Militancy: highest stage of alienation - Organisation des Jeunes Travailleurs Révolutionnaires



A critique of the role of the political militant, its misery and arrogance; written by Dominique Blanc and published by the OJTR in France, 1972.

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Since the occupation movement of May '68, we have seen a whole collection of small organisations which claim to follow Trotskyism, Maoism or anarchism, developing to the left of the Communist Party and the CGT.[1] Despite the tiny percentage of workers who join their ranks, they pretend to compete with the traditional organisations for control of the working class, of which they proclaim themselves the vanguard.

The ridiculousness of their pretensions might make you laugh, but laughter is not enough. It is necessary to look deeper, to understand why the modern world produces these bureaucratic extremists, and to tear away the mask of their ideologies in order to reveal their true historical role. As far as possible, revolutionaries must distance themselves from leftist organisations, and show that far from threatening the old world order, the action of these groups can at best only lead to its reconditioning. Starting to criticise them prepares the ground for the revolutionary movement, which will be obliged to liquidate them, or else risk being liquidated itself.

The first temptation which presents itself is to attack their ideologies, to point out how archaic or exotic these are (from Lenin to Mao), and to expose the contempt for the masses which lies concealed behind their demagogy. But when you consider there are enormous numbers of organisations and tendencies, all of them anxious to affirm their tiny ideological originality, this would soon become tiresome. Moreover it would amount to placing yourself on their level. Rather than their ideas, it is more appropriate to take on the activity which they deploy "in the service of their ideas": MILITANCY.

If we take militancy as a whole this is not because we deny the differences which exist between the activities of the various organisations. But we think that despite – and even because of – their importance, these differences can only be adequately explained by taking militancy as their origin.

The various ways of being militant are only different responses to the same fundamental contradiction, a contradiction which no one has a solution to.

In taking the activity of the militant as the starting point of our critique we do not underestimate the importance of the role of ideas within militancy. But from the moment that these ideas are put forward, without any connection to activity, it becomes important to know what they conceal. We will show the discrepancy between them, we will connect the ideas to the activity and reveal the impact of the activity on the ideas: seeking behind the lie the reality of the liar, in order to understand the reality of the lie.

While the criticism and condemnation of militancy is an essential task for revolutionary theory, it can only be done from the "point of view" of the revolution. Bourgeois ideologues can treat militants as

dangerous hooligans or as manipulated idealists, and advise them to occupy their time with work, or in getting away to *Club Méditerranée*; but they cannot attack militancy in depth, for that would expose the misery of the activities permitted in modern society. We don't intend to hide our bias, our criticisms will not be "objective and valid from all the points of view".

This critique of militancy cannot be separated from the construction of revolutionary organisations, not just because the organisations of militants will need to be fought without relaxation, but also because the struggle against the tendency towards militancy must be taken to the heart of even revolutionary organisations. Clearly this is because, at least initially, these organisations are likely to be made up from a significant proportion of "repented" former militants, but it is also because militancy is rooted in the alienation of each one of us. Alienation is not eliminated by waving a magic wand and militancy is the special trap which the old world sets for revolutionaries.

What we say about militants is firm and without appeal. We are not prepared to compromise with them, these are not revolutionaries who have made a mistake, nor are they semi-revolutionaries, they are people who remain on this side of the revolution. However this doesn't mean (1) that we exempt ourselves from this critique, for if we make a point of being clear and sharp we do so firstly with regard to ourselves; or (2) that we condemn militants as individuals and make this condemnation a matter of morality. It is not a question of falling back on a separation of the good from the bad. We don't underestimate the temptation to say "the more I mouth off about militants, the more I prove that I'm not one, and the more I shelter myself from criticism!"

Masochism

Let’s try to overcome the boredom which militants naturally generate. We won't bother to decipher the phraseology of their leaflets and speeches. Instead let’s question the reasons which impelled them personally into militancy. There is no more embarrassing question for a militant. In the worst cases they will witter on interminably about the horror of capitalism, about the misery of third world children, about cluster bombs, about rising prices, about repression... At best they will explain how having once become conscious of the true nature of capitalism – how they value this famous "raised consciousness" – they decided to fight for a better world, for socialism (real socialism of course, not the other kind). Filled with enthusiasm by these exciting prospects, they couldn't resist the desire to throw themselves on the handle of the nearest duplicator. Let’s look deeper into this question and focus, not on what they say, but on how they live.

There is an enormous contradiction between what they claim to want, and the misery and the ineffectiveness of what they do.

The efforts which they demand of themselves, and the degree of boredom which they are capable of putting up with, leaves no doubt: these people are primarily masochists. It's not just that in view of their activity, one cannot believe they sincerely want a better life, but that even their masochism shows no originality. While certain perverts may put into a body of work an imagination which ignores the poverty of the old world's rules, this is not the case for militants. Within their organisations they accept the hierarchy and petty leaders they claim they want to rid the world of, and the energy which they expend spontaneously takes on the form of work. Because militants are the kind of people for whom eight or nine hours of daily degradation are not enough.

