

# Characteristics of the French Labour Movement (With Two Appendices)

*Writings of Jacques Camatte 1959–1964–1971 Translated by Balance y Avante 2024*

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**Introduction: the point of arrival..... 1**  
**The French Workers' Movement and the Revolution of 1789.....7**  
    I. The French Revolution in the cycle of the Bourgeois Revolution..... 7  
    The French Revolution and capitalism..... 8  
    Bourgeoisie and the universalization of social relations..... 11  
    Bourgeois and proletarian revolution..... 20  
**APPENDIX I..... 34**  
**APPENDIX II..... 48**

## Introduction: the point of arrival

It was two months ago that the XVIIth Congress of the P.C.F. was held. It was very much in line with the previous ones, particularly the XVIth, to which we devoted an article *Les amis du peuple*<sup>1</sup>. We find in these two congresses three fundamental demands: 1. a renewed democracy with a republican state; 2. the unification of democratic forces (a unification that is all the more necessary now that personal power is stronger); 3. recognition of the irreplaceable role of the P.C.F. in the nation. But the insults to the proletariat, the mockery of its historic mission, were more precisely expressed. Two examples will suffice, both taken from what might be called the Algerian question. The first concerns the P.C.F.'s action in support of the Algerian revolution. Waldeck Rochet recounts:

*"The scale of our efforts was all the more necessary because it was a question of overcoming nationalist and chauvinist prejudices that had been firmly entrenched for over a century by the French bourgeoisie in the broadest strata of the French people".*

Now, everyone knows that, for the Stalino-Krushchevites, the proletariat is part of the people. So the proletariat is chauvinist and colonialist. The first insult. But who, if not Saint-Thorez, has instilled in the ranks of the proletariat a love of the fatherland, a desire to reconcile proletarian internationalism with the greatness of France? On the other hand, W. Rochet goes on to cite as examples of struggles to help the Algerian revolution *"the mass political strikes of February 1, 1960 and April 27, 1961"*, which were in fact strikes against the right, in support of de Gaulle, against whom we should be fighting today. Rochet was careful not to mention the spontaneous movement of recalled servicemen or the 1956 strikes in Saint-Nazaire. He would have had to explain why these movements could not have had any effect, which would have led him to explain, with quotes from Lenin and dialectical alchemy, that the P.C.F. had been obliged to betray these movements, and thus the Algerian revolution, in the interests of French greatness. They have destroyed the autonomous struggle of the proletariat, then come to insult it.

The second example relates to the characterization given to present-day Algerian society. W. Rochet hails *"the progress made by the young People's Democratic Republic of Algeria and the determination of its government to follow the path of socialism"*. This simply means that the road to socialism can be travelled without the action of the Communist Party. This is an insult of historic proportions. The proletariat has always struggled to constitute itself as a class, and therefore as a party, in order to bring down the bourgeoisie's class state and establish its dictatorship, which will enable the development of socialism. W. Rochet's assertion is tantamount to throwing Marxism overboard and telling the

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<sup>1</sup> *Programme Communiste*, no. 16, 1961. This article is of little interest. (Note from October 2009)

proletariat — in effect — that all its efforts to emancipate itself were useless, since it was fighting for something inessential.

All this is a permanent feature of the activity of the P.C.F. Only the XVIIth Congress is presenting itself as having its own specific characteristics, which give it great importance in the total decomposition of this Party.

It was, in fact, a congress not for communists but for socialists, a meeting at which it was proclaimed that the only way for the P.C.F. to exist was to unite with the S.F.I.O. This had been prepared well before the opening of the congress by a series of articles entitled *Problèmes idéologiques et unité*, which appeared in the March issue of *L'Humanité*. The first of these broadly set the tone:

*"The re-establishment of unity, by bringing together communists and socialists in a single party, is a profound aspiration of the workers, who realize how much profit the bourgeoisie derives from division"...*

*"The liquidation of the split is a constant Communist objective."... "We will not rest until we have ensured the unity of the proletariat... One working class united against the bourgeoisie, one union, one party of the proletariat" (Thorez, speech 02.12.1932).*

*"To put an end to the split that has existed since 1920 means learning from the experience of the working class and the people of France " (L'Humanité, 17.03.1964).*

Yes, the tone was set and the slogan found — the 1920 split had to be overcome. Thorez then went on to justify it historically:

*"We've come a long way since 1922, since that Paris congress when, as a young worker, I was delegated by the Pas-de-Calais Federation. It was then that for the first time, on Lenin's recommendation, the problems of working-class unity and the united front with the Socialist Party were put before our party."*

*"Since that time, we have fought tirelessly to put an end to the split. To unite all workers once again in a single fighting front. Our efforts were to culminate in 1934, just thirty years ago, when working-class France rose up against fascism, in the pact of unity of action between the Communist Party and the Socialist Party. This was soon followed by the formation of the Popular Front.... " !!*

*"Communists denounced and fought those who compromised the national heritage and pushed the country into decadence. They returned the Marseillaise and the tricolor flag to the people."*

To achieve this long-awaited unity, we have to put aside everything that might separate us. All preconditions must be removed. Let's unite, then we'll

come up with a program. The P.C.F. is winking at all left-wing political formations, like a whore on the sidewalk. It stays in the here and now so as not to frighten anyone; it only courts the current events to get the success of the day. The P.C.F. parable is almost complete. It's the whore and her great sentiment, national greatness.

To unite, we need to eliminate, after the sole party, the dictatorship of the proletariat. A Paris cell called for this, pointing out that *"in the public mind, this expression" is "interpreted as meaning the existence of a single party"*; that, on the other hand, *"when the expression was used by Lenin, there had not been the Hitler-Franco experience, and the expression dictatorship in the minds of all workers is somewhat linked to the dictatorship of a minority"*. G. Marchais replied to these *"over-hasty comrades"* that *"our Party has rejected the idea that the existence of a single party was an obligatory condition for the transition to socialism"*.

*"But we've gone further. Indeed, we consider that alongside a unified party of the working class, at the service of socialism and the national interest, other parties can exist and collaborate in the building of socialism, thus enabling it to be achieved under the best possible conditions, thanks to a broad alliance between the working class, the toiling peasantry, the intellectuals and the middle classes"*. As we can see, this effectively denies the dictatorship of the proletariat. It's just that we need to keep the term, and not go too fast, as J. Vermeersch would say. As for the second reason, G. Marchais is careful not to point out that it wasn't Lenin who "created" the word, but that Marx had been using it since 1850, as had Flora Tristan since 1840. Poor Marx had never experienced dictatorship. He couldn't find an example in Napoleon I, Napoleon III, the King of Prussia or the Emperor of Germany, while Lenin didn't know that the Tsar's power was dictatorial! The masters of Marxism were truly innocent!

So we can't remove the dictatorship of the proletariat from the statutes. But it can be obscured. This is clear from the political resolution adopted by the XVIIIth Congress, and from W. Rochet's speech. We know the solution: peaceful coexistence must replace the dictatorship phenomenon.

At this point, in calling on the Socialists to unite, they reverted to the language of the minorities of the Tours Congress. That is, of those who were against joining the III. International. A few comparisons between the two will be edifying.

To quote Léon Blum's characterization of the Socialist Party:

*"Our Party was as broadly based as possible. As such, it was a party of freedom of thought, because the two ideas are linked and one necessarily derives from the other. If you want to group all workers, all wage earners, all the exploited into the same party, you can only bring them together on the basis of*

*simple, general formulas. You would say to them: "All those who want to work for the substitution of one economic regime for another, all those who believe — for this is the essence of Marxism — that there is an ineluctable link and connection between the development of capitalism, on the one hand, and socialism, on the other, are socialists. If you agree to work for this goal, your act of faith is complete: you are socialists"*<sup>2</sup>

The Communists understood the advice well, and declared in the new P.C.F. statutes:

*"Between those who accept the present statutes, an association is formed to be called the French Communist Party".*

*"The French Communist Party is the party of the working class of France. It brings together workers, peasants, intellectuals, all those who intend to act for the triumph of the cause of socialism, of communism".*

*"The French Communist Party was founded to enable the working class to create the conditions of happiness and freedom for all, prosperity and security for France, friendship and definitive peace between nations."*

Here, the act of faith can be further consummated. The party is thus a mass party, which is what L. Blum was talking about when he said that the Socialist Party was a recruiting party. The P.C.F. abolishes limits. *"It is open to the winds of our times"*, as Garaudy put it. It's the party of realism. But, according to Garaudy, realism must be without shores, so the party has none!

As far as the dictatorship of the proletariat was concerned, L. Blum had the same position as that adopted by the XVIIth Congress, and he declared: *"We are in favour of it. Here too there is no disagreement of principle. We are so much in favour of it that the notion and theory of the dictatorship of the proletariat was inserted by us into a programme which was an electoral programme"*. Here, L. Blum shows himself to be even stronger, since it is possible, according to him, to conceal the reality associated with this word. *"I think it impossible,"* he says, *"first of all, as has been repeated so often, to conceive in advance and with precision what form such a dictatorship would take, because the very essence of a dictatorship is the suppression of any prior form and of any constitutional prescription"*. And after analysing different forms of dictatorship, he goes on to condemn terrorism. Farewell to the dictatorship of the proletariat, since the latter is not an idyll between classes but the abolition of classes and therefore the application of terrorism.

As far as the programme is concerned, the similarity is even more striking. We will mention only one point because it is very dear to our

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<sup>2</sup> Quotations from Léon Blum are taken from *Le congrès de Tours (1920). Birth of the French Communist Party*, A. Kriegel, ed. Archives Julliard, Paris, 1964 (Note of October 2009).

present-day communists: the convening of a Constituent Assembly! The comparison is still valid for national defence and patriotism. L. Blum affirmed what W. Rochet and company now proclaim: *"that, even in a capitalist regime, international duty and national duty can coexist in a socialist consciousness"*.

So Léon Blum's phrase: *"We are convinced, to the core of our being, that while you go off on adventures, someone has to stay and guard the old house"*, now takes on a strange prophetic flavour. Our current communists are returning to the old house. That is the significance of their last congress. The search for unity and communal integration was Thorez's *"passion"*. The time has come for it to come to fruition. History, it is said, needs great men. When it doesn't have any, it invents them. This means that it gives them life for as long as they are needed. It withdraws them as soon as their role is over. Thorez had become a useless being since unity had been achieved in practice. His mission was over. He had to disappear... With the old house once again inhabited by everyone, there was no longer any need for the apostle of the grand return.

The old house was the old socialist party with its republican and democratic traditions, and Faure, Blum, Longuet, to remind us — in Tours in 1920 — of 1830, 1848, 1871... all considered from a purely democratic angle. They wanted to replace it with something new: *"we are in the presence of something new"* (Blum). Bolshevism was a particular phenomenon due to the backward state of Russia. It cannot be valid for a civilised country like France. Consequently, how can we accept Moscow's diktat, the famous 21 conditions and, in particular, the last one: *"Party members who reject the conditions and theses established by the International must be expelled from the party. The same applies to delegates to the Extraordinary Congress"*.

Our socialist martyrs did not know that the 21 conditions were not the diktat of Moscow but had also been demanded by the Western delegates, as Zinoviev reminded the German socialists at the Halle Congress. The much decried 21st condition had been adopted on the proposal of an Italian delegate, a member of the Abstentionist Fraction which was to become the Italian Communist Left.

The Stalino-Krushchevites who want to establish themselves fully in the old house proclaim:

*"The French Communist Party is the heir to the democratic traditions of the French people [and not of the proletariat, editor's note]. It draws its inspiration from its struggles for national independence, human freedom and social progress, in particular from the experiences of the fighters of the Paris Commune, the first proletarian state in the world, the French workers' party, the unified party of Guesde and Jaurés, and the entire workers' and democratic movement of our country"*.

They consider, like the minorities of Tours, that the Russian Revolution is a particular, incidental case. They reject the Russian Revolution and the 21 conditions, and gloss over the question: "*As for the question: 'Are the conditions [the 21, editor's note] still valid?'*" it can no longer be asked, since the Communist International "*has not existed since 1943*" (L'Humanité, 17.03. 1964).

There can no longer be any obstacle to unity. There can be no more conditions, no more single party, no more dictatorship of the proletariat, because there is no longer a backward country like Russia and there is no longer an International. As for the question: "*Should the CPF always remain a communist party fighting for the world communist revolution?*" This question no longer arises, since the Communist International has not existed since 1943.

The cycle has therefore come full circle, from the split — albeit a small one — in 1920 to the desire for unification in 1964. The only question that remains unanswered — and this time it is we who are asking it — is this: was the real tradition of the proletariat the one enclosed in the old house, a veritable old people's home, or was it in fact represented in the something supposedly new that was Bolshevism? Didn't the Bolsheviks really come to remind the French proletariat of its real struggle; to invite it to leave the house of the dead, filled with bourgeois memories?

To answer this question, we are going to study the original characteristics of the workers' movement, which are linked to the particularities of its origin (its birth). In other words, we need to explain the weight and influence of the French Revolution on this movement. In the periods when it struggled upwards, it was able to overcome this. When it degenerated, when the autonomous struggle was abandoned, the proletariat immersed itself in the people, and became the continuator of 1793, as the minorities of Tours said in 1920 and as today's communists proclaim.

# The French Workers' Movement and the Revolution of 1789

## I. The French Revolution in the cycle of the Bourgeois Revolution

*"The only model for the revolution of 1789, at least in Europe was the revolution of 1648; the only model for this one, the revolt of the Dutch against Spain<sup>3</sup>. Both were, not only in time, but in content, a century ahead of these models."*

*"In both revolutions, the class at the forefront of the movement was the bourgeoisie. The proletariat and the non-bourgeois sections of the population did not yet have interests distinct from the bourgeoisie or did not yet represent well-developed classes or strata. Where they came into opposition to the bourgeoisie, as for example from 1789 to 1794 in France, they fought only for the triumph of its interests, even if not in the bourgeois way. All the terror in France expresses nothing other than the plebeian way of putting an end to the enemies of the bourgeoisie, absolutism, feudalism and the shopkeepers."*

*"The revolutions of 1648 and 1789 were not English or French revolutions, but European-style revolutions. They were not the victory of a particular class of society over the old political order for the new European society. They marked the triumph of the bourgeoisie, but that triumph represented the victory of a new social order. The victory of bourgeois property over feudal property, of the nation over provincialism, of competition over guilds, of sharing over the birthright, of the owner of the land over the domination of owners over the land, of enlightenment over superstition, of the family over family titles, of industry over heroic idleness, of bourgeois law over medieval privileges".*

*"The revolution of 1648 was the revolution of the 17th century against the 16th; that of 1789 the victory of the 18th century over the 17th. They expressed the needs of the world even more than those of the sectors in which they took place, England and France".*

This long quotation from K. Marx extracted from *Bilan de la révolution prussienne de 1848* gives three essential characteristics of the French revolution which enable it to be situated in the historical cycle of the bourgeois revolution: 1. it is the expression of the needs of the time, 2. it is more a universalisation of social relations than a creation of them, 3. the appearance of the proletariat.

