

Introduction to the Greek edition

Le Brise- Glacé's essay was published in 1989, a short while before the collapse of the Eastern Bloc and the all-embracing victory of democracy throughout the whole planet. We publish it in Greek 17 years later, at a time that democratic speech is universal. But, why should we insist on criticizing democracy? Just because, when democratic speech legitimizes "humanitarian intervention" in Yugoslavia, Afghanistan and Iraq and, at the same time, dominates the multicoloured resistance to war, revolution has to "seek another way", to "stammer a language which is neither that of the politician, nor that of the lawyer".

The fundamental contribution of French comrades' text lies in showing that democracy is a part of capital's social relations. Democracy was born, together with the speech about human rights, when capital emerged "in blood and fire" from the destruction of communities and previous forms of life production. Democracy was born when the above historical process dissolved previous social bonds, producing individuals-owners of their labour power alone, namely proletarians. Just like exchange, which became universal during that period, democracy also composes the unity of an already fragmented world. Yet, they both reunite it as fragmented. Vote is the political equivalent of money. So, our liberation is not for us a matter of seeking to establish a new democracy or a new type of democracy. The existing one is the only one possible.

However, precisely because democracy stands at the center of this world's social relations, our minds, our actions and therefore the struggles of our class are haunted by it. Here lies the second important contribution of *Le Brise- Glacé's* analysis. The writers point out that "movements in the modern era -the era of the birth and concomitant development of capitalism and of democracy- have almost always presented a double nature, both a radical protest against the world order and a demand for a place in its bosom". This double nature appears as a contradiction within each proletarian struggle, originating from proletariat's own contradictory nature. Democracy is the limit that every proletarian movement has to overcome, if it wishes to advance towards the direction of abolishing class and communising social relations. Whenever the proletarian movement speaks the democratic language, it speaks capital's language; thus, it reproduces our own poverty. Anyone who puts management forward condemns themselves to creating a managerial apparatus. Communist critique desires to turn the conversation back to the content of our experience, words and actions. The writers indicate this contradiction in the examples of specific class struggles in France during the '80s, pointing out proletarians' communist gestures and criticizing the reproduction of democratist ideology.

We conclude this small introduction by mentioning that we've added some footnotes throughout the text in order to help the reader understand references to persons, social conditions and proletarian struggles in France which are partly unknown in Greece.

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THE IMPLOSION POINT OF DEMOCRATIST IDEOLOGY

The plutocrat Bush and the bureaucrat Gorbachov, the terrorists Shamir [1] and Peres [2], the murderer Chadli [3] and his buddy Arafat, Isabelle Adjani [4] and Jean-Paul II, Harlem Desir [5] and Margaret Thatcher, Krasucki and the spokesmen of co-ordination [6], everyone is an authority on it, the stars and the democrats. The extension of the discourse of human rights over the whole planet, and particularly its introduction into the phraseology of the leaders of the East, marks its high point but also, perhaps, the beginning of its decline. When all Heads of State, all representative thinkers speak the same language, the moment has come when revolt will seek another way, stammer a language which is neither that of the politician, nor that of the lawyer.

The hour approaches when one will speak of real democracy in the way that today one speaks of real socialism.

DEMOCRACY IS A RELATION

A question of words

Democratism is the illusion according to which democracy -- the set of procedures of representation and of the production of rights -- can and must regulate the whole of social life. However it is a fact in the history of societies (at least of modern societies), as in that of individuals (at least of the individuals of recent centuries), that those moments of deliberation in which norms are fixed, always alternate with others, where the relations of force underlying the ordinary course of things abruptly explode, and where physical and symbolic violence are exerted. Set beside the Lilliputian thinkers of the French consensus, even an ex-guerillanist and feebly repentant sycophant like Regis Debray [7] takes on the stature of a giant of thought, as in his latest 'work' he recalls that Right and parliamentary representation were founded in blood, and he denounces the enterprise of revision, the «freeze-drying» of the history of revolution.

According to democratists we have finished with moments of breakdown, from now on society will be the scene of an uninterrupted deliberation, which will perpetually regulate social relations and delegitimise violence. Finally we have found the form of the eternal society -- a phantasm which François Furet [8] has summarised for the delighted media: «Revolution is finished.»

Finished? Not for us, and not for those who will derive some benefit from reading *Le Brise-Glace*.

As we see that the discourse of human rights and democracy has become the discourse of nearly all the worlds leaders (the others, sooner or later, will be required to fall into line), we must conclude that today all revolutionary effort proceeds from the critique of this discourse and, especially, of the practices which it conceals. But you remain within democratic discourse if you try to show that those who use it are not truly democrats, or that the reality which they defend (a trade union, a party, a State) is not democratic, or

that they, or it, are not democratic enough. You are then confined in a system of action and thought which can criticise Ceausescu for the dictatorial destruction of the Rumanian countryside, but is impotent in front of the same process if it is achieved through the play of economic phenomena which respect democratic rituals; just as this discourse is impotent in front of the exactions of the International Monetary Fund, the representative of the great democratic nations, which causes famines similar to those started by the Ubu of Bucharest, and does so for the same reasons : the repayment of debt, submission to the Laws of the Economy. Because he respects the law, the democrat will only accept the expulsion of illegal immigrants in accordance with a law voted for by parliament and approved by the majority of his fellow citizens, even while he insists that he himself wants it. And if, by chance, he is not opposed in the abstract to the expulsion «of immigrants», but is opposed to the expulsion of concrete individuals, he ceases acting as a democrat.

Here, as everywhere else in this world, where words are in the hands of the enemy, questions of vocabulary are posed from the start. «You are against democracy? So therefore you are for dictatorship, for totalitarianism?» demands the voice of common sense. One can always agree on vague enough concepts to satisfy everybody. If by democracy, one understands the greatest possible control of their history by individuals and social groups, then yes, we are democrats. But in reality, the whole quarrel between the democrats and us rests on the definition of what is possible.

Only schizophrenic sectarians would mix together in the same insult the democratic Head of State, who acting through the GIGN [anti-terrorist police], is prepared to flame-throw the democratic settlement of the kanak question [9], with the sincere democrat who wants a vote for fear of a neo-colonial massacre. And yet, without the latter, the former could not have committed his exactions. We will not insult the revolutionist obsessed with the principle of direct democracy by confusing him with a partisan of electoral stupidity. Unlike our direct enemies, we know that we have with all those of which we speak -- the nice leftist as much as the ardent self-managementist -- a point in common (but it is often the only one) : unlike the reactionary who wants to subject individuals to the determinations of a pre-established Order, we are all and sundry in favour of the greatest possible self-determination of individuals and human groups.

Democracy and Communism

What separates us from all the others is that they concentrate entirely on the question of autonomy. They are in search of procedures making it possible to impose the will of the individual or the group on that which determines them. The revolutionary approach, by contrast, consists in going to the heart of that which determines. The efforts made by those who want to change the world through democratising it, including by means of self-management, only lead to perpetuating it through giving everyone the illusion of being able to modify the rules, whereas everybody is subjected to the Law of an abstract monster: the Economy -- the other name for capitalism. It is why, restoring their original meaning to words which the failure of past revolutions has left in the hands of their worst enemies, we affirm that to be expressed, liberty needs the human Community, a society which has never been seen anywhere on our planet, a communist society.

