

REVOLUTIONARY INTELLECTUALS AND THE SOVIET UNION*

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A RELATIONSHIP with the socialist countries—with revolutions “elsewhere”^D—has been part of the history of the European left, which has not had its revolution, for fifty years. A relationship composed of hopes and disappointments, alliances and recantations, inspiring utopias and depressing realisms. Almost always subordinate, it has become one aspect of the defeat of the left in the “developed capitalist countries”. And as a love-hate, hope-disillusion relationship is always in some sense ridiculous and always turns into weakness, the European left has tried more than once to free itself of it by rejecting it as a problem: whatever the nature and the destiny of the “other” revolutions, they have nothing to do with me, mine will be “quite different”. But this is no more than an exorcism. The “other” revolutions exist. They define the world in which we live. They define us, whether we like it or not. They cannot be avoided.

And for two reasons. The first is the fact that the unity of the world stage has become obvious: capitalism has created a system, a mechanism in which interactions between the centre and the periphery are more and more immediate and constraining. The second is that the conceptual apparatus of Marxism—despite (or perhaps because of) all the distortions it has suffered in the “Vulgate” of the Communist Parties, despite its enervation in the reformist version or admixtures from the mongrel but Marxisant culture of “American radicalism” or other “new cultures”^H—has provided a common political vocabulary, a grid for reading and interpretation which has in its turn speeded up the unification process. Thus, every break in the imperialist bloc or the capitalist front, or in the “socialist camp” is perceived—however remote its epicentre—not just as a problem agitating all the fronts of the movement, but as an interrogation which is immediately recognizable because it is common to us all: always and everywhere *de te fabula narratur*. The history of *revolutions* appears once again as a pure phenomenology of the history of *the revolution*.

Hence we are surrounded. The left cannot evade either a factual or a

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value judgement of the socialist countries. Think of the history and of the crises of the European workers' movement and you will find inextricably linked to the history of *commitment* questions concerning the socialist countries. Must they be accepted, and to what extent? Or rejected, and with what consequences? These questions have always had direct consequences for the way the revolution has been understood and for immediate political alliances.

In the Marxist left, those who have rejected, or attempted to reject the need to test themselves on this terrain have been rendered impotent thereby. Starting from opposite positions, the Social Democrats and the Trotskyists have put the socialist countries into parentheses. The Second International, while it still contained within it someone to think for it, failed to see the approach of the revolutions. When it could no longer ignore their irksome presence, it registered it as an accident: history had brought forth monsters. Marx had foreseen the arrival of socialism as a break, admittedly, but also as the consummation of capitalism at the summit of its development, when the impetuous productive forces had come into contradiction with the old relations of production. If such is the schema of the socialist revolution, October 1917 did not have its papers in order; about China the less said the better and as for Cuba, that is quite another matter. Neither substance nor accident, these are phenomena to which the Second-International Marxist can grant no legitimacy, and hence which do not disturb him at all. If need be he can make use of the internal difficulties in the socialist countries to justify his gradualist vocation, his integration; and when the latter has been achieved, it is clear that any reflection on the "socialisms" loses its drama. He who does not believe in the revolution does not find the revolutions a problem.

The Trotskyist current—the respect due to certain exceptions notwithstanding—has given up too, but by the opposite method. Not through indifference, but through excessive dramatization. October 1917 is indisputably the revolution; but it has been transformed into a fatal bureaucratic degeneration. This being so, history is seen as a mistake, a non-history (which, from the political standpoint, amounts to the same thing). I have no wish to offend the susceptibilities of the Trotskyists when I note that the quarrel they have sought with the Eastern countries has been the same for forty years. Like all refusals, their attitude fails either to defeat the inimical reality or to analyse it in itself, in its objective relations with its surroundings, in its development. If for them the USSR is the country of Leninism betrayed, the Chinese revolution is quite simply incomprehensible (and the Cultural Revolution an aberration) nor is it on the terrain of pure principles that they base their sympathy for Cuba—a sympathy which is not returned besides. The result is a world vision in which the revolutions,

those which have been realized or others, are permanently compromised; what remains is a theoretically imprecise element with confused features (the degenerated, bureaucratic, workers' state).

It is the militants of the Communist Parties and their more or less distant fellow-travellers for whom the relationship with the socialist countries is inscribed in their life-blood. It has a history, stages, wounds. It contained a real problematic, itself not static. And, more clearly than for the other, it eventually became a symbol, a focus in which, on every occasion, the point of their reflection on the revolution converges.



I shall not try to outline this history. To write it seriously would require work of quite a different order, for it is neither simple nor linear. It is neither simple nor linear even for the Communist leaders, despite the fact that they all but managed to prevent their tormented relationship, **first** with the Third International and then with the socialist countries from filtering through to the outside. Moreover I think that even the most minute research would not change the conclusions that it is possible to draw from this history today.

In the relationship with the socialist countries, the weight accorded to their *existence* and their *international role* has predominated absolutely over the judgement to be made about their *internal* nature. Paradoxical as this may seem—given that the Communist Parties did not criticize the Soviet Union before 1956—this fact very rapidly became clear, precisely in the Parties themselves. I only have first-hand knowledge of the Italian Communist Party, and of certain militants in other Parties; but this knowledge is sufficiently eloquent. In Italy, as early as 1923, after the failure of the councils and the factory occupations, Antonio Gramsci wrote very lucidly that in the ebb of the great European experiment, October, the socialist workers state, was not so much simply the image of a hope realized, but the guarantee, the sole guarantee that the workers' movement had not been defeated. The result was a change of priorities in his political thought. And when, in 1926, he wrote his famous letter to Stalin condemning him for having broken the unity of the leading group in his rupture with **Trotsky** (for Gramsci, **Trotsky** was certainly wrong, but remained a vital component of the Soviet revolution), he was thinking of the future of Communists throughout the world. Togliatti replied—with a harshness of tone that has remained characteristic of the entire attitude of the Communist Parties—that the problem was not whether Stalin was agreeable or not, but that Stalin was from now on the Soviet Union, and that the Soviet Union was the sole guarantee that the class had not been **defeated**.¹

Whether Togliatti was right or wrong is of little importance here;

of course, there has been no revolution that has not had to define itself with respect to the socialist countries. But that is not the end of the question, as we shall see later. Here let me simply note that the relationship with the USSR very quickly became more a strategic choice than the recognition of an identity. The Communist Parties' unconditional support for the Soviet state, their inability to give at least a problematic, if not a critical image of it in their press, their refusal of all but apologetic analyses of the "homeland of socialism" and later of the people's democracies, correspond less to a certainty about the identity of the aims of the October Revolution and the concrete reality of the Soviet state than to a deliberate decision not to confront this problem. The USSR was the first socialist country, and an encircled one, too: and that was that. For it and for the Communist Parties, the first priority was to safeguard it. Thus the whole history of the International can be read as a subordination of the Communist Parties to the USSR. It can also be read as the anchoring of the revolutions lacking in Europe to the only reality antagonistic to capital existing as a state, and hence capable of opening an objectively new potentiality for class struggle on a world scale.

The itineraries of Paul Nizan, or of Ernst Fischer, or of Jean-Paul Sartre—to take three intellectuals differently implicated in the Communist camp, Nizan a militant and journalist of the PCF, Fischer on the staff of the International, Sartre completely independent of any organizational discipline—show that this grid for political interpretation was fundamental, and not only for the bureaucracies of the Communist Parties.

