and arrests (in the reverse sense of "direct democracy") the dialectic between class and consciousness.

It is not therefore surprising that Gramsci should have been exploited as much by the partisans of the workers' councils orientation, which reappeared after 1956, as by those who sought in him a theoretical justification for the supremacy not only of the party, but of its leading cadres.¹³ The real Gramsci is in his itinerary, the theoretical echo of the crisis of revolutions of the twenties, the reflection on the complexity of the relation between spontaneity and organization in the stress of concrete history, in a period when the failure of the

movement seems to leave no other hope than international reference to the Soviet Union, and the maintenance at all costs of even a restricted vanguard in each country. But the real Gramsci is also to be found in the strong awareness which he always had of the complexity of the social fabric and of its forms of expression, of the consequent necessity for any organization—whether "direct" or "vertical"—to present itself as the synthesis of a process comprising numerous levels and mediations. This basic element in Gramsci does not resolve the political opposition between the two conceptions noted earlier, but it infuses a common preoccupation into both, to the point where Gramsci, even though not condemned as was Rosa Luxemburg, always remained suspected of heresy in the Communist movement.

THE PROBLEM TODAY

After Lenin, the Communist movement no longer discussed the question of the relation between party and class, except in an extremely one-sided and indirect way, and in order to call for a "better link of the party with the masses". The question was thus reduced to one of democratic functioning of the vanguard and of its channels of communication, and of the vanguard's degree of receptivity. In its most advanced sectors, as in the Italian Communist Party, the Communist movement, inspired by Gramsci, became a complex institution, rich in possibilities, not only in its internal life, but also in the interpretation of national reality which an ever better adapted political instrument made possible. Yet, here also, the effort was exclusively related to the functioning of the instrument, to the institution and to nothing else. Even the dramatic debate on Stalinism in the European socialist societies did not go beyond this purely *political* level. This is why the debate, where it occurred, oscillated between sectarianism and right deviation: the defence of monolithic structures or proposals for a multi-party system, even inside socialist society. Only one socialist country, China, displaced in the course of its revolution—and particularly during the tumultuous "cultural revolution"—the theoretical terms of the question mass-and-party by proposing the permanent recourse to the mass, the permanent reference not only to the latter's objective needs, but to the most immediate forms of its consciousness ("the poor peasant", those most in need becoming the axis of the construction of the movement wherever arrived the Red Army and its propagandists): it is according to these criteria that must be measured the correctness of the political process and to which the organization must be subordinated. However, this insistence on the material condition is itself conditioned by the charismatic character of the "correct thought" of Mao, the leaven for the achievement of consciousness, the

guarantee of the subjective process. This duality harbours an explosive tension which, from time to time, shatters the concrete forms of political organization or of the administration of the state, but only to reproduce immediately new such forms, just as rigidly centralized, with their specific institutions and their external relation to the mass. It seems that, rather than speak of a dialectic, it is more appropriate to speak of an unresolved antinomy, kept alive as a practical, empirical system, with its own reciprocal corrective features. It may be that this is the only system which, in a situation of immaturity of productive and up to a point social forces, allows the relation class-party not to be frozen in a hierarchical structure which would otherwise be encouraged by the immensity of the problems to be tackled. The theoretical question remains unresolved; but it also remains at least present and alive in China, while in the other socialist societies it has come to be frozen in the reiteration of a Leninist scheme revised and impoverished by Stalinist experience.

Until the last few years, the debate was continued only within marginal groups. But where it did occur—as in Italy in the debate around the councils,³⁴ and in France in the polemic against Sartre, begun in 1952 by Merleau-Ponty and Claude Lefort, and then continued in the journal *Socialisme ou Barbarie*—it revealed a fundamental inadequacy. This inadequacy was much less theoretical than political: for it is the political dimension which gives their strength to the theoretical arguments of Marx, Lenin, Rosa Luxemburg and Gramsci. The discussions on the theory of the party have, since the twenties, always had in Europe a "leftist" tinge; and they have always brought one back to the "lateness" of the revolutionary movement in the West. But all these discussions also sought a solution in a "return to the sources", whether in Marx or in Gramsci, so as to find again a "pure" relationship between the class and its political expression in the mechanism of exploitation.

All positions which, against the weaknesses of the institutional forces of parties and trade unions, affirmed in this period the priority of the class as the political subject (whether they accepted or denied the necessity of organization) lent themselves easily to the critique which Lenin addressed to the "economism" of his own day: namely that they reduced the class and its exploitation to the relationship between capital and labour and paid little attention to all the political, national and international implications of the class struggle; while these implications were, on the contrary, recognized by the institutionalized organizations of the working class. A re-reading of the debate on workers' councils reveals a lack of historical perspective, a fragmentation of political programmes, a curiously "insurrectionary" aspect where there should have been a rediscovery of the totality of Marx's

thought. What the debate showed was that it was impossible to define a coherent class position without taking into account the total organization of capital as a total system of social relations. Thus, in the discussion conducted in *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, it was not by chance that Lefort—even though he was concerned to criticize with good reason Sartre's reduction of the class to the party—deemed it a matter of no importance whether the French working class did or did not demonstrate against General Ridgway—that was not its business. The fact that the working class movement of the 20th century was represented by social democracy or by Leninism (or by its Stalinist version); the existence of the Soviet Union and the relations of forces which this entailed on a world scale; the occurrence of revolutions or of revolutionary crises in "backward" areas where revolution, when it was not organized through Communist parties, assumed even more centralized and hierarchical forms (always justified by the objective immaturity of the revolution)—all this was left aside and thus condemned the debate to fundamental sterility.