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<sup>3</sup> It is interesting to note that in this case the revolutionary phenomenon is simultaneous with that of national liberation. This makes it similar in part to the American revolution of 1776, as well as to anti-colonial revolutions. The Republic of the United Provinces of the Netherlands was founded in 1579.

This revolution is part of the cycle of bourgeois revolutions, but we can't say it's a capitalist revolution, because what's decisive in this area is still land ownership and, above all, the phenomenon of value. It should be noted that the American revolution triumphed as a capitalist revolution with the victory of the North in the American Civil War, i.e., with the triumph of capital over land ownership and value (Note October 2009).



## The French Revolution and capitalism

The French Revolution was an expression of the needs of the time, and a sign of the worldwide rise of one social form of production (capitalism) from another (feudalism). The movement to establish capitalist relations, which began in the thirteenth century (the commune movement and the Ciompi revolt in Italy), accelerated in the seventeenth century with the English and Dutch revolutions. This led to the destruction of the ancient agrarian community and the feudal mode of production. In France, however, this movement was slowed down, and the French revolution therefore appeared to be a revolution late in coming. This explains the contradiction that France presented at the end of the eighteenth century: the presence of a great agrarian capitalism, theorised by the physiocrats, in the midst of a dying feudalism and the stubborn remains of the ancient community.

However, there had been an expropriation of the rural population, a destruction of the ancient bonds of personal dependence, freeing the man to move to the city and become the future proletarian; a destruction which at the same time allowed a certain number of peasants to become property owners. This did not develop to any great extent until the 18th century, and by 1789 peasants owned 30 to 40% of the land. But there was no enclosure movement as in England.

During the revolution, the peasant revolt manifested itself in two ways: against feudalism for capitalism, and for the preservation of communal rights against feudalism and capitalism. The result was a balance between the different economic forms.

*"Thus the French Revolution achieved a compromise. The capitalist transformation of agriculture which had begun under the Ancien Régime saw the disappearance of some of the obstacles which had clogged its path, but collective land use was not abruptly abolished; it was left to time and self-interest to persuade the peasants to give it up; in fact, they persisted in using it for their own ends; in fact, they persisted more or less as they were until very recently and they have not disappeared altogether; the law of 1889 still makes the abolition of common grazing subject to the will of the peasants in the village" (G. Lefebvre)*

Here we see the first essential feature of this revolution: it did not completely destroy the old social relationships, capitalism stumbled against the smallholding; although it was a radical revolution, violent precisely because it came late. This was to mark all subsequent development in France. It was not until De Gaulle came to power that peasants were really expropriated with the help of the State. This mass of small farmers, *"this class of barbarians"* (Marx) was to be an enormous brake on the development of the workers' movement. Firstly, by ignoring them and failing to reach out to them (1848-1871) and,

secondly, by trying to conciliate them by making concessions of principle (the socialist movement from 1890 onwards, then the Stalinists).

This feature can be found in a country that experienced an even more powerful and radical revolution: Russia. The formation of the kolkhoz was the realisation of a compromise between different social forms: a parody of the communal form, the retention of land ownership and wage labour. It was the ideal form for restraining the class struggle in the countryside and thus constituting the surest bulwark of the Stalinist counter-revolution.

The destruction of the natural community is not exclusive to the French revolution. We find it in every country undermined by the introduction of capitalist relations of production. Marx described it for India.

*"England has destroyed the foundations of the social regime in India, without so far showing the slightest inclination to build anything. This loss of their old world, which has not been followed by the acquisition of a new world, gives to the present misery of the Hindus a peculiarly desperate character, and separates Hindustan, governed by the English from all its ancient traditions, from its past history as a whole". (Marx, 10 June 1853. New York Daily Tribune.)*

Rosa Luxemburg described it for other countries like Egypt and Algeria. We see the phenomenon 'in action' throughout Black Africa.

At the same time, there had been a major accumulation of capital in the cities, mainly through trade. As a result of scientific discoveries imported from England, manufacturing expanded rapidly, absorbing the men driven off the land and creating the proletariat. However, very often the number of these people was too high in relation to the "jobs on offer", hence the shortage of work and the corresponding struggle to obtain it. The bourgeoisie understood the danger of such a situation. *"Ensure work for all citizens, give assistance to the old and infirm, and, to crown your work, promptly organise public education"* (Hébert). Thus, for the first time, the right to welfare was proclaimed<sup>4</sup>:

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<sup>4</sup> This is not true in the sense that the themes of the right to work (discussed in the next paragraph) and the right to assistance become necessary as soon as the dissolution of the feudal mode of production begins. K. Polanyi, in *La grande transformation* Ed. Gallimard, 1983, tackled this question by studying the Speenhamland Act of 1795, which crystallised the themes of the need to work, the need to help the involuntarily unemployed, and the need to avoid creating welfare recipients who would take advantage of the system and could thereby call into question the obligation to work. Robert Castel, in *Les métamorphoses de la question sociale*, Ed. Fayard, 1995, took his turn to study this Act, the content of which he summarises: *"not only does each parish take care of its poor, but it must provide them with a sort of minimum income by guaranteeing additional resources indexed to the price of cereals if the salary is insufficient"* (p. 59). Christian Topalov, in *Naissance du chômeur, 1890-1910*, Ed. Albin Michel, 1994, took this Act into account in his study of the unemployed. These studies complete what K. Marx wrote in the chapter: *Bloody Legislation Against the Expropriated, from the End of the 15th Century - Forcing Down of Wages by Acts of Parliament*, in *Capital*, where he wrote in particular: *"In this chamber (that of the House of Commons, editor's note), where for more than four hundred years laws had been constantly framed to set the maximum wage movement that it should never exceed, Whitbread proposed in 1796 to establish a legal minimum for agricultural*

*"Public welfare is a sacred debt. Society owes a living to its unfortunate citizens, either by providing them with work, or by ensuring the means of existence for those who are unable to work".*

The emergence of *"proletarian citizens whose only property is work"* (Lepelletier de Saint-Fargeau) posed serious problems. How to ensure their existence? The nascent proletariat answered the question by proclaiming the right to work. This right emerged during the Revolution of 1789, and was reaffirmed in a new revolution in 1848; here again, the French revolution was the model for those that followed. In all the bourgeois revolutions, the proletariat manifested itself, and always did so, initially by demanding the right to work. The proletarian revolts in Congo-Brazzaville and those of the Algerians in Oran in 1963 are recent examples.

This double series of transformations, in the cities and in the countryside, led to the formation of the national market, a phenomenon that was to be found in all countries undergoing the same social transformation. Lenin described this for Russia in *The Development of Capitalism in Russia*. The formation of the national market is at the same time the attainment of a certain economic independence. It is in the realisation of this that the great difficulties of the countries that have recently achieved independence lie.

The formation of the internal market is accompanied by the replacement of the simple circulation of goods C-M-C by that of the circulation of capital M-C-M. In other words, a social form in which use-value was still the aim of production was supplanted by a form in which it was no more than a pretext for producing more and more exchange-value<sup>5</sup>.

All these processes were already well advanced by 1789, so that the old agrarian community and that based on feudal hierarchy were increasingly supplanted by a new mode of production championed by the bourgeois class.

*"In 1789, when the bourgeoisie rose up, all it needed to be free was to participate in the government of the country. For them, emancipation meant taking high civil, military and religious office out of the hands of the privileged, who had a monopoly on these functions of public affairs. Rich and enlightened, capable of self-sufficiency and self-direction, it wanted to remove itself from the*

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*labourers"*. (Ed. Sociales, Livre I, t. 3, p. 181) We can see, therefore, that the question of a living wage is not a new one. But what is much more interesting in the studies by the various authors cited above is that, from the outset, the wage had an economic function but also a function of social control and repression, which became increasingly important as the former declined (Note of October 2009).

<sup>5</sup> The tendency to create a world market pre-exists capital, but it is only when it achieves real domination over society that it is fully realised. The creation of an internal, national market, on the other hand, is the work of capital and is determined in part by the demands of wage labour.

The world market is in fact an internal market for capital (October 2009).

*regime of good pleasure" (Michel Chevalier, quoted by K. Marx in Vorwärts de Paris, August 1844).*

But it was estranged from the community; it could not accept the feudal one, which was in contradiction with its general and particular interests. It was therefore isolated. It could only break this isolation by founding another. *"Every revolution dissolves the old society"* (K. Marx).

*"Could the French Revolution have taken place without the fateful isolation that separated the French bourgeoisie from the Gemeinwesen? It was intended precisely to put an end to this isolation" (K. Marx, ibid.).*

This would seem to contradict historical materialism's claim that economic phenomena determine political phenomena. As always in such cases, the so-called contradiction is merely the recognition of an inability to integrate the different elements expressed in their movement. Revolution seems all the more necessary, all the more inevitable, when man is cut off from the community. You can't "buy" the human species, you can't guarantee it a certain material life that would make it forget the social misfortune of being cut off from the community. This is why enlightened despotism has failed<sup>6</sup>.

But revolution, as the movement of the masses, as the surge of energy needed to destroy the oppressive state and found a new community, is triggered by an economic crisis.

*"Since the beginning of the 18th century, there has been no serious revolution in Europe that was not preceded by a financial and commercial crisis. This applies no less to the revolution of 1789 than to that of 1848" (K. Marx, New-York Daily Tribune, 1853).*

## **Bourgeoisie and the universalization of social relations**

The bourgeoisie wanted to found a new community. To achieve this, they had to find a form of organization capable of binding people together. This is where K. Marx's second characteristic of the French Revolution comes in: universalization. Marx gave to the French Revolution: the phenomenon of universalization.

In the *Fragment of the primitive version of the Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, he explains the origin of capital in terms of the autonomisation of exchange value. In other words, value is no longer directly linked to the particularities of the commodities that give rise to it. To this end, he is led to show that such a realisation presupposes in parallel the autonomisation

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<sup>6</sup>As will all the "socialisms" that are nothing but a mockery of scientific socialism. It should be noted, however, that while Turgot's despotism, for example, mimicked the future form, our various socialists more often than not mimic the old form: capitalism.

of man, and therefore his liberation (his separation) from the community, and the private property which takes the form of equality.

*"Thus the process of exchange value developed by circulation not only respects freedom and equality, it creates them, it is their real basis. As pure ideas, they are idealised expressions of their various phases; their legal, political and social development is merely their reproduction on other planes. This assertion has been verified historically. Not only was the trinity of property, liberty and equality first formulated theoretically on this basis by the Italian, English and French economists of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but these three entities were only realised in modern bourgeois society".*

The law of value has been in operation, said F. Engels, since the dissolution of primitive communism; money and trade are the dissolvers of this social form. This is why in certain countries, where individual private property had been able to extend to a certain extent, the person as "*subject of exchange*" appeared. Hence the misunderstanding of the French revolutionaries.

*"The ancient world, which had not made exchange value the basis of its production and which, on the contrary, died precisely as a result of its development, had created a freedom and an equality of content quite opposed to this and which was only essentially local in character. On the other hand, the various phases of simple circulation having developed in the ancient world, at least between free men, it is explicable that in Rome and especially in imperial Rome, whose history is precisely the dissolution of the ancient community, determinations of the juridical person, the subject of the process of exchange, were developed; This explains why the essential determinations of the law of bourgeois society were developed there, and why, especially in relation to the Middle Ages, it had to be defended as the law of the nascent industrial society".*

The Roman world and the bourgeois world of the late 18th century had one thing in common: they both arose from the dissolution of the natural community. This community was not totally destroyed by slave society. On the other hand, it was restored, so to speak, but in an alienated form, in feudalism. In feudalism, the community is based on personal ties of dependence that effectively bind people together. The land, the main source of wealth, dominated the whole community, which was directly linked to it: the lord as possessor (lord because he owned the land) and the serfs through their dependence on the lord. Such a form of production, where production and consumption were in balance, tended to live in a closed circuit, limiting exchange and thereby preventing exchange value from achieving the autonomy it had begun to enjoy under the Roman Empire. This community had to be destroyed so that the two essential elements on which capital was founded - money (exchange value) and labour power (use value) - could be liberated. The community was destroyed. How could a social organisation be founded to replace it? Hence the search by all the philosophers of the eighteenth century for a law with a natural basis, a set of institutions capable of keeping people together. This was also the quest of

Saint-Just, a disciple of J.J. Rousseau, who set out to define the new social contract:

*"We see that men, treating themselves as enemies, have turned against their social independence the force that was only proper to their external and collective independence; that this force, through the social contract, has become a weapon for a portion of the people to oppress the whole people, under the pretext of defending it against its members and against foreign enemies"*<sup>7</sup>

*"If the purpose of the social contract was to preserve association, then men in this sense are regarded as wild beasts that had to be tamed".*

In the work from which this quotation is taken, *Fragments sur les institutions républicaines*<sup>8</sup>, he defines the importance of institutions in precise terms: *"Institutions are the guarantee of the government of a free people against the corruption of government"*. Fighting corruption is the central concern of bourgeois revolutionaries. People had to be supervised, otherwise society would be in peril.