Is not Nizan the symbol of the militant Communist intellectual shattered in a single day—24 August 1939—by his discovery of the gulf dividing the rationale of the world anti-fascist front and the rationale of the Soviet Union? After a long period of militant activity, which for every intellectual, but for him in particular, had also been a surpassing of himself, of his origins, his weaknesses and his cultural inclinations—with the always slightly morbid satisfaction of "serving the people" through obedience to the Party—Nizan resigned on the spot, departed ostensibly as a volunteer for the war that the USSR did not want to wage, and died less than a year later, at Dunkirk. This death has all the appearances of a suicide (even if it was not one), so emblematic is it, occurring when Nizan had ceased to "live" since his life had been entirely identified with political commitment.

After his death, Nizan was to remain a symbol, the symbol of how low the Communist Parties could sink when they wished to destroy one of their own. He was not yet dead when Maurice Thorez wrote: "Paul Nizan, police informer, made himself the champion of a national communism." And, after the War. Henri Lefebvre and Louis Aragon

turned him into the very image of treason.⁹ Although on numerous occasions the French Communists have been defied to provide proofs of such an accusation, they have never withdrawn it.

However, Nizan's tragedy was not his disappointment at the nature of Soviet society. That it was not a heaven on earth he must have discovered long before. The ambiguous remark that Simone de Beauvoir records shows this too: after his return from the USSR—on the one hand writing panegyrics in the Party press, on the other evading any sincere assessment with his friends—he had let slip: "It was a very corrupting stay." From what point of view corrupting? Did he fear as an intellectual that he had definitively accepted the USSR as a "positive religion"? The trials—about which he did not write—did not really upset him. The toughness of the situation, the difficulties, the isolation of the Russian revolution, its dramatic initial conditions acted as a counterweight and attenuated the errors, tragic as they were: once Trotsky's thesis that everything happening in Moscow was the deliberate betrayal of the ideas of 1917 was set aside, everything happening in Moscow could be set down as part of the heavy but unavoidable price to be paid, compensated by a different order of conquests. Communists quickly become realists—and this cannot be said to be their worst failing. All the more so given that weight was added to their arguments by all the utterly disillusioned "returns from the USSR" which regularly put the disappointed on the other side of the barricades. In the 1930s, confronted with the rise of fascism, this became less and less acceptable to the honest intellectual. From the Dimitrov trial to the red flags of the Popular Front, via the Seventh Congress of the International, the mass movement against the fascist threat, propelled and sustained by the International, sufficed to suppress the memory, or even the awareness—think of Romain Rolland—of Stalin's trials. It was not just the officials, but also the finest figures of European anti-fascism who allowed themselves to be persuaded that everything else must be put into parentheses before the threat of Hitler.

But when the attitude of the USSR to this threat seemed to change, i.e., in August 1939, everything collapsed for Nizan. Although he tried for some months to maintain his hopes in the Soviet Union, which objectively remained the strategic enemy of fascism, and therefore directed his polemic against the French Communists rather than against Stalin, Nizan finally came to the conclusion that this distinction between long-term objective nature and immediate subjective choices not only represented intolerable juggling, but could not be made without something profound, something of prime importance being damaged or irretrievably lost. If "in order to understand what is happening," he wrote to his wife, "we shall have from now on to refer rather to the history of Charles II than to the complete works of Marx,"¹⁰ that meant

that the USSR as a traditional "power" had now indisputably prevailed over the USSR as a "socialist state". Which no doubt led to the consequence that the equation "defence of the USSR = defence of Communism" no longer held. Nizan did not, at least explicitly, reach this conclusion. He probably even hesitated on the brink of it, waiting: "In these days," he wrote in one of his last letters, "I recognize only one virtue; neither courage, nor the will to martyrdom, nor abnegation, nor blindness, but solely the will to understand. The only honour remaining to us is that of **understanding**."⁴

Understanding? Yes, but what to do once one has understood? We do not know how Nizan would have answered this question; probably—were it not for the infamies which his Party was quick to heap on him—like many other militants who moved away in 1939, he would have rejoined after the War. Stalin and Ribbentrop's notorious handshake would have been redeemed, even buried, by Stalingrad, by the millions dead, by the capture of Berlin. All the questions which seemed to be posed by the drama of 1939—the relation between revolution and state power, between socialist states and Communist movements, between strategic defence of the USSR and tactics on the international chess-board—all this confused and barely extricable tangle fell with the War. Nizan's crisis was no more than the outline of a conflict between politics and ethics from which he had neither the time nor the ability to free himself.

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Is not Ernst Fischer's itinerary in a certain respect the counter-test for what I have claimed? Intellectually, Fischer was even less inclined towards Stalinism than Nizan: his culture was all subtleties and careful distinguos; he had a profoundly critical mind, a mind totally foreign to the rhetorical temptations to which the French intellectual was prey and which constitute, for Communists, a convenient alibi for intelligence. Before becoming a Communist, Nizan had been attracted towards right-wing revolt; before he joined the Austrian Party, Fischer had always been a democrat and a socialist. He joined the CP and rapidly became its delegate to the International. Rereading the account in his *Erinnerungen* of his experience in Moscow and even more in speaking to him during the last years of his life, I was struck by the fact that he agreed to commit himself so completely to an experience so totally, intrinsically incompatible with his scale of values, with his most constant and personal note: a delicately critical tolerance, a fundamental refusal of Manicheism. It had been enough that in an occasional discussion with Togliatti or Dimitrov, in whom he recognized the same refusal of defeat, he had been told: "Here, in Russia, things could not be otherwise; 'our' socialism will be different, but the USSR

and it alone can guarantee it for us" for him to have adapted himself to the *Realpolitik* for which he was not really suited. Why? Because of the weight of the defeat of the revolutions in Europe; also because of Hitler.

During these years, the USSR did not just represent the last stronghold. Paradoxically, just when its situation was most serious, its policy—the Seventh Congress of the International, "frontism"—constituted for the European Communist Parties, in their last extremity, a framework in which they could rapidly grow. Similarly, the 1945 victory and the displacements of forces that followed long appeared not at all as the sanction for a division of the world that left no space for the revolution in Europe, but rather as the guarantee of a reorganization of the movement, of its indestructibility. The *Realpolitik* of the difficult period seemed to have paid off. Thus Ernst Fischer was not to break with the Party because of the trials of the 1930s, nor because of the Nazi-Soviet pact, nor in 1948, nor because of the Prague trials, nor in 1956. Fischer broke in 1968 when the Soviet state sent its tanks into Prague and thus carried out an action in which it was no longer possible to recognize the slightest intention to defend socialism or its principles but solely a logic of power, in no way distinct from that of the conventional powers and obtaining their tacit consent. He broke as soon as to be on the side of the USSR no longer meant to have placed oneself in opposition to the system. In fact, for Fischer, behind the break with the USSR in 1968, besides Czechoslovakia of course, there was above all ten years in which, within the socialist camp, itself, there had emerged a critique of the international role of the Soviet Union, either explicit, as in the Chinese case, or indirect, as in the case of Cuba and the revolutionary movements. There was also Khrushchev's ambiguous attitude to Vietnam. Finally there was, in the 1960s, the exhaustion of what, even in Stalin's policy and despite his nationalism, made the USSR the hope of a possible alternative.