When militants try to justify themselves, they only succeed in showing off their lack of imagination. They cannot conceive of

something different, of a form of activity other than that which currently exists. For them the divisions between the serious and the amusing, between ends and means, are not tied to a specific period. These categories are held to be eternal and unsurpassable: one can only be happy later on by sacrificing oneself now. The sacrifice without reward of millions of militant workers, the generations of the Stalinist period, stirs nothing in their tiny minds. They do not see that means determine ends, and that by agreeing to sacrifice themselves today, they prepare the sacrifices of tomorrow.

One cannot help being struck by the innumerable resemblances which bring together militancy and religious activity. The same psychological attitudes can be found: the spirit of sacrifice but also the intransigence, the will to convert yet also the spirit of submissiveness. These resemblances extend to the domain of rituals and ceremonies: sermons on unemployment, processions for Vietnam, references to the sacred texts of Marxism-Leninism, the cult of emblems (red flags). Don't the political churches also have their prophets, their great priests, their converts, their heresies, their schisms, their practising militants and their non-practising sympathisers! But revolutionary militancy is only a parody of religion. The richness, the insanity, the excesses of religious projects are beyond it; militancy aspires to seriousness, it wants to be reasonable, it believes that in exchange for this it can win a paradise here below. It doesn't even achieve this much. Jesus Christ is resurrected and ascends into heaven. Lenin decomposes in Red Square.

If the militant can be compared to the believer in terms of the ingenuousness of his illusions, it is another matter with regard to his real attitude. The sacrifice of the Carmelite nun, who imprisons herself to pray for the salvation of souls, has a very limited effect on social reality. The situation is quite different for the militant. His sacrifice is likely to have distressing consequences for the whole of

society.

The Desire for Promotion

The militant talks a lot about the masses. His activity is centred on them. He acts to convince them, to make them "achieve consciousness". And yet the militant is separated from the masses and their possibilities for revolt. This is because he is separated from his own desires.

The militant feels the absurdity of the existence that is imposed on us. In "deciding" to become militant, he tries to find a solution to the gap which exists between his desires and the life which he really has the possibility of living. His decision is a reaction against the misery of his own life. But he commits himself to a dead end.

Although he is dissatisfied, the militant remains unable to recognise and face his desires. HE IS ASHAMED OF THEM. This leads him to replace the promotion of his desires, with the desire for promotion. But the feelings of guilt which he maintains are such, that he cannot contemplate a hierarchical promotion within the framework of the system, or rather he is only ready to fight for a good position, if at the same time, he can obtain an assurance that this is not just for his own benefit. His militancy enables him to elevate himself, to place himself on a pedestal, without this promotion appearing to others, or even to himself, as what it really is. (After all, the Pope himself is only the servant of the servants of God!).

Putting oneself at the service of one’s own desires doesn't mean retreating into one's shell, and has nothing to do with petit-bourgeois individualism. On the contrary, it can only proceed through the destruction of the armour of selfishness, which confines us in bourgeois society, and the development of a true class solidarity. The militant who claims to place himself at the service of

the proletariat ("the workers are our masters" Geismar[2]), only places himself at the service of the idea that he has of the proletariat's interests. Thus by a paradox which is only apparent, in truly putting oneself at the service of oneself one comes back to helping others, and doing so on a class basis, while in placing oneself at the service of others one comes to protect a personal hierarchical position.

To be militant, doesn't mean trying hard to transform ones daily life, or directly revolting against oppression, but on the contrary means fleeing this terrain. However, once it is understood that our everyday life is colonised by capital, and ruled by the laws of commodity production, this is the only revolutionary terrain. In politicising himself, the militant is in search of a role which places him above the masses. Whether this "above" takes the form of "vanguardism" or of "educationism" changes nothing. Already he is no longer a proletarian who has nothing to lose but his illusions; he has a role to defend. In revolutionary periods, when all roles crumble under pressure from the desire to live without restriction, the role of "conscious revolutionary" is the one which survives best.

In being militant he gives substance to his existence, and his life finds a meaning. However he does not find this meaning within himself, in the reality of his subjectivity, but in his submission to external necessities. In the same way that at work he is subjected to goals and rules which escape him, as a militant he obeys the "necessities of history".

Obviously one cannot put all militants on the same level. Not all of them are as deeply affected. Among them one finds naive individuals who, not knowing what to do with their spare time, possessed by loneliness, and deceived by revolutionary phraseology, are led astray; they will seize the first excuse to leave. Buying a television, meeting your heart’s desire, working overtime to pay for

the car, all decimate the ranks of the militant army.

The reasons which impel people into militancy are not products of modern society. On the whole they are the same for militant trade unionists, Catholics and revolutionaries. The reappearance of revolutionary mass militancy is related to the current crisis of commodity societies and the return of the "old mole" of revolution. The possibility of a social revolution appears sufficiently serious that militants take a gamble on it. This is all reinforced by the collapse of religions.

