

THE CRISIS OF POLITICAL LIBERALISM:

- POLITICAL LIBERALISM HIT BY STATE FISCAL CRISIS AND WORLD MARKET COMPETITION
- REGRESSION OF REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACY INTO PLEBISCITARY DEMOCRACY
- RETURN OF PROTO-FASCISM

INTRODUCTION

This document has for the moment only been published in French and English and is a work in progress. The text has arrived at a certain level of maturity, and that's why we have presented it for the criticism of comrades without waiting for further developments in the situation. We will take account of criticism received in the eventual publication of another pamphlet which will then be translated into various languages, as is usual.

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INTRODUCTION

Over the last few years we've seen something, in various countries, that hasn't been experienced for a long while. It is the election of candidates who are not functional in terms of the interests of big, modern, global internationalist capital, and with a programme of hatred towards migrants, even all external entities, thrown in.

Undoubtedly, the example of Trump is the paradigm but it's not the only one. This phenomenon is accompanied by the progression, in the parliamentary democracies, from the tendency to short-circuit or reduce the role of parliaments, to the establishment of a direct link between the head of state and the people, to ignoring intermediate bodies (trade unions, etc.). And this applies whether the head of state belongs to the camp of sovereigntists like Orbán, or to the camp of modernisers like Macron.

The corollary of this is the demand for protection on the part of the population, aroused by fears, confirmed or not, that require order. Liberal, parliamentary representative democracy is therefore in crisis (and that affects the traditional parties and causes them to crumble). But what is representative democracy, how was it created and how has it evolved? Do the new men of the hour and the forces that support them represent a new phenomenon? Unfortunately not. Between 1900 and 1930, similar tendencies, that we can qualify as proto-fascist, existed before the forms that were actually deployed, Italian Fascism and German Nazism, came to dominate.

But representative democracy is not only attacked from the "right". It is also attacked from the "left" by the supporters of "participatory" democracy who share a number of common points with the right, notably on the constitution of the people, even if they put the accent on the constitution of community (of struggle, affinity etc.). Another recent phenomenon is the emergence of spontaneous movements from civil society, in Germany and Italy, for example, which does not involve fascist organisations hunting down immigrants. Finally, does this change in the period, the crisis of representative democracy, the emergence of proto-fascist movements, set the course towards war?

To try to understand the situation and its possible evolutions, this work in progress therefore puts together the following texts:

- First, the "Crisis of political liberalism"
- Second, Contextual Notes on the text "Crisis of political liberalism"
- Third, "About proto-fascist movements"
- Finally, some annexes reproducing texts by Marx.

The text has reached a certain maturity, that's why we're publishing it in the form of a work in progress, for comrades to criticise, without waiting for further developments in the situation. It is a situation which is evolving, unfortunately in the bad sense, as is shown by the agitation of the Gilets jaunes in France, who illustrate the possibilities of proto-fascism¹.

¹ See "GILETS JAUNES: the first attempts at mobilising "the people" for a strong state against the proletariat": <http://movement-communiste.com/documents/MC/Leaflets/BLT1812ENvF.pdf>

CRISIS OF POLITICAL LIBERALISM

A changing state of affairs

Political liberalism has been hit hard by the state fiscal crisis and competition on the world market. Representative democracy in regression gives rise to the monster of plebiscitary democracy in the most varied forms, from referendum inflation to its extreme variant in so-called participatory democracy. Conscious workers must sharpen the tools of class political independence by the theoretical and practical critique of bourgeois democracy in all its variants.

“While I was in Manchester, it was tangibly brought home to me that the economic facts, which have so far played no role or only a contemptible one in the writing of history, are, at least in the modern world, a decisive historical force; that they form the basis of the origination of the present-day class antagonisms; that these class antagonisms, in the countries where they have become fully developed, thanks to large-scale industry, hence especially in England, are in their turn the basis of the formation of political parties and of party struggles, and thus of all political history. Marx had not only arrived at the same view, but had already, in the Deutsche-Französische Jahrbücher (1844), generalized it to the effect that, speaking generally, it is not the state which conditions and regulates the civil society at all, but civil society which conditions and regulates the state, and, consequently, that policy and its history are to be explained from the economic relations and their development, and not vice versa. When I visited Marx in Paris in the summer of 1844, our complete agreement in all theoretical fields became evident and our joint work dates from that time. When, in the spring of 1845, we met again in Brussels, Marx had already fully developed his materialist theory of history in its main features from the above-mentioned basis and we now applied ourselves to the detailed elaboration of the newly-won mode of outlook in the most varied directions.” Engels, “On the History of the Communist League”²

The present epoch is one of profound changes in the global capitalist order. The fiscal crisis of the most developed capitalist countries unleashed by the most serious crisis of the credit system since the 1930s has overturned equilibriums in the world of capital. The brutal halt to the internationalisation of markets in capital and commodities which happened after the financial crisis of 2007/2008 relaunched the trade war through protectionist measures, exchange rate wars and tax breaks for companies. Competition on the three crucial terrains of customs laws, taxes on companies and supposedly competitive devaluations was accentuated by the accumulated delay in the recovery of productive investments aiming at raising the social productivity of labour. Investments suffered at the same time from the destabilisation of credit markets, the stagnation of internal markets due to the depreciation of the commodity labour power and postponement of productive investments, along with the summersaults of external markets.

In this unstable context, the arrangement of productive territories, their interlocking across borders and the definition of integrated commercial regions, suffered considerable modifications. NAFTA³, the commercial agreement which unites the countries of North America, trembles under the blows of the Trump plan to renationalise the capitalism of the USA (repatriating the profits of US multinationals, import tariffs on raw materials, penalties for relocation). Latin America suffers from the stoppage of the whole project of regional commercial integration in the wake of the grave

² See: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1847/communist-league/1885hist.htm>

³ NAFTA is a treaty which has been in force since 1 January 1994, between Canada, the US and Mexico which removes economic barriers, creating a free trade zone between the three countries, which comprise around 475 million inhabitants in 2017. Under the impetus of the Trump government, it is being replaced by the USMCA (“United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement”).

industrial and political crisis of Brazil, the only real power on the continent, where the arrival to power of Bolsonaro, sworn in in January 2019, does nothing to overturn this tendency.

The European Union is in its turn shaken by the British intention to leave the organisation and by the pressure of relocation in the new member countries of the Union, which came out of the crumbling of the Russian Empire. The Middle East has been burning for a decade. In sub-Saharan Africa, political crises have followed the difficult expulsions of the South African and Zimbabwean heads of state. East Asia is hit hard by the new Chinese expansionism which increases commercial agreements, which launches a gigantic infrastructure plan along the ancient Silk Road, which extends its direct foreign investments in raw materials as far as North Africa and Latin America, which accelerates its re-armament and its military presence in South East Asia and which treats its most devoted vassals more and more aggressively, in the image of North Korea. On the defensive, Japan puts into practice its project of transformation of its army into an offensive army of occupation. As for Russia's sphere of influence, it is grappling with the colonialist revival of the Putin administration.