When this distinction between the Soviet state and the other states disappears totally in the consciousness of a Communist, then—but only then—the relationship is broken. So long as this is not the case, the bond that unites him to the socialist countries holds firm, reduced to a single thread, but extremely strong: the "otherness" of the camp. This bond may be accompanied by a thousand distinctions, critiques, maintenance of distances, even condemnations, but they are issued *from the same side of the barricades*. (See for instance—since it is shared by a large part of the left, even the non-Communist left—the attitude of the Italian Communist Party to the USSR, the most autonomous in this sense.) With a consequence: once the relationship is located on this terrain, a break becomes very difficult. In fact, if it is easy to recognize that the USSR *cannot* be identified with the revolution (the left's crisis of conscience before the War), and if it is now accepted that the USSR

can no longer even be identified in any specific way with an antagonistic contradiction with imperialism (the left's crisis of conscience since the War, especially in the 1960s), it is qualitatively more difficult to deny its *difference* with respect to capitalism and imperialism. Hence it is always possible to find a line of demarcation justifying an alignment. (Only the Chinese try to erase it by reducing it to an "inter-imperialist contradiction", i.e., one between imperialism and social-imperialism: but the use of a different term is enough to leave an open breach, all the more so since their analysis of when, how and why the USSR changed its nature is far from satisfactory.)

The objective character of this difference is of great importance; the socialist countries invoke it continually. The Soviet Union, which made great use of it in the 1930s, still carries on accompanying its brash affirmations of **strength** with the still profitable thesis of the fortress to be defended against the enemy attack. It is enough to remember the extraordinary confusion which the invasion of Czechoslovakia managed to sow precisely in the extreme left, more than one group of whom regarded it as a "left-wing" intervention against German intrigues. Undoubtedly, it is Cuba that makes most use of this argument: small and isolated in the face of the American giant which would gladly liquidate it, it believes this makes it irreproachable. A large part of the **European** left gives in to this argument as far as Cuba is concerned. Only China—despite the toughness of its polemic—avoids recourse to the theme: "I am surrounded, everything I do is right. You must therefore approve it."

Thus the European left can become extremely sceptical towards the socialist countries and yet choose nonetheless to remain on their side, so long as they remain in contradiction with imperialism. For example: if the USSR is no longer the rampart of revolution, it is still true that it represents a **barrage** against the fascization process in Europe, and that an agreement with the Social Democracies is preferable to an extension of fascism. Or else: it is true that the USSR did not prevent the Americans from attacking Vietnam; but without Soviet aid, could Vietnam have held out? Moreover, by a ruse of History, it is those on the left who used to fear a revolutionary USSR who today make the best of the USSR as a guarantor of the balances in Europe, just when the latter is able to take advantage of the post-war crisis of American imperialism. Thus the semi-skilled Italian worker—not the old Communist, but the young worker, more advanced, more radically aggressive and more radically sceptical about Brezhnev—hardly warms to the denunciation of the USSR, because he coolly recognizes the political importance which its existence on the borders of Europe and the relationship between equals it has established with the USA retains vis-a-vis the Italian government, vis-a-vis the "bosses".

But is this not the extreme product of the ambiguous seduction of the "factual" for which Merleau-Ponty attacked Sartre? For in Sartre's itinerary—which is the last I shall take as an example—this type of realistic relationship with the USSR is the most exemplary because it is freely assumed, outside all party discipline and the corresponding moral obligations. Sartre, a late-comer to militant politics during the Second World War, was never a member of the PCF and has never tried to become one.⁵ He came closest to the Communists in 1952, not when the Party was triumphant, but when it seemed to have reached the nadir of isolation and crisis. 28 May. The Cold War was at its height. The PCF had called on the masses to demonstrate against Ridgway; the government had banned the demonstration. The masses had retreated and not taken to the streets. All the governmental establishment exulted, naturally, but so did a certain left wing which saw in this abstention a liberation of the French working class from the grip of the Communist Party and the Soviet Union. It was then that Sartre spoke out violently, proclaiming not just for himself, but for the whole class, the necessity for a coalition with the whole of the Communist movement—states and Parties—as its special and indestructible interest. He wrote this in *The Communists and Peace*,⁶ which Merleau-Ponty was maliciously to describe as the most eloquent justification and defence of the Communist Parties, unfortunately by arguments which they would not accept. Historically, claimed Sartre, the political being of the class—i.e., the idea and hope of socialism—is linked to the October Revolution and the Soviet state (it is no accident that the reference is to the Lenin of "Better Fewer but Better" which provides a basis for the distinction between the inevitability of the victory of socialism since "capitalism carries within itself the seeds of death", even if the Soviet state were destroyed—a proposition of principle—and the defence of socialism from the concrete historical point of view).⁷ Thus those fighting against the USSR and the Communist Party today, for whatever reasons, were fighting against the class and against the revolution. Soviet socialism might or might not be agreeable, the Communist Parties might or might not be agreeable, they still represented the only current element of antagonism in a world which, without them, would have been entirely bourgeois. This was the only authentic criterion of discrimination; to depart from it in the name of a different idea of the revolution, of the Party, of the class—which did not for the moment exist and thus constituted neither object nor subject of the confrontation with the system—meant abandoning the true terrain of the struggle.

The strength of Sartre's position in the debate which ensued with Merleau-Ponty on the one hand and Lefort on the other lay entirely in this argument. From a scholarly point of view both were more steered than he in Marxism. Only the theoretical lucidity that led Lefort to

re-establish the party-class relationship more correctly on the plane of principles, also led him to put into parentheses what in his own analysis he called the "improper" crystallization of the class represented by the Parties, that "improper" social reality the socialism of the Soviet revolution. By doing so not only did he desert the line of battle but also, said Sartre, objectively played into the hands of the class enemies, of the government. Willy-nilly. Merleau-Ponty, more skilful than Lefort, sought to evade this dilemma, but did not do much better. He tried in fact to dissociate Communism as it is from Communism as it ought to be, while refusing to attack Communism as it is so as to avoid objectively lining himself up with the bosses.⁸ His proposed a-Communism was supposed to save him from anti-Communism and to situate him on the side of the workers' movement. But this operation could be no more convincing than the one for which Sartre was to attack Camus: "You blame the European proletariat because it has not publicly emphasized its disapproval of the Soviets, but you also blame the governments of Europe because they are going to allow Spain to join UNESCO: in that case, I can only see one solution for your problem: the Galapagos Islands."⁹

Yet it was Merleau-Ponty who was to give the most lucid definition of the impasse which eventually every member of a left which claimed to be Marxist confronted in the Soviet Union and the practice of the Communist Parties. It was condemned, he wrote, to oscillate ridiculously between two impossibilities of remaining faithful to Marx: on the one hand the acceptance of a factual reality (this revolution, this Party, this type of contradiction which they maintain with the bourgeoisie) which allowed it effective militant activity, but on condition of sacrificing the principled reasons justifying that activity; on the other refuge in a tranquil philosophical sterility, in the maintenance of principles, which also constitutes a betrayal of Marx because a Marxism cut off from all capacity for immediate action is no more than philosophy "in the worst sense of the term".

But the second term of the dilemma—a Marxism which remains no more than "thought", an imaginary proletariat—comes down to a mere critique of its own inadequacy, to its transformation into pure "ideology", whereas the first term is simply a way of reproducing a series of unresolved problems. Can the "fact" of revolutions, Soviet, Cuban or Chinese, be defined simply by negation, by what they are not? If it was a matter of a pure negativity, how could they constitute a political contradiction, object and subject of confrontation and history? But then what is this mongrel factual reality, these movements which are neither "the" revolution nor the "non-revolution", these societies which are neither socialism "as such" nor capitalism, these Parties which are neither the political expression of the class nor a political

expression of the bourgeoisie? What are they in relation to the mechanisms of capital, the class struggle, the formation of proletarian consciousness? How are they integrated into history? What are the mechanisms which induce them or deflect them, what mechanisms do they themselves induce, to what will they eventually lead?