*"Without institutions, the strength of a Republic rests on the merits of fragile mortals or on precarious means".*

*"The purpose of institutions is to establish all the social and individual guarantees necessary to avoid dissension and violence; to substitute the ascendancy of morals for the ascendancy of men".*

This institutional vision presupposes a definition of man. This can be found in the famous Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen. Robespierre felt that the 1789 declaration was too incomplete because it left out a large number of people: passive citizens. Those who did not have enough money to pay the tax. This is where the misunderstanding of the men of 93 is expressed. They wanted to do as the ancients did, *"we never find a study to determine which form of land ownership, etc. is the most productive or creates the most wealth. Even though Cato may have investigated which form of cultivation of the soil was the most advantageous, or Brutus may have lent his money at the highest interest, wealth does not appear to be the goal of production. The study is always concerned with the form of ownership, which produces the best citizens of the State".* *"Wealth appears as an end in itself only among the few monopolistic merchant peoples of the carrying trade, who lived in the pores of the ancient world like the Jews in medieval society"*. Indeed, Saint-Just proclaimed: *"There should be neither rich nor poor, opulence is an infamy"*. But the revolution at the head of which he temporarily found himself was liberating a

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<sup>7</sup> As always, the dynamic of *"it's for your own good"* shines through. (October 2009)

<sup>8</sup> This text was published in Saint-Just: *L'esprit de la révolution suivi de Fragments sur les institutions républicaines*, Ed. 10/18, 1963. The full title of the first text is *L'esprit de la révolution et de la constitution de la France*. (Note from September 2009)

mode of production in which wealth was an end in itself. It wanted to abolish inequality, but it could not understand that the only equality between men accepted by capital was that of exploitation. They expressed the generalisation of mercantilism. Only at a given stage of generalisation does it become capitalism<sup>9</sup>. This is why they express the requirements of both while trying to reconcile them with human data. *"We must give all French people the means to obtain the basic necessities of life, without depending on anything other than the laws and without mutual dependence in the civil state"* because *"man must live independently"* (Saint-Just). So what is the first human right? *"The first right is the right to exist, so the first social law is the one that guarantees all members of society the means to exist; all the others are subordinate to it"* (Robespierre). In addition, for people to live independently, they must be guaranteed property: *"Property is the right of every citizen to enjoy and to dispose of that portion of property which is guaranteed to him by law"*. Finally, this property will not be guaranteed by an egalitarian division - there is no such thing as equality of goods - but by the intervention of society, which must ensure that everyone has something to share: *"Muddy souls! who value only gold, I do not wish to touch your treasures, however impure their source"*. Robespierre was well aware of the power of money. He attributed all the evils to it because it was the cause of imbalance: thanks to it, it was possible to accumulate at the expense of others. The power of money corrupts. Robespierre had no illusions about the moral value of the rich. *"You must know that this agrarian law, about which you have spoken so much, is only a phantom created by rogues to frighten fools; no revolution was needed to teach the people that the extreme disproportion of fortunes is the source of many evils and many crimes, but we are no less*

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<sup>9</sup> Even according to what is set out in the *Urtext (Primitive Version)*, this statement is imprecise. Mercantilism has established itself as an economic theory and as an expression not of the phenomenon of capital, but of the phenomenon of value in its phase as money in its third form (universal currency). Capitalism exists when capital achieves real domination of the production process and tends towards formal domination of society.

To understand the emergence of capital, we need to think in terms of the phenomena of fonciarisation (land ownership as the basis of power), value and the anthropomorphosis of labour (labour as the basis and determinant of man). From the end of the 14th century, when, according to K. Marx *"the wage-earning class emerges"* (*Capital, Ed. Sociales, Book I, t. 3, p. 179*), while he dates the appearance of capitalism from the 16th century (*"the capitalist era dates only from the 16th century"*, *ibid.*, p. 156), there is a struggle between the tenants of fonciarisation (who cannot simply be defined as feudal), and the tenants of the phenomenon of value, the bourgeois, at the same time as workers freed from feudal ties attempt to maintain their independence through the anthropomorphosis of work. I also take into account the struggle of landowners and bourgeois against the persistence of communities, as shown by K. Marx in chapter XXVII of Book I of *Capital*: *"The expropriation of the rural population"*.

In the second half of the 18th century, and especially at the end, another phenomenon came to the fore, that of capital, initially defined, according to K. Marx, as a social relation founded on the recovery of the anthropomorphosis of labor, and as a phenomenon of production that becomes the paradigm of human activity. Surplus-value is produced, not *"harvested"*, so to speak. Capitalists oppose both landowners and the holders of value (particularly in its speculative, usurious form).

To triumph, capitalists will have to take over trade, land ownership, credit, the monetary system and the state. (October 2009, note)

*convinced that the equality of property is a chimera. For my part, I believe that it is even less necessary for private happiness than for public happiness. It is much more a question of making poverty honourable than of outlawing opulence."* (Robespierre, On Poverty)<sup>10</sup> Property is therefore the solution, but property within certain restrictions. Robespierre made himself the hero of a vanished world<sup>11</sup>. Small individual property based on labour would be increasingly supplanted by capitalist ownership, while the inequality of wealth would grow. Pauperism is a product of capitalism. Robespierre was indicating a way of concealing reality. Modern Switzerland has gone so far as to prevent its "poor" from appearing in the street; hence the denial of the problem. Robespierre's proposal is in fact the first principle of the philosophy of misery common to J.P. Proudhon, the Romantics, and the scum of the Russian revolution: the Khrushchevians, the Stalinists, and so on. Men like Thorez gave it a Marxist veneer by speaking of absolute misery, denying that capitalism had improved the material condition of workers in any way. In all cases, it is true, the bourgeoisie remained true to itself and granted a large part of society only a subsistence minimum. In the days of Robespierre and Saint-Just, this was a solution: abolition of inequality. *"Let Europe learn that you no longer want a wretch or an oppressor on French soil; let this example bear fruit throughout the world; let it spread the love of virtue and happiness. Happiness is a new idea in Europe"* Saint-Just.

*"Thus [as A. Soboul in his Histoire de la révolution française<sup>12</sup>,], the notion of social right was restored in republican thought: the national community, invested with the right to control the organisation of property, intervenes to maintain relative equality by reconstituting petty ownership, as economic*

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<sup>10</sup> We used Robespierre, *Textes choisis*, Ed. Sociales, three volumes, from 1956.

<sup>11</sup> This is also true of bourgeois economists and politicians: "the general legal conception, from Locke to Ricardo, is therefore that of petty-bourgeois property. What makes this possible is the relationship between buyer and seller, who formally remain the same in both forms. In all these authors, we find the following duality:

1. From the economic point of view, they present the advantages of expropriation of the masses and of the capitalist mode of production as opposed to private property, based on labour;

2. From the ideological and legal point of view, they transfer the ideology of private property, based on labour, to property based on the expropriation of the immediate producer" (K. Marx, *The Unpublished Sixth Chapter of Capital*, Ed.10/18, p. 303).

Bourgeois society is one of mystification, because it is the social form in which the forces of production free themselves from ancient tutelage and subjugate man. Bourgeois theories are compromises between reality and the minimum of "human vision". This is why what is proclaimed in theory is most often at odds with reality. The best example of this is democracy, which is the complete mystification of man. As a result, there are still those who are surprised that Russia, where only the bourgeois revolution has triumphed, is the country of the great lie.

<sup>12</sup> A. Soboul, *Histoire de la révolution française*, Ed. Gallimard, 2 volumes. We also particularly appreciated D. Guérin's *La lutte des classes sous la Première république (1793-1797)*, Ed. Gallimard, 2 volumes, 1946, which should be taken into account when revisiting the study of the workers' movement. The same applies to *La classe operaia nella rivoluzione francese*, Ed. Riuniti 1960, two volumes, 1909 and 1911 for the Russian original (*La classe ouvrière dans la révolution française*) by the Russian historian Evgheni Viktorovic Tarle, as it contains very detailed documentation.



*development tends to destroy it, in order to prevent the monopoly of wealth as well as the formation of an independent proletariat" (vol. II, p. 107).*

The community is therefore the nation, the constituted sovereign people. Hence Kellermann's cry at Valmy: Long live the nation, not long live the king! The common good of the people is the homeland. The common good of the ancient natural community is replaced by pure evanescence. *"The fatherland is not the soil, it is the community of affections which means that everyone fighting for the salvation or freedom of what is dear to him, the fatherland is defended"* (Saint-Just). The revolutionaries at least had the advantage of proclaiming illusions.

Between the national community and the individual (particular interest) stands the State (general interest), like M between C and C'. The State appears both necessary, as the guarantor of institutions, and therefore the guarantor of the link between the community and individuals, and superfluous, as a mere convention; just as money, between goods C and C', appears both necessary and useless, and even disruptive in the exchange between goods of equivalent value.

This is the origin of all the aberrations concerning the State. The bourgeoisie, in general, understood very well the function of the State: to ensure the triumph of economic demands, in order to gain recognition for its class monopoly. Here, with Saint-Just and Robespierre, at a time when the bourgeoisie was not yet powerful enough to assert itself in all its reality, the question was seen in a moral light.

The State is the guarantee against corruption, provided it achieves virtue. So the real intermediary between the community and the individual becomes a moral value. This is another characteristic of the French Revolution.

*"Terror can rid us of monarchy and aristocracy; but who will deliver us from corruption? Institutions. There is no doubt about it; you think you have done everything when you have a machine of government...". (Saint-Just).*

*"Laws are revolutionary, those who execute them are not... The Republic will only be founded when the will of the sovereign compresses the monarchical minority and reigns over it by right of conquest... Those who cannot be ruled by justice must be governed by iron... It is impossible for revolutionary laws to be executed if the government itself is not revolutionarily constituted" (Robespierre).*

He theorised the relationship between morality and politics:

*"In the system of the French Revolution, what is immoral is impolitical, what is corrupting is counter-revolutionary". "I am speaking of the public virtue*

*that worked such wonders in Greece and Rome; of this virtue, which is nothing other than love of country and its laws".*

*"The sole foundation of civil society is morality... Immorality is the basis of despotism, just as virtue is the essence of the republic... Revive public virtue. Command violence, but above all plunge vice back into nothingness".* But, although he was on moral ground, Robespierre was much more of a materialist than any of today's politicians and moralists. It is true that he based his system on a moral value, and that he therefore drove violence out of society. These are themes dear to the hearts of today's pacifists. But in the final analysis, virtue can only be founded by force, by organised violence, by the Terror. Robespierre knew very well that it was only by means of the Terror that we could neutralise the power of the traffickers and all the hoarders, the *"souls of mud"*, driven solely by the pursuit of profit.

Virtue can only be acquired through a long apprenticeship. It is therefore necessary to educate the people accordingly.

*"The revolutions which have taken place in the last three years have done everything for the other classes of citizens, but almost nothing for the most necessary perhaps, for the proletarian citizens, whose only property is in their work. Feudalism has been destroyed, but not for them, because they own nothing in the freed countryside. The contributions are more fairly distributed; by their very poverty they were inaccessible to the charge... Civic equality is established, but instruction and education are lacking... Here is the revolution of the poor...".* (Lepeletier de Saint-Fargeau).

Education must lead to equality, without which virtue cannot be exercised.

*"Education is the need of all. Society must do everything in its power to promote the progress of public reason and make education available to all citizens"* (Robespierre).

It must be common and must enable men to be trained for work and abstinence:

*"Children will receive equally and uniformly, each according to their age, healthy but frugal food, comfortable but coarse clothing; they will be put to bed without softness; so that, whatever profession they embrace, in whatever circumstances they may find themselves during the course of their lives, they will bring with them the habit of being able to do without conveniences and superfluities, and contempt for factitious needs"* (Lepeletier de Saint-Fargeau).

Mass culture is nothing new. The desire to create a common soul, to standardise, to mass-produce people is not unique to China today, as R. Guillaïn would have us believe in a series of articles about that country. Today's bourgeoisie often ridicule these methods and talk about the needs of poor

countries. France in 1789 was also a capital-poor country; hence the need for intense exploitation of the proletariat. The Chinese, moreover, seem to take great pleasure in going over the stages of the French revolution. They have now arrived at the cult of the Supreme Being. It is true that they have made a more radical break with religion than the French revolutionaries of 1789 and that, as a result, they do not speak, like Robespierre, of a supra-human divinity. But the bourgeois revolution also generated a cult of great men, of individuals who were supreme beings. Thus the Chinese worship Mao-Tse-Tung, just as the Russians worshiped Stalin. The French Revolution is the model for today's counter-revolutions.

The French Revolution, like all the revolutions that preceded it and all those that followed, was a social revolution with a political soul. It was a social revolution because it could only take place if the old social relationships, whether communal or feudal, were destroyed. It has a political soul because its fundamental concern is to find a link between men; a link that has been destroyed by economic phenomena, by the introduction of money into exchanges between men, by trade. The republic appears, as shown by K. Marx's Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right, as the end of politics. The republic, with its institutions, provides the new relationships between people that can replace the old community. The ancient process of the expropriation of men from the community and their means of labour reaches its full development in the course of primitive accumulation, the genesis of capital and the bourgeois class which represents it. It is precisely this class which poses the questions of social life, of the whole process of production and reproduction of the human species, in the form of organisational questions. For the proletariat, it is a question of being: restoring the primitive communal being, master of all the productive and technical contributions of class societies.

*"The revolution (says Saint-Just) must stop at the perfection of happiness and public liberty through the laws. Its impetus has no other object, and must overthrow everything that opposes it; and each period, each victory over monarchism, must lead to a republican institution".*

At the same time, it expresses the gradualist vision of history, which postulates that progress can only be made in stages, that it is impossible to skip a stage. This is Menshevik theory. But it is also the theory of open-ended revolution. When will we be able to say that the revolution is complete and finished? The French socialist revolutionaries must have been prisoners of this vision, they who wanted to complete the French revolution, even though they were working for the advent of a new world. But in this gradualist perspective, Saint-Just was right to point out: *"People talk about the height of the revolution: who will fix that height? It is mobile. There were peoples who fell from higher heights".*

Saint-Just had understood the scale of the revolutionary wave. He did not want to stop it and prevent the arrival on the scene of the sans-culottes, without whom the revolution could not develop fully. He was well aware *"that those who make half-hearted revolutions only dig their own graves"*<sup>13</sup>. However, the irony of history meant that he would behave in this way. On 9 Thermidor, Saint-Just and Robespierre refused the help of the sans-culottes that would have enabled them to triumph. But they would then have been prisoners of their allies and therefore forced to push the revolutionary wars further. The same was true of Napoleon, who refused to free the muzhiks as he had been advised to do, and then to enlist the help of the workers of Paris to fight the invasion. He was defeated. Stalin suffered the same fate. He too led only a half-revolution, since the revolution was not supposed to stop, to freeze at the bourgeois stage. He died after his actual death. De-Stalinisation is his real tomb.