Economic and regional wars follow each other with a growing danger of uncontrolled escalation. The course to world war has begun even if, barring a major "accident", the process is only really in its early stages. Beyond the readiness of armies for lengthy conflicts, it is above all a question of fulfilling the political conditions for the acceptance of such a perspective by civil society. It is a long-drawn-out battle which began even within the dominant classes and their dominating political bodies. For the moment, this more and more bitter fight is taking place within the democratic institutions. Extra-institutional accelerations, *coups d'État* more or less violent, direct actions on the part of the most determined sectors of the factions involved are nevertheless not to be excluded. Very schematically, what is at stake is the reform of the details of class domination by the state. It is a reform which significantly reduces "democratic rights", which reinforces the overtly repressive functions of the state apparatus and which considerably weakens organised instances of political and trade union mediation, organs of social democracy, vehicles of the organisation of civil society in the state. In a word, the critique in acts of modern political liberalism in its so-called social variant (such as the German social market economy⁴) has been launched and has reached important stages in several mature capitalist countries.

An attack on three fronts

The reconstitution of the people

Modern political liberalism presupposes that the private interests of citizens coincide with those of civil society and that it is sufficient to regulate their modes of expression by fixing the limits of individual initiative. It does not deny conflicts in civil society and, in its most elaborated expressions, modern political liberalism integrates the "class struggle" factor as a motor of capitalist expansion. The private individual always takes precedence over the people and is the only source of development of civil society in modern liberal ideology, the inheritor of Christian "personalism" (the Catholic doctrine of primacy of the individual).

⁴ The name that the social liberals give to their doctrine is the social market economy, which gives the idea that the free market is naturally social. This system opposes to each other the planned economy, the completely free market and the mixed economy. It seeks to maintain at the same time high growth, low inflation, low unemployment, good working conditions and social protection. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_market_economy

“The members of the political state are religious owing to the dualism between individual life and species-life, between the life of civil society and political life. They are religious because men treat the political life of the state, an area beyond their real individuality, as if it were their true life. They are religious insofar as religion here is the spirit of civil society, expressing the separation and remoteness of man from man. Political democracy is Christian since in it man, not merely one man but everyman, ranks as sovereign, as the highest being, but it is man in his uncivilized, unsocial form, man in his fortuitous existence, man just as he is, man as he has been corrupted by the whole organization of our society, who has lost himself, been alienated, and handed over to the rule of inhuman conditions and elements – in short, man who is not yet a real species-being. That which is a creation of fantasy, a dream, a postulate of Christianity, i.e., the sovereignty of man – but man as an alien being different from the real man – becomes, in democracy, tangible reality, present existence, and secular principle.” Karl Marx, “On the Jewish Question”, Part 1⁵

The citizens, the associated private individuals, are the source and the artisans of law, of the formal Constitution and of the modern democratic state. The maximum of individual freedom is thus defined by non-interference in the affairs of others. Civil society is protected in its turn by the state which manages individual and social animosities by the intermediary of the law and the Constitution.

“Democracy is the resolved mystery of all constitutions. Here the constitution not only in itself, according to essence, but according to existence and actuality is returned to its real ground, actual man, the actual people, and established as its own work. The constitution appears as what it is, the free product of men. One could say that this also applies in a certain respect to constitutional monarchy; only the specific difference of democracy is that here the constitution is in general only one moment of the people's existence, that is to say the political constitution does not form the state for itself. Democracy is the essence of every political constitution, socialised man under the form of a particular constitution of the state. It stands related to other constitutions as the genus to its species; only here the genus itself appears as an existent, and therefore opposed as a particular species to those existents which do not conform to the essence. Democracy relates to all other forms of the state as their Old Testament. Man does not exist because of the law but rather the law exists for the good of man. Democracy is human existence, while in the other political forms man has only legal existence. That is the fundamental difference of democracy.” Marx, “Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right”, Chapter 2, 1843⁶

“Thus, in order to behave as actual citizen of the state, to acquire political significance and efficacy, he must abandon his civil actuality, abstract from it, and retire from this entire organisation into his individuality. He must do this because the only existence that he finds for his state-citizenship is his pure, bare individuality, for the existence of the state as executive is complete without him, and his existence in civil society is complete without the state. Only in opposition to these exclusively existing communities, only as an individual, can he be a citizen of the state. His existence as citizen is an existence lying outside the realm of his communal existences, and is hence purely individual. The legislature as a power is precisely the organisation, the communal embodiment, which his political existence is supposed to receive. Prior to the legislature, civil society, or the unofficial class, does not exist as political organisation. In order that it come to existence as such, its actual organisation, actual civil life, must be established as non-existing, for the Estates as an element of the legislative power have precisely the character of rendering the unofficial class, civil society, non-existent. The separation of civil society and the political state appears necessarily to be a separation of the political

⁵ See: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/jewish-question/>

⁶ See: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1843/critique-hpr/ch02.htm>

citizen, the citizen of the state, from civil society, i.e., from his own actual, empirical reality; for as a state-idealist he is a being who is completely other, distinct, different from and opposed to his own actuality. Here civil society effects within itself the relationship of the state and civil society, a relationship which already exists on the other side [i.e., within the state] as the bureaucracy. in the states the universal becomes actually, explicitly [für sich] what it is implicitly [an sich], namely, opposition to the particular. The citizen must renounce his class, civil society, the unofficial class, in order to achieve political significance and efficacy; for it is precisely this class which stands between the individual and the political state.” Marx, “Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right”, Chapter 5, 1843⁷

The present anti-liberal movement identifies the people and not the private individual as the political and social protagonist. The people does not know classes and even less social individuals. The people pushes the atomisation of the private individual to its extreme. The people is the negation of the citizen dreamed of by liberals. But it is also its practical culmination. Sooner or later, the “free” citizen imagined by the classical liberals (John Stuart Mill) or by the most modern of their best followers (Frankfurt School) gives way to the warlike people and lines up, more isolated than ever, behind the strong state. They become a slave of the community, a patch in a construction excluding all diversity and above all any opposition between classes. The people defines itself by a territory, a “culture”, traditions, ways and customs, often by a language and a religion. The people constructs itself around one or several of these elements and gathers around a symbol, a totem which sublimates its existence and gives it a metahistorical phantasmagorical essence. The people is outside history and reality. It only exists as a rudimentary instrument of domination over civil society and, within that, the potentially revolutionary class, the proletariat. The people is therefore the worst enemy of the latter.