This has some concrete implications today. How one must act depends on the limits to be exceeded, and on all the boundaries put up to the communist project. Since Communism is the destruction of the State, of money and, more concretely, the abolition of the business enterprise, of the separation between material production and the acquisition of knowledge, and therefore the liquidation of the school, the destruction of prisons, of advertising, of nuclear power, of one-sided «communication» (media), we are not ready to

«respect rhythms» and the self-limitations of social movements under the sole pretext of respect for their autonomy, or for the procedures of self-organisation which they have developed. Being a society which will only incidentally be reached through voting in assemblies, a society which will give the liberty of all an expansion that is still impossible in the world of Capital, communism is not defined by procedures for the expression of the collective will. **The human Community is neither democratic nor anti-democratic: the question of democracy does not arise in it.**

It is here that the most rigorous thinkers of democracy, like Lefort, believe they can trap us into the old dilemma: are you for democracy or for totalitarianism.

«Whoever dreams of an abolition of power secretly cherishes the reference to the One and the reference to the Same : he imagines a society which would accord spontaneously with itself, a multiplicity of activities which would be transparent to one another and which would unfold in a homogenous time and space, a way of producing, living together, communicating, associating, thinking, feeling, teaching which would express a single way of being. Now what is that point of view on everything and everybody, that loving grip of the good society, if not an equivalent of the phantasy of omnipotence that the actual exercise of power tends to produce?» [10]

Putting on one side the pop psychoanalysis that concludes this passage, what is striking is the obsession with the question of power.

«If by Communism... one understands a society from which would be absent all resistance, all substance, all opacity; a society which would be for itself pure transparency; where the desires of all would agree spontaneously or at least, to agree would need a winged dialogue that the bird-lime of symbolism would never weigh down; a society which would discover, formulate and achieve its collective will without passing through institutions, or whose institutions would never create problems - if this is what it is about, then it is necessary to say clearly that it is an incoherent daydream, an unreal and unrealisable state of which the representation must be eliminated. It is a mythical formation, equivalent and analogous to that of absolute knowledge, or of an individual to whose "consciousness" all being is reduced.» [11]

Because our imaginations cannot conceive of the disappearance of the unconscious dimension, but equally because our desires don't demand an end to it (since those same desires presuppose it), to us it appears inseparable from the social dimension (the propensity of humans to associate and to change through associating) which we, communists, regard as the primary wealth of mankind. That human relations, both interpersonal and social, in general give certain individuals power over others, and that these powers are partly related to the unconscious, these are realities that seem to be difficult to get beyond in any existing society. In the same way, it is difficult to imagine that these powers will stay in an eternal state of blissful fluidity and succeed in simply being -- that is to say, act -- without fixing themselves in forms of organisation (of institutions, Castoriadis would say) which assure them that minimum of permanence essential to any human activity. One can still object that the difficulty in conceiving of the disappearance of all power only expresses how difficult it is for our imagination to leave the limits of the old world, its images and its mental categories. But similarly one can wonder if its disappearance is even desirable. Is the existence of power compatible with the existence of liberty? Not only can one answer in the affirmative but one can also say that each presupposes the other.

Abolition of Power?

I am happy, for example, to have the liberty to submit myself to the power of the conductor, the musician and the composer who will presently plunge me into ecstasy. I am less than happy to have the «liberty» to submit to the carving up of my time by the economy, or to the need to lose my life in order to gain it, or to the making of profit from musical emotion... In short, the liberty to go to the concert after finishing work means little to me. In the same way, it isn't unimaginable that I might freely choose to submit myself, whether for a short time or forever, to the rhythms, the symbols and the rules of a community. But when the State occupies the whole horizon of time and social codes, this is only liberty in the service of a great renunciation.

For a revolution to pretend to abolish power would be as illusory as for a dictatorship to want to suppress all liberty. However totalitarian it is, a society cannot survive without leaving its members a minimum of initiative. However libertarian it is, it could not exist without power being exercised. The «chief» of a tribe of Ouvéa who is constrained by custom to speaking with his back turned to the assembly, so as not to risk influencing it by his facial expressions, or those Guayaqui «chiefs» which Clastres describes in *The society against the state* [12], are they really without power? One can say that the influence they exert on those who belong to their tribe doesn't resemble that exercised by Heads of State, feudal lords, kings, etc. But the acts and gestures of these same individuals still exercise an effect on their counterparts which can be exercised by no-one else. In these societies without a State which are (which were) primitive society, power exists. It is set in a whole network of relations which delimit its interventions and scope, but the exercise of this power is no less a decisive moment of the expression of the collective will.

To dream of the abolition of the State and, better still, to attack it from the point of view of its abolition, is to oppose a society in which power is frozen, hierarchical and concentrated by and for the perpetuation of class division. It is not to dream of the abolition of all power, because power and liberty are inseparable. Liberty is a «power to act or not to act» (according to the definition of Littré), and the power to act on things, and on the conditions of existence, is inseparable from the power to act on men: whatever activity I have to undertake, I won't avoid it because it exercises, in its own way, an influence, a power over others.

Whoever wishes to avoid handling grand empty words must fill them with history. An idea born with the practical emancipation of the individual, liberty is a historical creation.

History of Liberty

Long Live Liberty, a thousand gods ! Let's vomit on laws, decrees, regulations, ordinances, instructions, opinions, etc. Lets kick into the dunghill bouffe-galette, jugeurs et roussins : the pigs who prepare laws, the asses who apply them and the cows that impose them. Yes, to do what one wants, that is what's great. [13]

In the West the modern era began with the emancipation of the individual in respect of the community of which he formed a part - village community, urban township, corporation and lineage. This liquidation of feudal society went hand in hand with the establishment of the sovereignty of the monarch within the limits of his territory. The theories of natural right preceded those of human rights. «*Natural Right is the set of principles according to which men must live independently of the existence of a particular society; these principles are deduced from the living and rational nature of man*» [14]

These rights simultaneously established both the independence of the individual and the sovereignty of the monarch. Individuals could possess and could produce, without the hindrances of feudal privileges; subjects could belong to the sovereign without him having to refer to the Church or to share them with his vassals. Then the bourgeois revolution disembodied the principle of sovereignty by transferring it from the king to the nation. The civil rights which were then added to the «natural» rights of man guaranteed to each individual a kind of right of abstract ownership over the democratic State, which resulted not just from their concrete membership of a nation and its State, but also through a kind of universal proclamation with quite real effects: democracy is peculiar to man thus all men from now on belong to democracy.

The subject of a monarch could always appeal royal decisions before divine law, the national of a non-democratic State can always seek the protection of a democracy but, as Furet wrote, *«democratic law, having nothing beyond it, doesn't include any court of appeal; the obedience which is due to it does not depend at all on its contents, but only on the formal procedures which led to its promulgation (...) The power of the democratic state eliminates the concept even of right of resistance, and a fortiori the old recourse to tyrannicide (...) By a kind of premium which it is able to confer on any provision which emanates from it, the majority transforms into right all that it does.»* [15]

Pursued by the guard, the outlaw found refuge in the church. Threatened by totalitarian henchmen, the regime's opponent shelters behind the borders of the democracies. But whoever contravenes the laws of a democracy, especially whoever takes up arms against one of them, soon finds there is no asylum anywhere. «Terrorists» and «delinquents» will always learn this to their cost : outside the State of right (état de droit), there is no longer anything, except prison and death.

