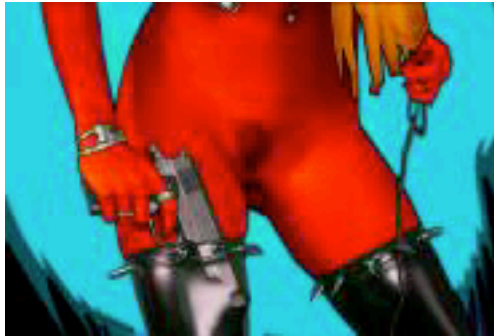


Loaded Words



A Guide to the Spectacle

Proletariat, n: The class of all those who have to sell their labour-power in order to survive, and who, therefore, have no control over the use of their own lives. This term was originally used by Marx to mean the

industrial workers, but in our time, the proletariat has expanded to include service, technical, and clerical ("white collar") workers -- in fact, the huge majority of the population. Hence the term "proletarianization". Revolutionary theory cannot glorify the proletariat, "proletarian culture", "proletarian morality", etc. This would be only the glorification of alienation itself. What is positive about the proletariat is the historical possibility of its self-negation: since, for the proletariat, to free itself is to abolish itself, by abolishing Capital, class society, and alienated labour. That is its only glory.

Bourgeoisie, n: The class epoch originated in the merchants, usurers, and bankers of the 17th century, and which directed the development of urban industry in the 18th and 19th. It superseded the aristocracy as the political ruling class of Europe during the revolutions of 1640, 1789, etc. In America, the bourgeoisie led the rebellion against colonial domination. Historically, it has been the class of private ownership of the means of social production. It is now being gradually superseded in its turn by the state and corporate bureaucracy (see, for example, the joint management of the "defense" industries by the Pentagon bureaucracy and the corporate ones, the Penn Central affair, etc.) which is tending to merge in the new ruling class of State Capitalism.

State Capitalism, n: the state ownership and management of all means of life. This form of capitalism exists already in the USSR, China, North Vietnam, Cuba, etc. in its pure form (though economically underdeveloped) form, under the guise of "Socialism". These were countries where there was no strong native bourgeoisie to carry out industrialization; the various Leninist parties took over the task of accumulating capital and the proletariat, after they seized the state. State-capitalism remains capitalism because there is still a proletariat, that is, the vast majority still do not directly control their own lives, because they sell control over their daily lives to the state for a wage, and because a surplus for trade in the world market, military armament, and amassing of capital goods for heavy industry is still being accumulated by the state bosses out of the forced labour of the workers. Thus, everywhere there is still capital, and capital still reigns supreme in the world.

Alienation, n: In its original juridical definition, alienation refers to "transfer of the title to property by one person to another by conveyance (as distinguished from inheritance): e.g., to alienate lands." Also,

interestingly enough, mental "alienation" was a 19th century euphemism for insanity: "alienist" was the term for "psychiatrist" until early in this century.

Marx used the term specifically as a synonym for the sale of labour in any form (i.e., "labour" both as labour-power itself (self-power), living labour, and a s dead labour, labour turned into an object, goods).

To paraphrase Perlman in "The Reproduction of Daily Life", through sale, the labour of an individual becomes the property of another, it is appropriated by another, it comes under the control of another. In other words, a person's activity becomes the activity of another, the activity of its owner; it becomes alien to the person who performs it. Thus one's life, the accomplishments of an individual in the world, the difference which his life makes in the life of humanity, are not only transformed into labour, a painful condition for survival; they are transformed into alien activity, activity as if performed by the buyer of that labour. In capitalist societies, the architects, the engineers, the laborers, are not referred to as "builders": the man who buys their labour is called "the builder". The workers in a branch of industry are not referred to as "the producers": the owner of the industry, the management, or the corporate name is. The projects, calculations, and motions carried out by the workers are not their own, are not decided by them, but are executions of the orders of others and are thus alien to them; their living activity, their accomplishments, belong to capital.