Capitalism no longer needs systems of religious compensation. Having arrived at maturity, it no longer has to offer an extra portion of happiness in the hereafter but all happiness in the here-below, through the consumption of its material, cultural and spiritual goods (metaphysical anguish promotes sales!). Bypassed by history, the religions and their faithful can only move on to social action or.... Maoism.

Leftist militancy primarily affects those social categories which are in the process of accelerated proletarianisation (high-school pupils, students, teachers, socio-educational personnel....), who have no possibility of fighting concretely for short-term advantages, and for whom to become truly revolutionary presupposes a very profound personal reassessment. The worker is much less complicit in his social role than the student or teacher. For the latter, being militant is a compromise solution which enables them to shoulder their fluctuating social role. In militancy they find an importance that the deterioration of their social standing denies them. To call themselves revolutionaries, to occupy themselves with the transformation of the whole of society, permits them to minimise the transformation of their own social status and personal illusions.

Within the working class, trade unionism has a virtual monopoly of

militancy, it assures the militant immediate satisfaction, and a position whose advantages can be concretely measured. The worker who is tempted by militancy will most probably turn to trade unionism. Even the anti-union committees of struggle tend to become new style trade-unionism. For militant workers politics is only an extension of trade union action. Militancy hardly attracts workers, especially young workers, since they are the most clear-sighted proletarians when it comes to the misery of their work in particular and of their life in general. Little tempted, as a whole, by trade unionism, they are even less attracted by the nebulous advantages of leftism.

That said, when the reign of the commodity and of consumption dissolves during a revolutionary upheaval, trade unionism, whose importance is based on wage demands, will be ready to survive by turning to revolutionary militancy. It will take up the most extreme slogans, and will then be much more dangerous than the leftist groups. Following May 68, we have already seen how the CFDT[3] blended the term self-management into its neo-bureaucratic gibberish.

Political Work

The militant devotes the "free" time, which his professional or educational obligations leave him, to what he himself calls "political work". It’s necessary to print and distribute leaflets, manufacture and stick up posters, hold meetings, make contacts, prepare rallies... But this sort of activity considered in isolation is not enough to characterise militant work. The simple fact of composing a leaflet, with the aim of printing and distributing it, cannot in itself be considered a militant act. If it becomes militancy it is because it forms part of an activity which has a particular logic.

It's because the militant's activity is not the extension of his desires,

it's because it obeys a logic which is external to him, that it approaches work. Just as the worker does not work for himself, the militant is not militant on his own behalf. Thus the results of his action cannot be measured by the pleasure he gets from it. Instead it will be by the number of hours spent, the number of leaflets distributed. Repetition and routine dominate the activity of the militant. The separation between execution and decision reinforces the civil servant aspect of the militant.

But if militancy approaches work, it cannot be assimilated to it. Work is the activity on which the dominant world is based, it produces and reproduces capital and capitalist relations of production; militancy is only a minor activity. By definition, the results and effectiveness of work are not measured by the satisfaction of the worker, but they have the advantage of being economically measurable. Commodity production, by means of currency and profit, creates its standards and instruments of measure. It has its own logic and rationality, which it imposes on producer and consumer. By contrast, the effectiveness of militancy, "the advancement of the revolution", still hasn't found its measuring instruments. Their control evades militants and their leaders. Assuming, of course, that the latter still worry about the revolution! So they are reduced to counting the material produced and distributed, the levels of recruitment, the number of actions undertaken; obviously none of these measure what they pretend to. Naturally enough from this they come to imagine that what is measurable is an end in itself. Imagine a capitalist who could not find a means of evaluating the value of his production, and so settled for measuring the quantity of oil consumed by machines. Conscientiously, workers would empty oil into the gutter in order to produce an increase in... production. Incapable of pursuing its proclaimed goal, militancy only gives itself the name of work.

As they conscientiously endeavour to imitate work, militants are

very badly placed to understand the prospects which are opened up, on the one hand by the increasingly widespread contempt for all constraints, and on the other by the progress of knowledge and technology. The most intelligent of them line up alongside modernist bourgeois ideologists, in order to demand that hours of work are reduced, or that repugnant activity is humanised. Whether they speak in the name of capital or of the revolution these people are unable to see beyond the separation between work time and leisure time, between activity devoted to production and activity devoted to consumption.

If we are obliged to work, the cause is not natural, but social. Work and class society go hand in hand. The master wants to see the slave producing because only what is produced can be appropriated. The capitalist doesn't give a shit for the joy or the pleasure which can be found in any activity, and which cannot be capitalised, accumulated, or translated into money. When we work we are entirely subjected to authority, to an external law, our only reason for existence is what we produce. Any factory is a racket, where our lives and our sweat are squeezed out, to be transformed into commodities.

Time spent at work is time in which we cannot directly satisfy our desires, but which instead we must sacrifice, while waiting for the subsequent compensation of a salary. This is exactly the opposite of play, where the unfolding and rhythm of what you do is led by the pleasure you take in it. In emancipating itself the proletariat will abolish work. The production of the foodstuffs necessary for our biological survival will no longer be anything but the pretext for the liberation of our passions.