The French Revolution universalised principles, it did not create them. They passed through the revolutionary inferno and acquired worldwide value. This is why they were subsequently adopted by all countries. This is what Robespierre said when he said that France must become the model for all nations. *"We want to fulfil the wishes of nature, fulfil the destinies of humanity, keep the promises of philosophy, absolve providence from the long reign of crime and tyranny. May France, once illustrious among slave countries, eclipsing all the free peoples that have ever existed, become the model of nations, the bane of oppressors, and, by sealing our work with our blood, may we at least see the dawn of universal happiness shine"*. It would become so after the military failures proving that it could not encompass other countries, and also showing that the revolution could not be exported. The revolutionaries believed that the Declaration of Human Rights was valid for all countries and that nationalities should therefore disappear. In reality, this led to France's attempt to dominate Europe. Prussia, Austria, etc. could only fight the revolutionary nation by finding revolutionary motives for it. Hence the King of Prussia's promises to free the peasants, for example. Hence also Hegel's theorisation of what might be called national paths to liberation, to capitalism. Hegel did not believe that one

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<sup>13</sup> To make a full-scale revolution implies a great development of the will, because what would enable us to go from a "half" revolution to a full-scale revolution? Under what conditions can it be carried through to the end? I sense a certain disconnection between St-Just and reality. But I also think he is asserting something very important: any incomplete gestalt is the basis of ontosis, a kind of death of the natural being, and drives the repetition compulsion to reach a never-realised completion. Yet what has happened in France is not a delirium of the will, as I pointed out in relation to Blanquism, but which we are seeing repeated with the Situationist International, accompanied by a great deal of bluster and insults. The Situs are not only the last to resist (in the manner of Asterix and his companions) but they are the ones who will create the new society, with the help of the workers' councils to come. A similar dynamic was re-imposed by the members of the Tiqqun movement, who advocated an imaginary party for an obscured proletariat.

A very important exception is the anarchist Naturiens movement, which I only became aware of thanks to F. Bochet. Bochet, until the early 1990s (see *Invariance*, special issues 1993 and 1994). What is fundamentally lacking in their investigation is any consideration of parental repression. (December 2009, note)

nation should encompass all the others, but saw nationality as a way of embodying the Idea in reality. Each people, each nation, has original characteristics, qualities that are the manifestation of the Idea: *"that is why each people has the constitution that is appropriate to it and that suits it"*. Nations should not be destroyed but strengthened. The French nation simply became the guiding nation. In both cases, we can see how the bourgeoisie uses the nation for its own ends.

The defence of the great nation, of eternal France, will be the major theme of bourgeois propaganda. Unfortunately, many proletarians were infested with it. In 1914, not only French workers but also many foreigners enlisted to defend their threatened homeland, since every man has two homelands, his own and France. The success of Gaullist propaganda is also due to the fact that it is orchestrated around this leitmotif.

The UN and the Universal Declaration of Rights represent both the triumph of the Hegelian vision of the proliferation of nations and the most extreme generalisation of the principles of the French Revolution. Finally, this is also true of the Khrushchevites, who can only conceive of proletarian internationalism in the following way: *"All parties are independent and have equal rights. All are responsible for the Communist Movement and equal members of the great world revolutionary community"* *L'internationalisme prolétarien*, in *L'Humanité*, 19.03.1964.

France is the cradle of all ideologies harmful to the proletariat. The workers must above all fight against their nation because of its international importance, the home of all bourgeois illusions for all countries.

## **Bourgeois and proletarian revolution**

However, this universalisation did not seem real. The bourgeois revolution had destroyed the states, it had included men in a community: the nation. But in fact many people remained outside it. They had been uprooted, torn from their natural or feudal homeland; the new nation could not encompass them. How would the "proletarian citizens" react to the dissolution of community ties? The first reaction was to proclaim that the revolution had failed, since the new world could not integrate them except in an antagonistic way. For them, as for Marat,

the revolution had to be proclaimed constantly<sup>14</sup> otherwise it would fail. This was another source of deviation and harmful influences within the workers' movement. The proletarians must take up the work of the Jacobins; everything that is done in this direction is an absolute improvement, it is a necessary stage which cannot be skipped. Before anything can be done, 1793 must be completed. In *The Holy Family*, K. Marx fiercely criticised this position:

*"In the Revolution of 1789, the interest of the bourgeoisie, far from being 'missed', 'won' everything and had the most 'lasting' result, even though the 'pathos' had faded and the 'enthusiastic' flowers with which the interest had adorned its cradle had faded. This interest was so powerful that it overcame the pen of Marat, the guillotine of the terrorists, the sword of Napoleon, the crucifix and the royal blood of the Bourbons. The revolution was a "failure" only for the masses, who did not possess in the political "idea" the idea of their real "interest", whose real vital principle was therefore not confused with the vital principle of the revolution, whose real conditions of emancipation differed from the conditions in which the bourgeoisie and society wanted to emancipate themselves. If, therefore, the Revolution, which can represent all the great "actions" of history, "failed", it failed because the mass, in whose conditions of existence it was confined in essence, was an exclusive mass and did not embrace the whole of society, but a limited mass. And if it failed, it was not because the mass was "enthusiastic" for the Revolution or interested in it, but because the most numerous part of the mass, that which was distinct from the bourgeoisie, did not possess in the principle of the revolution its real interest, nor its own revolutionary principle, but a mere idea, therefore a mere object of momentary enthusiasm and purely apparent excitement" (*Œuvres philosophiques*, ed. Costes, vol. II, p. 144-145).*

The revolution had not failed. It had benefited a single class: the bourgeoisie. Emancipation had not been universal.

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<sup>14</sup> *"The constitutional act is going to be presented to the sovereign for approval; have you outlawed speculation therein? No. Have you pronounced the death penalty against hoarders? No. Have you prohibited the sale of coined money? No. Well then! We declare that you have not done everything for the happiness of the people.*

*Freedom is but a vain phantom when one class of men can starve the other with impunity. Equality is but a vain phantom when the rich, through monopoly, exercise the right of life and death over their fellow man. The Republic is but a vain phantom when the counter-revolution is carried out day by day through the price of foodstuffs, which three quarters of citizens cannot reach without shedding tears."*

*"Pronounce it once more. The sans-culottes with their pikes will enforce your decrees" (Jacques Roux).*

*"When I read Bourgeron's book on Marat, I realized that in many respects we were unconsciously imitating the great example of the Ami du peuple. I also realized that the howls and falsifications which, for nearly a hundred years, have altered Marat's true face, can be explained very simply. Firstly, by exposing those who were preparing to betray the Revolution, Marat mercilessly tore off the masks of the idols of the moment; secondly, like us, he didn't consider the Revolution to be over, but wanted it to be proclaimed permanent" (F. Engels).*

*"All revolutions so far have resulted in the ousting of the domination of one particular class by that of another; ... but if we disregard the specific content of each case, the common feature of all these revolutions was that they were revolutions of minorities. Even when the majority collaborated in them, it did so - knowingly or unknowingly - only in the service of a minority; but because of this, and also because of the passive and unresisting attitude of the majority, the minority had the air of being the representative of the whole people" (Engels, Introduction to Class Struggles in France).*

The French revolution - a revolution late in coming - bore the seeds of another. These were the enthusiastic flowers of which Marx speaks. This is why the clash between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie was more powerful than in previous revolutions; the proletariat asserted itself more autonomously and no longer as a mere adjunct of the bourgeoisie.

*"In all the proclamations to the proletarians, from 1688 to 1846, the liberal bourgeoisie did anything other than 'carve out systems and arrange phrases' in order to break, by the force of the proletariat, the power of the aristocrats" (Marx, Herr Vogt, vol. I, p. 128).*

So how did the conflict between classes develop during the French Revolution, and how did the conflict between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie emerge?

*"The name under which a revolution introduces itself is never the name it will wear on its banners on the day of triumph<sup>15</sup>. To ensure their chances of success, revolutionary movements in modern society are forced to borrow their colours, from the outset, from those elements of the people who, while opposing the existing government, live in total harmony with existing society. In a word, revolutions must obtain their ticket to the official stage from the hands of the ruling classes themselves" (Marx, New-York Tribune, 27.7.1857).*

Indeed, "the first blows to the French monarchy came from the nobility and not from the peasants" (Marx, *ibid.*). The bourgeois revolution is increasingly characterised by the movement of the masses, freed from the ancient bonds of dependence on land or hierarchy (when the umbilical cord linking man to the community has been cut). It is the destruction of the orders and states in which they were confined. So, for a certain period, the revolution takes on the aspect of a popular revolution involving the whole of society (the pathos and enthusiastic flowers of which Marx spoke); an impersonal force linked to no class because no class is individualised.

The division occurred very early on and certain elements began to group together: Girondins, Montagnards, Sans-Culottes (Bras-Nus). Hence the question of power. Who would lead the masses? Who would control the newly established

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<sup>15</sup> The same was true of the Russian Revolution. It began as the bourgeois democratic revolution (February 1917) and triumphed as the socialist revolution (October 1917).

state? A phenomenon that was to be found in all revolutions occurred: the duality of powers: the Convention and the Comité du Salut Public; the bourgeois republic of 1870 and the Commune; Kerensky's bourgeois state and the Soviets.

The proletariat is a driving force but not a leading protagonist. It is one of the layers driving the revolution and emancipation. It can contest power with the bourgeoisie, but it cannot take it away (Germinal and Prairial, the conjuration of the Equals). In so doing, it marks out the essential characteristic of its being: the thirst for power, it poses the fundamental contestation: the economic forces developed with capital can be directed either by the proletariat or by the bourgeoisie. On the other hand, it was only through its intervention that feudalism could be overcome (terror = plebeian way of putting an end to the old order of things, K. Marx).

But the counter-revolution triumphed in 1795. The plebeian upsurge was halted. The development of bourgeois society dates from this moment:

*"After the fall of Robespierre, political progress, which had wanted to surpass itself, which had sinned through excess of enthusiasm, only began to be realised prosaically under the government of the Directory, bourgeois society, whose liberation had itself freed it from feudal fetters and officially recognised it, even though terrorism had wanted to sacrifice it to an ancient conception of political life, manifested a formidable vitality. The race for commercial ventures, the desire to enrich oneself, the intoxication of the new bourgeois life whose first enjoyment is still daring, impulsive, frivolous, intoxicating; the truly enlightened progress of French land ownership whose feudal organisation was shattered by the hammer of the revolution, and which, in the first fever of possession, the many new owners are subjecting everywhere to intense cultivation; all these first movements of industry which has become free, these are some of the manifestations of the new bourgeois society. Bourgeois society is positively represented by the bourgeoisie. The bourgeois thus inaugurates his regime. Human rights cease to exist only in theory" ("The Holy Family", in c.w., vol. II, p. 220).*

The first bourgeois revolution was thus built on the defeat of the workers<sup>16</sup>. The workers of the suburb of Saint-Antoine were disarmed and deprived of organisation (1797). They then had to support Napoleon, who was carrying out a revolutionary task.

*"Napoleon was the last battle of revolutionary terrorism against bourgeois society and its policies, which were also proclaimed by the revolution. Of course, Napoleon already understood the nature of the modern state; he knew that it was founded on the free development of bourgeois society, on the free play of vested*

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<sup>16</sup> This is an inaccurate assertion, by virtue of the very quotation from K. Marx at the beginning of I (The French Revolution in the Cycle of the Bourgeois Revolution). On the other hand, the English revolution of 1640 triumphed when the levellers, becheuxes, antinomians, etc. were defeated (Note of October 2009).



*interests, etc. He decided to recognise these foundations and to protect them. He was no dreamy terrorist. At the same time, however, Napoleon still saw the State as an end in itself and the bourgeoisie as a provider of funds, a subordinate with no will of its own. He fully realised terrorism by substituting permanent war for permanent revolution". Work cited.*

The feudal counter-revolution came to fruition in 1815 with the defeat of the French troops at Waterloo. So, for the proletariat, the counter-revolutionary phase that began in 1795 was not to end, for a short time, until 1830. Our era is not the only one to experience such a long phase of retreat. The one that followed the revolutionary wave at the end of the 18th century lasted 35 years. Ours has lasted 38, but it is true that the dawn of the "Three Glorious Years" has not yet broken.

The movement of 1789-99 will be repeated thereafter, giving the history of French society an air of parody. But each time a new element would appear. The social structure would become more and more purely capitalist, and the tasks of the revolution would be accomplished.

*"The history of the French revolution, which began in 1789, has not yet ended with the year 1830, when one of its elements, enlarged by the feeling of its social importance, won the victory". (K. Marx, Œuvres philosophiques, vol. I, p. 222)*

Each time, a more progressive social stratum appeared and tried to resolve the social question. This is progressive emancipation:

*"In France, you only have to be something to want to be everything. In Germany, no one has the right to be anything, unless they renounce everything. In France, universal emancipation is the sine qua non of all partial emancipation. In France this is the reality, in Germany it is the impossibility of progressive emancipation which must give birth to all freedom. In France, every class of the people is politically idealist, and it has first of all the feeling of being not a particular class, but the representation of the general needs of society. The role of emancipator therefore passes successively, in a dramatic movement, to the different classes of the French people, until it finally arrives at the class which achieves social freedom, no longer assuming certain conditions external to man but nevertheless created by human society in the hypothesis of social freedom" (K. Marx, Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right, in Œuvres philosophiques, ed. Costes, vol. I, pp. 104-105<sup>17</sup>).*

In each phase the proletariat has manifested itself. The French revolution was a social revolution from start to finish (Engels). From then on, the importance of the proletariat grew:

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<sup>17</sup> See *Invariance*, special issue, November 1968, p. 38-39.