"Academic sociologists, who take the sale of labour for granted, understand this alienation of labour as a feeling: the worker's activity 'appears' alien to the worker, it 'seems' to be controlled by another. However, any worker can explain to the academic sociologist that the alienation is not only a feeling and an idea in the worker's head, but a real fact about the worker's daily life. The sold activity is in fact alien to the worker; his labour is in fact controlled by its buyer. Alienation exists subjectively and objectively."

"In exchange for his activity, the worker gets money, the means of survival in capitalist society. With this money he can buy commodities, things, but he cannot buy back his activity. This reveals a peculiar 'gap' in money as the 'universal equivalent'. A person can sell commodities for money, and he can buy the same commodities with money. He can sell his living activity for money. An unequal exchange hides under the appearance of equity in the exchange between capital and living labour."

"The things the worker buys with his wages are first of all consumer goods which enable him to survive, to reproduce his labour-power so as to be able to continue selling it; and they are spectacles, objects for passive admiration. He consumes and admires the products of human activity passively. He does not exist in the world as an active agent who transforms it, but as a helpless, impotent spectator; he may call this state of powerless admiration 'happiness', and since labour is painful, he may desire to be 'happy', namely inactive, all his life (a condition similar to being dead). The commodities, the spectacles, consume him; he uses up living energy in passive admiration; he is consumed by things. In this sense, the more he has, the less he is."

The consequences of this central fact, this alienation, by the vast majority of people, of their socially productive powers, of their very selves in a social sense, are devastating. More and more human relations become commodity relations -- people are brought together and interact, not out of some mutual affinity, but on terms defined by money exchange. Think of an average day: you get up, you go to work -- where the people around you, your co-workers, aren't there because they like working together, or because they all enjoy what they're doing, but because they have to be there, to receive wages, to survive. You get off work, go to the supermarket -- the other shoppers are alien; you have nothing in common with most of them except being there to buy. The same with the laundromat, the bar, nightclub or theater you go to. Human beings are mostly brought together in modern society to do things for money or to get things for money. We are the servants of money. Relationships based on real shared desire, on real affinity, are being rapidly squeezed out. No wonder the struggle for contact with another person feels genuine, that comes about as a result of the wills of the individuals, is so desperate. People who are treated as objects, as machines, and who are forced by the conditions of their lives to treat others the same way, start to acquire the characteristics of objects, of machines. Their senses grow dull from the constant attempt to avoid being bruised by more meaningless collisions, more empty exchanges with objectified people. Even thinking becomes pointless because it can't affect anything, so we forget how to think, or think only in spectacular, fetishized, reified categories offered by the ruling power. Life is reduced to survival, to the daily fight to keep from dying of boredom, to keep from seeing what our existence has become.

But the more total alienation becomes, the more it forces people to wake up inside it: the energy of their desperation is the same energy that can build the new world. Revolutionaries are those whose alienated

consciousness has become the consciousness of their own alienation, who begin to refuse the present world in its entirety. The first step is nihilism, the desire to negate categorically the whole bloody senseless nightmare. A nihilism which has acquired strategy, tactics, and analysis is already at the threshold of revolutionary theory. But revolutionary theory is a nihilism that has transformed itself from within: it recognizes its one positive in the subjective will and desires of human beings. It sees the old world as the totality of alienated relationships and begins to attack it on all fronts. The goal of the revolutionary movement can be nothing less than the end of all alienation.

Postnote(s):

1) Alienation cannot completely flip the object into the subject and vice-versa. Its inversion is but that of partiality. It is in this reservoir that a common project is to be born. We do have something in common with all we encounter on the terrain of shadows - and that is our will to live. It is in the subdued laugh, the wry wink, the paused truth that we will find a greater self locked within others - and they within us. The above can tend to bleaken a bit much, as if alienation can produce itself without us. Not true. It takes one to mangle.

2) The commodity and money are symptomatic. The belief that their re-inversion can take place without total change is like believing that shedding wool clothes will turn the Winter cold into Spring sunshine.

3) The "attack on all fronts" should emphasize that "all" means "totality", not just a sum of the parts, as the Left(behinds) always practice.