Inversely, the first historic task of the proletariat established as a class is to practically dissolve the people, that is to say to make classes and their conflicts appear once again. If the relation of the conscious proletariat to the liberal “citizen” has been dialectical up to a point in its political constitution into a class, if the proletarian party has been able, at the moment of affirmation of bourgeois democracies, to demand citizenship as a tool in the class struggle⁸, its relationship to the people has never varied and has always been one of war. Today, the political leader best incarnates the symbol of the people, in the image of Trump, Putin, Orbán, Farage, Salvini, Xi, Mori, now Bolsonaro, and all the rest. Their respective parties are reduced to lifeless obeyers of orders, pale simulacra of bourgeois political parties in their own right. The timid babbling of democrats who try to loosen the grip of the people in the name of the citizens by the defence of what exists now cannot compete with the war cries of the charismatic leaders.

⁷ See: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1843/critique-hpr/ch05.htm>

⁸ “The workers attach so much importance to citizenship, i.e., to active citizenship, that where they have it, for instance in America, they make good use of it, and where they do not have it, they strive to obtain it. Compare the proceedings of the North American workers at innumerable meetings, the whole history of English Chartism, and of French communism and reformism.”, Marx-Engels, “The German Ideology”, 1845 See: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/german-ideology/ch03d.htm>

“But in England, where the industrial and agricultural working class forms the immense majority of the people, democracy means the dominion of the working class, neither more nor less. ... Moreover, in England a real democratic party is impossible unless it be a working men’s party.”, Engels, “A Working Men’s Party”, article in the *Labour Standard*, 1881 See: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1881/07/23.htm>

“Therein lies the difference between Chartist democracy and all previous political bourgeois democracy. Chartism is of an essentially social nature, a class movement”, Engels, “Condition of the Working Class in England”, Chapter 8, 1845 See: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/condition-working-class-england.pdf>

“We have seen above, that the first step in the revolution by the working class is to raise the proletariat to the position of ruling class to win the battle of democracy”, Marx-Engels, *Communist Manifesto*, Chapter 2, Proletarians and Communists, 1847 See: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/communist-manifesto/ch02.htm>

And the reason is simple: against its ideological will, really existing liberal democracy has engendered in the pain of the catastrophic movement of capital, in the succession of its cyclical discontinuities, the people and its ephemeral despotic leaders. In other words, contrary to appearances, liberal democracy is soluble in the strong and despotic state and vice versa.

The renationalisation of the economy and the labour market

The long process of preparation of states for major conflicts also involves the re-nationalisation of the economy and the labour market. It is not a question here of forms of property – state or private property. This false opposition obsesses the state socialists but it has no material basis. Capital in its totality is indifferent to the juridical form of property. Its most lucid representatives have always understood that it's best not to get too concerned with forms of property. State property and private property cohabit perfectly well despite their recurrent friction. On the other hand, the opening and closing of markets is prone to generate major inter-capitalist conflicts like the two global capitalist slaughters of the twentieth century, or the numerous regional wars currently in progress. The conquest of new markets is first of all a matter of the productivity of social labour. This involves the capacity of individual capitals to appropriate super-profits⁹ by conquering parts of the market in their respective productive segments. Here the first battle that the capitals engage in is therefore to preserve their internal outlets, their parts of the market internal to the countries which they come from. But if access to the market (including that of labour power) is forbidden by law, that is to say by the sovereign decision of the state, then the question is displaced on to the terrain of straightforward force. And that is exactly what is starting to happen right now.

When productive investment has not produced the effects hoped for in terms of raising the productivity of labour, when investment in capital is impaired, minimised, made harder by malfunctioning of the credit system, when the valorisation of capital is essentially dependent on the forced depreciation of labour power and when the devalorisation of the latter happens without an accompanying, at least equal, depreciation of the commodities involved in its reproduction, the defence of the internal market becomes vital for the fraction of total capital in a given country. As an individual capitalist entity endowed with special prerogatives and as a committee for managing the affairs of the bourgeoisie of its country, the state erects all manner of defensive systems to curb competition coming from outside. Two fundamental means are at its disposal in an epoch where the financing of public deficits has become more complicated because of the recent global financial crisis: the fiscal lever and the control of capital flows.

With the fiscal lever, it is a question of taxing imports and encouraging companies to invest in the country by tax handouts. On the side of controlling capital flows, there are multiple instruments, going from so-called competitive devaluations to the regulation of capital markets, to buying the debt of companies in the country to controlling exchange rates. All these measures have become familiar during the years since the financial crisis of 2007/2008. The renationalisation of the labour market proceeds in parallel. Stopping or dissuading migration and making it ever harder to obtain nationality for foreign residents feeds the ambient xenophobia founded on the generalised fragility of the terms of contract in force in the labour market.

⁹ For a given productive sector and market, a capitalist realises super-profits when he manages to produce more cheaply than their competitors in the same sector and market, thus realising a supplementary profit relative to the average profit of that sector and market. This can be obtained by a better organisation of production (technical innovation, optimised process of production, coupled or not with lower wages) or by a situation of monopoly.

We are in a period where the mechanisms of social democracy are crimped by the fiscal crisis of the state which imposes clear and lasting cuts to its unproductive public spending. Also, the valorisation of capital relies above all on the reduction of wages and the raising of the rate of absolute and relative surplus value by the reinforcement of the command of the company, the hardening of capitalist despotism in places of production. Thus, the war between proletarians to keep or get a job is intensifying.

The absence of repetitive and widespread struggles over wages and working conditions, and against the power of the bosses does the rest, preparing the ground for competition between proletarians. The war of all against all maintained by states within the exploited class finds a point of fusion with the reconstitution of the people in hostility towards class brothers and sisters from elsewhere. The renationalisation of the economy and the labour market is an attack on the world market and the competitive movement of total capital. It is also, in complete contradiction to the advocates of modern political liberalism, solidly based on the pillar of free trade.

“The Free Traders (the men of the Manchester School, the Parliamentary and Financial Reformers) are the official representatives of modern English society, the representatives of that England which rules the market of the world. They represent the party of the self-conscious Bourgeoisie, of industrial capital striving to make available its social power as a political power as well, and to eradicate the last arrogant remnants of feudal society. This party is led on by the most active and most energetic portion of the English Bourgeoisie — the manufacturers. What they demand is the complete and undisguised ascendancy of the Bourgeoisie, the open, official subjection of society at large under the laws of modern, Bourgeois production, and under the rule of those men who are the directors of that production. By Free Trade they mean the unfettered movement of capital, freed from all political, national and religious shackles. The soil is to be a marketable commodity and the exploitation of the soil is to be carried on according to the common commercial laws. There are to be manufacturers of food as well as manufacturers of twist and cottons, but no longer any lords of the land. There are, in short, not to be tolerated any political or social restrictions, regulations or monopolies, unless they proceed from “the eternal laws of political economy,” that is, from the conditions under which Capital produces and dis-tributes. The struggle of this party against the old English institutions, products of a superannuated, an evanescent stage of social development, is resumed in the watchword: Produce as cheap as you can, and do away with all the faux frais of production (with all superfluous, unnecessary expenses in production). And this watchword is addressed not only to the private individual, but to the nation at large principally.