*"the economic development of France since 1789 has meant that for fifty years no revolution has been able to break out in Paris without assuming a proletarian character, so that after victory, the proletariat that had bought it with blood entered the scene with its own demands". (Engels, Preface to the German edition of The Civil War in France).*

In the last part of the drama that unfolded from 1789 to 1799, a current emerged that broke with the bourgeois order in practical terms and marked a discontinuity with the bourgeois revolution, setting in motion the beginning of the proletarian cycle: the "Conspiracy of Equals", the so-called Babeuf conspiracy. Babeuf proclaimed: *"The French revolution is but the forerunner of another revolution, far greater, far more solemn, and which will be the last"*<sup>18</sup>. His system was no longer simply dependent on the past; it contained the elements of the future, being the ultimate point of the bourgeois revolution and already the practical beginnings of the communist movement. Babeuf was first and foremost a supporter of equality in the manner of Robespierre. He wanted real political equality. For that to happen, there had to be economic equality. He called for private property for all. Then he realises that the evil lies precisely in private property, so he wants collective property. The following quotations highlight his originality and his anticipation of the utopians.

*"The high and mighty of the day hear the word revolution in a peculiar way when they claim that the revolution in our country is over. Let them rather say the counter-revolution! (Here, Babeuf first makes the same remark as Saint-Just: "The revolution is frozen; all principles are weakened; all that remains are red bonnets worn by intrigue". Saint-Just was talking about the revolution of his class; he remained in the bourgeois cycle. Babeuf spoke in the name of a new class, still very weak and embryonic. As a result, the structuring of the State, and hence of the new society, is a counter-revolutionary act in relation to the new class which tends, by the very historical process, to develop within the new society). The revolution, once again, is the happiness of all (it's the same definition as Saint-Just's, only where everything will diverge will be on: how to organise it so that all are happy. The break will be over the goal: for Saint-Just, small private property and antion; for Babeuf, collective property and the human community); that's what we don't have; the revolution is therefore not over. The counter-revolution is the misfortune of the greatest number; that is what we have: it is therefore the counter-revolution that is made!"*

Babeuf then clarifies *"What is a political revolution in general? What, in particular, is the French revolution? A war declared between the patricians and the plebeians, between the rich and the poor". "24 million against the golden*

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<sup>18</sup> The theme of the last revolution to come was taken up many times, particularly by A. Bordiga, who spoke of the N+1th revolution to define the communist revolution to come. It inevitably evokes that of the last prophet, but also that of the hidden, concealed imam who must complete the work of the last prophet, Mohammed. The proletariat which is to bring about the last revolution is also hidden, and revolutionaries are waiting ardently for it to come out of its hiding place. In a way, the positions of the Shiites anticipated those asserted by the Italian left, above all by A. Bordiga. In both cases, at different times, the question was how to behave in a period of retreat (Note, October 2009).

*million". Babeuf imperfectly proclaimed the class struggle, in other words, by mislabelling the protagonists. Such is the social aspect, politically how does it present itself? "We've said several times what revolution means. It means conspiring against an unsatisfactory state of affairs, trying to disorganise it and replace it with something better. Now, until what is worthless is overturned and what would be good is stabilised, I do not recognise that we have revolutionised enough for the people".*

*"The revolution needs to be remade",* said Babeuf. He demonstrated this by criticising society. For example, the Declaration of the Rights of Man:

*"in my opinion, it is very incomplete, too insubstantial and written in terms that are too imprecise and too unclear. There is an abundance of words, but underneath this excessively metaphysical prolixity lies a perfidious means of neutralising or reducing to mere apprenticeships what at first appears to be a reality. The bait and the trap are so intertwined that on studying this declaration, we soon realise that it is a decoy, as the sedators of the people must have conceived it. Their declaration is no more than a rattle. It admits, it is true, the great principles of liberty and equality, but with all sorts of reservations which allow them to be distorted in their application and by mitigating them with correctifs which no longer leave them any scope".*

Babeuf really does seem like a giant compared to the radical-socialists who created the League of Human Rights, to which not only socialists but also recent communists joined in 1920. The Declaration of the Rights of Man is a mere rattle, said Babeuf, and almost two centuries after him, individuals claiming to be communists are urging the masses to fight for the defence of human rights. It is therefore no longer possible to polemicise at this stage. We simply need to reaffirm what communism is, what the Communist Party is, spanning several generations. The others are the henchmen of capital. To argue with them would be to think that they might have something in common with the party, that they might be related to Babeuf.

K. Marx was to take up Babeuf's critique, put it on a firmer footing and thus provide the proletariat with a more formidable weapon. *"It was shown that the recognition of human rights by the modern State has no other meaning than the recognition of slavery by the ancient State. The basis of the ancient State was slavery; the basis of bourgeois society was the man of bourgeois society, that is to say, the independent man attached simply to other men by the bond of private interest and unconscious natural necessity, the slavery of utilitarian labour, of his own needs and the selfish needs of others. The State has recognised this natural basis in universal human rights. And it did not create them. As a product of bourgeois society, driven by its own evolution beyond its political fetters, it merely recognised its own origin and basis in proclaiming human rights"* (K. Marx, *The Holy Family*, p. 202). K. Marx shows a phenomenon that could not have been perceived by Babeuf and that no revolutionary of the

time understood: bourgeois society existed within feudal society. The revolution broke down the separation between the bourgeoisie and the community. It founded a state that corresponded to the economic situation of which it was itself the product. In proclaiming human rights, it was merely acknowledging its own origin.

In opposition to all the declarations of rights, Babeuf asserted that *"he who has the strength is right"*, thereby unmasking all the mystifications and deceptions of bourgeois ideology and proclaiming that what would become the proletariat would have the strength and therefore would triumph over the human solution that it possessed. To achieve this revolution, violence must be used, and he replies to those who criticise him for it: *"Civil war! I will ask you if there is one more terrible than that which has perpetually existed since the establishment of property, by means of which each family is a separate republic, which, for fear of being dispossessed and the constant worry that it or its members will run out, constantly conspires to dispossess the others"*. This is a first attempt to highlight man's alienation. It is a virulent critique of the uncertainty principle of bourgeois society. The famous principle set out by F. Engels in his critique of the Erfurt programme: *"It is possible that the organisation of the workers and their ever-increasing resistance will act as a kind of dam against the growth of misery. But what is certainly increasing is the uncertainty of existence"*.

Nor did Babeuf have any illusions about the democratic principle:

*"This sophism, this suspicious theology which establishes the necessity of a meeting of the people to vote in order to legitimise an insurrection, is a happy way of appearing to pay homage to principles, when we know that, through form, the certain impossibility ensures the eternally peaceful reign of the oppressors. In this respect, those of 14th of July and 10th of August were not. It was only Paris that rose up, and Paris is not the whole of France... Paris itself did not set the whole of France in motion; the class that always remains calm... never sees in popular movements anything but the outbursts of an untamed multitude... It was only the multitude and what that class calls the Parisian rabble [now the Stalinists speak of black jackets or Teddy boys, when it comes to proletarians who make demands on a class basis, outside the parties, editor's note] who shook; and however numerous the Parisian multitude may be, it represents only a handful of factious people in relation to the population of the whole of France; [therefore, not democracy, but an act of force, a violent action, makes a social stratum triumph, editor's note] thus the much-vaunted movements of 10 August and 14 July, described as sublime, great and generous, were in fact nothing more than seditions whose perpetrators, the scoundrels of Paris, deserved the most inexorable and exemplary punishment. That's why they've been given a proper punishment for the last three years"*.

What is fundamental in the evolution of human society, therefore, is not the democratic mechanism, which is a deception, but force. The Equals can only

triumph by using violence, with the help of a strongly organised political movement which will lead the revolt. This is the political lesson that the proletariat had to learn from Babeuf and Ph. Buonarotti and that K. Marx had to integrate into the programme of the Communist Party.

His starting point for the politics of the bourgeois revolution was equality. He shows how it does not generalise, does not completely universalise the data it had found ready-made. But this leads him to criticise the link between man and community in bourgeois society.

*"Equality is the French expression for the unity of human essence, for man's consciousness of his species and his attitude towards his species, for the practical identity of man with man, i.e., for the social or human relation of man to man. Hence, just as destructive criticism in Germany, before it had progressed in Feuerbach to the consideration of real man, tried to resolve everything definite and existing by the principle of self-consciousness, destructive criticism in France tried to do the same by the principle of equality." (Œuvres philosophiques, ed. Costes, t. III, p. 67).*

Babeuf took the bourgeoisie at its word: let's achieve equality. The bourgeoisie saw it as the unifying principle of the human race, which had just been fragmented by the expropriation process. He was well acquainted with the facts of the old communal societies, having lived in Picardy, where that was still very much alive at the end of the eighteenth century<sup>19</sup>. He was also very familiar with the process of proletarianisation. He was speaking on behalf of those who had been expropriated from the land, men driven from the countryside by poverty, men whose only wealth was their labour power. How, then, could equality be achieved between them and the rich bourgeois of the city or the landowners of the countryside? Does the evil lie in the inequality of wealth, or

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<sup>19</sup> Is this the reason why, like so many others, he did not condemn the insurrectionary movement in the Vendée? However, it's strange that, given his past and his communist stance, he didn't highlight - if he did indeed perceive it - the communitarian dimension of the movement. Indeed, in his book *La guerre de la Vendée et le système de dépopulation* (Ed. Tallandier, 1987), there is no mention of the underlying causes of this war, nor of the de facto alliance between nobles and peasants, nor of the fact that the latter were fighting to maintain what remained of the community that the bourgeois movement was trying to liquidate everywhere. Nevertheless, he presents the Vendéens in a sympathetic light, and denounces the atrocities committed by the Republicans. This war is presented as having been determined by the need to exterminate royalists as well as republicans, because *"the French population was in excess of the resources of the soil"* (p. 91). However, this thesis of extermination is not presented to us in a well-founded way, even in the excruciating chapter *Plan de destruction total*. Babeuf reports various statements by politicians mentioning the need for extermination, but this is insufficient. So, is this a work limited to denunciation?

What we are told in this virulent pamphlet is unconscious in Babeuf, but works on him and horrifies him: men and women have a long-standing tendency to exterminate one another and, I would add, in the perception of what does not become conscious in him, that in doing so they replay the original risk of extinction, as if to verify that they exist, they had to exterminate themselves. This happened in the course of various wars generated by conflicts of material or spiritual interest, but also in liberation movements; the possibility of liberation provoking the resurgence of horror that cannot be exorcised, if not in carnage. The 19th and 20th centuries are full of such exterminating liberation movements (note, 2009).

does it not lie in private property? Wouldn't the solution lie in the community, in communism? So the bourgeois solution of the dissolution of the ancient community is opposed by that of the proletariat. The future of humanity does not lie in private appropriation, but in collective appropriation.

To achieve this goal, we need a new revolution. But won't this bring harm to humanity? Won't it lead to anarchy? Babeuf replies: *"Were it true that this passage would bring deviations, I say they would be the last effects of dying anarchy. Strictly speaking, disorder and anarchy really do exist in all European societies, where, under different pretexts and by different means, the people are stripped of their rights. And certainly it would be well worth running the risk of some momentary deviations to put an end to the great organized and perpetual anarchy"*. His response is much the same as K. Marx's nearly fifty years later. *"Anarchy is the law of bourgeois society emancipated from classifying privileges, and the anarchy of bourgeois society is the basis of modern public organization, just as this organization is in turn the guarantee of this anarchy. For all their opposition, they are conditional on each other"* (*Œuvres philosophiques*, ed. Costes, t. III, p. 210).

Through Babeuf, we can clearly see the character of the new revolution, the proletarian revolution: it is political with a social soul. It's a political revolution, because only a political act - the overthrow of the current state of affairs, i.e. the destruction of the bourgeois state, linked to the seizure of power by the proletariat through a strongly organized party - can liberate humanity from oppression. But the social question can only be resolved by social measures taken after the revolution. In setting out these measures, he anticipates those taken by the Paris Commune of 1871.

*"That each article of the constitution be pure of expressions and definitions, within the reach of common sense (for Napoleon, on the contrary, the constitution had to be short and obscure), without ambiguity, without possibility of comment or interpretation, without the slightest room for argument on the part of the makers of pernicious doctrines, head-scratchers, legal researchers of red herrings and loopholes, of the secrets of amphibology and of all those counterfeiters of the basoche who speculate on the place of the period and the comma; that, for example, all the liberties of which Liberty is composed be enumerated without omitting a single one, and I answer that no one will speak of attacking the least of them, without everyone immediately feeling threatened in his own life... "*

*"The possibility of mandate withdrawal is a useful, indispensable threat; it is, along with the publicity of all votes, one of the best guarantees for the people"*.

In all these measures, Babeuf included a mechanism, which was not considered a calamity. Here again, he anticipates. This is not an aberration.

Babeuf is the spokesman for a new social stratum that is already in the position of being able to emancipate itself only by emancipating the whole of humanity. The theoreticians who immediately followed would live in a phase of retreat; in a phase where this rising class would have been halted and, from a political point of view, completely suppressed.

*"If I have invented a machine, a process that simplifies and shortens the work of my art, if I possess a secret for doing anything better or faster, I do not fear that it will be stolen from me; on the contrary, I will hasten to communicate it to the association and deposit it in its archives, so that no one will ever be sorry to have lost it. This secret will be counted to me, it will be worth resting, it will be worth resting to all, in the category of work that its application will facilitate, and this rest will no longer be a disastrous unemployment but a pleasant leisure..."*

Further on, Babeuf refutes the stupid objection of those who see the future society as a society of idlers: *"no voluntary idler can exist within it"*. This formula should be read in conjunction with the following: *"no one should escape from work"*. Both are reminiscent of the one that characterizes the dictatorship phase of the proletariat and inferior socialism: *"Who doesn't work, doesn't eat"*. Babeuf's society was not so economically developed that it was possible to liberate man from the suggestion of material life, and thus achieve K. Marx's vision of a communist society in which social man manifests his potential and develops all his activity, without any problems of reproduction of material life, with no antagonism between compulsory work to sustain material life and work as a manifestation of the joy of production.

What's important to note is not the inadequacy linked to the limited nature of production, but the method, the perspective, the vision. This is already on the trail of communist society. It leaves behind utopia and takes root in reality. It may be a limited vision, but it contains the premises of a real vision. It's in the real future of communism, and Babeuf draws it from struggle. Indeed, the revolts led to the establishment of the maximum; the hunger riots of Prairial and Germinal showed him the need for rigorous organization of the *"distribution of labor and products"*. This is a clear expression of class dictatorship over economic phenomena and classes. For Babeuf, as we've seen, no one should be exempt from work. This is the first stage in the transition to communist society, the first stage still marked by the infamous stigmata of bourgeois society.