Sartre did not need to attempt an answer like *The Communists and Peace* to evade the dilemma Merleau-Ponty spoke of. His profoundly existentialist formation (his most authentic vein) was enough to allow him to abstract from it. This formation made him resist the temptation to exorcise reality, the fact, in the name of an idea. He will always admit that for him it is enough that *this should be*. This is what was to push him, he who is yet so remote intellectually from the Communists, so close to their realism. It is this that was to make him a fellow-traveller, not a very comfortable one, but a reliable one. It is this which separated him unhesitatingly both from Social Democracy—whose "factual reality" is immediately clear, insofar as it lies on the other side of the barricades—and from Trotskyism, in which he saw no more than pure Talmudism. This is what made his relationship with the socialist countries the least passionate, the least dramatized in comparison with those of other European intellectuals. He rarely attempted to idealize them, he rarely sought from them a true response, he did not lose himself in the search for either an original purity—the revolution betrayed—or a purity to be rediscovered, more in Cuba than the USSR, or in China rather than in Cuba. He objectified them (for which they were rarely grateful to him) as experiences *which exist*, and as realities antagonistic to imperialism—so long as the contradiction seemed clear to him.

His real separation from the "historicity" of the Communists only occurred in 1968. But not, as with Fischer, because he reached the nadir of an intolerable disillusion in August, at Prague, but on the contrary because he saw in the month of May, in Paris, a new hope, borne by the working class and youth, which could replace that of the Communist Parties, a new front on which he could *relink* himself to militancy. A minority reality, with uncertain outlines, an inadequate one, but one very different from the purely ideological solution of a Lefort: a *real* class embryo. A different factual reality. From that moment, the relationship with the socialist countries and the Communist Parties became secondary. They remain a datum in the world framework, but their antagonistic nature has become blurred if not, as in Paris in 1968, reduced completely to nothing. They no longer represent the inevitable reef, the militant's "take it or leave it".

However, the problem seems only to have been resolved for a short time. A short time because the May wave was not long lasting—as a mass movement capable of shifting the fundamental equilibria and opening a new historical period. A short time, above all, because once

the ebb tide revealed itself, what remained lost its novelty and its innocence. After having apparently swept away all the old conceptions of the relationship between vanguard and class, tactics and strategy, in a total re-invention of politics, what the wave left behind as a strategic consciousness inevitably tends to relocate itself in the conceptual schemata of the past, in a heavily repetitive manner. In May, and in the movement of the students, a work of purification and reappropriation of the history of Communism seemed to be achieved, via certain exemplary options: Lenin, Rosa Luxemburg, Trotsky, Guevara, Ho Chi-minh, Mao Tse-tung. Each represented the symbol of an immediate need: in the first three, revolutionary rigour with three different emphases (organization, spontaneity, intransigence), in Guevara, the exaltation of subjectivity, in Ho, the proof of the possibility of a victory of the poor, in Mao, egalitarianism. In other words, Communist experience, theoretical and practical, seemed recuperable, without traumas, without too much running foul of the concrete impasses of the past, via a positive selection. But with the ebb-tide of the movement of 1968, this reconciliation became more complicated and impoverished. Lenin, Rosa, Trotsky, Mao were once again the object of theoretical disputes and organizational choices within the minority groups characterized by the most notorious vices of the Communist movement—without even the justification of its grandeur—and often fifty years behind in relation to history.

Sartre has tried in vain this time to exorcize this reality. He has sought to discover beneath the advertised ideological categories new categories, ones which in fact suit him perfectly: the rediscovery of violence, the priority given to exemplary praxis, the identification of politics and ethics.¹⁰ But really this is less a question of a convincing portrait of "France's Maoists" than of three aspects of his own personal return to the ethic of the gesture, to morality more than to politics—an unusual sign of discomfort, the need to indicate in something, in someone, an inarticulate germ and to rally to it. In twenty years, since 1952, this has forced him to reduce, terrifyingly, what remains "non-bourgeois" in a world which is thus totally integrated. The class and its organizations no longer bear the mark of antagonism that he had recognized in *The Communists and Peace*. The great optimism of 1968 has overturned into a perhaps unprecedented absence of hope.

And, in this void, the "factual", ungraspable and now inimical, is back on top: the revolutions "as they are", the Communist Parties who have recovered their audience. What is left of the revolutionary movement—now that the flags no longer fly from the occupied faculties and factories and the luminous schematisms of the slogans are no longer enough—realizes that it will have to settle accounts not with the image and words of Guevara, but with the Cuba of the 1970s, that economic

crisis has tipped into the Soviets' lap; with a Vietnam which, after twenty terrible years, has attained difficult negotiations and which, if it does eventually win, will still have a struggle for survival ahead of it; with the China of the post-cultural-revolution period, which sees the main enemy on the left. The rationale of history has once again swept away the illusions of ideology. Europe is facing the same problems as before, with one experience more: the problems and impasses that were thought to be those of others reveal themselves in the moment of the rising as in that of retreat to be our own. Nothing has been surpassed, but only—for a brief moment—referred to the hope of a revolution in our countries, to our measure.

II

I might have evoked other itineraries, other protagonists here. The result would certainly have been richer and more complex. But I doubt whether the conclusions drawn from this work could have been anything but the confirmation of a double impasse. To return to Merleau-Ponty's dilemma, those who have refused the historicity of the socialist countries and Communist Parties in Marx's name have first found themselves outside history and then been caught out by it. But those who have recognized the reality of the socialist societies (and hence of the Communist Parties, the two things going together) in the name of this same Marxist enlightenment, have been caught up in the wheels of an uncontrollable, coercive and disillusioning logic and in the last analysis found themselves once again facing the problem they thought they had evaded.

In fact, the socialist countries can be liquidated neither by the ideological Trotskyist, nor by the now relativistic and sceptical orthodox Communist. To the former they counter the weight of their existence and what that has given rise to since the beginning of the century; to the latter they periodically present the state not only of their international position but also that of their internal nature. In his last years Togliatti may have tried to save what could be saved by agitating for the "plurality of roads to socialism", according to which each post-revolutionary society would only have to measure itself by its own standards, would represent no model and yet could be recognized in a common front, but this is no more than a "realist" hypostasis which reality is only too ready to explode. For the "nature" of each socialist country determines not only its inner being but also its relations with the other socialist countries, with the revolutionary movement, with other states. Moreover, it is the expression of a totalizing and tendentially global outlook which cannot be made tocoexist relatively with the others; hence it may constitute a powerful disintegrating factor in

the "camp". It is difficult to be simultaneously with Brezhnev and Mao, with Dubcek and Husak, with Castro and Tito, with the guerrillas and with Allende. The problem of socialism—and not just of *socialisms*—has become deeper, with all its contrasts and trials, it has been active in upsetting the balances of the post-war world, and that just as the left succeeded in washing its hands of it with its thesis of the "national roads to socialism".

In other words, the attempt to separate alliance with the socialist countries from analysis of their revolutions has not outlived the cold war. When the two questions have tended to recombine, the left, Communist and non-Communist, has had no choice but to recognize its own political and theoretical disarray—betrayed every time by attempts to escape the historical and political analysis of the revolutions in one way or another. This critical and theoretical inadequacy might be said to be simply a consequence of its lack of revolution: the European left, politically disarmed, lacks adequate investigatory instruments. But the opposite could just as well be true: this kind of intellectual blockage—which is all too easily blamed on the Communist "Vulgate"—is itself a brake or an alibi for the inability to think one's own revolution. It is an "ideology" in its turn, in the sense of a false consciousness.