In 1789, the writers of the various drafts of the Declaration of the Rights of Man based their demonstrations of the need for these rights on the primordial needs of man in the «state of nature». The Rights of Man were founded on the fiction of a man preexistent to all social bonds. This philosophical abstraction only reflected and prepared for the real abstraction to which capitalist society returned the individual that it had just created.

The Citizen, Restricted Individual

«Above all,» writes Marx in 1844, *«we note the fact that the so called rights of man, the droits de l'homme as distinct from the droits du citoyen, are nothing but the rights of a member of civil society, i.e., the rights of egoistic man, of man separated from other men and from the community.»*

Recalling the definition of liberty in the different Declarations («power to do anything which does not harm another») [1791 Declaration of the Rights of Man] , he notes : *«The limits within which anyone can act without harming someone else are defined by law, just as the boundary between two fields is determined by a boundary post. It is a question of the liberty of man as an isolated monad, withdrawn into himself.»* This right *«is based not on the association of man with man, but on the separation of man from man. It is the right of this separation, the right of the restricted individual, withdrawn into himself.»* [16]

Regarding these famous passages from On the Jewish Question, Lefort writes that Marx doesn't grasp the sense of the historical mutation which is consecrated in the Declarations, and by which *«power is assigned limits and right is fully recognised as existing outside power.»* In opposition to Marx's communism, and to the notion of the human Community, Lefort makes himself the apologist of separation. *«The rights of man,»* he explains, *«appear*

as those of individuals, individuals appear as so many little independent sovereigns, each reigning over his private world, like so many micro-entities separated off from the social whole. But this representation destroys another: that of a totality which transcends its parts.» Lefort sees the disappearance of transcendence in the disembodiment of the law (which is no longer incarnated by the king) and he opposes this happy relativisation, which would have taken hold of social relations, to the Communist project which, for him, would reinstall a society «like a single body», leaving no space for the «indeterminate», for the «uncircumscribable» [l'«incernable»] -- in other words : for liberty.

Lefort's strong point is that he bases his argument on a reality which is shrugged off too quickly, if not by Marx, at least by vulgar Marxism: the presence of democracy at the heart of capitalist social relations. The conception of the individual as a micro-unity, Lefort tells us, «*discloses a transversal dimension of social relations, relations of which individuals are the terms but which confer on those individuals their identity, just as much as they are produced by them. For instance, the right of one individual to speak, to write, to print freely implies the right of another to hear, to read, to keep and pass on the material printed. By virtue of the establishment of these relations, a situation is constituted in which expression is encouraged, in which the duality of speaking and hearing in the public sphere is multiplied instead of being frozen in the relation of authority, or being confined in privileged spaces.»*

It is easy to show the ridiculousness of this idyllic vision, to recall for example that the right of Messrs Hersant [17], Maxwell [18] or Berlusconi to speak, to write and to print freely presupposes for others only the right 'to swallow their soup and keep silent' - or to read nothing and to distribute a slim little-read magazine. But that doesn't exempt us from seeing what Lefort underlines: the rights of man don't guarantee a mode of being, a purely static human nature, but a mode of acting, an activity which is at the foundation of existing society.

Lefort himself assigns a purely mystical concept of right, like an «*uncontrollable domain*» («*foyer inaménageable*»), as the origin of this «*manner of being in society*». Returning to the fiction of a man without determination, as the editors of the Rights of man had expressed it through their theory of the state of nature, he assures us : «*The rights of man reduce right to a basis which, despite its name, is without shape, is given as interior to itself and, for this reason, eludes all power which claims to take hold of it... for the same reason they cannot be assigned to a particular period... and they cannot be circumscribed within society...»*

In historical reality, from the beginning rights indeed had a «figure», perfectly circumscribed within one society. In his draft of the Declaration, Marat wrote: «*As long as nature abundantly offers men enough to feed and clothe themselves, all is well, peace can reign on earth. But when one of them lacks everything, he has the right to snatch from another the superfluity in which he abounds. What am I saying? he has the right to snatch what is necessary, and rather than perish of hunger, he has the right to cut his throat and devour his palpitating flesh (...) The love of preference which each individual has for himself leads him to sacrifice the whole universe for his happiness : but the rights of man being unlimited, and each man having the same rights, from the right which all individuals have to attack, they all have to defend themselves; free exercise of their rights necessarily results in war and the evils without number which accompany it... It is these frightening evils which men wanted to avoid, when they met in a body. For that purpose, it was therefore necessary that every member of the association engaged to harm the others no more, that he handed over to society his personal vengeance, the care to defend and protect himself; that he renounced the common possession of the products of the earth, to possess a part as his own, and that he sacrificed part of the advantages attached to natural*

independence in order to enjoy the advantages offered by society. Here we have arrived at the social pact.» [19]

This vision of man as an isolated, selfish individual, always ready to murder to satisfy his individual needs doesn't in any way correspond to anthropological and historical data. It is impossible to conceive man at his origin in the form of an isolated individual who would then have to enter into relations with others! In reality, this aggressive monad, haunted by fear of scarcity resembles nothing of what is known of prehistoric man, but is a fantastical projection of the bourgeois individual in a situation of competition.

The Democrat and the Capitalist

In order for the purchase and sale of labour power -- the activity on which the modern world rests -- to take place, it is necessary that the individual is, for one moment, free. Free, that is, of any obligation prohibiting him from entering into the contract which binds him to capital. Even if, in reality, he has hardly any choice... *«Everything that helps to measure men and products, without prejudice or consideration of statute, rank, race or nation... assists capital. And everything that hinders the free measurement of the social labour contained in products for exchange, hinders the smooth operation of capital. (...) There is a zero moment of exchange (like the «free» hiring) where the two parties are supposed to meet without precondition. Precisely as at the time of an election, one mimics the recreation of a new, original moment, a starting point, a resetting of the meters to zero.» [20]*

The abstract character of liberty and equality under capital by no means prevents these concepts from having a real impact : *«It is necessary that one hundred Mauritian shirts at one dollar apiece encounter a Japanese television set at one hundred dollars so that one hundred dollars exchanges against one hundred dollars even though, actually, the exchange is unequal, the shirts incorporating more human labour and thus more value. For this mechanism to function, it is necessary that the individuals or social persons who manage these quantities of value in circulation are neither hindered nor favoured in their encounter, and that their circulation is thus not frustrated or impaired by too awkward privileges in the accumulation of value. . . The equality of men and things also supposes confrontation in political and legal life. Ideas must meet, to measure themselves equitably. [21]»*

From their origin one has seen that the rights of man, far from being indeterminate, belonged to a given society. Lefort attempts to dismiss this argument in two ways. First he accuses the revolutionary critique of Right of *«confusing the symbolic and the ideological»*, as if the first was sheltered from the influence of ideology. The dominant ideology cannot be summarised as a doctrinal unity -- today less than ever. The texts of the founding fathers, the annotations of specialists, the litanies of journalists are only the elaborated part, the visible tip of an iceberg of more or less conscious mental representations which structure rationality and the social imaginary. Symbolic authority is in fact an integral part of it. Right doesn't only exist in constitutions and codes, but also in people's heads, cause and effect of their *«manner of being in society»*.