The Obsession with Holding Meetings

A significant characteristic of militancy is the time spent in

meetings. Let’s leave to one side the debates devoted to grand strategy: where are our comrades in Bolivia, when will we have the next world economic crisis, is the construction of the revolutionary party being advanced...

Instead let’s be content to consider those meetings concerning "everyday work". It is perhaps in these that the misery of militantism is best displayed. Aside from a few desperate cases, militants themselves will complain of the number of these "meetings which make no progress". Even though militants like to bask in one another's company, they cannot fail to suffer from the obvious contradiction between their will to act on the one hand, and on the other, the time wasted in fruitless discussion and endless debate. But they are condemned to remain in this dead end because they are only attacking "meeting-itis", without seeing that it is the whole of militancy which is called into question. The only way they have of ending the obsession with meetings amounts to retreating into an activism with less and less grasp on reality.

WHAT IS TO BE DONE? HOW SHOULD WE ORGANISE OURSELVES? These are the questions which underlie and give rise to meetings. However these questions can never be settled and their solution gets no closer, because when militants put them to themselves, they pose them as if they were separate from their own lives. Answers are not found because the questions are not raised by those who possess a concrete solution to them. You can meet for hours and rack your brains but this won't conjure up practical support when ideas are lacking. While these questions are trifles for the revolutionary proletariat, because for them the problems of action and organisation arise concretely and form part of their struggle, for militants they become THE PROBLEM. An obsession with meetings is the necessary complement to activism. In fact, the problem which arises is always the same: how to merge with the mass movement while remaining separated from it. The solution to

this dilemma is either for them to truly merge with the masses, through finding the reality of their desires and the possibilities for their realisation, or else to reinforce their power as militants, while lining up against the proletariat at the side of the old world. Wildcat strikes show that there are risks!

Militancy reproduces its internal failings in its relationship with the masses, in particular the obsession with meetings. You gather people and you count them. For some groups like the AJS[4] to present themselves and to count heads becomes the height of the action!

These questions of action and organisation, already separated from the real movement, are then mechanically separated from one another. The various tendencies of leftism concretise this separation. On one side we find the Maoists and the former *Gauche Proletarienne*,[5] the pole of action, and on the other we find the Trotskyists and the Ligue Communiste,[6] the pole of organisation. In order to leave the dead end, which militancy is plunged into by separating from the masses, they either fetishize action or else fetishize organisation. Each protects its particular idiocy while mocking the orientation of rival groups.

Bureaucracy

Organisations of militants are all hierarchical. Some organisations not only don't hide this fact, but pride themselves on it. Others are content to talk about it as little as possible. Finally some small groups try to deny it altogether.

In the same way that they reproduce, or rather ape work, militant organisations have a need for "bosses". Unable to build their unity starting from their concrete problems, militants are naturally led to believe that the unification of decisions can only result from the existence of a leadership. They don't imagine that a common truth can emerge from particular wills, or as they see it, can come out of

the shit, instead it must be weighed and imposed from on high. So by necessity they represent revolution as a clash between two hierarchical state apparatuses, one bourgeois, the other proletarian.

They know nothing about bureaucracy, about its autonomy or about the way in which it resolves its internal contradictions. Grassroots militants naively believe that conflicts between leaders can be reduced to conflicts of ideas, and that when they are told there is unity, there is indeed unity. Their great pride is to have been able to distinguish the organisation provided with THE best leadership. While adhering to this or that chapel they will adopt a system of ideas in much the same way as one slips on a costume. Without having verified its basis, they will still be ready to defend all of its consequences, and respond to any objections with incredible dogmatism. At a time when priests are torn by spiritual crises, militants keep the faith.

Forced to take account of the increasingly widespread contempt for any form of authority, militancy has produced offshoots of a new kind. Some organisations claim not to be organisations, and in particular conceal their leadership. The bureaucrats hide themselves all the better to pull the strings.

Some traditional organisations try to set up parallel forms of organisation, some permanent, some not. They hope in the name of "proletarian autonomy", to co-opt or at least to influence people who otherwise would have escaped them.

One could mention *Secours Rouge*, the OJTR and the *Assemblées Ouvriers Paysans du PSU*...[7]

Secours Rouge ('Red Aid') was formed in 1970 by a committee of "militants and personalities" (Biard) including the ubiquitous Sartre. Its purpose was to be a unitary body for organising practical defence and struggle, theoretically to be controlled by popular local

meetings. It attracted the support of a number of Trotskyist, Maoist and anarchist groups and organised activities ranging from demonstrations to attempts at practical solidarity of different kinds. In reality Secours Rouge was primarily an initiative by the Maoist *Gauche Prolétarienne* which by then had been banned by the government and existed through networks of groups and organisations which it either started itself or else co-opted. (See footnote 5) The scene of in fighting amongst the various groupings from the start, one by one the Trotskyist groups and the left socialist PSU broke away, leaving the militants of the "ex-GP" in control before it broke up completely. See Roland Biard, *Dictionnaire de l'extrême-gauche de 1945 à nos jours,* Belfond, Paris, 1978., pp. 345-346 and A. Belden Fields, *Trotskyism and Maoism – Theory and Practice in France and the United States,* Autonomedia, New York, 1988., Chapter 3 pp. 108-109.