The goal of this revolution, which is absolutely essential, is to establish a communist society. It is in his description of this society that Babeuf arrives at both the greatest condemnation of capitalist society that was made before K. Marx, and captures the very essence of what communist society is.

*"This government will make disappear the bounds, the hedges, the walls, the locks on the doors, the disputes, the trials, the thefts, the assassinations, all the crimes; the courts, the prisons, the gibbets, the punishments, the despair"*

*caused by all these calamities; envy, jealousy, insatiability, pride, deceit, duplicity, in short all the vices; plus [and this point is undoubtedly the essential one, editor's note] the gnawing worm of the general, particular, perpetual worry of each of us, about our fate tomorrow, next month, next year, our old age, our children and their children".*

Babeuf clearly understood the inability of bourgeois society to provide security and sustenance for all, as set out in the 1793 constitution.

Art. 8 - *"Security consists in the protection afforded by society to each of its members, for the protection of his person, rights and property".*

Art. 9 - *"The law must protect public and individual liberty against the oppression of those who govern."*

The same thing is indicated in Robespierre's draft constitution, which we reported above.

Bourgeois society is, in fact, one of uncertain existence and social anguish. Only K. Marx went further in criticizing man's social misery, because man had to be even more destroyed, more dehumanized. He had to bring out with extraordinary violence the inhumanity of our world, because it is becoming so strong that it is intolerable. But how can we fail to salute the class power and virulence of Babeuf's vision, which draws its strength not from the past but from the future; which puts an end to ancient conceptions, leaving the dead to bury the dead. How, correlatively, can we pay any attention to all those pseudo-philosophers and politicians of the present day who are incapable of understanding the world and, indeed, of interpreting it. The novel of their stupidity and misery has already been written in history for almost two centuries. All the existentialism, anxiety and anguish of our modern world stem from the same society that Babeuf denounced and vilified.

Bourgeois society is also one of super-individualism, which makes each man a stranger to the other, giving him only two modes of existence: exploiter or exploited.

*"What, indeed, is this society, where you find the most profound solitude in the midst of several million souls, where you can be seized by an implacable desire to kill yourself, without anyone guessing? This society is not a society, it is, as Jean-Jacques says, a desert inhabited by ferocious beasts..."*

"In short, the relations between interests and minds, the true relations between individuals, are still to be created from top to bottom among us, and suicide is only one of the thousand and one symptoms of the general social struggle, constantly developing anew, from which many combatants withdraw because they are tired of counting themselves among the victims, or because



they revolt against the idea of taking a place of honor among the executioners" (K. Marx)<sup>20</sup>. Babeuf understood this well, which is why he proclaimed that "in regenerated society [...] there can be no motive to put oneself forward, to show off, to want to dominate. There must be neither high nor low, neither first nor last..."<sup>21</sup>.

It's clear that Babeuf marked a new stage in his work, especially in practical terms, while in theoretical terms his brilliant insights were rooted in the very heart of the Fourth Estate's struggle. We mustn't forget the paroxysm of violence that French society had reached in 1793-1795. In this volcanic period, certain positions were able to go beyond the content of the bourgeois revolution.

*"The French Revolution gave rise to ideas that went beyond the ideas of the old state of things. The revolutionary movement that began in 1789 at the Cercle Social, which had Leclerc and Roux as its principal representatives in the middle of its evolution, and which ended up succumbing for a moment to Babeuf's conspiracy, had given birth to the communist idea that Buonarotti<sup>22</sup>, Babeuf's friend, reintroduced in France after the revolution of 1830. This idea, heightened*

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<sup>20</sup> In fact, K. Marx quotes Jacques Peuchet, whom he introduces as "curator of police archives". See K. Marx, *Peuchet au sujet du suicide* in *Invariance*, no. 6 (available), series II, 1975. These two quotations can be found on pages 27 and 28 (122 and 124 in J. Peuchet's text, 394 and 395 in K. Marx's).

I have used the German text — *Peuchet: vom Selbstmord* — published in volume 4 of the MEGA (Complete Works of K. Marx and F. Engels), a reprint of the text that appeared in January 1846 in Moses Hess's journal *Gesellschaftsspiegel*. I compared it with the French text by J. Peuchet, which consists of chapter LVIII (pp. 117-181), *Du suicide et de ses causes* from the book, *Mémoires historiques tirés des archives*. Photocopies of this chapter were supplied to me by G. Pogorel. Unfortunately, I have no indication of the edition.

I have not reproduced the statistical tables on the number of suicides, their causes, etc., from K. Marx's text. These tables differ from those published by J. Peuchet. In addition, I have reproduced passages - which seemed interesting to me - not translated by K. Marx. Finally, I have pointed out interpolated comments by K. Marx, such as the following. *"The most fearful men, the most incapable of resistance, become inexorable as soon as they think of asserting their absolute parental authority. The abuse of the latter is also a crude substitute for the multiple submissions and dependencies to which they are subjected, voluntarily or against their will, in bourgeois society"* (p. 396 of K. Marx's text; this insertion is placed on p. 127 of J. Peuchet's after the word fury in the sentence *"His reasons and his pain did not disarm their fury"*, and not after chorus, the last word of the following sentence, as was erroneously indicated in *Invariance* at note 5, p. 29).

I must add, however, that I cannot rule out the hypothesis that this interpolated paragraph is not by J. Peuchet himself, but has been taken from another part of the book.

I'd like to point out that what J. Peuchet and K. Marx write is perceptibly reminiscent of the existence of the infernal mechanism that generates victims and executioners, and the difficulty of escaping it, leading to suicide or various mental illnesses. (Note from 2009)

<sup>21</sup> On many issues, G. Winstanley and the Diggers anticipated what Babeuf expounded (Note from October 2009).

<sup>22</sup> *Conspiration pour l'égalité dite de Babeuf*, Ed. Sociales, 2 volumes, 1957. See also Maurice Dommanget, Sylvain Maréchal *"L'homme sans dieu" (1750- 1803) - Vie et œuvre de l'auteur du Manifeste des Égaux*, Ed. Spartacus, 1950, and by the same author *Jacques Roux le curé rouge - Les "Enragés" contre la vie chère sous la Révolution*, Ed. Spartacus, 1948 (Note from October 2009).

*in its logical consequences, is the idea of the new state of things" (K. Marx, Œuvres philosophiques, ed. Costes, t. II, p. 213).*

Babeuf had understood that the revolution should not stop at the "height" it had reached in 1794, but that another, communist revolution was needed to solve the social question.

*"Babeuf's conspiracy, written by his friend and companion Buonarotti, shows how these republicans brought into the "movement" the very clear idea that, in getting rid of the social question: monarchy or republic, not a single question had yet been resolved in the direction of the proletariat" (K. Marx, ibid., p. 135).*

Elsewhere, K. Marx calls Babeuf the founder of the first acting communist party, "which takes place within the framework of the bourgeois revolution, at a time when the constitutional monarchy is set aside". It is precisely on the practical, political level that the French labor movement's contribution to Marxist theory is made, integrating all the data of struggle and theory. It was this movement that laid the foundations for the dictatorship of the proletariat, because it had sought its realization and political definition (Flora Tristan).

With Babeuf, the proletarian cycle really begins. From him onwards, K. Marx's famous phrase is valid:

*"The revolution of the 19th century cannot draw its poetry from the past, but only from the future. It cannot begin with itself until it has completely liquidated all superstition with regard to the past. Previous revolutions needed historical reminiscences to conceal their own content from themselves. The revolution of the 19th century must let the dead bury the dead in order to achieve its own object. Formerly, the sentence overflowed the content; now it is the content that overflows the vase" (K. Marx, Le 18 Brumaire de Louis Bonaparte, ed. Sociales, p. 175).*

This was to come to fruition in the following period. In France, however, it took a long time, due to the slow development of capitalism. Indeed, it's not enough for the idea to meet reality, reality must meet the idea (K. Marx). This idea was born in the 18th century, when feudal society broke up. There were two solutions to this disintegration: the bourgeois solution: the community based on the private individual and the nation; the proletarian solution: the community based on collective property and social man, communism. It was an idea; economic forces were too weak to match reality. That's why only a small detachment, a small avant-garde, was able to oppose the new bourgeois society: the first active communist party, the seed of the future human community. In so doing, it showed that it had resolved all questions of organizational form, since to a new mode of exploitation of man, it opposed an impersonal being: the future community. Since then, economic forces have increased to such an extent

that communist society is a prisoner of bourgeois society. But counter-revolution has driven out the idea. Reality overwhelms theories because they are no longer, even partially, equal to it. Only the distant idea put forward by Babeuf, which in the form of the Communist Program has become the vital principle of the internationalist Communist Party, can embrace it and, by uniting them, create a new society. The cycle of the proletarian movement will then be complete.

## APPENDIX I

This work on the French workers' movement was begun in 1959, but it was not until 1964 that it was presented at the July meeting in Marseilles and published, with many cuts (due to censorship), in *Il Programma Comunista* no. 4, 5 and 6 of 1965. It was to be linked to the study of the "military question", where the French Revolution was again discussed, to that of democracy and finally to that of the formation of the Belgian State, where the French Revolution was once again analysed (see the journal *Le fil du temps*, nos. 1 and 4). The plan was as follows:

1. Introduction: the arrival point.
2. The labour movement and the French revolution.
  - 2.1. The French revolution in the cycle of bourgeois revolution.
  - 2.2. Influences of the French revolution on the labour movement.
    - 2.2.1. The bourgeois revolution achieved all its important measures as a result of popular movements imposing their force on the assembly. This impressed many revolutionaries, which led them to the following position: the political movement of an elite would be sufficient to succeed in 1° mobilising the broad masses, 2° transforming society with the help of the working masses, especially after the "coup de main". This is the essence of Blanquism, which theorised the need for the dictatorship of the proletariat. Although it clearly distinguished itself from bourgeois theory, Blanquism ultimately tended to complete the bourgeois revolution and did not really succeed in thinking out the new revolution. Thus, the French workers' movement, which was originally Blanquist, suffered the same misfortune as the Jacobins.

*"Robespierre, Saint-Just and their party succumbed because they confused the ancient democratic realist Community (Gemeinwesen), based on effective slavery, with the modern democratic spiritualist representative State.*

*What a colossal illusion<sup>23</sup> to have to recognise and sanction in human rights modern bourgeois society, the society of industry, of general competition, of private interests freely pursuing their goals, of anarchy, and at the same time to annul in certain individuals the vital manifestations of this society and to want to educate the political head of this society in the ancient manner.*

*This illusion was tragically manifested (erscheint) when Saint-Just, on the day of his execution, pointing to the great painting of the Rights of Man hanging in the Conciergerie, declared: "It was I who did it". This picture proclaimed precisely the right of a man who cannot be the man of the ancient community (Gemeinwesen), any more than today's industrial and economic relations can be those of ancient society" (Marx-Engels, The Holy Family, ed. Costes, in Œuvres philosophiques, vol. 2, pp. 218-219).*

The other characteristic of Blanquism was its overestimation of politics (see Marx: Le roi de Prusse et la réforme sociale. By a Prussian., Invariance, series I, no. 5, pp. 97 and 100, or Marx-Engels, Texts of 1842-47, pp. 81 and 86-87, Spartacus no. 33. This passage has already been quoted in Invariance, series I, no. 1, p. 39).

- 2.2.2.** The Blanquists' position was that true equality had to be achieved, and for that another revolution was needed. On the other hand, the republicans and later the radicals thought that it was enough simply to complete 93. That's why they were in favour of reforms, skilful at using proletarian force to make their demands triumph. They had a harmful influence on the working class through Freemasonry, the League of Human Rights, the libre-pensée and the whole secular movement in general. For them, it was necessary to educate people according to the principles of a better society before being able to transform the existing society. The myth of culture.

These elements are related to the materialists of the eighteenth century, and it is therefore understandable - apart from what has been said above - that they could have had an influence on the proletarian movement.

*"No great insight is needed to recognise how the theories of materialism about the original goodness and*

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<sup>23</sup> In German, Täuschung means illusion and disillusionment. Here, it means both.

*equal intelligence of men, about the omnipotence of experience, habit, education, about the influence of external conditions on men, about the high importance of industry and the rightness of enjoyment, etc., necessarily relate to communism and socialism. If man derives all knowledge, feeling, etc., from the sensible world and from experience in that world, then it is important to organise the empirical world in such a way that man learns to be truly human there, and becomes accustomed to experiencing himself as a man. If the well-understood interest is the principle of all morality, it is important that man's particular interest be confused with the human interest. If man is not free, in the materialist sense of the word, that is to say if he is free not by the negative force of avoiding this or that, but by the positive force of asserting his own individuality, it is not appropriate to punish crimes in the individual, but to destroy the anti-social places where crimes are born, and to give everyone the space they need in society for the essential manifestation of their life. If man is shaped by circumstances, then circumstances must be shaped humanly. If man is, by nature, sociable, he develops his true nature only in society, and the strength of his nature must be measured not by the strength of the particular individual but by the strength of society". (La Sainte-Famille, in Œuvres philosophiques, vol. II, ed. Costes, p. 234-235).*

The Republicans and Jacobins never went as far as to explain the consequences of the assertions of the French materialists; they were content to be humanitarians. Towards the end of the century they "reinvigorated" themselves by plundering from the socialist programme a very large number of points; this gave rise to radical-socialism, which is the first "adaptation" of bourgeois theory to the existence of the proletariat. The adaptation of capital to the proletariat would be fascism.

Reciprocally, the so-called socialist elements were in turn influenced by these radicals, and the result was humanitarian socialism à la Jaurès.

- 2.2.3.** Another group of theorists did indeed perceive the importance of the mass movement in the French revolution, but they saw in it an infirmity, a deviation: it asphyxiated the individual. The anarchist movement represented by Stirner is to some extent related to Sylvain Maréchal, even if there is no direct affiliation, there is the same "problem".

- 2.2.4.** The principles put forward by the revolution are the fundamental principles emanating from eternal human nature; however, the development of capital has disrupted the economic movement; it is the cause of inequality and injustice. Hence, for Proudhon, justice must be achieved (another variant of anarchism). Note that, like Robespierre, Proudhon needs an intermediary, a general equivalent in the form of a moral value: virtue for one, justice for the other.
- 2.2.5.** The "reflective" position of Marxism - subsequent to the others - is based on a study of the whole plebeian movement and in particular Hebertism, which has not been studied enough in the preceding pages, and Babouvism. The revolution of '89 succeeded; it was a bourgeois revolution.