Royalty, with its “barbarous splendours,” its court, its civil list and its flunkies — what else does it belong to but to the faux frais of production? The nation can produce and exchange without royalty; away with the crown¹⁰. The sinecures of the nobility, the House of Lords? faux frais of production. The large standing army? faux frais of production. The Colonies? faux frais of production. The State Church, with its riches, the spoils of plunder or of mendacity? faux frais of production. Let parsons compete freely with each other, and everyone pay them according to his own wants. The whole circumstantial routine of English Law, with its Court of Chancery? faux frais of production. National wars? Faux frais of production. England can exploit foreign nations more cheaply while at peace with them.

¹⁰ Indeed, in October 1994 the journal of the “men of the Manchester School”, *The Economist*, founded in 1843, called for the abolition of the monarchy. See: <http://hereditas-historiae.org/Home/On-monarchy-and-royalty/The-Economist-An-idea-whose-time-has-passed-1994/>

You see, to these champions of the British Bourgeoisie, to the men of the Manchester School, every institution of Old England appears in the light of a piece of machinery as costly as it is useless, and which fulfils no other purpose than to prevent the nation from producing the greatest possible quantity at the least possible expense, and to exchange its products in freedom. Necessarily, their last word is the Bourgeois Republic, in which free competition rules supreme in all spheres of life; in which there remains altogether that minimum only of government which is indispensable for the administration, internally and externally, of the common class interest and business of the Bourgeoisie; and where this minimum of government is as soberly, as economically organized as possible. Such a party, in other countries, would be called democratic.” Marx, Articles on “Free Trade and the Chartists”, appearing in the New York Daily Tribune, 10 August 1852¹¹

“The bourgeoisie has through its exploitation of the world market given a cosmopolitan character to production and consumption in every country. To the great chagrin of Reactionists, it has drawn from under the feet of industry the national ground on which it stood. All old-established national industries have been destroyed or are daily being destroyed. They are dislodged by new industries, whose introduction becomes a life and death question for all civilised nations, by industries that no longer work up indigenous raw material, but raw material drawn from the remotest zones; industries whose products are consumed, not only at home, but in every quarter of the globe. In place of the old wants, satisfied by the production of the country, we find new wants, requiring for their satisfaction the products of distant lands and climes. In place of the old local and national seclusion and self-sufficiency, we have intercourse in every direction, universal inter-dependence of nations. And as in material, so also in intellectual production. The intellectual creations of individual nations become common property. National one-sidedness and narrow-mindedness become more and more impossible, and from the numerous national and local literatures, there arises a world literature.” Marx-Engels, “Manifesto of the Communist Party”, Bourgeois and Proletarians, 1847¹²

“We need not recall the fact that the great progress of the division of labour began in England after the invention of machinery. Thus, the weavers and spinners were for the most part peasants like those one still meets in backward countries. The invention of machinery brought about the separation of manufacturing industry from agricultural industry. The weaver and the spinner, united but lately in a single family, were separated by the machine. Thanks to the machine, the spinner can live in England while the weaver resides in the East Indies. Before the invention of machinery, the industry of a country was carried on chiefly with raw materials that were the products of its own soil; in England – wool, in Germany – flax, in France – silks and flax, in the East Indies and the Levant – cottons, etc. Thanks to the application of machinery and of steam, the division of labour was about to assume such dimensions that large-scale industry, detached from the national soil, depends entirely on the world market, on international exchange, on an international division of labour. In short – the machine has so great an influence on the division of labour, that when, in the manufacture of some object, a means has been found to produce parts of it mechanically, the manufacture splits up immediately into two works independent of each other.” Karl Marx, “Poverty of Philosophy”, 1847, Chapter 2¹³

“Manufacture and the movement of production in general received an enormous impetus through the extension of commerce which came with the discovery of America and the sea-route to the East Indies. The new products imported thence, particularly the masses of gold and silver which came into circulation and totally changed the position of the classes towards one another, dealing a hard

¹¹ See: <https://marxists.catbull.com/archive/marx/works/1852/08/25.htm>

¹² See: <https://marxists.catbull.com/archive/marx/works/1848/communist-manifesto/ch01.htm>

¹³ See: <https://marxists.catbull.com/archive/marx/works/1847/poverty-philosophy/ch02b.htm>

blow to feudal landed property and to the workers; the expeditions of adventurers, colonisation; and above all the extension of markets into a world market, which had now become possible and was daily becoming more and more a fact, called forth a new phase of historical development, into which in general we cannot here enter further. Through the colonisation of the newly discovered countries the commercial struggle of the nations amongst one another was given new fuel and accordingly greater extension and animosity. ... Big industry universalised competition in spite of these protective measures (it is practical free trade; the protective duty is only a palliative, a measure of defence within free trade), established means of communication and the modern world market, subordinated trade to itself, transformed all capital into industrial capital, and thus produced the rapid circulation (development of the financial system) and the centralisation of capital.” Marx–Engels, “The German Ideology”, Feuerbach Opposition of the Materialist and Idealist Outlook, C. The Real Basis of Ideology¹⁴

“It is altogether self-evident that, to be able to fight at all, the working class must organize itself at home as a class and that its own country is the immediate arena of its struggle – insofar as its class struggle is national, not in substance, but, as the Communist Manifesto says, “in form”. But the “framework of the present-day national state”, for instance, the German Empire, is itself, in its turn, economically “within the framework” of the world market, politically “within the framework” of the system of states. Every businessman knows that German trade is at the same time foreign trade, and the greatness of Herr Bismarck consists, to be sure, precisely in his pursuing a kind of international policy.” - Marx, “Critique of the Gotha programme”, 1875¹⁵

Over the course of time, the proletariat accompanied the geographical expansion and progressive reinforcement of the competitive movement of capital. The modern revolutionary class assisted the formation of the world market, the realisation of the idea of free trade of the classical liberal thinkers. It went along with it from its own existence as a class for capital but also as a class for itself. As a class for capital, the proletariat had grown numerically and had extended its divisions over the whole planet at the same time as expanding its productive capacity. Wage labour productive of new value had given birth to total capital and created the necessary conditions for its absolute domination over the whole of the earth’s crust. The price that capital payed in return is to have consented to the constitution of a formidable army which, one day, would have its hide. This profound comprehension of capitalist social relations, the recognition of this double dependence, is something that the historical communist movement made its own in the fight with the first free traders. This was because the success of their cause was the promise of a finally universal class struggle, overcoming all kinds of divisions, separations and oppositions within the proletariat. The class party, that is to say the class for itself, has no fear of the world market, of bourgeois cosmopolitanism, of the dissolution of national and other barriers. It is on the contrary their most accomplished expression, their overcoming in action.