It is because they are unaware of this reality that so many minority activists and rebels against the democratic consensus find themselves crushed without understanding why. The spectacle of anti-terrorism which liquidates them is not simply a matter of manipulation by masters who consider society from the ramparts of their castle. This spectacle draws its substance and its dynamism from the spontaneous democratism which secretes capitalist social relations. Democratic formalism exchanges the pacification of

social life for a thousand humiliations and a great renunciation. When zygotes come to disturb this peace in such a manner that the citizen has nothing in common with them, he feels that this dearly acquired tranquility is being threatened. From this arises a rejection which nourishes all the state-media manoeuvres.

Conversely, the idea of Right is so little constitutive of a human nature that in order to put it into the heads of savages, it was necessary to cut a certain number of them off. When a Kanak tribe, divided between «masters of the earth» and «masters of the sea», caused the products of soil and ocean to circulate among its members in a framework of relations marked by the reciprocity of the gift (See «*Lettre aux Kanaks*» in *Le Brise Glace* no. 1), the acquisition of concepts such as rights of ownership or fishing rights could only be experienced as an impoverishment and debasement of life. For his part the modern proletarian experiences how far the language of right which he stammers and the democratic rituals that he reproduces constitute a brake as soon as he attacks their conditions of existence.

Everything which individuals and communities immediately had hold of became an object of right from the moment that a mediation intervened, the great universal mediators of money and State which, as a last resort, always impose the measure of the former, and the guarantees and sanctions of the latter. When masses of peasants were forced from their land, and their ties, their histories and often their flesh were finely chopped up by industry, once they had been reduced to nothing more than labour power, they obtained the right to associate in order to be able to sell themselves more effectively.

As our bodies have progressively been taken in charge by specialists, so that each moment of our lives has been made the object of a new intervention by external authority, we have won the right to life, to death, to procreate, to maternity for women, to health, to a worthy old age. Never have we had so many rights, never have we had so little responsibility for the good and bad fortune of our carcasses.

To finish with Lefort, he continues: «*From the moment when the rights of man are posited as the ultimate reference, established right is open to question (...) Now, where right is in question, society - that is, the established order - is in question.*» But what happens when that order is established, amongst other things, upon its being put into question? The dynamics of democratic legalism which spontaneously double the ever increasing mediatization of our lives certainly involve modifications to the law, sometimes even changes in the leading personnel. But this reinforces a fundamental adherence to the system, an acceptance of the presence of the Great Mediator and the fiction of a social contract which we must have adhered to, in total liberty, at our birth.

We like liberty well enough, this brave old notion so many times abused and disguised as its opposite, to consider that democracy is not an idea large enough to contain it. To the limited democratic definition of liberty («power to do anything which does not harm another»), we oppose this communist definition: **liberty is power to do all that others do** -- to make that which makes the Other, this Other who makes me. To intervene in that which determines others, what power they give me! And if others determine me, what liberty I offer them!

The Democrat and the Proletarian

To criticise democracy by denouncing its «formal» and «bourgeois» character is a mistake of vulgar Marxism which disregards a double reality : on the one hand, the association from the start between the workers' movement and the democratic movement, and on the

other, the fact that democracy is not just a simple idea which one could denounce as false but a reality at the heart of capitalist social relations. It is itself a social relation, the activity which at the same moment both divides individuals up and also joins them together to make the whole of society function.

The histories of modern democracy and of the workers' movement are indissociable. It is with good reason that the author of *«The Making of the English Working Class»* starts his book with a chapter on the London Corresponding Society which faced with the *«hardness of the times»* and the *«dearness of all the necessaries of life»* advanced as its principal programme that *«every adult person, in possession of his reason, and not incapacitated by crimes, should have a vote for a Member of Parliament»*. [22] Since the dawn of modern times a new characteristic of social movements has affirmed itself.

Unlike the millenarian uprisings which from Spartacus [23] to the Peasant Wars [24], knew only one alternative, «liberty or death», and only one outcome, death, movements in the modern era -- the era of the birth and concomitant development of capitalism and of democracy -- have almost always presented a double nature, both a radical protest against the world order and a demand for a place in its bosom.

Since then, every time that the first aspect has prevailed (from the luddites to the Durrutistes, by way of Kronstadt and the uprisings of the 1920's in Germany), death was never far off. When the second aspect imposed itself, the movement has spoken the language of right, that is to say it has tended to find a common language with the State, if necessary by trying to obtain a modification to democratic law, though this has never excluded massacres, even when it was only a question of the silk workers of Lyon affirming their right to work or of the Communards defending social and communalist rights.

Democracy is the political location of the counter-revolution where the divergent interests in society are certainly recognised, but on condition that their irreducibility is absorbed in the «consultation» that enfolds them into the «general interest». At its beginning (the period of «formal domination»), democracy was purely political, and the democratic state was strictly speaking the bourgeois state, a community of human beings created by universal suffrage; its disconnection from the social life of those same human beings was obvious. The boss got busy buying labour power below its value or increasing the working day without increasing wages. The principal intervention by the State in social life was anti-worker repression.

The difficulty of finding a private accommodation with the capitalists dragged workers into «general political action». By opposing all reform, the bosses placed the worker into a situation where he was tempted to go beyond reformist disputes over the mode of valorization of his labour power toward a revolutionary questioning of valorization as such. A danger which was averted by social democracy and the democratic State, though not without causing them some difficult moments. Under the influence of social democracy, the democratic state learned how to put the interests of capital in general before the interests of those private capitalists who did not understand where the future lay, and more and more it intervened in social life. Thus during the great strikes of 1889 and 1905 it was the bismarckian State which forced the barons of the Ruhr to yield to all the workers demands [25].

«If the bourgeoisie believes that in us it can find lightning conductors, it is mistaken. We must go to meet with the world of work. It is necessary to accept the requirements of the working classes, the eight hour working day, the six hour day for miners and night workers, the pension fund, the funds for disability and old age, the controls on industry. We support

these demands because we want to accustom the working class to the capacity to direct the enterprises and also to convince the workers that it is not easy to set in motion an industry or trade. If the syndicalist doctrine maintains that one will be able to extract from the masses leaders capable of assuming the direction of work, we cannot stand in the way of this, especially if this movement takes account of two realities, the realities of production and of the nation (...)»

In this 1919 speech, in which he also defended the right of women to vote, Mussolini (for it was he !) set out the programme of social democracy which was to be applied in most of the capitalist countries. This movement accompanied the development of the material community of capital. The rights of the working class are recognised to the extent that it abandons its true class character. The capitalist class always exists but they are no longer the simple representatives of their individual capitals, they are functionaries of social capital which is now autonomised, which is no longer the simple sum of all its constituent parts but which on the contrary determines them. Individual capitalists can be replaced by simple functionaries of capital. The working class also appears as a functionary of the material community.

The Plaster of Right on the Wooden Leg of the Individual

But beneath the appearance -- which itself is also a part of the reality -- the exploitation continues. With social democracy, capitalist society cherishes and sets on stage the dream of a society which would abolish classes while preserving capital. The orgy of democratism which has marked recent years shows that society always needs to believe in this dream.