Reification, n: The mental inversion of abstract ideas into concrete things, and conversely, of real subjects into apparent objects. For example, the headline "USA and USSR Sign Treaty" gives to the concepts "USA" and "USSR" the verbal status of material entities and the will (self-power) of real human beings. In fact what has happened is that two sets of bureaucrats representing their respective ruling classes have signed an agreement. Similarly, banks offer you 5% interest, cars teach you how to live, motorcycles conquer boredom, detergents are kind to your hands. Meanwhile, the bureaucracies, their cost-efficiency experts and market researchers, continue to reduce human beings to the status of things (quantifiable, statistical, predictable, manipulable) in their plans for the permanent Golden Age of worldwide state-capitalism. Reification is the means and the end of the upside-down world of the commodity.

When we use the term "bourgeoisie" and "proletariat" in an active sense, we are always aware that these classes are made up of greater or lesser numbers of real human beings, with real desires. The bourgeoisie is

already conscious of itself as a class. The point is for the proletariat also to become so, and thus move, theoretically and practically, towards negating itself as a class. While class-consciousness for the bourgeoisie means the false awareness of itself as the only "subject", class-consciousness for the proletariat is a real awareness of itself as an "object": it is an object in the sense that capitalist society treats every one of its members as an object, as a production-machine and as a consumption-machine. Proletarians will continue to be acted on as objects until each one rediscovers his or her own subjectivity, at first passively in realizing that together they themselves re-create their society every day in its own image, by continuing to play the roles assigned them ("worker", "consumer", "viewer", "student", etc.) and then actively in stopping the old world's "reproduction of itself" by a general strike, workplace occupations and, should they make that qualitative leap, beginning to create the new world by means of generalized self-management. Self-management is the practical negation of reification because it allows (demands) the maximum participation of each proletarian in the concerted action of his or her class, and thus in the abolition of classes: human beings can no longer be "objects" nor can things, divested of their commodity-value, become "subjects".

Ideology, n: The generic term used in revolutionary theory for systems of false consciousness. At the heart of every ideology, "revolutionary" and reactionary alike, lies a reification, an essential inversion of subject and object. Ideology is always alienation accepted, reification accepted: thus it always takes the side of the dominant class, or a new group seeking domination as a class, in the struggles of the world. Religious ideology is the oldest and simplest example: the fantastic projection called "God" creates and rules the world, especially mankind, and is the Supreme Subject of the cosmos, acting on every human being as "His" object. In the reactionary ideology of bourgeois political economy, capital is the real and "really productive" subject of world history, with the "invisible hand" of the capital system guiding human development even against human desire and will. On the other hand, the revolutionary ideology of Leninism sees its Party as the true subject and rightful dictator of world history, with the proletariat and capital as objects on which it operates. The examples could go on and on.

But the secret of the "separate ideas" of ideology lies in their connection with separate power. Every ideology is the theoretical self-defense of a ruling power, or of a power that seeks to rule. The separate class of those who rule must deny subjectivity, both theoretically and practically, to the rest of the people, the classes over which they rule. The ruling

group maintaining the passivity and impotence of the ruled majority is identical with the task of maintaining their rule itself, their separate power. "From now on, revolutionary theory is the enemy of all revolutionary ideology, and knows it."

Leninism, n: Ideology of state-capitalism in its revolutionary form, as propounded by V.I. Lenin, leader of the Bolshevik Party, in his "What Is To Be Done?" and other works. The Leninist form of organization is the so-called vanguard party, a tightly-organized, hierarchical body which, by incorporating a number of workers into its ranks (usually dominated by the intellectuals) claims to speak -- and then to rule -- in the name of the working class. The Party's organizational ideology, "democratic centralism", consists in the election by members of a permanent Central Committee, which then governs the Party from the top down: internal "discussion" of its directives is permitted, but no mention of such disputes is allowed outside the Party itself. Obviously, to speak of such an organization as "democratic" is as laughable as it is disgusting. Thus the other facet of Leninist ideology, which generally approves of "workers' councils", "workers' control", etc. is completely self-contradictory. The Soviets and factory committees in the Russia of 1917, which had sprung up spontaneously to administer all social life, were truly democratic, or well on the way to being so: they also made the "state-power" which the Bolsheviks had seized "for" them, totally unnecessary, and by extension, the Bolsheviks also. From that moment on, the Russian Revolution was a struggle for power between the Party and the autonomous workers' organizations: the massacre of the Free Soviet of the Kronstadt workers and sailors in 1921 sounded its death knell.