“Towards the end of 1847, a Free Trade Congress was held at Brussels. It as a strategic move in the Free Trade campaign then carried on by the English manufacturers. Victorious at home, by the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846, they now invaded the continent in order to demand, in return for the free admission of continental corn into England, the free admission of English manufactured goods to the continental markets. At this Congress, Marx inscribed himself on the list of speakers; but, as might have been expected, things were not so managed that before his turn came on, the Congress was closed. Thus, what Marx had to say on the Free Trade question he was compelled to say before the

¹⁴ See: <https://marxists.catbull.com/archive/marx/works/1845/german-ideology/ch01c.htm>

¹⁵ See: <https://marxists.catbull.com/archive/marx/works/1875/gotha/ch01.htm>

Democratic Association of Brussels, an international body of which he was one of the vice-presidents. The question of Free Trade or Protection being at present on the order of the day in America, it has been thought useful to publish an English translation of Marx's speech, to which I have been asked to write an introductory preface. "The system of protection," says Marx, "was an artificial means of manufacturing manufacturers, of expropriating independent laborers, of capitalizing the national means of production and subsistence, and of forcibly abbreviating the transition from the medieval to the modern mode of production."" Marx, Capital, vol. I¹⁶

"Such was protection at its origin in the 17th Century, such it remained well into the 19th century. It was then held to be the normal policy of every civilized state in Western Europe. The only exceptions were the smaller states of Germany and Switzerland -- not from dislike of the system, but from the impossibility of applying it to such small territories. ... That was the time of the Brussels Congress, the time when Marx prepared the speech in question. While recognizing that protection may still, under certain circumstances, for instance in the Germany of 1847, be of advantage to the manufacturing capitalists; while proving that that Free Trade was not the panacea for all the evils under which the working class suffered, and might even aggravate them; he pronounces, ultimately and on principle, in favour of Free Trade.

To him, Free Trade is the normal condition of modern capitalist production. Only under Free Trade can the immense productive powers of steam, of electricity, of machinery, be full developed; and the quicker the pace of this development, the sooner and the more fully will be realized its inevitable results; society splits up into two classes, capitalists here, wage-laborers there; hereditary wealth on one side, hereditary poverty on the other; supply outstripping demand, the markets being unable to absorb the ever growing mass of the production of industry; an ever recurring cycle of prosperity, glut, crisis, panic, chronic depression, and gradual revival of trade, the harbinger not of permanent improvement but of renewed overproduction and crisis; in short, productive forces expanding to such a degree that they rebel, as against unbearable fetters, against the social institutions under which they are put in motion; the only possible solution: a social revolution, freeing the social productive forces from the fetters of an antiquated social order, and the actual producers, the great mass of the people, from wage slavery. And because Free Trade is the natural, the normal atmosphere for this historical evolution, the economic medium in which the conditions for the inevitable social revolution will be the soonest created – for this reason, and for this alone, did Marx declare in favour of Free Trade. The wage labourer everywhere follows in the footsteps of the manufacturer; he is like the "gloomy care" of Horace, that sits behind the rider, and that he cannot shake off wherever he go. You cannot escape fate; in other words, you cannot escape the necessary consequences of your own actions. A system of production based upon the exploitation of wage labour, in which wealth increases in proportion to the number of laborers employed and exploited, such a system is bound to increase the class of wage laborers, that is to say, the class which is fated one day to destroy the system itself. In the meantime, there is no help for it: you must go on developing the capitalist system, you must accelerate the production, accumulation, and centralization of capitalist wealth, and, along with it, the production of a revolutionary class of laborers. Whether you try the Protectionist or the Free Trade will make no difference in the end, and hardly any in the length of the respite left to you until the day when that end will come.

¹⁶ Engels makes reference here to the German edition of Capital. This quote can be found in Chapter 31 ("Genesis of industrial capitalism"). See: <https://www.marxists.org/francais/marx/works/1867/Capital-I/kmcapI-31.htm> (in French)

For long before that day will protection have become an unbearable shackle to any country aspiring, with a chance of success, to hold its own in the world market.” Preface by Engels to the 1888 English edition of “On the Question of Free Trade”¹⁷

“Finally, modern industry and the opening of the world-market made the struggle universal, and at the same time gave it an unheard-of virulence.” Engels, “Socialism, Utopian and Scientific”, Chapter 3, 1880¹⁸

“By creating the world market, big industry has already brought all the peoples of the Earth, and especially the civilized peoples, into such close relation with one another that none is independent of what happens to the others.” Friedrich Engels, “Principles of Communism”, Point 19, 1847¹⁹

Classical liberal ideology, just like the rest of the bourgeoisie, is nevertheless not internationalist despite its profession of faith. The state is the anchorage of capital that cannot be overcome. The state is the obstacle to the competitive movement of total capital that the individual capitals which make it up cannot and do not want to breach. The state is their most precious instrument of defence against their own competitive movement. Nationalism, strongly criticised by classical liberalism, was let in through the back door by the right to constitute a modern state on the ashes of every *ancien régime*.

“This right of the great national subdivisions of Europe to political independence, acknowledged as it was by the European democracy, could not but find the same acknowledgment with the working classes especially. It was, in fact, nothing more than to recognise in other large national bodies of undoubted vitality the same right of individual national existence which the working men of each separate country claimed for themselves. But this recognition, and the sympathy with these national aspirations, were restricted to the large and well-defined historical nations of Europe; there was Italy, Poland, Germany, Hungary. France, Spain, England, Scandinavia, were neither subdivided nor under foreign control, and therefore but indirectly interested in the matter; and as to Russia, she could only be mentioned as the detainer of an immense amount of stolen property, which would have to be disgorged on the day of reckoning.” Engels, “What have the working classes to do with Poland?” in Commonwealth, weekly of the International, spring 1866

The formation and stabilisation of modern capitalist states led to a new territorial segmentation, certainly shifting, structuring the world market. The proletariat has ceased to accompany the bourgeoisie, formerly revolutionary in the days of its initial impetus. The demand for political independence of nations is the motive through which operates the junction, never simple nor automatic and painless, between the cosmopolitan ideal of the bourgeoisie which wants to dominate the world, to unify under the sign of the commodity and the search for maximum profit, and the bourgeoisie which has become the undisputed dominant class, well protected by the high walls of its state. Capital in its totality does not exist without its global competitive movement. And the global competitive movement only makes sense in the competition between individual capitals, themselves engaged in the search without end for more concentration and centralisation. When the going gets tough individual capitals hide behind the monopoly of violence of their states.