Democratism rests on the illusion according to which procedures of representation (the designation of representatives, the setting in play of deliberation and collective decision making) guarantee individuals and societies the greatest possible control of their fate. The polling booth («L'isoloir») is the symbol par excellence of democratism. This act in which man isolates himself from his counterparts (for which the only equivalent is the act of defecation) in order to take a decision which is supposed to commit him for life, aims to ritually give a minimal reality to this «private world», this «micro-entity separated off from the social whole» over which he would reign as a «little independent sovereign»: his individuality.

In reality, and today less than ever, the lone man has no will of his own. Each of his acts, his desires and his thoughts is always a moment in the continuity of the acts, desires and thoughts of others. If ideas of individual liberty and of personal will have a meaning it is that of a capacity to defy the influences which form a person. The more he is capable of recognising these influences and modulating them, the more his relation with them is immediate, the more a person is free.

However never in human history have individuals not also been subjected to impersonal, dehumanised influences, been obedient to an abstract logic (the economy), never have images and ideas not escaped people at such a point to concentrate themselves in a world both foreign and omnipresent (the spectacle). Never, perhaps, have individuals not been confronted with a domination that is both meticulous and imperceptible.

Formerly, they could dream of killing the king -- sometimes they even did it. Today one would have to be shut into in the vizer-less armor of a rusted ideology to believe that one could change what exists by killing a democratic leader. The gesture would be as ridiculous as voting for or against him.

The more impotent man is to change his life, the more must be put into play the infinite conquest of rights inside this life. One must especially put into play the right to designate representatives who, in fact, represent nothing more than the interests of lobbies, the general interest of capital and their interest in seeing their own poor appetites are met. But, in reality, who is unaware of this? Who would argue with Castoriadis (whose re-reading of Freud has apparently left him in a better state than Lefort has been left by his re-reading of Tocqueville) when he declared in an interview: «*To choose for eternity between Barre and Mitterand, the mere statement of this project is enough to condemn it*»?

And yet people vote. Our representatives may not look appetising... At least they guarantee that we are not in one of those totalitarian countries where terror is permanent, where they torture in cellars, where the *Brise-Glace* could not appear. Rather democracy than that terror. Here we see how terror even reigns in territories where no torturers operate.

THE CRITIQUE OF DEMOCRATIST IDEOLOGY

Democracy, Community and Revolutionary Action

The critique of democracy made by the communist movement leads some revolutionaries to suspect that behind it lies a refusal of «direct democracy», and they see in the aspiration for a *human community* an inclination towards unanimism, a suffocation of the individual or even a new totalitarianism.

The suspicions of those who don't consider that in essence all society is totalitarian are founded on the manner in which they privilege an organisational form that is born from a necessary reaction to this world. In an atomised society, in which individuals end up by confining themselves in a solitary «madness» from which nothing seems able to deliver them, it is certain that an authentic revolutionary movement, however partial it is, will from the start affirm itself as the meeting, the reunion of the mass of the excluded, excluded both from themselves and from one another. The necessary condition for the success of such movements will obviously be the participation of the greatest number of people, acting together, without separation or mediation or manipulation. Assemblies, whether one calls them «councils», «soviets» or, today in France, «co-ordinations» contain within themselves this possibility of free association from which a revolutionary movement might begin to transform society. But, while they are the necessary condition, they are far from being a sufficient condition.

However democratic an assembly is, however direct the democracy that reigns within it, it is never safe from attempts at manipulation. The only guarantee that the movement doesn't degenerate and that manipulation is frustrated, is the strength of the movement itself; is that the people who are assembled prevent power from passing into other hands; and that they understand that in itself representation is already renunciation. Even the most radical who say «we are all delegates» should rather say only «we are!». Of course, what is easy in a shop or a small factory where everyone knows one another is less easy in a big enterprise, or a city, and still less at the scale of a country. From the start transparency and the control of debate are more difficult. However, movements have already provided some practical solutions.

In 1976 at Vitoria (in the Basque country) [26] proletarians from all the factories on strike succeeded in assembling several thousands without the quality of debate suffering. At Gdansk in 1980 [27], at the time of the negotiation of the famous «agreements» (whatever

one might think about their content), workers from the yards insisted that microphones were installed in the conference room so that all those outside could follow the proceedings and know what «their» delegates were saying.

The Limitations of Workers' Councils

The merit of the workers' councils which have appeared at different times during this century is that debate was not separated, as it is in a bourgeois parliament, instead they were assemblies where discussion and action were reconciled, those who debated being the same as those who acted. The critique of workers' councils doesn't relate to the form of organisation they took, but to the fact that they remained confined to the place where they were established, the factory.

It is true that history has also given us the example of «territorial» soviets, as in Russia in 1917-18, or in Germany in 1918. But in fact these were bodies in which soldiers, workers' representatives and the members (intellectuals) of workers' parties (even, in Germany, representatives of fractions of the bourgeoisie) were found jumbled together.

Because of the role played by parties in Russia, particularly the Bolsheviks (who saw in the councils a means to take power and did everything to limit their action), because of the role played by social-democracy in Germany, (which, relying on its working class base, succeeded in containing the Spartacists, even excluding Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht from the central Council of delegates for Greater Berlin because they were not workers, before finally assassinating them), and finally because of the role played in both cases by soldiers, (who often only wanted peace and nothing more, and limited the movement after having been the element which spread it), these territorial soviets represent a separate case in the history of councils since they were neither rank and file assemblies, nor assemblies composed of rank and file delegates. Besides which, they swiftly proved to be ineffective, and then counter-revolutionary.

Staying with Russia and Germany, if it is a question of criticising the action of the *workers' councils*, properly speaking one can only place in this category the factory councils in Germany (which finished by being integrated in the form of works councils) and the factory committees in Russia (which disappeared after the summer of 1918).

Born in the factory, because it was there that proletarians had begun to attack their exploitation, the workers' councils remained imprisoned within them, their vision of the world remaining that of something to be managed. Remarkably, for it bore upon the central location of their exploitation, their attack remained partial. In particular from the start they retained the organisational *form* -- the council as a place of debate, with its problems of majority and minority -- and they forgot the essential purpose, *action* by workers against their exploitation, action for which organising themselves in councils in order to debate was only one aspect. But in fact the «critique of workers' councils» hardly makes sense. In reality it is a question of understanding the actions of workers who, having formed councils in their factories amongst other things, did not know how to extend their action to the whole of society.

The question of whether form precedes content or vice versa, is the same type of false debate. To put it correctly it is the movement itself which conditions the forms of organisation it gives itself. As long as the movement is in the ascendant, it naturally finds the forms necessary for the pursuit of its activities. The «democratic» purity of decisions matters little as long as the decisions taken lead to actions which develop the movement's adhesion. At that moment, initiatives by a determined minority can rally round them a

majority which can immediately recognise itself within the actions in which it finds itself caught up, and this will more often advance the movement than debates where a democratic majority remains undecided. It is often when the movement begins to ebb that its form solidifies, and this even contributes to accelerate the defeat.

When one looks back at the great movements of the past one can see that they always began to be «beaten» from within. Thus it was with the Paris Commune, the soviets and factory committees in Russia, the councils in Germany in the 1920s, in Spain in 1936 or in Hungary in 1956 - these movements all began by losing the initiative before being beaten by reactionary forces, which existed either outside of them or in their midst.