Thus, Stalin was perfectly correct (Trotsky to the contrary notwithstanding) when he claimed to be Lenin's ideological and practical heir. Stalinism is no more than internally consistent Leninism: "Trotskyism" is a juggling-act, an impossible bureaucratic fantasy in which a permanent state of dual power would be maintained between Party and workers' councils. The fact that this fantasy has been negated over and over again in historical practice does not deter buffoons like Ernest Mandel and the "theoreticians" of the Socialist Workers' Party (SWP) from serving up endless, elaborately constructed models of "The Leninist Theory of Organization" and "democratic centralist workers' self-management" which have all the practical value of perpetual-motion machines. Mandel's vision of a glorious socialist future is compulsory university education for all, and a good social welfare system.

As for the Maoists, they are now no more than the most pathetic religious

fanatics, desperately clinging to the "True Path" long after their obese and senile Messiah has lumbered off to embrace Richard Nixon and other well known anti-imperialists. The vast State Church of Maoism blew itself apart in China during the so-called "Cultural Revolution" (an ideological monster, this: it was not a revolution in any meaningful sense, and culture had nothing to do with it) and the Peking bureaucrats had to suppress both a new Warlordism and a nascent proletarian rebellion by means of the Army, on whose power they now prefer to rely.

Castroism, Guevarism, Ben-Bellaism, Titoism, Ceauseescuism, Hoxhaism, Hoism, Allendism -- the list is endless: but all of them are essentially ideological disguises for the power of state-capitalism, the power of the bureaucracy as ruling class. Leninism is merely the trunk from which the whole rotten tree has grown: among the tasks of any revolutionary organization is chopping it down.

Spectacle, n: The organization of appearances made possible through modern means of communication (media). The ease with which images can be detached and alienated from their sources, and reorganized for re-presentation in accord with the ideology of the ruling power, forms the technical basis of the unprecedented scope of the modern spectacle, where "everything that was once directly lived has moved away into its representation". For example, an advertisement on TV shows a family in a car driving happily into the country, then "having fun" in the close proximity of the car, which watches over them like a guardian angel. The car is being shown in its most pleasurable possible context: the image of the car is then linked with the image of "having fun" suggesting the need to buy the car as a means of "buying" this experience. But in actual fact, while the ad is being shown, millions of people are not out in their cars "having fun": they are in front of TV sets consuming this image, passively.

The organization of spectacular activity is the organization of real social passivity and pacification -- the grouping of human beings as spectators around the one-sided reception of the images of their own alienated life. The spectacle is not a collection of images but a social relation among people mediated by images. Real relations between people are transformed into relations between images: for example, the image of "Sammy Davis Jr." embracing the image of "Richard Nixon" on TV is supposed to show that the real human being Nixon, as a representative of middle America, is not a racist, and that the real human being Sammy Davis Jr., as a representative of black America, loves and respects Nixon. Again, when a "movie star" or "sports star" advertises a product, we are

supposed to respond to their image as an ideal, and therefore to emulate it by associating ourselves with the images with which they associate themselves.

But the process goes further: spectacles become topics of conversation, discussion, and even the subject of further spectacles (e.g., "The Tonight Show"). The conversation of urban children is monopolized by arguments about (and even renditions of) the TV programs they simultaneously watched the night before. Communications of lived experience become communications of (and about) spectacles, communication of passivity, non-communication. The spectacle in general names the ensemble of the social relations of non-communication, of isolation. Real means of communication would be means to dialogue as opposed to the technologies of "unilogue" which have developed with the spectacle. Unilateral, one-way communication is always authoritarian: the giving of orders.