¹⁷ See: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1888/free-trade/index.htm>

¹⁸ See: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1880/soc-utop/ch03.htm>

¹⁹ See: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1847/11/prin-com.htm>

Liberal democracy, which calls for openness and freedom²⁰ ends up by opening the way, deliberately or not (it doesn't matter), to the strong state and, further along, to its fascist mutation in all its variants: Nazi, classical fascist, Islamist, Peronist, Stalinist, Maoist etc. The state of law ruled by lawful government, founded on the Constitution makes itself into a shrunken state, a religious (officially secular or not) state, charged with dominating civil society without allowing the slightest dialectic with civil society. The relation between the strong state and its people is from then on one of univocality, from on high to the base without any reply. The command of the state reformulates the terms of political domination by imposing *a priori* the complete submission of the private individual, deprived of any recognised social existence. The People is set up as a collective guarantee of this submission of the private individual to the shrunken paternalist state. The "free" rational citizen, endowed with a critical spirit, gives way to the disciple, the subject, the fanatical patriot.

The question of the contours of civil society in the epoch of a restricted world market, mass migrations, of the return to sovereigntism and the multiplication of regional armed conflicts is central. It's a question which, in the developed capitalist countries, accompanies the growing insecurity of the labour market in the segments occupied by the least skilled proletarians. While poverty is in retreat on a global level by the accelerated capitalist development of big countries like China and India, it is growing in the advanced capitalist countries. This fragility comes partly from the presence of migrant proletarians capable of doing unskilled work at a lower cost but, also, from the long wave of automation of productive functions which takes away whole sectors of simple unskilled work. It's a long wave which began by taking over certain sectors of industry, following the effects already felt hard in the financial and then the commercial sphere. Among the latest productive sectors to experience automation we can count logistics and electronic and IT production, notably through the rapid generalisation of the use of robots.

All these phenomena contributing to the existing backdrop, coupled with the absence of offensive class struggles, give rise to the demand for protection by the state. Thus, the state restores its reputation even while its means of buying consensus are shrinking because of the fiscal crisis. Workers' defensive struggles often end in appeals to the authorities to reduce the application of company strategies which hurt the workers (redundancies, relocation, shutting sites etc.) going as far as demanding nationalisation. The state unions go along with these demands because the forced return by state action to a national dimension of social conflicts is essential for their survival as apparatuses of mediation and co-management between the working class, capital and its state. The latter is in its turn torn between its role as an individual capital in retreat because of the fiscal crisis and its function of guaranteeing the internal market and representing "its" national segment of capital.

This contradiction is at the heart of the fights which can happen between unions and parties and also within the state executive itself but, being what they are, they do not express any potential for independent class struggle. At the same time, the impoverishment of the least qualified layers of the "native" workforce of the most developed capitalist countries is straightaway translated into a refusal to share a common struggle with class brothers and sisters from elsewhere. More generally, civil society secretes a diffuse wish for reconstitution and solidification in a vessel closed off from, and

²⁰ "...the bourgeoisie had also the ambition to secure for itself a political status in keeping with its social status. To attain this aim it had to be able freely to debate its own interests and views and the actions of the government. It called this "freedom of the press". The bourgeoisie had to be able to enter freely into associations. It called this the "right of free association". As the necessary consequence of free competition, it had likewise to demand religious liberty and so on. Before March 1848 the Prussian bourgeoisie was rapidly moving towards the realization of all its aims. ... Obviously, the rights and liberties which the bourgeoisie sought for itself could be demanded from the government only under the slogan: popular rights and popular liberties", Karl Marx, "The Bourgeoisie and the Counter-Revolution", *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*, no.165, 10 December 1848. See: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/12/10.htm>

against, the outside factors of capital accumulation (“foreign” workers and capitals). It should go without saying that as far as the proletariat trusts its aspirations to one or other of the organs of domination of capital, its future as a class for itself is compromised. As for civil society, it reinforces its role as a straitjacket which constrains the exploited class. That its relative autonomisation from capital advances because of the predominance within it of ideas and reflexes of sovereignty is not a surprise for materialists who have learnt the lesson of Marx and Engels, for whom the determination of the economic factor, the primacy of the interests of total capital, only imposes itself in the last analysis, not without hitches, setbacks and even steps backward. Also, in certain conditions, when reactionary ideologies inadequate to the accumulation of capital become a material force setting in motion civil societies and states, they have the capacity to divert for a time the trajectory of development of capital place conditions on it.

The marginalisation of the organs political and trade union mediation and the totalitarian refounding of democratic institutions

The shrunken state has no need to institute and formalise a conflictual controlling dialectic with the civil society of capital which it is the expression of. It rises above civil society in an ascending movement towards its sacralisation. Civil society itself is no longer capable, in the epoch of fully developed capitalism, of generating within itself dynamic equilibriums endowed with sufficient stability. The world market, capital which valorises itself, has undermined and loosened its contours. The growing complexity of social relations, the extreme dispersal of productive and reproductive territories, the frantic shearing of the elements of identification structuring civil society, the return of mass migrations of the workforce, shattering families as the elementary cell of conservation of what exists ending up in a social order which is extremely volatile. At the same time, this growing complexity of social relations associated with the role of dissolving the sovereignty of nation states played by the triumphant world market depreciates politics as the art of mediation between civil society and the committee for the affairs of the bourgeoisie. States are pushed to delocalise a number of their prerogatives towards supranational entities.

When the crisis of valorisation makes itself felt in the most violent way, in the last resort, states have nothing to offer their subjects but violence and the miserable ideology of the People. The regaining of national sovereignty is still possible but at the steep price of partial withdrawal from the world market and/or in reinforcing colonial and imperial policies. The fiscal crisis of the state draws in the perimeters of social democracy, of social protection, therefore of its costly corporate and trade union organs. On its side, the political democracy of the liberal matrix thus loses its object and its faculty of representation of civil society. The political parties which have always been essential actors of representative democracy no longer express any programmatic capability. *“In this ideal sense, parties are correlative to, and dependent upon, the Weltanschauung [conception of the world] of liberalism.”*²¹, as is summed up nicely by Giovanni Sartori, one of the most reputed professors of political science. From protagonists of representative democracy, they have become second rate, anachronistic as well as useless, associated with times past. They are replaced by charismatic parties, “fluid” organisations, conglomerations based on “affinity”, *ad hoc* organisations which pursue narrow objectives.