The revolutionary movement inherited from the democratic viewpoint the idea that all conflict can be regulated through debate. This is treble false : it is false beforehand when a movement has not yet erupted, it is false when it is spreading and it is even false when it ebbs. Most strikes do not start following a vote. The situation is ripe and there is suddenly an explosion, or more frequently, an audacious minority forces the hand of the others and the result is an activity which is not the object of a debate, which is not voted for and which is not sanctioned. To take well known examples, it is enough to mention the strike at the Renault factory at Cléon in May 1968 [28] or the railway men's strike in 1986-7 [29].

(...) The idea of voting to strike, for example, is as absurd as the idea of decreeing a riot. You don't go on strike because a majority of your comrades are ready to, but because you yourself as an individual and as a proletarian, and not as a «member of the working classes», desire to do it. If the lads of Paris-north, of Bretigny or wherever had waited until a majority of French railway men had agreed to walk out, there simply would not have been a strike. On the contrary, they sought to pull the others out by first affirming their own revolt. Hats off to them !

In the same way the extension of the movement to other enterprises (starting with the nearest, the RATP and the PTT) could not be a decision emanating democratically from the assemblies or coordinations. The assemblies which could have expressed the will for it had no real power, since they systematically pushed away anything that might divide them. As for the representatives of the movement, they similarly made no moves to saw through the corporatist branch on which they sat. It would thus have been necessary that some determined railway workers went everywhere to incite factory and office workers to strike. And that they did this without the prior support of the railway men's assemblies, and obviously without waiting for the workers from other enterprises to approach them. This made a lot of conditions to be fulfilled and on the whole they were not. On the other hand democracy functioned very well to accelerate the return to work. In the second week in January, while a majority of depots were still on strike and at the same time most of the assemblies had declared themselves in favour of continuing the struggle, it was enough for those who had decided to go back to work to announce that they would not comply with the decisions of the assembly, and immediately a second vote produced a majority in favour of resuming work. And thus, in the space of a few days, the «slow» drift back became a «quasi general» return to work, to the satisfaction of all our enemies. Of course, the connivers in the coordinations and trade unions threw all their weight in this direction. But that made no difference to the fact that it was the democratic mechanism which made it possible to break the movement (...)

Finally it is necessary to say a few words on the famous «autonomous coordinations» vaunted by some at length in leaflets. In fact they were only the result of a bungled

compromise between bureaucrats and workers, between democratic ideology and the real workers' movement, between the necessities of the struggle and the needs of the apparatuses. Proletarians, when they rebel, are confronted with the urgent necessity of accomplishing a host of concrete tasks. To this end they spontaneously join together without the need to refer to abstractions like the «sovereign assemblies» or the «autonomous coordinations». And so long as they act in this way, their movements are difficult to control in practice: this was the case with the railway workers strike during the first week.

Things begin to go bad when, out of fear, the greater number tend to rely on a few to lead the struggle, thus falling again into the rut of passivity. Increasingly centralised structures take form which seize control of everything: meetings, decisions and actions. At this point the trade unions and parties perk up : on the one hand by placing their men at all levels of these new structures of proletarian control, on the other hand by organising phony demonstrations alongside them and by promoting corporatist strikes which are obviously aimed at exhausting workers combativity. Then the bastards can claim with the Stalinist Krasucki: «The rank and file doesn't exist, the rank and file is the CGT» (or the CFDT [30], or LO [31], the list is not closed). Effectively, the rank and file didn't know in time how to get rid of the rank and file militants (...)

Extracts from the pamphlet

Critical reflections on the social movement in France, Winter 1986-87

Strengths and Limits of Recent Social Movements

As one could see again recently during the strikes, however limited, by French railwaymen, as long as the movement was dynamic -- during the first week -- it took place without any official registration or democratic sanction. It was possible to hear from the mouths of strikers these completely anti-democratic sentences which clearly demonstrate how a movement functions. «We don't vote, since everyone is in agreement». Then «We voted not to stop trains, but we stopped them anyway».

It's not a matter of saying there is never any need for debate because the movement will obey a blind logic, or because proletarians will be pushed to the front by the «contradictions of capitalism». The path is never marked out in advance and all the time there are practical problems to resolve, with the risk of disagreements and confrontations, which may be violent, over the immediate decisions to be taken. Nothing excludes the possibility that it is sometimes necessary to know how to step back and catch your breath before setting out again with renewed vigour.

During the English miners strike in 1984-5 [32], the logic of 'to the finish' prevented such a tactic. But after three months some might have decided to go back to work to get wages in order to immediately go back on strike. To take this sort of decision obviously requires discussion and debate. But the form these take, be it the vote which permits one to «know the opinion» of the majority, or the democratic character of the assemblies, offers no guarantee as to the content of the decisions made.

It is now necessary to reconsider the latest object of worship of democratic ideology : the «coordinations» which have flourished since the winter of 1986 every time proletarians have attempted to take their affairs in hand. [33] Of course this form of organisation starts

from the correct idea that it is necessary to unite outside the «workers» organisations, which from now on are one of the best supporters of the system, and attempt to go beyond the sectional barriers imposed by capitalist organisation - at least in the best cases, because inside the same firm there are often extremely corporatist tendencies which do not unite.

An example was provided during the recent movements in the RATP (Parisian public transport) in Nov-Dec 1988. Once having achieved their demands the train crews did not assist the maintenance shop workers. As for the latter they established no links with the bus drivers who were on strike at the same time. In the same way at the time of the nurses struggles there was no coordination (!) with the nursing assistants, the masseurs, the intensive care workers or the maintenance workers, categories which could only be seen marching one after the other.

However in those rare cases where the sectional barriers defended by the unions have been crossed, this practice of openness has still not been sufficient to surmount one of the principal weaknesses of these movements : their inability to break the categories down and call them into question. The action by hospital staff in the autumn of 1988 is a classic example. Thousands of nurses [34] took to the streets, held numerous assemblies and knew how to create a nationwide network of coordinations in a few days. But what was this fine example of «direct democracy» used for ? Was it to pose the central questions of «health» ? or of «medicine» ? Knowing how to bandage or operate on an injured person is all very well; but why are all these patients sick ? And as for the psychiatry, the chemical straightjacket keeping «alive» vegetables in agony, is this «health» ? Why is the doctor the boss and the nurse his servant ? . . . what were these coordinations used for in reality ? Merely to negotiate with power in the place of the unions or even to put pressure on the unions so that they negotiated «better».

Hardly had the nuclear power workers at Pierrelatte gone on strike than they got a 35 hour week. Perfect. But in the long run it will be necessary for them to pose the questions of maintaining nuclear power and of their role as workers.

By contrast, two other struggles, the first by the workers in SNECMA (aircraft engine manufacturer), and the second by postal sorting office workers, succeeded in forcing a little deeper the wedge that had been driven in by the rail workers. The strike at SNECMA was remarkable for several reasons. Firstly, the workers left the workplace to make their strike known, something which had not been seen for some years. They presented an anti-economic demand by asking for 500 francs extra for everybody. The strike which lasted two months did not end in defeat but was succeeded by other forms of struggle. The strikers continued their action in spite of media misrepresentation (this was the time of the presidential elections) demonstrating a salutary disregard for the democratic masquerade. The strike was also marked by massive participation by the workers : when a thousand of them went out to popularise the struggle, there still remained a greater number in occupation. Finally the work of propaganda and the production of leaflets was done by the workers themselves. The only shadow cast on this picture was that the «coordinations» were not openly anti-union but joint bodies involving them.