The nightmare of the spectacle, of images which take on a "life" of their own, is fully realized when people consciously attempt to live up to the images with which they are presented: even in lovemaking, potentially the most perfect form of communication (the unity of pleasure-giving and pleasure-getting), human beings are constantly trying to present images of themselves to each other -- "stud", "sensuous woman", etc. -- the immediate contact of two human beings is lost in the pseudo-lovemaking of their spectacular images. (This is now officially recognized as a "problem" by sexologists).

Meanwhile, the goods and services (commodities) produced by the proletariat are also part of the spectacle, in that they are sold back to the proletariat which produced them by means of their images: in advertising, the act of consumption itself is a spectacle. Commodity consumption becomes the only kind of consumption. "There are fewer and fewer gratifications for which one does not have to pay". Spectacular existence is by definition schizoid. The alienation of the spectator to the profit of the contemplated object (which is the result of his own unconscious activity) is expressed in the following way: "the more he contemplates the less he lives; the more he accepts recognizing himself in the dominant images of need, the less he understands his own existence and his own desires.... in that his own gestures are no longer his but those of another who re-presents them to him". (Debord, "The Society of the Spectacle").

Broadly considered, the spectacle is capital to such a degree of

accumulation that it becomes an image, i.e., becomes visible. Since the present world is nothing other than capital in its concentrated self-deployment, the spectacle is capital creating a world in its own image. Capital is the material God, and the spectacle is religion (ideology) materialized. As in religion the self-powers of human beings are alienated into the image of "God", so in the spectacle they are alienated into more literal images, which nonetheless become "subjects" of their own sources, the human beings themselves. This is as true of the "heroic proletarian" of the Chinese propaganda poster as it is of the "happy family" of Madison Avenue imagery. The spectacle, in its various forms, rules the world: the world which it re-presents as its world.

Postnote(s):

1) The example of the car and happiness could be expanded to far more than the passivity of TV, which is too obvious. Passivity does not just depict sitting, as if thinking is to then be considered passive since no movement is possibly noted. It is less the actions (or lack thereof) and more the social relation which should be exemplified here. For instance, it is precisely the critical examining (or gaming with) TV that unfolds the social relationship as it is re-presented in shows, news, ads, segmenting, tone, colors, etc. It is not TV but the relationship with what is on TV that should be understood. This is still a problem today when all the talk of commodities as evil misses the social relationship that binds one to the incompleteness (e.g., partiality) of commodified creations and use.

2) The example of Nixon and Davis, to be more clear, showed Davis spectacularly embracing the policies of Nixon, not Nixon. Seeing Davis as "black America" and Nixon as "middle America" is a spectacular view, as well. I think the example got clouded with the dislike of Nixon's policies, which in fact, were not even his own - but those of a system.

3) The "movie star", "rock star", and "sports star" are now the products; it is no longer what they use but what they are (not) that is produced. They are images separated from their sources by a social relationship of the consumer more so in many cases than those of the producer. The spectacles are only possible by a mutual inclusive relationship between the image and the consumer of that image as a pseudo-fulfillment of alienated activity/life. They are only possible because of this social relationship. It is not movies, not music, not sports. It is the underlying social relationship which separates and re-presents a substanceless vitality to the image so that others may appear to live their lives again. Sorry gang, it works only partially and the "endless" well of funding to consume more and more is going dry. The "fake it 'til you make it" world meets the real world of "fictitious capital" and the overspending of future assets - and, suddenly it's capital crisis time!

4) Isolation is to be understood as not just "the aloneness of one" but as human activity being disconnected from its source. The attempts to re-connect are provided for by the same social relations that require the disconnection. The multitude of pseudo-communities (e.g., "women's movement", "black community", "abused husbands", "orphans", "left-handed masturbators") exemplify the degree to which partiality can go without challenging that which maintains and requires it. Isolation is a group is isolation supreme!