*"I advised you to work on Avenel's 'Cloots'<sup>24</sup> for the following reasons:*

*In my opinion (and that of Marx) the book contains the first accurate account, based on archival research, of the critical period of the French Revolution, in particular the period from 10 August to 9 Thermidor.*

*The Paris Commune and Cloots were in favour of a war of propaganda as the only means of salvation, while the Comité de Salut Public played the statesman, was afraid of the European coalition and sought peace through the division of the coalitionists. Danton wanted peace with England, that is to say with Fox and the English opposition who hoped to come to power in the elections. Robespierre was dealing in Basel with Austria and Prussia and wanted to come to an arrangement with them. Both of them united against the Commune, in order above all to destroy the people who wanted a propaganda war and the republicanisation of Europe. They succeeded: the Commune (Hébert, Cloots, etc.) was decapitated. But from then on peace became impossible between those who wanted to make peace with England alone and those who wanted to make peace with the German powers alone. The English elections went in Pitt's favour. Fox was excluded from the government for years, which ruined Danton's position; Robespierre triumphed and had him guillotined. But - and this is the point that Avenel has not sufficiently emphasised - while the reign of terror was pushed to the point of madness because it was necessary to keep Robespierre in power in the circumstances prevailing at home, it became*

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<sup>24</sup> G. Avenel, *Anarchasis Cloots, l'orateur du genre humain.*

*completely superfluous following the victory of Fleurus on 26 June 1794, which not only liberated the borders but delivered Belgium and indirectly the left bank of the Rhine to France. From then on, Robespierre also became superfluous. He fell on 28 July.*

*The entire French Revolution was dominated by the coalition war, and all its pulses depended on it. When the coalition army penetrates France, tension predominates, the heart beats violently: there is a revolutionary crisis. The plebeians - the beginnings of what would later become the proletariat - whose energy alone had saved the revolution, would be brought back to order and reason.*

*The tragedy is that the party of the war to excess, of the war of liberation of the peoples, finally had the last word and that the republic overcame the whole of Europe, but only after this party had long since been decapitated and instead of the propaganda war came the Basel peace and the bourgeois orgy of the Directoire" Engels to Adler, 04-12-1889.*

Note: the anarchist movement has in common with Blanquism the cult of the will: the method of attacks to awaken the spontaneity of the masses (see France at the end of the 19th century, Russia, etc.); with the bourgeois, the myth of education but here it is to maintain spontaneity or awaken it. Variant: Russian populism and today's vast "Maoist-style populism".

However, anarchists converged with Marxists in their understanding of the importance of organisation, e.g. the anarcho-syndicalists; others sought a synthesis between communism and anarchism: libertarian communism, anarcho-communism.

In all cases, anarchism is a syncretism.

- 2.2.6.** One very negative aspect of the influence of the French Revolution is the glorification of the great nation and the republic as the best in itself.

*"The republic is the necessary political form of proletarian emancipation. It must be preserved at all costs. It is the impotence, it is the crimes of our so-called republicans (therefore it is not the institutions) which have compromised it and expose it to the onslaught of the conspired and masked monarchists. It is their detestable*

*policy that has created the Boulangist peril", Guesde-Lafargue-Deville.*

The corollary of such a statement is the ever-present possibility of a return to feudalism!

The great nation was exalted as a model for other nations. Better still, for the young Lafargue, the question of nationalities was resolved. Basically, all nations were to be absorbed into France, which had finally discovered the principles of human emancipation. Marx had already written in his correspondence (see Volume IX, Costes ed., pp. 74-75) about how he had ridiculed this French claim! Engels would also have to combat this Blanquism in the mature Lafargue:

*"You are still perfectly right to glorify France's revolutionary past, and to believe that this revolutionary past will be responsible for its socialist future. But it seems to me that, having arrived there, you are giving in a little too much to Blanquism, that is to say, to the theory that France was destined to play a part in the bourgeois revolution of 1789-98. This is contrary to the economic and political facts of today" (Correspondance Engels-Lafargue, ed. Sociales, volume III, p. 293).*

*"To want to attribute the same role to France in the future is to distort the international proletarian movement, it is even, as the Blanquists do, to make France ridiculous, because beyond your borders people laugh at these pretensions" (ibid., p. 293).*

*"Proletarian emancipation can only be an international fact; if you try to make it a merely French fact, you make it impossible" (ibid.).*

Note: the question of the centre of the revolution gave rise after '45 to all sorts of elucidations which reached the level of ridicule of the French socialists. Predicting the revolutionary centre is a theoretical problem. The assertions of the socialists of the last century, like those of the Trotskyists, about the Third World as the revolutionary centre, reflect their total theoretical vacuity.

The same applies to the debate within the Left. After the debate on the nature of the USSR, the debate on the revolutionary centre, the focus of the revolution, gave rise to a number of errors. From a global point of view, we can say



that the facts showed the error of placing Germany as the revolutionary centre of the future proletarian revolution. Theoretical study would show this just as clearly. The centre is now in the USA<sup>25</sup>.

From this exaltation of the great nation and the republic as the best in itself, we moved on to pure and simple chauvinism. This was the case for Blanqui during the 1870 war. Lafargue, Guesde and others justified it in the name of proletarian internationalism: *"By shouting long live the International! They are shouting long live the France of labour!"*

*"And now that we have established how, far from being mutually exclusive, patriotism and internationalism are but two complementary forms of the same love of humanity, we repeat loudly, to the face of our slanderers..." (Ibid., p. 291).*

And of course it was the humanitarian Jaurès who crowned it all by theorising about the need for the fatherland and attempting to refute the Manifesto:

*"The proletariat is not outside the fatherland. When, in 1847, Marx and Engels' Communist Manifesto uttered the famous phrase, so often repeated and exploited in all directions: 'the workers have no fatherland', it was no more than a passionate jest, a paradoxical and unfortunate reply to the polemic of bourgeois patriots who denounced communism as the destroyer of the fatherland" (J. Jaurès, L'armée nouvelle, ed. 10/18, p. 254).*

In 1924, Bordiga said that fascism had not created a theory. Fascism did not need to elaborate a theory because it had already been produced by the various national socialists.

Exaltation of the homeland linked to terror and almost to the Urmensch.

*"It is rooted in the very depths of human life and, one might say, in human physiology" (p. 268).*

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<sup>25</sup> In fact, there is a certain imprecision. The intention was to indicate that the decisive centre for the emergence of a revolution was in the USA, because that was where the most advanced capitalism was to be found and where a revolutionary movement was developing within the black proletariat. However, all the historical and theoretical data still led us to believe that Germany remained the nerve centre of the coming revolution, as Bordiga had indicated in his text commemorating the 40th anniversary of the October 1917 revolution - see the text in *Invariance*, series I, no. 6 (Note 1990).

*"To freeze the State is to suppress hope, to suppress action. No, today's democratic State is not a homogeneous block made of a single metal; it is not a monstrous and impenetrable idol which, with its ever-equal weight and immovable shadow, uniformly oppresses generations until the hour comes when the prostrate ones, suddenly rebelling, overthrow it in one fell swoop" (Ibid., p. 253).*

Exaltation of work:

*"... that it [socialism] should establish ever closer international relations with the proletarians of all countries and thus practically institute a beginning of working-class humanity capable of bringing a little order and equity into the chaos of national rivalries [...] creating the free consent of historical homelands, a social homeland of labour" (Ibid., pp. 48-50).*

He goes on to talk about the humanity of law and work.

*"The only social role that France can fulfil in the world [...] is to help, in France itself, with all the forces of republican democracy, the advent of labour finally conquering property" (p. 60).*

Note: in the final version of this study, we would have followed Marx's theoretical approach of first indicating the possibility of a phenomenon manifesting itself (e.g. the possibility of crises, indicated in chapter III of Book I of Capital) and then studying the effectiveness of this phenomenon (this work was not completed: see, for example, what Marx has to say about Ricardo in Book IV). Consequently, the theorists' national-socialist future would have been dealt with in point 8.

In this summary, we've adopted a different approach to immediately demonstrate the importance of certain statements.

- 2.2.7.** Broadly speaking, the negative influence of the French Revolution on the workers' movement is that it gave credence to the theory of progressive emancipation. The struggle for revolution was replaced by the struggle for reform; revolution was accepted from above, and in the end, some socialists saw the League of Nations, and later the UN

with its Declaration of Rights, as a decisive achievement, even for the proletariat.

3. The period of retreat 1815 — 1830.
  - 3.1. The movement of retreat and the movement of the proletariat.
  - 3.2. Utopians: education, emulation, anticipation.
4. The organization of the proletariat 1830 - 1848.
  - 4.1. The importance of the idea of autonomous proletarian organization.

Flora Tristan's working-class unity.

- 4.2. Proudhon's mutualism.

An important feature to note: from 1840 onwards, the French workers' movement became linked with those of other countries. Theoretically, Babouvist theory influenced Chartism (Bronterre), which in turn influenced French workers through Cabet and Leroux, as did Owenism. On the organizational front, attempts were made to form various international organizations, culminating in the formation of the League of Communists. At the same time, there was a split between Republicans and workers.

5. The revolution of 1848.
6. Period from 1850 to 1871.
  - 6.1. The decline of the labor movement, followed by a recovery after the crisis of 1857.

Formation of the Blanquist party. It is necessary to highlight Blanqui's contribution, which is often "*maligned*" because it is judged through stereotypes (this should not lead us to obscure his flaw: his chauvinism for the great nation - see above). To this end, here are a few quotations:

*"Around 1859, it was necessary," he said, "to create the socialist party of the most revolutionary mass, which would thus find itself the only organized one, in an active and militant state". The time was most difficult. "Politics, in my opinion, is going from bad to worse. The flattening out is only growing and embellishing. We thought we were at the bottom of the ditch, but now we realize that we can fall even further... The stock market is in rut; it is*

*rising like an equinox tide, greeting the crushing of the revolution with cries of joy."*

Setbacks breed stupidity:

*"Everything is in complete decay. You can't imagine the state of platitude, cowardice and decay people have fallen into. There's no trace of men left. Those who aren't gangrened are stupid. The same difficulty in making oneself heard: "The defeated are annoying and inconvenient. They don't count". "Everything that speaks, everything that writes is our enemy".*

The movement cannot rebuild itself by using parliament.

*"The people have given up action, which is no longer in their temperament, and thrown away the cartridges to take the ballots. Their heroism does not go beyond the small piece of paper to be put in the ballot box".*

Elections solve nothing:

*"The power hasn't shifted. It's still in the same hands and doesn't seem to be getting out. But there is no force but force." "All the ballots in France and Navarre don't weigh a grain of powder..."*

Around 1865, agitation was growing in student circles; moreover, the *"right of coalition"* had been recognized for the working class on May 25, 1864, although the law limited the right to strike. Blanqui criticized this limitation:

*"They want to confine the worker to his individuality, to the atom, to forbid him any concert, for the protection of his interests... they want to isolate him in his individual powerlessness... To those isolated blades of grass that bend and turn yellow in the wind, they don't allow them to bind together against the storm".*

Contrary to Proudhon, Blanqui advocated the strike as a means of struggle:

*"The strike is the only truly popular weapon in the fight against capital".*

Blanqui has no illusions about the democratic principle and puts his trust in class dictatorship:

*"When counter-revolution has had the sole right to speak for fifty years, is it too much to grant it for one year to liberty, which claims only half the podium and will not put its hand over its opponent's mouth?"*

*"Parisian dictatorship. The hasty call for universal suffrage in 1848 was a deliberate betrayal. We knew that, through the gagging of the press since the 18th of Brumaire, the provinces had fallen prey to the clergy, functionaries and aristocrats. To ask these enslaved populations for a vote was to ask their masters".*

*"In 1848, the Republicans, forgetting fifty years of persecution, granted full freedom to their enemies..."*

*"What was the answer? Extermination. Settled. The day the gag comes out of the mouth of labor, it will be to enter the mouth of capital.*

*"One year of Parisian dictatorship in '48 would have spared France and history the quarter-century that is now drawing to a close".*

This lesson was not lost. The Bolsheviks did not hesitate to disperse the Constituent Assembly.

Criticism of those who want to know what communism is before committing themselves, down to the last detail. Criticism of those who want us to solve their problems without questioning their current state of being.

*"It's a delightful thing, when discussing communism, how the terrors of the adversary instinctively carry him to this fatal piece of furniture. "Who will empty the chamber pot?" It's always the first cry. "Who will empty my chamber pot?" is what he really means. But he's too wise to use the possessive pronoun, and generously dedicates his alarms to posterity."*

How apt. We can only accept men who agree to throw the pot in the face of our class adversary. Our concern is to get rid of the current shit, which is capitalism and all its minions: Stalinists, philanthropists, leftists, philosophers and so on. We don't want them holding each other's shit pots any longer. We want to free humanity from this excrement!

Finally, what's important is the organization of the struggle. The theory of street fighting, the barricades. Only the Marxists have

included this data in their revolutionary theory: insurrection is an art.

*"The duty of a revolutionary is always to fight, to fight all the same, to fight to extinction."*

In the same vein, there is the famous "toast" that we published in *Invariance*, no. 1, 1968, p. 56, but not in successive reprints<sup>26</sup>.

Already in 1831, he had written:

*"when it comes to freedom, you can't wait, you have to take it". "Insurrection is a practical work that requires a technique you have to know".*

Blanqui was indulgent neither to others nor to himself. He declared:

*"When you get involved in serious politics, you mustn't let yourself be surprised"*<sup>27</sup>.