As for the postmen they succeeded in establishing coordinations between different sorting offices which remained in a minority but functioned entirely outside of the unions, the production of leaflets being done without any outside assistance.

January 5th, 1919 in Berlin

«The communist eyewitness continues his account :

«At this point the incredible occurred. The masses were there very early, in the cold and fog. And the chiefs sat somewhere and deliberated. The fog increased and the masses still waited. But the chiefs deliberated. Midday arrived and in addition to the cold, came hunger. And the chiefs deliberated. The masses were delirious with excitement : they wanted a deed, a word to alleviate their delirium. Nobody knew what. The chiefs deliberated. The fog increased again and with it the twilight. Sadly the masses went home : they had wanted something big to happen and they had done nothing. And the chiefs deliberated. They had deliberated in the Marstall [35], then they went on to the prefecture of police, and they deliberated again. Outside the masses were kept, on the empty Alexanderplatz, guns in hand, with their heavy and light machine guns. And inside, the chiefs deliberated. In the prefecture sailors pointed guns in all directions, and in all parts giving onto the outside, a swarm of soldiers, sailors and proletarians. And inside, the chiefs sat and deliberated. They sat all evening, and they sat all night long, and they deliberated. And they sat the following morning when the day became grey, and so on and so on, and they deliberated again. And the groups returned again to the Siegesalle and the chiefs sat and deliberated. They deliberated, deliberated, deliberated.»

Die Rote Fahne, 5th September 1920.

cited by Pierre Broué, *Revolution in Germany, 1917-1923*, Ed. de Minuit, 1971.

Democratism against Subversion, and vice versa

As we mentioned in La Banquise (no. 4) the next revolutionary wave will be confronted with the question of what to do with the innumerable files which modern technology stores in its computer memories. One can well imagine the Council of Greater Paris (or of Sofia Antipolis [36], or wherever) voting, democratically and according to majority, to put them in cold storage while deciding what to do with them. Let's hope that a band of «uncontrollables» takes the happy initiative of burning them double quick.

The idea that within a revolutionary movement one must count hands, or even that one could, makes no sense. To yield to this idea is to place oneself at the mercy of the democratist illusion according to which the collective will is the simple addition of sovereign individual wills, whereas in reality it is always the result of a complex play of reciprocal influences.

When deliberative proceedings are constituted (a council, a parliament or a coordination) the principal question is not the procedures by which the will of all the participants can best express itself, but the relation between the process of debate and the action to be carried out, a question which cannot be dissociated from the nature of the action itself. If a situation is sufficiently rich in possibilities, one can well conceive of a minority undertaking its own action alongside the majority, and that the result of their actions then leads a good part of the majority to join the minority, or else shows the minority that it was mistaken. If possibilities are limited, the majority may consider that the action of the minority will endanger the action of the majority. A relation of force will then be posed.

The triumph of the democratist illusion would, in the first case (an «open» situation) lead the minority to do nothing out of respect for procedure -- and the movement as a whole would lose the opportunity for a qualitative leap. In the second case (a «closed» situation) the democratist illusion could serve the minority if it was composed of scheming politicians (trotskyists, for example, have acquired a long experience of manipulating assemblies through the opportunist use of voting), veiling the relation of force established by the mass by superimposing on it the image of procedures which «are always right», an image which on occasion (see above) will do a disservice to the movement.

While one must not reduce everything to the «organisation question», the question of organisation is posed by all activity. Retaining control of what they do is always the primary concern of those who break with the dominant forms of representation and delegation. But the multiplication of control procedures guarantees nothing : it only succeeds in multiplying the opportunities for manipulation. The «elected and instantly revocable delegates» are either a fiction in the service of a new bureaucracy in formation, or a reality which in practice is constantly menaced and susceptible to any kind of accommodation. A movement which spent all its time electing and revoking would quickly be defeated, while delegates who were revocable but never ever revoked would finish up by being indistinguishable from parliamentary deputies ! Between these two extremes is space for a whole series of forms of organisation, of delegation and of interchange. But no form will ever guarantee the nature of a movement. Within a movement the role of a revolutionary is to act in line with the most radical tendencies... when there are any. The fact that a movement emerges from the rank and file and organises itself doesn't in our opinion constitute a sufficient criteria for intervening in it. For example, faced with the rank and file prison officers movement in the autumn of 1988, the only response would have been to invite them to disappear after destroying their instruments of work ! In other words there is nothing else that they could have done for us not to continue regarding them as enemies.

May 5th, 1937 in Barcelona

«The attitude of the anarchist militants in these dramatic events was precisely the same as that which I noted with regard to collectivisations for example. They rushed into battle spontaneously and with eagerness. They made themselves masters of three quarters of the city. But they waited for instructions, for orders, from their revered chiefs ! When these ordered them to leave the barricades they refused ! They would not leave the barricades that day nor the next, in spite of all the appeals from their leaders. Nonetheless out of this disappointed waiting for revolutionary instructions, a certain hesitancy, a certain indecision was born, which the opposing forces profited from in order to retake the Station and the Telephone Exchange. Of course, this hesitancy went hand in hand with an incontestable eagerness to fight, but, here again, this eagerness was defensive. They waited for their chiefs to give them an overall plan of attack, a global and offensive strategy (we saw that when this «overall plan» was retreat pure and simple, they refused it), and as they didn't receive anything of the sort, they were content to hold their barricades and locals without passing on to a generalised and coordinated offensive. For the numerous actions and partial victories of the previous day were no longer sufficient at this stage of the battle.»

Carlos Semprun-Maura, *Revolution and counterrevolution in Catalonia*, Ed. Mame, 1974.

Acting in a radical way means seeking to have an influence on the movement by adopting the most appropriate form for the action, that is, a form which doesn't risk becoming

autonomous and imposing its own dynamic, and therefore neither a democratic form (see above) nor a dictatorial one. Only archeo-leninists still believe that the dictatorship of a party or a State can produce anything beyond itself, and only the infra-leninists still imagine that «councils» could exercise a dictatorship without turning into a State.

Acting in a radical way, means seeking to influence a movement not by coercion or illusionism but through subversion. It is a question of creating situations which make it difficult to return to the previous state of affairs, and of starting to modify, however slightly, the conditions of existence of those touched by the movement -- both within it and outside it. At the time of the recent strikes in the postal sorting offices, some postmen put forward the idea of delivering the mail for free. If only one post office had done it -- for example by stamping all the letters without charge -- it would have made an impact from which the whole movement would have benefited and the shock waves of which would have spread throughout society : the action of a minority would have had infinitely more weight, for themselves as well as for the others, than a hundred thousand votes in the assemblies.