Recuperation, n: The name for the technique common to the various means, other than direct violent repression, which Power uses to bring rebellion back under its control. The three main means of recuperation used today are (i) fragmentation, (ii) diversion, and (iii) spectacularization. Sometimes only one method is used, sometimes two, sometimes all three.

Fragmentation was used successfully against the various rebellious movements of the 1960's -- "student struggles" were separated from "black struggles", which were separated from "women's struggles", etc. All these partial movements remained partial (and were, for the time being, defeated even in terms of their partial demands) because they lacked a total critique of society. Though there were moments in all of them -- the early SDS (Students for a Democratic Society) and the Free Speech Movement, the Watts and Detroit riots, the W.I.T.C.H. demonstrations at the Miss America Pageant -- when real coherence began to appear in their practice, and even to some extent in their theory, these rebellions petered out in isolation. They fell victim not only to the spectacular separations which "official" powers had already imposed, but also to the manipulations of various social-democratic and Leninist bureaucrats, armed with their assortment of ideological smokescreens. Wherever these parasites penetrated, they laid their little eggs of collapse, by treating the different groups as constituencies, thereby reinforcing the false divisions among them. They masked this counter-revolutionary activity (building towards the establishment of themselves as a new power) under the proclamations of a meaningless, abstract "unity" and "solidarity" (the Trotskyists are especially notorious for this). In fact, real solidarity can only appear among the various groups on the basis of shared desires, which must give rise to a shared theory and practice; when the whole of everyday life is what everyone wants to change, they can then all fight side by side.

The absence of a total critique also makes possible the use of diversion: here, movements are channeled into reformism because they lack a clear consciousness of the full implications of their own goals. The women's movement is a prime example: as long as the enemy is seen as "sexism" and the oppressor as "men", power can accommodate all but the bitterest and most determined rebels, who then find themselves isolated under the label of "extremists", "dykes", "bitches", etc. This usually has the effect of deepening their false consciousness: they turn in on themselves, suppressing their own pleasure-instincts, and retreat into a strange nether world of apocalyptic fantasies (Volarie Solanas and SCUM,

for example) in which men are abolished and the world is left to women who reproduce asexually. Still other feminists become trapped in the delusions of the maoist, Trotskyist, and "anti-imperialist" groups. Clear parallels can be seen throughout in the history of the black movement: Ms. is sold alongside Ebony on the racks, while more and more intelligent women are forced into exclusive homosexuality, more and more sensitive young blacks head for the rooftops with M-16s. An older example of diversionary recuperation is, of course, the labour movement: the unions are by their very essence reformist.

Finally, spectacularization of movements in their partial form (with the real content carefully avoided) renders them first "familiar" and then boring. They become defined by their shallow appearances -- "crazy niggers", "spoilt brat students", "bra-burning man-haters", and so on. The growing rebellion against work itself is currently being given the spectacular tag of "Blue-Collar Blues"; while the extreme oppression of assembly-line workers is used as a kind of moral bludgeon, much in the way mothers guilt-trip their kids by telling them to "think of the starving children in India". How lucky we are to be autoworkers! In the spectacle, misery is always somewhere else. The totality of poverty is fragmented into the sum of its parts -- bad housing, pollution, job boredom, sexual frustration, racial discrimination -- all of which labels are used over and over again until no one can see the forest for the trees. Repetition to the point of habituation is one of the techniques through which the spectacle spreads its narcosis.

What can resist recuperation? A total revolutionary movement, which uses subversive attacks on the spectacle wherever it tries to re-present it; whose critical theory is as all-embracing as its practical assault, and which has but one end in view: a world of free creative human beings and unlimited pleasure, to be brought about by means of generalized self-management.

Postnote(s):

1) I always preferred the Bowel Liberation Movement to all the ABC acronyms of the Left-Behinds with their duct-tape and bureaucratic string.

2) The Industrial Workers of the World (I.W.W. aka "Wobblies") do not fit conveniently into the dismissal of unions. Their rejection of the tactics of DeLeon (Socialist Labour Party) and Eugene Debs posited that the "point of production" is precisely where economic democracy is neither a "magical" nor "deified" concept - direct democracy refuses the "same old crippled dance" and posits and exemplifies the "new world within the shell of the old".