The extraordinary inability—since Lenin and Rosa Luxemburg—to rethink the mechanisms of imperialism (if we also call inability the heart-breaking attempts of the revolutionary groups to replace all investigation, all analysis by a few sterile schemata) may well be the proof that, for those who are inside the imperialist fortress, it is perhaps not so crucial to know the monster to defeat it. The Western left shakes its head at the inadequacy of the peremptory theses that come from the third world—even if it does periodically look to that world for regeneration. But these theses do at least reflect a need for liberation which does perhaps impel them towards over-rapid definitions, whereas the laziness of the Western left reflects a long familiarity with the advantages of false consciousness. Similarly, no one will dissuade me that if the revolution is so long delayed in the West it is because in the crisis shaking it the part of integration is equal to that of revolt, the Communist imperative has as a counterpart the passive acceptance of the Western model of consumption, and the two have formed and are in conflict in a framework where subsistence is more than guaranteed. I am thus inclined to believe that the many lacerations and the lack of serious analyses induced by the relationship with the socialist countries also betray an unconscious flight, an unavowed complicity.

What other explanation could there be for the scarcity of interpretative hypotheses about the socialist societies in the last fifty years? Eliminating the anti-Communist arsenal, itself hardly rich in in-

novations, it is clear that all the reflection of the European left has either been oriented towards Trotskyist theses (in the broad sense) or has not been oriented in any direction at all. All, or almost all of its analysis can be summed up as follows: the Soviet Union is not the direct and indisputable expression of the power of the proletariat. Question: why? Answer: because once capitalism was abolished and the bases of socialism had been laid, the class's power of political expression degenerated. Second question: why did it degenerate? Answer: because of a subjective failing (with many tautological variants which bring it very close to: because it degenerated. Because power was not democratic, because it was centralized, because it was bureaucratized, because it fell into dangerous or incompetent hands, or hands insufficiently armed ideologically. Because power is power, and those who hold it will not let it go). Final corollary: either, on the left (Maoists and Trotskyists), the situation can be redressed if power is restored to the base; or, in the centre (the Communists), the situation can be redressed, and will necessarily be redressed, because the development of the productive forces itself will lead to an extension of power to the masses; on the right (the Social Democrats), the situation is irremediable because the masses can exercise power only through the institutions of the modern bourgeoisie.

There is no way out here. And from this viewpoint, it is surprising that Trotsky's procedure corresponds conceptually to that of the Communist Parties, even of those in power. A re-reading of *My Life* or *The Revolution Betrayed* confirms that not only is the accent laid entirely on the phenomenology of power, at the social-psychological level,¹¹ but also in the rest of the analysis this vision of history is deliberately brought to the fore, in opposition to the conquests which make the USSR otherwise a guaranteed proletarian state. Only one "social basis" is taken into consideration: the apparatus of power, i.e., the bureaucratic caste, seizes the levers controlling the distribution of goods for its own purposes—and, in doing so, this caste sets itself in contradiction with the socialist nature of the state, thus creating a situation of instability which leads either to the adaptation of distribution to the "socialist norms" already governing property, or to the adaptation of property to the "bourgeois norms" of distribution.

The critique of Stalin made at the Twentieth Congress and the secret speech are not based on a fundamentally different reasoning, even if they are silent about the problem of the enrichment of the bureaucracy and go on much more about the violations of socialist legality. This is not fundamentally different because the appearance of Stalinist deformation is reduced entirely to the subjectivity of the man or of the "anti-Party" group, and hence of the apparatus that the latter constructed. In other words, it is a matter that takes place entirely in

the "political" sphere in the narrow sense of the term and which can be remedied by changes in the "political", i.e., formal, mechanisms of power—i.e., the re-establishment of socialist "legality" and of "collective responsibility", the "democratization" of the state. The same pre-occupation is found in Trotsky, in Khrushchev and in the Mao of the essays of 1956, those on "The Historical Experience of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat" (if they are by him as is claimed), and this is all the more interesting given the fact that the three have nothing else in common. All three separate these degenerated political elements from a social body whose base has not been changed since it has become *socialist* with the seizure of political power and the abolition of the private ownership of the means of production.

Only the Chinese have, quite recently, broken with this schema, and not without a basic contradiction, as we shall soon see. All the rest of the Communist movement and the greater part of the European left accepts it. It accepted it before the Twentieth Congress, and this enabled it to believe that the worst epoch of Stalinism could be redeemed not only, as we have seen, by reason of the international function of the Soviet Union against fascism, but also by a correction of the mechanisms of power, which remain foreign to the nature of the system. (Trotsky himself never renounced his defence of the USSR as a proletarian, workers' state, suffering only from a bureaucratic degeneration.) When, at the Twentieth Congress in 1956, this critique was unfolded, based as it is on the affirmation of a discrepancy (for which Stalinism alone is responsible) between a socialist economic base and a superstructure which is not yet socialist, the European left favourably welcomed this diagnosis of the evil and the hopeful prognosis, and anxiously awaited the process of "liberalization", of "political democratization". Even those who had no illusions about Khrushchev dreamed for a moment after the Polish October of a more radical democratization, of the re-establishment of workers' "councils", of a new "sovietism" that could be obtained by a mere transfer of power from the summit towards the instances at the base.

There is more. All the left was to accept the Soviet thesis, a thesis that goes back to the 1920s anyway, according to which the difficulties and delays in the democratization had an almost fatal cause: the "scarcity" of resources, the socio-economic backwardness of Russia in 1917, necessarily led to a phase of authoritarianism, centralization, hyper-stratification, in which it was necessary—for the survival of the youthful revolution—to give priority to the objectives of the "material construction" of socialism, to strengthening it economically and, in consequence, to the state apparatus that guaranteed it. Once a certain level was attained, it would be possible to move on to objective no. 2, the socialist transformations. This thesis can also be found in Sartre in

1952. It was even to appear in Guevara much later: a certain dose of Stalinism is the price to be paid for the escape from backwardness. And the Twentieth Congress is all in the same vein: "Now that the USSR has reached this level of the productive forces, it is possible, as it was not hitherto, to crown our work by transforming human relations in a socialist direction." It had even become almost obligatory, since excessive centralization of power was no longer a motor but rather a brake on the development of mass initiative. At the Twenty-Second Congress, Khrushchev was to say that things had advanced to such a point that it was now possible to dispense with a centralized power (necessarily similar to that of the bourgeois state) and even with the dictatorship of the proletariat—the state already belonging to "the whole people" and the self-government of the workers being capable of realization between then and 1980.

And yet, since the Twentieth Congress we have seen such an alternation between timid attempts at "liberalization" and sharp backward steps where repression is concerned, that it is easy to declare (almost twenty years having passed) that the hypothesis built on the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU was quite unrealistic. The new course, and the invasion of Hungary which followed are the most dramatic symbol of this. But other, less obvious signs confirm the tendency: Poland, where the class struggles attained a higher level than in the other socialist countries and where the repression took more skilful and complex forms; Yugoslavia which, at the cost of a vertical crisis in the League of Communists, put a brake on the manifestation of an already complete process of disintegration. Even in the—quite specific—case of Cuba, there is a recurrent alternation of centralization and extension of democracy; the most politically significant example being the self-critical speech after the failure of the 1970 *zafra* made by Castro who had seemed at one time to represent the whole history and structure of power in Cuba and who, a few months later, promoted a management in which the Soviet line slowly but surely prevailed.

Hence it is essential to ask what is wrong with this type of interpretation. Why does the superstructure fail to become "socialist" on a basis which is already supposed to be so? Why does it manage this neither when the development of the revolution is hindered by backwardness nor when it has overcome it?