Notes

- [1] **(Translator's note)** Prime minister of Israel (Likud Party) during the periods 1983-84 and 1986-92
- [2] **(Translator's note)** Prime minister of Israel (Labour Party) during the periods 1984-86 and 1995-96. He shared the Nobel Prize in Peace with Rabin and Arafat in 1994.
- [3] **(Translator's note)** President of Algeria from 1979 to 1992. He imposed a policy of liberalization.
- [4] **(Translator's note)** French actress
- [5] **(Translator's note)** French politician, member of the Socialist Party and European Parliament
- [6] **(Translator's note)** CGT (one of the 5 major unions in France, controlled by the Communist Party) leader during the period 1989-92.
- [7] **(Translator's note)** French intellectual, professor and journalist. He formally engaged in Che Guevara's activities, especially in Bolivia where he was arrested and jailed in 1967. He was sentenced to 30 years in prison, but was released in 1970 after an international campaign for his release which included Jean-Paul Sartre. Debray returned to France in 1973. Following the election of President François Mitterrand, in 1981, he became an adviser of the President on foreign affairs. Debray was recently in the news for his support of the French ban on headscarves for female Muslim students in public schools.
- [8] **(Translator's note)** François Furet was an influential French historian who attacked the way the French Revolution is interpreted by Marxist historians. His 1978 work "Interpreting the French Revolution" set about treating the Revolution less as the result of social and class conflict than of conflict over the meaning and application of egalitarian and democratic ideas. He saw France during the Revolutionary Era as pitted between two revolutions: first an egalitarian one that began in 1789 and then Bonaparte's authoritarian one of 1799. The egalitarian side did not extinguish itself with Napoleon and instead resurrected itself in 1830, 1848 and 1871, all revolutions taken place as the monarchy tried to make itself more authoritarian. Furet served as Director of Studies at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales in Paris and as a professor in the Committee on Social Thought at the University of Chicago. He died in 1997.
- [9] **(Translator's note)** Indigenous inhabitants of New Caledonia seeking independence from France.
- [10] Claude Lefort, *L'Invention démocratique*, Le livre de poche-Biblio-Essais, 1981. All the quotations of Lefort which follow are drawn from this book.
- [11] C. Castoriadis, *L'institution imaginaire de la société*, Le Seuil, 1975.
[In English as *The Imaginary Institution of Society*. Polity Press, Cambridge, 1982]
- [12] **(Translator's note)** Pierre Clastres, *The society against the state*, Ed. Aperture 1980.
- [13] Félix Fénéon (dans Le Père Peinard)
- [14] Pierre Lantz, *Genèse de Droits de l'Homme : citoyenneté, droits sociaux et droits des peuples*, L'homme et la société, no 3-4, 1987.
- [15] François Furet and others, *Terrorisme et démocratie*.
- [16] Marx/Engels Collected Works, Volume 3, (Lawrence & Wishart), 1975.
- [17] **(Translator's note)** Journalist and right-wing politician in France, founder of Hersant Group of Companies
- [18] **(Translator's note)** Media tycoon in the UK. He possesses Daily Mirror, Sunday Mirror, Scottish Daily Record, Sunday Mail, half MTV's shares and other European TV channels
- [19] *Les déclarations des droits de l'homme de 1799*, Textes réunis et présentés par Christine Fauré, Payot, 1988. See also, for example, the draft of Sieyès which conceived citizens as «shareholders of the grand social enterprise».
- [20] *Pour un monde sans innocents*, La Banquise No 4
- [21] *ibid*
- [22] E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*. The quotes are taken from page 19 of the Penguin edition. **(Translator's Note)** London Corresponding Society was founded in London by Thomas Hardy in 1792. It consisted of Tradesmen, Shopkeepers and Mechanics, aiming to universal suffrage. It has often been claimed as the first definitely working-class political organisation formed in Britain. However, Thompson claims that it may be more accurate to think of it as a "popular Radical" society than as "working class". The fact that many of its members were artisans gave them the opportunity to become masters themselves (as Hardy eventually became).

[23] **(Translator's note)** Spartacus revolt (73 BC) was one of the three slave rebellions in ancient Rome. Spartacus' army, consisting of slaves and gladiators, defeated many Roman Legions before being crushed in two battles where 5 to 6 thousands rebels were slaughtered.

[24] **(Translator's note)** The Peasants' War is one of the most significant popular revolts in central Europe between 1524 and 1525. The war was in part an expression of the religious upheaval known as the Reformation, during which critics of the Roman Catholic Church challenged the prevailing religious and political order. Of course, the material reasons of the revolt lay in peasants' miserable living conditions throughout Europe. At its peak point, more than 300000 peasants were involved, while over 100000 were killed.

[25] **(Translator's note)** Big miners' strikes took place in Ruhr in 1889 and again in 1905. Miners represented the most militant section in the class composition of the prewar Germany. They were perhaps the only class section that could mobilise others into struggle. In 1889, a spontaneous strike turned into a massive wave of strikes. Kaiser and Bismarck were forced to intervene, as unions were incapable of confining the struggle and Ruhr's barons remained intolerant. Finally, all of miners' demands were met, apart from their demand that the time wasted to and from workplace to be included in the 8-hour workday. It was precisely this demand that ignited the 1905 struggle. (See Sergio Bologna, *Class composition and the theory of the party at the origins of the workers' council movement*)

[26] **(Translator's note)** In early March 1976 a general strike took place in Vitoria lasting for many days. During street fighting police killed 3 persons.

[27] **(Translator's note)** In Gdansk (Poland) during August 1980, striking workers demanded among other things the constitution of independent unions, the abolition of censorship and the release of political prisoners. The demands of the strikers' committee are known as the "21 demands". As workers' demands were met, the union "Solidarity" was founded. "Solidarity" had more than 10 millions members. A year later, the union went underground due to the martial law imposed in Poland under the pressure of the USSR.

[28] On May 15, three hundred young workers went on strike and blockaded the factory. By the next day they had carried behind them the rest of the factory, and then the whole of Renault.

[29] **(Translator's note)** During 1986 there had been 14 one-day strikes organised by the unions in response to rank and file pressure. Although strike committees began to emerge during these strikes, the symbolic nature of the strikes rendered them ineffectual. Then in November, a non-union train driver from Paris Nord circulated a petition demanding better conditions and the scrapping of a project for salaries based on promotion by merit. Other drivers brought out a leaflet reiterating the demands and calling for an unlimited strike from December 18th. The strike spread like wildfire, without a single call from the unions. On December 20th non-drivers joined in as well. The strikers were defeated, without having had all their demands met and there was a full return to work by January 14th. Movement's own limits have contributed in this too, as strikers didn't break completely with the unions, despite their efforts to autonomously organise their struggle, nor did they succeeded in crushing sectional barriers. (See *The class struggles in France: the movement of winter 1995*, in *Aufheben* #5, autumn 1996)

[30] **(Translator's note)** Union controlled by the Socialist Party

[31] **(Translator's note)** Trotskyist union

[32] See on this subject Henri Simon *To the bitter end*, Ed. Acratie

[33] See the leaflet *We who amongst other things are users and unemployed*

[34] **(Translator's note)** Striking nurses acted in the name of a national coordination, demanding major wage increases and better training. After the rest of the unions had retreated, only CGT supported the movement.

[35] **(Translator's note)** Today, this is the oldest building in Potsdam and has become a museum.

[36] **(Translator's note)** Science and research park in South France.