Classical liberal ideology fades in the face of this tendency to go beyond political parties and pluralism and also in the face of plebiscitary correctives to representative democracy. The political formations which have the wind in their sails are, at best, “parties of the nation”, that is to say organisations with fluid ideological contours which claim to represent all the instances of civil society

²¹ *“Parties and Party Systems”*, Giovanni Sartori, ECPR Press, 2005.

in themselves. The very notion of the party finds itself negated. For classical political liberalism, the party is nothing other than a part of civil society which expresses political pluralism which “*does not perturb the unity of the state*” (Giovanni Sartori, *Parties and Party Systems*). “*political pluralism points to ‘the diversification of power’ and, more precisely, to the existence of a ‘plurality of groups that are both independent and non-inclusive.’ How this pluralism extends to those parts that are parties has been mentioned earlier.*”²² (idem).

And what’s more: “*Let it be stressed, therefore, that what is central to the pluralistic Weltanschauung is neither consensus nor conflict but dissent and praise of dissent. Characteristically – and this is very telling – dissent has never been understood as the opposite of consensus. Dissent draws from both consensus and conflict, but coincides with neither*”. For Giovanni Sartori, “*Consensus is a ‘pluralistic unanimity’. It does not consist of the one mind postulated by the monochromatic vision of the world but evokes the endless process of adjusting many dissenting minds (and interests) into changing ‘coalitions’ of reciprocal persuasion*”. In detail, “*It is right, then, to say party pluralism. The expression has actually more depth of meaning than we generally give it. Taken at its face value, party pluralism simply denotes the existence of more than one party; but the underlying connotation is that parties in the plural are the product of ‘pluralism’.*” (idem). It’s an essential clarification. When Professor Sartori and the liberals point out that democracy feeds on divergences of opinion, themselves coming out of conflicts, the notion cannot integrate class conflict in its independent political expression. In effect, Giovanni Sartori stresses that “*Conflict over fundamentals is not a possible basis for democracy, nor indeed for any polity: Such conflict – i.e., real conflict – calls for internal war and for secession as its only solution*” (idem). What this Florentine Professor, called “conflict over fundamentals” was obviously over the *Weltanschauung*, the conception of the world, of each of the parties in struggle (the parties of the workers and of the capitalist order in this case) carried within them and pursued concretely through their actions.

The “parties of the nation” and “parties of the people” which have emerged recently and imposed themselves at the centre of the political chessboard of the old western democracies do not sit well with classical bourgeois pluralism. While exploiting the numerous opportunities which it offers them, they fight for its totalitarian modification, even towards more or less overt dictatorship for some of them. Their *Weltanschauung* reserves no special place for pluralism, often decried as an inevitable evil or, worse, an admission of the weakness of decadent societies. Their watchword, beyond their weak conceptual apparatuses, is the regaining of sovereignty and the reconstitution of a people united in the face of numerous supposed internal and external threats. The virus of sovereignty and reconstruction of the people reaches both the left and the extreme left of the state. Chantal Mouffe, ideologue of *Podemos* in Spain and of *France insoumise* in France²³, explains that “*the discourse of Jean-Luc Mélenchon with France insoumise – ‘The strength of the people’ – advances in this construction of a collective identity around the idea of the ‘people’*”²⁴. The will to reconstruct the people is therefore the lowest common denominator of the present anti-liberal and sovereigntist bourgeois political formations, whether they come from the traditional right or extreme right or from their old denigrators on the opposite side of parliament. The project of a sovereigntist restructuring of the state is articulated above all around the reduction of representative democracy to plebiscitary

²² Giovanni Sartori specifies that “The first quote is from Robert A. Nisbet, *Community and Power*, Oxford University Press, 1962, p. 265; the second is from William Kornhauser, *The Politics of Mass Society*, Free Press, 1959, p. 81. Kornhauser is also very relevant on how pluralism relates to intermediate groups (esp. pp. 76–84, 131–41) – a major concern of Tocqueville and Durkheim.”

²³ See: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chantal_Mouffe

²⁴ *Humanité Dimanche*, 13 to 19 April 2017.

democracy²⁵, or Caesarism, Bonapartism. Its details of application are varied. They want to go from a referendum, to participation on communitarian platforms of so-called social networks via traditional elections where the real game is no longer to choose a programme which politically expresses the *Weltanschauung* incarnated in a party but rather to vote for or against a charismatic leader and his organisational tool. The idea of plebiscitary democracy is not new despite its new presentation.

Its first outing was in the 1920s and '30s. One of its most fervent ideologues was Carl Schmitt in his "Weimar" writings. The existence of political unity in a country, according to him, rested on the alternative of identity versus representation²⁶. In the first case, the people is "*capable of already acting politically by its simple immediate existence ... It is thus a political unity as real power in its immediate identity with itself*". (Carl Schmitt, *Constitutional Theory*, 1928). As for the principle of representation, the reactionary ideologue turned Nazi subsequently said that it "*departs from the idea that the political unity of a people in itself can ever be present under a real identity and states that it must always be represented [repräsentieren] personally by men*" (idem). Carl Schmitt hated intermediate bodies because, according to him, the state dissolves when it is "*weakened and relativised*" by the institutions of social democracy emanating from the various classes of capital. Political pluralism leads to the same consequences. His conception leads to the praise of the "total state" capable of seizing hold of civil society without mediations. He did not avoid calling from his wishes "*a politician and a leader in a particularly clear and strong sense*" (idem). In his delirium of omnipotence, Carl Schmitt described the political leader as a "man trusted by the whole people" (idem), transcending political pluralism and the "party bureaucracies" (idem). This person had to be designated by "*a grandiose acclamation of the German people which takes on the irresistible character that such acclamations take on in a democracy*" (idem). His "*Reichspräsident has a direct contact with the people*" (idem) and has nothing to do with political parties which "*totally politicise the whole life of the people and divide up the political unity of the German people*"²⁷. Nevertheless, this did not prevent him from joining the Nazi party on 1 May 1933.

In apparent opposition to this type of ideology, we find "left-wing" adherents of participatory democracy. Its partisans take inspiration more or less consciously from the old tax-payer democracy of the Classical era or, closer to our time, the communal democracy of the Renaissance. "*We've known for a long time about what's called direct democracy. The citizens discuss and decide together, therefore doing without elected representatives. They gather to directly deliberate and make their choices. That was the Ancient democracy of the Agora; it was more recently the democracy of the Landsgemeinde [cantonal assembly] in Switzerland; it is also a present form of democracy in many countries which have the right to popular initiative or local referendum.*"²⁸ The spiritual father of the new municipal democracy, American ecologist Murray Bookchin, summarised his conception like this:

"No policy, in effect, is democratically legitimate unless it has been proposed, discussed, and decided upon by the people directly - not through representatives or surrogates of any kind. The administration of these policies can be left to boards, commissions, or collectives of qualified, even

²⁵ "When the parties are led and animated by plebiscitary chiefs, it leads to a "loss of soul" [*Entseelung*] or yet, more clearly, a spiritual proletarianisation among its partisans. Partisans organised in an apparatus of this type can only be useful to the chiefs if they obey them blindly". Max Weber, German liberal economist and sociologist [1864-1920], "Politics as a Vocation" (1919).