Assemblées Ouvriers Paysans du PSU. The *Parti Socialiste Unifié* (PSU) was a small left-socialist party formed in 1960. Strongly divided over its direction following the 1969 elections, and facing strong pressure from sections of its membership (it had picked up a lot of younger and more militant recruits following May '68), the party's National Council decided to convene Assemblies of Workers and Peasants across the country. The novel element was that these would be open to non-members of the party, and would be charged with formulating strategy documents to go to the party's Congress at Lille in June 1971. Unsurprisingly the Assemblies promptly became the scene of in-fighting for control by the various factions in the party, and the texts which finally went to the congress represented the factions rather than the 'voice of the struggling masses'. See Roland Biard, *Dictionnaire de l'extrême-gauche de 1945 à nos jours,* Belfond, Paris, 1978., pp. 280-309 particularly 295-300.

The OJTR (*Organisation des Jeunes Travailleurs Révolutionnaires*) were the group which produced this text – presumably this is either

a joke by the authors or a misprint in the version this has been translated from (translator's note). In the same way, some independent newspapers or satellite organisations claim only to express the point of view of the revolutionary masses, or of the autonomous rank and file groups. For example, "Cahiers de Mai",[8] "Le technique en Lutte", "L'outil des travailleurs"... Wherever people refuse to clearly raise questions of organisation or theory, on the pretext that the hour for the construction of the revolutionary party has not yet arrived, or in the name of a bogus spontaneism ("we are not an organisation, but a gathering of nice guys, a community" etc. etc.), one can be certain that there is a bureaucracy and quite often that one is dealing with Maoism. The advantage of Trotskyism is that its fetishism of the organisation forces it to display its true colours; it co-opts while saying that is what it's doing. The advantage of Maoism (we're not speaking here of pure, archeo-Stalinist Maoism of the Humanité Rouge variety[9]) is that it creates the conditions for its own supersession; playing at being acrobats of co-option they will certainly tumble to the ground.

Objectivity and Subjectivity

The systems of ideas adopted by militants vary among the different organisations, but they are all undermined by the need to mask both the nature of the activities they conceal, and their separation from the masses. So at the heart of militant ideologies one always finds a separation between objectivity and subjectivity, conceived in a mechanical and a-historic manner.

Even if he does not deny that his activity has subjective motivations, the militant who devotes himself to the service of the people refuses to attach any importance to them. In any event what is subjective must be eliminated, in favour of what is objective. Refusing to be driven by his desires, the militant is reduced to invoking historical necessity, considered as something external to the world of desires.

Thanks to "scientific socialism", the congealed form of a degenerated Marxism, he believes he has the power to discover the direction of history, and to adapt himself to it.

He gets drunk on concepts whose significance escapes him: productive forces, relations of production, law of value, dictatorship of the proletariat etc. It all enables him to reassure himself about the seriousness of his agitation. Setting himself outside of "his critique" of the world, he condemns himself to understand nothing of its movement.

The passion which he does not manage to put into his everyday life, he displaces into his imaginary participation in the "world revolutionary spectacle". The earth is reduced to the level of a Punch and Judy show, where the nasty and nice, the imperialists and anti-imperialists clash. He compensates for the mediocrity of his existence by identifying with the stars of this planetary circus. The height of ridiculousness was reached with the worship of "CHE". Nutty economist, pitiable strategist, but a good looking guy, at least Guevara would have the consolation of seeing his Hollywood-style talents rewarded. A record in poster sales.

What is subjectivity, other than the residue of objectivity, which a society based on commodity reproduction cannot integrate? The subjectivity of the artist objectifies itself in the work of art. For the worker who is separated from the means of production and from the organisation of his own production, subjectivity remains a state of mania, of fantasy... he is made objective by the grace of capital, and even becomes capital. Revolutionary activity like the world it prefigures goes beyond the separation between objectivity and subjectivity. It objectifies subjectivity, and subjectively invests the objective world. The proletarian revolution is the irruption of subjectivity!

It is not a question of falling back on the myth of a "real human nature", or of the "eternal essence" of man, repressed by Society, and which would seek to return for all to see. But if the form and goal of our desires vary, they cannot be reduced to the need to consume this or that product. Historically determined by the evolution and necessities of commodity production, subjectivity by no means yields to the needs of consumption or production. Commodities must constantly adapt in order to co-opt the desires of consumers. But they still remain unable to satisfy the will to live by completely and directly achieving our desires. Shop windows, the avant-garde of commercial provocation, increasingly undergo a critique by paving stone!

Those who refuse to take account of the reality of THEIR OWN desires in the name of "Materialist Thought" risk not seeing the weight of our desires land in their face.