Subversion, n: (translation of the French *detournement*, literally "diversion"). The process by which the spectacle is turned back on itself, turned inside-out so that it reveals its own inner workings, which are the truth of the present world. This can be done in all kinds of ways: a good example is *Point Blank!*'s recent "takeover" of the UC (University of California) campus student newspaper, *The Daily Cal*, in which the editors announced that, since nothing ever happens in Berkeley, they were going to cease publication, and were turning the last issue over to a group of people who would describe the life of the student and sub-student in highly critical detail, and suggest what these people (the students) could do to make their lives really interesting (by taking back their lives into their own hands). Radio, television, comic strips, posters, etc. can all be used in similar ways. The momentary subversive negation by everyone of the society which produces it and which in turn produces.

Subversion is essentially playful: in a broader sense, subversion can be seen as the re-entry of play into any given aspect of daily life, at first on the level of disrupting the organization of appearances, and, with the successful extension and generalization of the "situation" thus created, on the level of transforming the organization of society itself, by putting all its techniques, its tools, its structures, its entire space-time, to new purposes. "Only play can deconsecrate, open up the possibilities of total freedom. This is the principle of subversion; the freedom to change the sense of everything which serves Power; the freedom, for example, to turn a cathedral, a civic center, or a shopping mall into a fun-fair, into a labyrinth, into a dreamscape...." - *Raoul Vaneigem*

Self-Management, n: (French: *autogestion*). Direct management of social production, distribution, and communication by the producers and their communities. Not to be confused with "workers' control", "co-management" (aka "co-gestion"), etc. which, under private or state capitalism, is merely a way of having workers organize their own alienation -- they merely check-up on management or at most are allowed to elect representatives who, on a joint board with the real managers, decide on such matters as how best to fulfill production quotas, etc. -- all the decisions that change NOTHING. We also separate our use of the term from Yugoslav "self-management" wherein workers become stockholders in their own capitalists enterprises producing commodities which compete against one another in a market economy, and elect a directorate committee to manage it -- under, of course, the close supervision of the Party and State bureaucracies.

Historically, self-management has appeared again and again all over the world -- in Russia in 1905 and 1917, in Spain in 1936-37, in Hungary in 1956, and most recently in Algeria in 1960 and Chile in 1972. The form of organization most often created in the practice of self-management has been the Workers' Council (in Russian, "soviet"). What usually happens is that the workers in a given factory, transport system, communications exchange, etc. form a general assembly which then elects committees of delegates to handle specific tasks, including self-defense and coordination with other enterprises which have also been seized by workers. Operations are then re-started under the workers' management and in accord with the needs defined by them - obviously, during a revolutionary crisis, the most important sectors would be production of food, weapons, and electrical power, and the continued provision of medical care, telecommunication, and transportation services.

At their highest moments, the councils have made all state power unnecessary -- their main failure in the past (with the partial exception of the Spanish workers and peasants of Catalonia in 1936-37) has lain in not realizing this, and thence destroying by force of arms the remaining bastions of and pretenders to the state. Self-management is the practical, determinate negation of the state and of capital. It makes possible the abolition of wage-labour and the commodity economy, and the end of all alienation -- in fact, it is the means that the proletariat uses to abolish itself by abolishing all classes. Self-management can tolerate no compromise with any separate power -- power over and above the self-organized population; any administration which takes control of their own lives out of their own hands.

How is the formation of a new state power avoided? Firstly, of course, by the suppression of all "revolutionary parties" along with the old reactionary one. Secondly, by ensuring that all power emanates from the general assemblies of workers and communities alone -- that the general assemblies themselves are the councils, and not any committee of delegates emanating from them. Of course, a central, society-wide coordinating body must be established, but its members must remain strictly mandated, so that their function is limited to generalizing communication ("executory dialogue") and to carrying out the explicit wishes of their constituent general assemblies. No hierarchy of councils wherein control over delegates by base assemblies would be mediated through another delegated body, can be tolerated. All delegates must be recallable at any time by their base.