Interesting perspectives may be opened up by the attempt to answer these questions. I shall restrict myself to advancing a few elements as the first guide-lines to a later, more serious investigation. First of all, it is striking that the vast majority of analyses of the degeneration, or the difficulties, or the delays (according to the varying optimism of those who discuss it) of the socialist societies accept totally a separation between the economic sphere, the (socialist) base and the sphere of

relations between men, or superstructure (which is not yet socialist). Let us **ignore** a first contradiction which all the defenders of this thesis quickly leap over: after all, it was a superstructure (the Party, the revolutionary vanguard) which changed that base in a socialist direction; and since it is usually admitted that state and power are now in the hands of this **vanguard**, it should follow that in the socialist societies the superstructure is simultaneously behind and in advance of the base. Even if the Party, the state, the cultural institutions, the press, the radio, etc. . . . are "**socialist**"—as any Communist will claim—the result is that there is only one domain to which this socialist nature does not extend: the relations between citizen and state, what is generally called the relations between the governors and the governed. Following this logic one should really speak of a *divided* superstructure rather than of a backward suwerstructure. For the Communist Parties it follows nonetheless that this disparity and this partial backwardness of the superstructure is what prevents direct democracy and implies "a reinforcement of the state until the moment of its withering away"; a rather obscure statement at the very least, fashionable since the 1920s, and which Mikoyan repeated again imperturbably at the Twenty-Second Congress of the CPSU, which predicted the transition to communism by 1980.

But even if one accepts this vision of a society divided into socialist bits and bits which are not socialist, why is there resistance to the progression towards a socialist totality, to what correspond the "not yet socialist relations" in the political sphere, what are their social bases? **Trotsky**, as we have seen, did not think that the bureaucratic, non-socialist degeneration of Soviet power derived from the old classes. It was born within the vanguard itself, as a mortal crisis. Inside the Bolshevik Party this resistance was at first reduced to the persistence of the **interests** of the former classes. But in 1936, Stalin declared as a position of principle that this type of class struggle had come to an end, given the hegemony of the socialist sector. And when in 1952, he returned to this problem of class conflicts, he tended to reduce it to the survival of **residual** and marginal elements of resistance from the past. The Chinese Cultural Revolution was to talk for quite a long time rather about a resistance caused by "old ideas", thus referring the superstructure to the superstructure.

The result of this interpretation, which is still found in the discussions of the left, is that socialism is a socio-historical formation characterized by a marked disequilibrium between superstructure and base: the former still lags behind the latter for decades and decades, as a consciousness which is now no longer the expression of a social being but which draws from itself an extraordinary capacity for reproduction. Hence it is supposed to be easier to liquidate capitalism than its

projection in the customs and relations between man and man. And this despite the fact that a large part of the superstructure—the state, the legislative power, educational instruments and those of propaganda—are in the hands of a vanguard regarded as a guarantee of the "socialization" of the structure. The unlikelihood of this series of correlations from a Marxist point of view stares one in the face. And in fact, Marx, intensively utilized in the study of the mechanisms of capitalist societies, is most often set aside as soon as discussion turns to the transitional societies: the economy is studied in classical, quantitative or technical terms, and the political sphere through a kind of sociology of power which, in the best of cases, turns into nothing more than the history of the choices and ideology of the leading groups. *The Short Course on the History of the CPSU (b)* is no exception to this rule.

The theoretical eclecticism, the loss of Marxist identity represented by this discussion of the socialist societies—together with the paradoxes that I have briefly mentioned—is a result, in my opinion, of the generally accepted premiss that the base is "socialized" at the moment of the seizure of political power by the abolition of the private ownership of the means of production.¹²

Even those—and this means the leaders of the Communist Parties—who have recognized that the seizure of political power is not the "initial" moment of the revolution implicitly assume that the transformation of property essentially signifies the abolition of capitalism as a mode of production. There is an underlying identification of "structure" and "ownership of the means of production"—in fact a distorted and reductive reading of Marx. Marx may have said that capital is not a thing but a relation between men mediated by things; he may have written—in the famous *Preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* which is the source of so many errors in the interpretation of structure-superstructure relations—that the structure is formed out of the "definite relations which are independent of their will" that men have with one another and that these "relations of production" are "appropriate to a given stage in the development of their material forces of production"; he may have said that it is "*the totality of these relations of production*" that constitutes the "economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness"; in other words, he may have claimed that structure and superstructure are two distinct levels of relations between men the first of which—those formed in the "social production of their existence"¹¹—are pre-eminent, but the ordinary reading has been quite different. The base has been assimilated to the system of ownership of the means of production, capitalism to their *private* ownership and the capitalist mode of production to a mere consequence, destined to fall

or lose its meaning with the disappearance of this mode of property. With the result that the post-revolutionary societies have thought that the *socialist* nature of the base was guaranteed by a no longer private management, a management by the working class through its political representation—the Party for Lenin, the "councils" for the Luxemburgists—of the same organizational and technical system of production that capitalism had created and left them as an inheritance (and, it goes without saying, of the same productive forces). The whole discussion in the 1920s in the Soviet Union, despite certain important allusions by Lenin to "state capitalism", seems to move within these theoretical limits.

But capitalism, as a historical formation and as a system of production, cannot be assimilated to the existence of a class of proprietors. It is a whole productive civilization born around a certain type of accumulation and reproduction, which has given birth to the most complex and simultaneously the most distorted web of relations known to history. The fact that the holder of capital is no longer a private individual and that—practically—that part of the profit which does not go to feed the accumulation fund changes its destination, does not change the substance and the mechanisms of the productive system. In Marx this is quite simply implicit, however obvious it is on the logical plane. All Marx's interest is concentrated precisely on this global system of relations, in which the private ownership of the means of production (like all property relations in general, cf. the *Introduction to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*) is only one aspect. A particularly profound examination of *Capital* is not indispensable to realize this; the most famous pages of the *Grundrisse*, "Pre-capitalist Economic Formations", are enough. In them Marx traces the history of the loss and reappropriation by man of his labour, of the product of his labour, hence of himself, and in them he suggests the complexity of the relations that designate the "productive civilization" introduced by capital, the capitalist world of production—an extremely close relationship between the material character of the productive fact, the inter-human relation between producer, wage-labourer and the holder or manager of capital, the "objectivity" of the system of accumulation and reproduction of capital, the political and social history which follows from it. The result is that the stake of the "socialist revolution" is very different from a change in the ownership of the means of production pure and simple, with the fairer distribution of profit that follows and without all the other relations of commodities and reification being touched. What is at issue is a total decomposition and re-composition of the relations between men, between men and things, the revolutionization of the "social mode of production of their existence". In other words, it is the tendential end of the present image of the

worker, of alienation, of the separation between labour and the product of labour, of the existence of the two as commodities.