Militants and their ideologists, and even university undergraduates, are less and less capable of understanding their own time and of being consistent with history. Incapable of secreting a thought that's the slightest bit modern, they are reduced to searching the dustbin of history to co-opt ideologies which have long since given evidence of their failure: anarchism, Leninism, Trotskyism... To render this more digestible they season it with a little badly understood Maoism or Castroism. They invoke the name of the workers movement, but confuse its history with the construction of state capitalism in Russia, or the peasant-bureaucratic epic of the "long march" in China. They claim to be Marxists, but don't understand that the Marxist project for the abolition of wage labour, commodity production and the state is inseparable from the seizure of power by the proletariat.

"Marxist" thinkers are increasingly incapable of taking up the analysis of the fundamental contradictions of capitalism which

Marx began. They bog themselves down on the terrain of bourgeois political economy, while endlessly repeating stupidities about the law of value, work, the tendency of the rate of profit to fall, the realisation of surplus-value. In spite of their pretensions, they do not understand the progress of modern capitalism. Believing themselves obliged to use a Marxist vocabulary, for which they don't possess the instructions for use, they cut themselves off from those few possibilities for analysis that still remain within political economy. Their "researches" are not worth those which the first disciples of Keynes produced.

Militants and Workers' Councils

Militant organisations make themselves autonomous from the masses which they claim to represent. They are naturally led to consider that it is not the working class which makes the revolution, but "the organisations of the working class". Thus it suits them to reinforce the latter. In extreme cases the proletariat becomes mere raw material, the manure from which will bloom the red rose of the Revolutionary Party. The necessities of co-option require that they say little about this externally; that is where the demagogy begins.

The autonomy of the objectives of the militant organisations must be concealed. Ideology is used for this purpose. They loudly proclaim that they are at the service of the people, that they don't act for themselves and that if ever they were obliged to take power for a short time they would never abuse it. Once the working class had been well educated they would make haste to return power to them.

The history of workers' councils shows that the so-called workers' organisations systematically sought to play their own game, and extricate their own chestnuts from the fire; for the best of reasons

of course. To ensure their own power they sought to limit, co-opt and destroy the forms of organisation which the proletariat had given itself: territorial soviets and factory committees.

The Russian soviets were first bribed and then liquidated by the Bolshevik party and state. In 1905 Lenin had attached no importance to them. In 1917 by contrast the Bolsheviks proclaimed: "all power to the soviets". In 1921 the soviets which had served as stepping stones to the seizure of power became troublesome; the workers and sailors of Kronstadt who demanded free soviets were crushed by the red army.

In Germany, the social-democrat government, the "people's stewards", undertook to liquidate the workers' councils in the name of the revolution.

Once again, in Spain the Communists took care to make the forms of popular power disappear. This was done to better develop the fight against fascism! There is no point in multiplying examples. All historical experiences have confirmed the antagonism which opposes the revolutionary proletariat and the militant organisation. The most extremist ideology can conceal the most counter-revolutionary position. If certain organisations like the Spartacus League and the anarcho-syndicalist CNT-FAI could fight at the side of the proletariat until their common defeat, nothing proves that these organisations would not have started to fight for power for themselves once their opponents had been overcome.

For all that they have cloistered themselves in politics, militants are no less social individuals, subjected to the influence of their milieu. When things heat up, many may cross over to the revolutionary camp. After all we have seen union representatives take charge of sequestrations! But the massive desertion of militants will be all the more likely since the councils and revolutionary councilists will be

the stronger. The movement may be helped in its successes by the reinforcement of many militants, but in the event of mistakes or hesitations the pendulum will swing in the opposite direction. The militant organisations will then be reinforced by proletarians seeking to reassure themselves.

The liquidation of the workers' councils was made possible by their weakness, their inability to apply internally the rules of direct democracy, and to effectively take power while crushing all the powers outside them. Militant organisations in fact are merely the proletariat's own weakness exteriorised, and then turned back against them.

Workers will make mistakes again. They will not immediately find the most appropriate form for their own power. The fewer illusions the masses have about militancy, the more the power of the councils will have a chance to develop. Discrediting and ridiculing militants, this is the task that falls to revolutionaries today. This task will be completed by the criticism in deeds represented by the birth of councilist organisations. These organisations will know how to do without a leadership and a bureaucratic apparatus. A product of the solidarity of combative workers, they will be free associations of autonomous individuals. They will demonstrate through their ideas, and especially by their behaviour in struggle, that they will never venture to pursue their own interests, as distinct from those of the whole of the proletariat.

The development of modern capitalism, which results in all social space being occupied by commodities, in the generalisation of wage labour, and also in a degradation of moral values and a contempt for work and for ideologies, will increase the violence of the clash. Proletarians will go much faster and much further than they did in the past. While in the past organisations of militants could perform a revolutionary role for a time, that will no longer be possible. At

the time of the next great battles of the struggle, these organisations can only rapidly become more and more counter-revolutionary.10

Le Militantisme Stade Supreme De L'alienation was first published in France in 1972 by the *Organisation des Jeunes Travailleurs Révolutionnaires* (OJTR).