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<sup>26</sup> *"Traitors will be the governments which, raised on the proletarian banner, do not immediately bring about: 1. the general disarmament of the bourgeois guards; 2. the arming and organization of all workers into a national militia."*

*"Undoubtedly, there are many other indispensable measures, but they will follow naturally from this first act, which is the first and only guarantee of security for the people."*

*"There must not be a gun left in the hands of the bourgeoisie, outside of which there is no salvation."*

*"The various doctrines now vying for the sympathies of the masses may one day realize their promise of improvement and well-being, but only if we don't give up the prey for the shadow."*

*"They would only result in a lamentable abortion if the people, in their exclusive infatuation with theories, neglected the only assured element, force!"*

*"Arms and organization, that's the decisive element of progress, the serious means of putting an end to misery, He who has iron has bread. We bow to the bayonets, we sweep away the unarmed cohorts. A France bristling with armed workers is the advent of socialism."*

*"In the presence of armed proletarians, obstacles, resistance, impossibilities, all will disappear."*

*"But for the proletarians who allow themselves to be amused by ridiculous strolls through the streets, by the planting of liberty trees, by the sonorous phrases of a lawyer, there will be holy water first, then insults, finally machine-gun fire, misery always."*

This quotation appeared in the 1968 edition of *Origin and Function of the Party Form*, but not in subsequent editions, where all the notes have been removed. That's why we've included it here.

<sup>27</sup> Blanqui, *Selected Texts*, Ed. Sociales p. 201 (*L'affaire de la Villette*).

He said this above all for himself. Similarly, after the failure of La Villette in 1870, he would say, after analyzing the causes and considering the unfavorable factors that might have intervened: anyone who makes a mistake is a traitor.

So it's no insult to Lenin to assert that he was more Blanquist than Marxist. In fact, in a certain sense, at one point Marx was too (this is Bernstein's great criticism of Marx, who considers that there is a split in Marx's work between the Blanquist advocate of the dictatorship of the proletariat and the adult Marx supporter of democracy<sup>28</sup>), insofar as he recognized that the real movement was Blanquist (the formal party of the time): *"the proletariat is grouping itself more and more around revolutionary socialism, around communism, for which the bourgeoisie itself invented the name of Blanqui"* (*Les luttes de classes en France*, ed. Sociales, p. 114-115).

## 6.2. The founding of the AIT and the importance of the International in France on the eve of the Commune.

## 7. The Commune.

We'll confine ourselves to recalling Marx's twofold assessment of the Commune, in order to demonstrate the inadequacy of most analyses of it.

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<sup>28</sup> However, G. Bernstein also points out that: "Marxism has never been able to rid itself completely of the Blanquist conception" (*Socialisme utopique et social-démocratie pratique - Die Voraussetzungen des Sozialismus und die Aufgaben der Sozialdemokratie*, ed. Stock, 1900, p. 55).

A. Blanqui was G. Bernstein's pet peeve, as is Hegel for Althusser. Both "see" a break in Marx. But this is not easy to grasp. You think you can no longer "read" Blanqui or Hegel in Marx and then, to your horror, Hegel or Blanqui reappears in a blank in Marx? Let's add that Althusser is indeed "related" to Bernstein, at least as far as reading skills are concerned, since the latter declared: "What Marx and Engels produced that was great, they produced not thanks to the Hegelian dialectic, but in spite of it" (*ibid.* p. 63).

That's why we can't agree with the translator of Marx's unpublished VIth chapter of Capital, Roger Dangeville, who declares that "no revisionist of the past would have dared to do this: to oppose Marx to himself, to put him in contradiction with his own statements and ideas, for example, by dividing his work into youthful and mature writings" (ed. 10/18, p. 13).

In fact, this was always the method used by Marx's opponents. For example, some economists and even socialists "noted" a break between the 1st and 3rd books of Capital, saying that Marx had elaborated another theory in the latter book, in opposition to the theory of value expounded in the 1st (some simply spoke of accommodation). Other authors suspected that Marx had cut himself off: after studying the Process of Immediate Production of Capital, he would have reached a theoretical impasse, which would have inhibited him, hence the non-publication of the rest of Capital during his lifetime. On the subject of value, Mr. Dangeville could rightly be accused of taking up the positions of Ricardian socialists without realizing it. But never mind the polemic! Let's end this parenthesis here.

On the one hand, he wrote: "The Commune was the most glorious achievement of our party since 1848"; on the other, he asserted that the Commune was not a daughter of the International. These two positions can only be explained in terms of the distinction between historical party and formal party. On the other hand, recent historical research has highlighted the important role played by the Internationals in the run-up to the Commune.

8. Period from 1871 to 1914.
  - 8.1. The impossibility of developing a "Marxist" party in France.
  - 8.2. The anarcho-syndicalist movement.
  - 8.3. Reformist socialism and "national-socialist" ideology.
9. The disaster of 1914 and the influence of Russia on the worker's movement.
  - 9.1. The disaster of 1914.

The few quotations given in section 2.2.6. provide ample evidence of the absence of any revolutionary position on the part of the various leaders of socialism in France. Consequently, it is totally inadequate to explain their stance in '14 in favor of the sacred union as a sudden betrayal of socialism. This inadequacy is not a departure from the historical "truth", but an obstacle to reappropriating the theory. If we don't understand that the theory of the proletariat was denied by socialist leaders from the end of the 19th century (which implies that the proletariat itself - for reasons we can't go into here - was not revolutionary<sup>29</sup>), we don't simultaneously understand the immensity of the historical task required to throw overboard all the contributions of the socialists,

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<sup>29</sup> This second statement may seem to contradict what is said in the second paragraph on page 1. In the latter case, it would seem that the proletariat has a constant tendency to be revolutionary, whereas here I'm pointing out that, at the end of the 19th century, the proletariat is not revolutionary. I didn't say no longer revolutionary. In other words, the theory of the proletariat was not yet denied. I thought that this class, following a crisis in the capitalist mode of production, could once again become revolutionary; the content of its action becoming different: the proletariat must immediately deny itself in the course of the revolutionary process. The difference between the two texts, which are seven years apart (the first is from 1964, the second from 1971), is that revolution is seen first as having as its initial, essential moment the constitution of the proletariat as a class, and therefore as a party; it must assert itself in an apparent, very real way, by generalizing its condition to the entire social body. Secondly, I consider that the moment of party formation is the very moment of the negation of the proletariat, since the capitalist mode of production has already achieved its generalization. It follows that the apprehension of the revolutionary character of the proletariat is necessarily different in the two cases. In addition, the second text is critical of all those who have glorified and mythologized this class. Later, I was led to abandon the theory of the proletariat. So all this has a historical value that enables us to understand the path we're on. (Note from November 1976)



and reject the explanations of the Bolsheviks because, being insufficient, they participate in the negation of the theory.

9.2. The masquerade of the formation of the Communist Party, section of the Communist International.

9.3. The Popular Front and the different periods of French Stalinism.

10. The war of '39-'45.

11. Remarks on the labor movement after the war.

## APPENDIX II

Above all, this study of the French labor movement had two essential aims: to highlight the question of community, and to show that the anti-colonial revolutions whose cycle had only just been completed were indeed bourgeois revolutions (see *Invariance*, series I, no. 6, Thesis 3).

The question of community had already been addressed in *Origin and Function of the Party Form*, 1961 (see *Invariance*, series I, no. 1), in *The Democratic Mystification* (Paris meeting - July 1963) and finally in the study on the 6th chapter completed at the end of 1966 (see *Invariance*, series I, no. 2). However, given the incompleteness of this work, an important aspect of the history of the workers' movement has not been exposed. It is directly linked to democratic mystification. It concerns the formation of the material community and the action of the proletariat at the moment of its realization.

When capital had developed sufficiently to replace ancient natural and social presuppositions, it shattered the institutions that had constituted the people (even if divided into antagonistic classes) and provided the basis for the State. This phenomenon began in Germany at the end of the '14-'18 war, and has been repeated in various countries ever since. In Germany in the 1920s, the movement of capital led to a significant growth in the new middle classes, social strata that could not be reduced to the classic proletariat, nor to the bourgeois class, nor to the old middle classes, but were part of the proletariat because they were wage-earners, and part of the middle class because they were situated between the proletariat and capital. Once the proletariat had been defeated, this new social stratum was a key element in the triumph of Fascism, which proposed an organizational solution to the crisis facing the capitalist world (the acute phase of which affected Germany). Fascism once again proposed the nation as a community, defining it as *Volksgemeinschaft* and tending to give it deep roots in race and terror. To the uprooted, disoriented people of the time, such a solution seemed valid. It was accepted by both the new middle classes and the vast majority of the German proletariat. Here again, however, the misunderstanding

that Marx spoke of in relation to the '89 revolution occurred. The "left-wing" theorists of Fascism<sup>30</sup>, who expressed the aspirations of the mass movement, presented Fascism as a genuine popular revolution to abolish capitalism, when in fact the community they spoke of was merely an illusion masking the development of the material community, that of capital over the social whole. Same misunderstanding, same end: death (the night of the long knives). The same phenomenon occurred to a lesser extent in Italy, and to a much lesser extent in Spain. In Spain, capital had not yet reached the stage of becoming a community.

The real domination of capital can only be achieved through the mediation of the domination of productive labor, i.e. the proletariat as variable capital<sup>31</sup>. This is the mystification of the domination of the proletariat as the ruling class. The cycle of the workers' movement begun under the French Revolution is now well and truly over. Even the proletariat will no longer be able to think solely in the political mode. Only the excrement of the workers' movement, such as Trotskyism or the International Communist Party, can still move in the political sphere, an opaque sphere that prevents them from realizing how inadequate they are to the reality of the revolutionary movement.

Within this cycle, there was a moment of particular importance: the Paris Commune. Many authors claim that Marx contributed to the creation of its myth, as well as that of the proletariat. However, a careful reading of *La guerre civile en France* is enough to dispel any suspicion. The passage taken from "*Premier extrait de rédaction*" (ed. Sociales, p.215-216) confirms our assertion.

*"Such is the Commune - the political form of social emancipation, of the liberation of labor from the usurpation (slavery) of those who monopolize the instruments of labor, created by the workers themselves or constituting a gift of nature. Just as the state apparatus and parliamentarianism are not the real life of the ruling classes, but are merely the general agencies of their domination, the political guarantees, forms and expressions of the old order of things; so the Commune is not the social movement of the working class, and therefore not the movement of a universal regeneration of humanity, but merely its organized means of action. The Commune does not eliminate the class struggle by which the working class strives to abolish all classes and, consequently, all class domination (because it does not represent a particular interest. It represents the liberation of "labor" (i.e., the liberation of the fundamental and natural conditions of all individual and social life, which only usurpation, fraud and artifice allow the minority to confiscate from the majority), but it creates the rational intermediate stage in which this class struggle can pass through its various phases in the most rational and humane way. The Commune can provoke violent reactions and*

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<sup>30</sup> The "theoreticians" of National Socialism base their arguments on a real fact: the socialization of the means of production and of people, brought about by capital. They wanted to circumscribe it to a given space: the nation.

<sup>31</sup> There is a dialectical movement between capital and labor, an interpenetration of opposites rather than a rigid, metaphysical opposition, as envisaged by most groupuscular theorists.

*equally violent revolutions. It begins the emancipation of labor, its great goal: it eliminates the roots of the evil that delivers an immense part of the national income to feed the state monster, by suppressing on the one hand the unproductive and evil activity of state parasites, and on the other hand by accomplishing the real work of local and national administration by means of workers' salaries. It therefore begins with immense savings, with economic reform as well as political transformation."*

*"Once communal organization had been firmly established on a national scale, the catastrophes it might still have to endure would be sporadic slaver rebellions which, while momentarily interrupting the work of peaceful progress, would only accelerate the movement, by arming the arm of social revolution".*

*"The working class knows that it must go through different phases of the class struggle. It knows that the replacement of the economic conditions of slave labor by the conditions of free and associated labor (economic transformation) can only be the gradual work of time; it knows that this transformation requires not only a change (Veränderung) in distribution, but also a new organization of production or, better still, of present-day organized labor (Befreiung - Freisetzung) of the social forms of production in present-day organized labor (generated by present-day industry) from the bonds of slavery, from their present-day class character, and by coordinating them harmoniously nationally and internationally. The working class knows that this work of regeneration will be constantly slowed down and hampered by the resistance of traditional interests and class egoisms. It knows that the present "spontaneous action of the natural laws of capital and landed property" can only be replaced by "the action of the laws of the social economy of free and associated labor" following a long process of development of new conditions, just as "the spontaneous action of the economic laws of slavery" and "the spontaneous action of the economic laws of serfdom" were replaced. But at the same time, it knows that great strides can be made through the communal form of political organization, and that the time has come to begin this movement for itself and for humanity."*

This long quotation clearly illustrates what a communist revolution could be under the formal domination of capital. The Commune is a political form of social emancipation, which means that classes are not abolished, but political leadership is assumed by the working class, the proletariat. The emancipation of labor simultaneously implies the development of the productive forces, and the proletariat must direct this in the interests of the working class itself, by destroying those who appropriate the product of other people's labor.

The Commune ends the period when the proletariat can think in political form. It was a final attempt by the French proletariat to accelerate economic and social development - as it had done in 1794, when, as Mars says, it momentarily seized power - and, to do so, to use political mechanisms. Even by uniting executive and legislative power, the Commune did not abolish politics, but definitively realized it.

From now on, capital and labor together form a material community. The only revolutionary action the proletariat can take is to destroy itself. It can only do so by stimulating the formation of the human community that arises beyond both politics and economics (but which can only exist following a certain development of the productive forces), because it can only be realized from human foundations, i.e. from the socialized man who takes charge of the automated whole - the new inorganic being of man - which appears for the moment as capital. It is from here that the individual human being, the social man, can flourish.

The Commune is a moment of the past. Any attempt to revive it, or to achieve what its short existence was unable to accomplish, would lead to the proletariat being locked into the sphere of activity of capital, which has also, in its own way, unified the executive and the legislature.

The Commune anticipated. The workers' movement between 1871 and 1917, on the other hand, developed at a normal pace, then retreated in relation to the I.W.A. This retreat was linked to the prospect that the use of democracy could enable the proletariat to reconstitute itself (especially in the case of France) and that, sheltered by democratic laws, it could avoid any provocation and prepare its new assault. In fact, participation in parliament and acceptance of the democratic game split the class and prevented it from realizing the extent to which society was changing, the extent to which democracy had devitalized the class, depriving it of any possibility of confronting the crisis opened in 1913, which developed into war and then a long civil war. However, a few groupings glimpsed the new phenomenon without being able to really circumscribe it and thus explain it (German, Dutch and Italian lefts).

The anticipation of the Commune was exhausted in the German workers' movement. From then on, another phase is possible. The black proletarian movement in the U.S. is the beginning of its realization: the suppression of the proletariat, and thus the definitive suppression of politics and the economy.

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