In a modern society, their proceedings would be constantly televised and shown on monitor-screens everywhere: assemblies could elect rotating "watch committees" to keep an eye on them. Among other reasons, delegates could be recalled for being boring. (It goes without saying that the membership of the central coordinating council must be rotated too, as often as possible: we must guard against the appearance of any new specialists in power, as also the power of specialists).

Finally it must be understood that the ultimate assurance of the success of self-management rests not with form -- no formal guarantee, however elaborate will be enough in itself -- but with content. On the individual level, this content is the consciousness, in the vast majority of the proletariat, of a deep desire for and an unswerving intent toward a free, creative, pleasurable life, under their own control. On the collective level, this content is what is being self-managed. Clearly, if this is only the existing economy, the existing type of production (assembly-lines, fragmented, boring work in general), the existing world -- self-management is doomed to failure; it would be pointless anyway. Self-management, on the contrary, must be the collective administration of the total transformation of the world, of every aspect of daily existence.

Clearly, this broadens the definition of self-management considerably. First of all, neighborhood or community councils of non-wage-earners (ex-housewives, ex-students, ex-school kids) would also be formed, which would exchange delegates and soon whole work-teams with the factory, communications, and transport councils. No one would have to do the same thing all the time: the really unpleasant tasks would be rotated until they could be eliminated through new technology. New parks could be created; churches, office-blocks, and other now-useless buildings could be put to new and playful purposes (rock musicians could, for example, could have places to practice); living arrangements could be completely restructured to suit everyone. This, of course is the merest beginning: the longer self-management continues successfully on a global scale after the victory of the federated councils over all states, the more astounding and marvelous could be the changes made -- changes almost beyond our present capacity to imagine.

Let us reiterate that self-management is not an abstract idea, a utopian master-plan to be injected into the minds of "the masses". Nearly all the things described above have already been done, and the essentials -- the formation of councils, their federation by means of strictly mandated, revocable delegates, and their immediate attempts to transform the social environment -- not once, but many times. Self-management sees

its small beginnings in the de facto control of the shop-floor by the workers in the millions of factories everywhere, in organized sabotage to slow down the lines, in factory occupations and "work-ins". To paraphrase Marx, we call self-management the real movement which abolishes the present state of things. We can only add -- abolishes them so as to create a world of marvels.

Postnote(s):

1) Once again, see how the delegates operate as defined by the I.W.W. locals, is organized:

"One Big Union"

<http://digital.lib.msu.edu/radicalism/onebigunion/AER.html>).

See also the following:

"The Workers Councils as Organisational Foundation of Communist Production"

<http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Acropolis/8195/gik-pc.htm>

"Worker's Self-Management"

http://flag.blackened.net/revolt/ws/ws50_factory.html

2) Remember, a world based on neither *centralism* nor *de-centralism* -- but on *omni-centralism* (the center is everywhere)... enveloping principles learned from history, ecology, and physics' "the whole is greater than the sum of its parts" -- use of the tools of the internet and telecommunications to establish communication and access information required to make decisions on a global and local scale.

3) If you can get a hold of the two 90-minute cassette tapes "The End of Prehistory" (Berkeley, post-1974) fascinating discussions regarding possible worlds illuminate just how much we have to win.

The preceding is an attempt to present a basic terminology as a point of departure. Not "cut in stone", it certainly deserves critical examination; more so, it yearns for modifications with all that has been lived, learned and lost in the 25 plus years since its original formulation and publication. The source from which comes this "lust for life", is certainly worth attention - for without yourself, there is nothing. - Lust for Life

Originally published in "New Morning" (Berkeley, CA. USA) in February 1973.

Re-published in "The Spectacle", Volume 1, Number 6 (East Lansing, Michigan USA) circa 1973-1974.

*This edition (r)epublished by "Lust for Life"
v1.0 (RTF) - March 2002
v1.1 (PDF) - December 2002
v1.2 (PDF) - March 2005*

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