The OJTR was formed in the early 1970s. Originally it was inspired by the Situationist International, though it was to publish a pamphlet containing a lengthy critique of it. (The SI influences can be seen in this present text. The concept of militantism develops themes that can be found in some situationist writing and SI influence can also be seen in the approach to councilist organisation set out in the closing paragraphs). Subsequently the OJTR became influenced by left communism, in particular the mixture of German and Italian left communist ideas developed by the milieu based around the bookshop *La Vieille Taupe*, from which came the group *Le Mouvement Communiste*.

The group also produced texts under the name *Quatre Millions de Jeune Travailleurs*, a name adopted from a 1971 PSU youth publication (*Parti Socialiste Unifié* – a small French left-socialist Party). In 1974 the OJTR organised a national conference (described in an article in *La Banquise* as a failure) and disappeared shortly afterwards. (One might reasonably wonder how far the OJTR applied its critique of militancy to itself). From the remains of the group came the text *Un Monde Sans Argent*: *Le Communisme*, published as three pamphlets by the *Les Amis de 4 Millions de Jeunes Travailleurs* between 1975-76.

This translation has been made from the French version which is on-line at the ADEL site and now also at the Communist Left site. The text refers to a number of French Trotskyist and Maoist groups – footnotes have been added to explain some of these references.

1 CGT – *Confédération Générale du Travail*, trade union federation traditionally having close links to the French Communist Party (translator's note).

2 Alain Geismar – a member of the *Parti Socialiste Unifié* (a small left-socialist party) and president of a university teachers union at the start of May 1968, Geismar became one of the most prominent personalities created by the May movement. After it ended he became close to the March 22nd Movement and in early 1969, along with other members, he joined *La Gauche Prolétarienne* (GP) the leading group in the activist wing of French Maoism. (See footnote 5) He became a public spokesman for GP and a *cause célèbre* in his own right when he was imprisoned in 1970 for incitement to riot. In later years he was able to resume his career as an academic and by the end of the century was a ministerial advisor to the socialist government (translator's note).

3 CFDT – *Confédération Française Démocratique du Travail* – French trade union federation. After May '68 (which it was more sympathetic to than the Communist Party linked CGT) it developed strong ties to the *Parti Socialiste Unifié* and became strongly identified with the cause of workers management ("autogestion"). In later years has moved closer to the Socialist Party (translator's note).

4 AJS – *Alliances des Jeunes pour le Socialisme* – Founded in 1969 as the youth movement of the (Lambertist) *Organisation Communiste Internationaliste* (OCI). In 1968 the OCI was the most 'old left' of the French Trotskyist groups, (it was a member of the International Committee of the Fourth International along with the Healyite Socialist Labour League until it broke with Healey in 1971). It achieved the notable feat of calling on young people to tear down the barricades in 1968, and then still getting briefly banned by the government. Its youth wing, the AJS, acquired an unenviable reputation for its manipulative frontism. See Roland Biard, *Dictionnaire de l'extrême-gauche de 1945 à nos jours*, Paris, 1978, pp. 23-26. and on the OCI, A. Belden Fields, *Trotskyism and Maoism – Theory and Practice in France and the United States*, Autonomedia, New York, 1988., pp. 64-73 and Chap. 7 (translator's note).

5 *Gauche Prolétarienne* (GP). Formed in September 1968 by former

members of the *Union de Jeunesses Communistes (Marxiste-Léniniste)*, an Althusserite Maoist group which had split from the UEC, the Communist Party's official student group, in 1966. At the start of 1969 they were joined by a number of members of the 'spontaneist' March 22nd Movement, and for the next three or four years GP became the most representative group within activist 'non-party' Maoism. This current – which had few parallels outside France – is described in detail in A. Belden Field's book (the relevant chapter is on line at the link below). GP was characterised by the number of 'personalities' which it both attracted as sympathisers (including Sartre and the publisher Maspero), and which it created – in France it exemplified the practice of 'radical chic'. Its organisational practise exemplified what was to become described in the US and the UK as the tyranny of structurelessness. Banned by the government in 1970, GP continued to function through a variety of fronts and networks of groups, and by attempting to take over or control other projects. See Roland Biard, *Dictionnaire de l'extrême-gauche de 1945 à nos jours*, Belfond, Paris, 1978., pp. 23-26, 253-7 and A. Belden Fields, *Trotskyism and Maoism – Theory and Practice in France and the United States*, Autonomedia, New York, 1988., Chap. 3 (translator's note).