Without this, the seizure of power and the abolition of a class of proprietors represent only a preliminary and incomplete condition for the struggle against the capitalist mode of production *which continues to operate under a different management*. This type of argument has long been rejected. Trotsky rejected it when he stated that the bureaucracy is not a class because it does not *own* the means of production and hence cannot hand them down to the next generation. Of more recent and interesting investigations of the socialist societies, many reject it too.¹³ And yet, if one re-reads (and reflects on) the debate that followed Lenin's death, it is this illumination that makes the only sense of the development of Soviet society. Here I shall only take up one example: the discussion about *socialist accumulation*, for it showed clearly that the almost ineluctable resistance of the mode of production inherited from the past could only be surmounted if the premisses were brought back into question. In Preobrazhensky's most lucid pages—Preobrazhensky, whom Stalin liquidated after assimilating his theses—the theoretical impasse is obvious.¹⁴ An accumulation was necessary, he said; and would have been had not the revolution included an enormous loss of resources. But how was it to be realised? Capitalism does it in three ways: by a levy on workers' labour in industry (surplus-value, surplus product), by the "brutal plunder" of the countryside, described by Marx, and by the even more brutal plunder of all the productive sectors of the colonies by the metropolises. The youthful republic of the Soviets had no colonies. It had therefore—maintained Preobrazhensky—to accumulate from workers' labour and the countryside. "The source of this accumulation," he recognized in relation to the former point, "is the same as under capitalism, that is the labour of the working class, whose wages must be less than the total value of the products they create". With a "number of very important distinctions. . . *in the forms in which labour power is used and is paid for*" (my emphasis), i.e., within the *limit* set on its exploitation from the physical and wage point of view. Now since they had inherited an industrial sector needing total reconstruction and structurally backward, accumulation would have to be realized less on the basis of a levy on workers' labour, which would hardly suffice to reconstitute resources, than on a massive levy on the countryside, which Preobrazhensky rather significantly called "our colonies". What had been called the "brutal plunder" carried out by capitalism was here also called a "transfer of resources from the pre-socialist sector to the socialist sector"; the process was the same. This ideological precaution is purely formal: industry is a "socialist" sector because in it the private ownership of the means of production has been abolished; the countryside is not yet a "socialist" sector because

ownership of the land still survives, and this justifies the levy (which, as is well known anyway, is produced and continues to be produced in *all* forms of property in land, even if the phenomenon is less important today because of tenacious peasant resistance). In reality it was a matter of an accumulation corresponding to a model of development of the productive forces forged by the industrial revolution, a historical form of capitalist production and one indissolubly linked to it. There was no escape. With all the consequences that this implied: the aggravation of the division between town and country, social stratification, the low level of social mobility, the accumulation of discrepancies from region to region, selection in culture and in roles, i.e., the reproduction of the *structural* inequality proper to capitalist development.

The theoretical problem posed is obvious. Indeed, how could a political revolution, i.e., the mere seizure of state power and the transformation of private property into state property, modify an already formed organization of the productive forces whose destruction would imply famine (and hence the rapid defeat of the revolution) and whose maintenance included the reproduction of the obligatory mechanisms of capitalist production? In other words, what can and must a socialist revolution destroy, what may it retain, and for how long, what mechanisms must it set in motion if it would not remain prisoner either of the destruction or of the retention of the capitalist mode of production? The question is important, and relates to an ambiguity present throughout Marxist thought, which sees the revolution simultaneously as the *crowning* and as the *overthrow* of capitalist development. It seems to me that the heart of the Maoist thought of the Chinese revolution has been the only one to confront it, the Mao of the 1956 speech on the "Ten Great Relations", of the "Great Leap Forward", of the beginning of the cultural revolution. This Maoism's only concern is to confront and overcome the challenge of the productive forces and of their organization, inherited and made obligatory by capital and the pre-capitalist structure, while at the same time rejecting all its internal consequences, opposing its natural logic, forcing it with the aim of creating the outlines of a different economic "rationality" able even to debouch onto the end of the model of development born with industrial mechanization and able to formulate a new relation between industry and agriculture at the productive level.

But this once said—and in my opinion it is the central theoretical problem of the construction of socialism—it is the political aspect that stares us in the face. If "socialist" accumulation has to be realized as it was in practice realized, through the persistence of working-class exploitation¹⁵ and a "levy" on the countryside as a whole—two measures dictated by the desire to reorganize resources so as to make possible an acceleration of the model of development characteristic

of the most advanced capitalism—the consequence must be a state "centralization". These economic priorities prohibit the construction of worker and peasant self-government, they remove the social base for it: in this way one can explain the impossibility of the survival of the soviets in the 1920s. No-one can deliberately preside over his own spoliation. Mao Tse-tung understood this very well when he refused to gamble on an accelerated industrialization at the expense of the countryside; when he chose a balanced development at the level of the whole of economic life, *at the same time as* a struggle against every mechanism of capitalist rationality, a development based on a relationship which granted a large place to agriculture with respect to industry, to light industry with respect to heavy industry. By this Mao avoided setting one part of society against the other (industry against agriculture, whereas the true conflict lies in class against class). And at the same time he allowed these two sectors (and most easily the countryside) to retain a proportion of the power, allowed them to direct themselves towards solutions of self-government (the communes) in which the pre-eminence of state centralization is organized on other bases. All this is possible insofar as it is founded on a *different* rationality of the *base*. It is no accident that, in this orientation, the cultural revolution revealed in its development the opposite of what is ordinarily stated. In China or in the USSR it was not just a matter of defeating the "old ideas" but also the "capitalist road", the capitalist mode of production which, while persisting and reproducing itself, also reproduces the superstructural forms of the *bourgeois state* and thus constitutes a permanent reproblematicization of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

From this point of view, the delays, the difficulties and the *political* degeneration of the socialist states, their inability to realize the ideals of liberty and equality for which they were born, the persistence of the subaltern character of the class, the separate nature of the power apparatuses appear as the *necessary* projection of a structure which is only partly socialized. There is not a discrepancy between base and superstructure but a correspondence. Socialist society is a *transitional* society in the full sense of the term; it is a historical form in which elements of capital continue to exist, mingled with other elements, and to exercise decisive pressure on the political sphere, on the relationship between men, on the relationship between governors and governed. In their turn, these elements of the past (or present) mode of production refer to the productive forces; the *social* revolution appears *as* an uninterrupted process, only begun by the political revolution, and which the latter does not necessarily guarantee. The history of the USSR shows it, but so does that of Cuba and China—the cultural revolution is an extraordinary indication of it, with the level it attained and the ebb it has experienced.

But if this is the case, the relationship between the European left and the socialist countries must be doubly re-envisaged. It can disengage itself from the alternation of hope and disillusion, utopia and realism which has always bogged it down, and provide a healthy and lucid analysis of the processes of transition. It can thus always distinguish between the moments of advance and the moments of retreat, the order of the contradictions, the class equilibria—in the full sense of the term class—and hence also the degree of antagonism attained, global, partial or zero, by the struggle of the system at the international level. This is the replacement of a relation between religion and apostasy by a "secular" relation. This type of analysis of the socialist countries is then, and in reality, a type of reflection on the socialist revolution and immediately becomes a reference point for our militancy in the West. The difficulty of taking up this different relationship surely reveals a curious "ideological" deformation, the difficulty we have in cutting the deepest root of the evolutionism of the Second International. That of conceiving a *different* model of development, of the productive forces, of society, which is not the capitalist model in which we live and which, in a by no means disinterested way, we transfer to the "socialist" societies while asking them for all that to accompany them with a system of political and social relations. Is it not here that lies the extreme ambiguity of Western Marxism and its most authentically revisionist vein, shared by militants and others—the political and theoretical vice which has hitherto blocked the revolution in the West? This tenacious umbilical cord, which links our way of thinking the revolution of the capitalist matrix of our societies, was cut by China at the most fruitful moment of Maoism, during the Cultural Revolution. By Europe, too, in the "refusal" of the students of 1967–8 and certain Italian workers' struggles **against** the capitalist organization of labour. In the heat of the struggle and in the clarity of a radical antagonism the necessity of a revolution not only in the world but also in ourselves, the total re-foundation discussed by Marx in *The German Ideology*, has been intuitively understood: a revolution in which we shall save nothing if not the ideas of liberty and equality, finally rediscovered in their material roots and guarantees—another way for men to organize their existence.