In comparison, the Communist movement had an easy task: all it needed to do was to insist on its own effective insertion in historical reality. It is true that the Communist movement often tended to use this as a means of avoiding any critical re-examination of its own positions. It is also true that the organization—an organization built upon the militancy and sacrifices of innumerable men and women—is often tempted to see its own perpetuation as its goal instead of constantly verifying the correctness of its political positions. Even so, the nature of Communist parties could not be brought into question, whether on theoretical or on practical grounds, merely by reflection on the nature of the class, least of all by reflection vitiated by the inadequacies noted earlier. It could only be brought into question by profound changes in real relations, which suddenly pose to the vanguard the problem, not whether it is in accord with the theory, but whether it is in tune with the potentialities of the movement, whether it precedes the movement, or follows it. Elaborated as it was in the first half of the twentieth century as an instrument of revolution in areas situated on the margin of advanced capitalism, the Leninist schema of the relation between party and class only comes to the fore again at the point when the question is posed anew of revolution in advanced societies.

The solution, or at least the working hypothesis which seems appropriate is suggested in the conversation with Sartre which follows. A solution requires collective research and discussion with the whole of the movement. It is not an accident that the questions raised here are now being asked on all sides, and as much inside Communist parties, where these are most open and receptive to the concern engendered

by the appearance of new forms of struggle, as in the groups which have come into being in the last few years and which have rapidly transcended an elementary vision of spontaneity.

We should like, in conclusion, to underline two further points. The first is that the question of class and party only has theoretical value when it is politically ripe, which is another way of saying that the only theory which has meaning is one which is formed within a praxis, a concrete historical situation: no solution to it is possible which does not start from a careful analysis of the different class contradictions in advanced societies, from the concrete forms of struggle, from the needs which the crisis of capitalism reveals today. What this means, in effect, is that a theory of organization is closely linked to a concept of revolution, and cannot be separated from it.

The second point is that the tensions which are present in the historic institutions of the class, whether trade unions or parties, do not only result from the subjective limitations of these institutions. They are also the product of a growth in a political dimension ever more closely linked to the achievement of consciousness, and ever less capable of being delegated. In effect, the distance between vanguard and class, which was at the origin of the Leninist party, is visibly shrinking: Marx's hypothesis finds new life in the May movement in France, in many of the confrontations which occur in our societies, and which tend to escape from the control, however elastic and attentive it may be, of purely political formations. It is in terms of this fact that the problem of organization may now be posed again. From Marx, we are now returning to Marx.

NOTES

"Now, we were by no means of the opinion that the new scientific results should be confided in large tomes exclusively to the 'learned' world. Quite the contrary. We were both of us already deeply involved in the political movement. . . ." Thus wrote Engels in his *On the History of the Communist League* in relation to this period.

Aus dem literarischen Nachlass von Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels und Ferdinand Lassalle, edited by Franz Mehring, Stuttgart, 1902, vol. III, p. 426. See Lelio Basso's Introduction to Rosa Luxemburg's *Political Writings*, Editori Reuniti, 1967, p. 107.

4. Lenin, *Marxism and Revisionism*.
5. Lenin, *The Historical Destiny of the Doctrine of Karl Marx*.
6. Lenin, *Backward Europe and Advanced Asia*.
7. This passage is cited *in extenso* in *What is to be Done?*
8. "In Russia too the theoretical doctrine of social-democracy was born altogether independently from the spontaneous development of the movement; it was born as the *natural and inevitable result of the development of thought* among revolutionary socialist intellectuals." *Zbid.* (Our italics).

9. Rosa Luxemburg, *The Crisis of Social Democracy*.
10. Rosa Luxemburg, *Und zum drittenmal das belgische Experiment*, in *Die Neue Zeit*, 14 May, 1902.
11. Letter to Matilde Wurm, February, 1917.
12. On this point, see particularly *Ordine Nuovo*, Einaudi, 1954. On the nature of the revolution, see particularly "The Party and the Revolution", pp. 67-68.
13. See especially the article by A. Natta and G. Pajetta in no. 5-6 of *Critica Marxista* (1963), p. 113, in which the "primary responsibility" of the leadership is deduced from Gramsci's thesis (in the *Notes on Machiavelli*) of a difference in political involvement.
14. The most interesting contribution to the debate was made by Raniero Panzieri and Lucio Libertini in 1958 and 1959 under the title *Tesi sul controllo operaio et Tesi sul partito di classe*.