6 *Ligue Communiste*. If the OCI (see footnote 4 above) represented the 'old left' within Trotskyism, the *Ligue Communiste* represented the 'new left' basing itself on the 'new vanguards' of youth, students, black nationalism and national liberation movements. *Ligue Communiste* was the name adopted in 1968 when the (Frankist) *Parti Communiste Internationaliste* (PCI) and *Jeunesse Communiste Révolutionnaire* (JCR), the student group it dominated, were banned by the government. As the French section of the Unified Secretariat of the Fourth International, the PCI had practised entrism inside the French Communist Party until 1968. Its influence inside the party's official student group led to the formation of the JCR in 1967. The JCR was one of the most active student political groups during May 68, and its success in promoting itself was the springboard for the formation of the *Ligue*. See Roland Biard, *Dictionnaire de l'extrême-gauche de 1945 à nos jours*, Belfond, Paris, 1978., pp. 206-9, 199-200, 266-70 and A. Belden

Fields, *Trotskyism and Maoism – Theory and Practice in France and the United States*, Autonomedia, New York, 1988., pp 49-64 and Chap. 7 (translator's note).

7 *Secours Rouge*, the OJTR and the *Assemblées Ouvriers Paysans du PSU*...

8 *Cahiers de Mai* – Journal founded in June 1968 by some militants from around Nantes, which originally set out to express the viewpoint of the Action Committees formed in May. As the movement which sprang into being during May 68 died away the journal became a forum for discussing and popularising workers struggles. In January 1969 it initiated a debate on the theme "How can we help the workers take revolutionary action?" This debate involved workers as well as militants and a number of study groups were set up. In 1972 an attempt was made to formalise this through an association of friends of Cahiers de Mai, devoted to championing new forms of organisation and action and promoting autonomous struggle. However as Biard puts it: "(...) the notion of the autonomy of the working class is closely bound to the notion of the organization of revolutionaries. What are the relations between the autonomous movement and the revolutionary groups? Depending on the answer that one gives – from the negation of the revolutionary groups to the recognition of their vanguard role – there is an infinity of possible positions". The journal ceased publishing in 1975. See Roland Biard, *Dictionnaire de l'extrême-gauche de 1945 à nos jours*, Belfond, Paris, 1978., pp. 57-58 (translators note).

9 *Humanité Rouge* – journal of the *Parti Communiste Marxiste-Leniniste de France* (PCMLF). Centralised Maoist party formed in December 1967 by a number of former Communist Party (CP) members. Unlike the Althusserite UJCML which broke from the CP's student group and was the seedbed for the 'non-party' Maoist current such as *Gauche Prolétarienne* (see footnote 5), the PCMLF was primarily composed of ultra-Stalinists opposed to what they saw as the 'revisionism' of the CP. Active during May '68, it was banned like many other organisations and subsequently operated clandestinely, its public face and name becoming that of its journal *Humanité Rouge*. See Roland Biard, *Dictionnaire de l'extrême-*

gauche de 1945 à nos jours, Belfond, Paris, 1978., pp. 270-273 and A. Belden Fields, *Trotskyism and Maoism – Theory and Practice in France and the United States*, Autonomedia, New York, 1988., Chap. 3. (Online at that link) (Translator's note).

10 Publication Details of *Militancy – Highest Stage of Alienation*

Attachments

Organisation des Jeunes Travailleurs Révolutionnaires-Militancy; highest stage of alienation.pdf (635.5 KB)

activism, OJTR, anarchism, state socialism, Maoism, Leninism, Trotskyism, Stalinism, Dominique Blanc, PDF

Comments

cardy lady 13 years 7 months ago

like - when was this written?

888 13 years 7 months ago

1972 it says

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cardy lady 13 years 7 months ago

ah right, I missed that, thanks

---

syndicalist 12 years 11 months ago

Has anyone read this? I keep putting it on my GRIL;..... but it hasn't be grilled yet.

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arminius 11 years 7 months ago

Maybe I just have Monday cobwebs, but what or who is 'OJTR'?

Entdinglichung 11 years 7 months ago

Organisation des jeunes travailleurs révolutionnaires,

according to http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Communisme_de_conseils#Depuis_1975 a council communist group which broke away from the PSU during the early/mid-70ies

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Spassmaschine 11 years 7 months ago

arminius

> *Maybe I just have Monday cobwebs, but what or who is 'OJTR'?*

the above article

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> *The group also produced texts under the name Quatre Millions de Jeune Travailleurs, a name adopted from a 1971 PSU youth publication (Parti Socialiste Unifié -- a small French Left Socialist Party). In 1974 the OJTR organised a national conference (described in an article in La Banquise as a failure) and disappeared shortly afterwards. (One might reasonably wonder how far the OJTR applied its critique of militancy to itself). From the remains of the group came the text Un Monde Sans Argent : Le Communisme, published as three pamphlets by the 'Les Amis de 4 Millions de Jeunes Travailleurs' between 1975-76.*

The La Banquise article referred to in this quote can be found here: https://libcom.org/library/re-collecting-our-past-la-

banquise

The text 'Un Monde Sans Argent: Le Communisme' can be found in English translation here: https://libcom.org/library/world-without-money-communism-les-amis-de-4-millions-de-jeunes-travailleurs

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arminius 11 years 7 months ago

Much appreciated, comrades. Thanx.

Craftwork 10 years 2 months ago

Corrected spelling/grammar, footnotes sorted.

Steven. 10 years 2 months ago

Craftwork

> *Corrected spelling/grammar, footnotes sorted.*

great stuff!

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