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NOTES

1. Cf. the exchange of letters published in *Rinascita*, the PCI weekly, in May 1964.
2. In his *L'Existentialisme*, Lefebvre describes him as follows: "Paul Nizan had few friends and we wondered what his secret was, the secret of his obsession and of his torment. Today we know. All his books revolved around the idea of betrayal." As

for Aragon, he depicts Nizan in his novel *Les Communistes* in the figure of Patrice Orfilat, traitor, paid agent, naturally with a certain sympathy for the Trotskyists defined by the positive character (Politzer) as "flics".

3. *Paul Nizan, intellectuel communiste*, selected and presented by J.-J. Brochier, Maspero, Paris, 1970, vol. II, p. 110.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 115. On 30 September, i.e. a few days after his resignation, he wrote to his wife: "Have read the complete text of the Kremlin agreement. I seem to understand Iossif Vissarionovich's game: the least that can be said is that it is double and *cousu de fil rouge* [a play on *cousu de fil blanc*, i.e., blatant]. . . ." And on 22 October: "It is not because I hold its agreement with Berlin against the USSR that I took the decision I did. It is precisely because I thought the French Communists lacked the necessary political cynicism and the political capacity to lie it required to draw the maximum political advantages from a risky political operation." In other words, the PCF should, while approving the USSR's action, have dissociated itself from it so as to avoid the after-effects of what was for Stalin an obligatory choice, whereas "to imitate the Russians to the letter was to mistake them entirely in spirit", it was to be no more than their "faithful imitators". However, the invasion of Poland seemed intolerable to him: "Stalin's policy disgusts me." From October 1939 to May 1940, the contradiction seemed insurmountable to him. The book presented by Brochier is very rich in hitherto unpublished documents on this question.
5. Just as the PCF never courted him. In "Matérialisme et révolution", which appeared in *Les Temps Modernes* from June to July 1946, Sartre tells how Jean Kanapa had proposed to him a meeting with Garaudy and Mougin at René Maublanc's house. Sartre, who was then concerned to maintain good relations with the Communists, went along. But to his astonishment he was greeted with a violent attack from Garaudy and the meeting at no point took the direction that the young Kanapa perhaps desired of a conquest of Sartre for the Party. Nor did this happen subsequently, although Sartre has always been concerned to define himself as a fellow traveller and his attacks on the PCF have been rare.
6. Cf. *Les Temps Modernes*, July and October–November 1952, and the subsequent polemic with Claude Lefort in April 1973, translated into English by Irene Clephane as *The Communists and Peace, with An Answer to Claude Lefort*, Hamish Hamilton, London, 1969.
7. "Russia is not the one way of reaching the final solution. Born in the antagonisms which provoked the war of 1914–18, it could disappear: the antagonisms will survive it, and the capitalist nations will in the end collapse. In this precise sense, the safeguarding of the USSR is not the *necessary* condition for world revolution. But these considerations are not *historical*: historically the opportunity of the proletariat, its 'example' and the source of 'the strength of revolutionary penetration' are in the USSR." "Les communistes et la paix", I, *Les Temps Modernes*, July 1952; *The Communists and Peace*, op. cit., p. 10.
8. Merleau-Ponty briefly characterizes the dilemma as follows: "Sartre's attitude is first a reminder of the facts. It is true that today the most active portion of the working class supports the PCF and the CGT. Hence it is true that every defeat of the PCF decreases the weight of the working class in the political struggle, that those who celebrate the failure of a strike called by the PCF as a victory of the working class are abandoning the working class that exists and is in a majority Communist. The left-wing anti-Communist gets out of this by calling the working class's fatigue lucidity and its disheartenment revolutionary spirit. He is walking with an imaginary proletariat towards a revolution at last freed from Communist tutelage and graces a politics which triumphs or suffers simultaneously with Pinay's government with the name proletarian politics. . . . If you are prepared to treat the PCF as the enemy number one and to think your politics in consequence,

your enemy number two, capitalism, is relatively speaking your ally; if your first concern is to weaken the Communist Party, you will lack the time and the desire to weaken its adversaries. . . . All this is true and had to be said." (Cf. "Sartre et l'ultrabolchévisme", in *Les Aventures de la dialectique*, Gallimard, Paris, 1953, pp. 140-1, where the whole argument that I have briefly reported here is developed.

9. Cf. "Réponse à Albert Camus", *Les Temps Modernes*, August 1952.
10. Cf. his preface to Michele Manceaux's book *Les Maos en France*, Gallimard, Paris, 1972.
11. See Chapter XLI in *My Life*, "Lenin's Death and the Shift of Power". "The leading groups of the party that emerged from underground were inspired by the revolutionary tendencies which the leaders of the first period of the revolution were able to formulate clearly and to carry out completely and successfully in practice. It was exactly this that made them the leaders of the party, and, through the party, leaders of the **working** class, and, through the working class, leaders of the country. It was thus that certain individuals had concentrated power in their hands. But the ideas of the first period of the revolution were imperceptibly losing their influence in the consciousness of the party stratum that held the direct power over the country. In the country itself, processes were shaping themselves that one may sum up under the general name of reaction. These extended, in varying degree, to the **working** class as well, including even its party. The stratum that made up the apparatus of power developed its own independent aims and tried to subordinate the revolution to them. A division began to reveal itself between the leaders who expressed the historical line of the class and could see beyond the apparatus, and the apparatus itself—a huge, cumbrous, heterogeneous thing that easily sucked in the average communist. . . ." And further on: "I am here limiting myself to the psychological aspect of the matter, and disregarding its social basis, that is, the changes in the anatomy of the revolutionary society. In the final reckoning, it is, of course, these latter changes that decide. But in actual life it is their psychological reflection that one encounters directly." In the rest of the book he never returns to the "social basis". See *My Life*, Grosset and Dunlap, New York, 1960, pp. 502 and 504.
12. See also the debate in *Le Monde*, 3 November 1972, on Roy Medvedev's book *Let History Judge: The Origins and Consequences of Stalinism*, Macmillan, London, 1972. Jean Ellenstein, for the PCF, repeats notably: "This pertains to the fact that the USSR possessed a socialist economy, that society there was socialist and simultaneously, at the level of the superstructures, where the government of men and the management of things are concerned, there was considerable backwardness. . . . It is clear—and I shall not linger long over the problem—that any judgement of Stalin is reduced to a superstructural phenomenon. As much for those who seek justifications (the Communists insist on the cultural backwardness of Russian society; Isaac Deutscher, who was not a Communist, explains the centralization and hence the excesses by general social backwardness) as for those who do not (like Medvedev or the orthodox Trotskyists, for whom the advance might, without Stalin, have been less bloody and more rapid).
13. In contrast, the question has been globally confronted in the fundamental debate between Paul Sweezy and Charles Bettelheim, with two different analyses, a debate **recently** published by Monthly Review Press; and in general in the analyses of the *Centre d'Etudes et de Planification socialiste*, directed by Bettelheim also.
14. "The Fundamental Law of Primitive Socialist Accumulation." This text by Preobrazhensky was published in *Vestnik Kommunističeskoj Akademii*, VIII, 1924. With some alterations, it constitutes a chapter of his *The New Economics*, translated by Brian Pearce, introduced by Alec Nove, The Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1965.

15. Preobrazhensky attempts to soften this harsh reality by maintaining that, during the revolution, the working class is *no longer the object, but rather the subject of the exploitation* since it is in a position to decide, on the basis of its being and political practice, to exploit itself.