²⁶ "All distinctions between the true forms of government – of whichever type it can be, monarchy, aristocracy and democracy, monarchy and republic, monarchy and democracy etc. – boils down to this decisive opposition between identity and representation". Carl Schmitt, *Constitutional Theory* (1928)

²⁷ Carl Schmitt, *Positionen und Begriffe im Kampf mit Weimar – Genf – Versailles*, Berlin, Duncker & Humblot, 1988

²⁸ "*La démocratie participative*", Jean-Pierre Gaudin, See: <https://www.cairn.info/revue-informations-sociales-2010-2-page-42.htm>

elected, individuals who, under close public purview and with full accountability to policy-making assemblies, may execute the popular mandate."²⁹

Finally: *"I must emphasize that direct democracy is ultimately the most advanced form of direct action. There are doubtlessly many ways to express the claims of the individual and community to be autonomous, self-active, and self-managing-today as well as in a future ecological society. To exercise one's powers of sovereignty – by sit-ins, strikes, nuclear-plant occupations – is not merely a "tactic" in bypassing authoritarian institutions. It is a sensibility, a vision of citizenship and selfhood that assumes the free individual has the capacity to manage social affairs in a direct, ethical, and rational manner. This dimension of the self in self-management is a persistent call to personal sovereignty, to roundedness of ego and intellectual perception, which such co-joined terms like "management" and "activity" often overshadow. The continual exercise of this self – its very formation by one's direct intervention in social issues – in asserting its moral claim and right to empowerment stands on a higher level conceptually than Marx's image of self-identity through labour. For direct action is literally a form of ethical character building in the most important social role that the individual can undertake: active citizenship.*"³⁰

Bookchin's critique of classical liberal democracy is made in the name of the citizen, finally activated by their own direct actions. Marx is in his sights. The founder of modern communism is scolded because he envisaged the self-production of the social individual by means of the class struggle, by the identification by the proletariat of their class belonging and, more, by their recognition of the central place which they occupy as a collective worker in the production of value. Devoid of class, freed from their material condition and of any collective dimension, the "active" citizen becomes ethereal, pure ethics in action. The elitist people which thus constitutes itself is the simple addition of the affinitary direct actions of direct actionists. This ethical people destroys any obstacle which faces it in the expression of the liberation of each of its members. Bookchinian ideological fury sweeps away any form of representation, including that which comes out of the real movement which overturns and transforms existing exploitation. As the prosecutor and inquisitor of the new religion of ecology, Murray Bookchin, took aim at the highest autonomous expressions of the working class, the Russian Soviets, the workers councils in Germany in the period 1918-21, the anarcho-syndicalist committees of the Spanish Revolution, the Hungarian councils in 1956. All put in the same bag for being to blame for having prevented delegated democracy.

"A second premise in creating libertarian institutions is a clear distinction between the formulation of policy and its administrative implementation. This distinction has been woefully confused by social theorists like Marx, who celebrated the Paris Commune's fusion of decision-making with administration within the same political bodies and agencies. Perhaps no error could be more serious from a libertarian viewpoint. The danger of delivering policy-making decisions to an administrative body, which normally is a delegated body and often highly technical in character, is redolent with elitism and the usurpation of public power. A direct democracy is face-to-face and unabashedly participatory. A council, committee, agency, or bureau is precisely the opposite: indirect, delegated, and often unabashedly exclusionary. For the latter to make policy decisions, as distinguished from coordinating activities, is to remove policy from the public domain – to depoliticize the process in the Athenian sense of the term at best, and render policy formulation totally exclusionary at worst. In fact, this subversive range of possibilities, all inimical to freedom and the ideal of an active citizenry, has been the destiny of the revolutionary council movements since the

²⁹ *Remaking Society*, 1990 and 1998

³⁰ "The ecology of freedom. The emergence and dissolution of hierarchy", 1982

beginning of the century – notably, the Russian soviets, the German Räten, and the Spanish anarcho-syndicalist chain of "committees" that developed early in the Spanish Revolution. Other council movements, such as the Hungarian in 1956, were too short-lived to degenerate as their predecessors had.

Moreover, the council system, conceived as a policy-making structure, is inherently hierarchical. Whether based on factories or communities, it tends to acquire a pyramidal form, however confederal its rhetoric and surface appearance. From factory and village to town, to city, to region, and finally to swollen, infrequently convened, easily manipulated national "congresses," the short-lived German Räten and the more long-lived Russian soviets were so far removed from their popular base that they quickly degenerated into decorative instruments for highly centralized workers' parties." (Idem)

The ideology of the "active" private individual rejects all delegation considering it in all circumstances as a dispossession of the citizen from their faculty of decision in complete freedom. Any specialised performer of decisions taken by "active" citizens becomes, from then on, an agent of bureaucratic degeneration, of the restoration of hierarchy. To this deviation it opposes a solution as dishonest as it is vague, the coordination of the initiatives of "active" citizens. Here, therefore, the critique of representation is transformed into an ontological mistrust of any structured political organisation no matter whether it is an expression of a class in revolt against the established order or of a passive part of the civil society of capital. The average voter is seen as the same as a revolutionary worker, an election of delegates to a workers' council is seen as equivalent to electing a deputy to the parliament of a bourgeois republic. And above all it reduces conflicts to their existential dimension effacing their collective material base.

From the beginning, Murray Bookchin forgets all about the problematic of the transformation of society, of its liberation from capital and all forms of oppression, so as to put at the centre of revolts the question of their organisation. Yet, it is exactly the opposite which happens. Organisation is a function of the collective capacity of the working class to elaborate and materialise through its struggles a project of a society without wage labour, without money, without oppressions. In a word, its concrete capacity to work for a society without classes. The real divergence is there. The capacity of the individual to deploy their social nature is not a matter of delegation or not, it is not contained within the "firepower" of its direct actions and is even less in the singling out of the citizen capable of only gathering on the basis of affinity, of ethics.

The revolution is not a *question of organisation* but there is no revolution without organisation. The latter can only justify itself on the condition that it can elaborate the theory of revolution in the given conditions. It is the only criterion important for judging the relevance of any organisation which puts itself on the side of the proletariat, which pursues the workers' cause. Not whether it is "democratic" enough, well "coordinated" or endowed with other trivial mechanisms related to the task.

Analytical adjustments

These few pages of analysis require communists to adjust their analytical apparatus. Four important points stand out:

- 1) Representative democracy is in grave crisis in most of the principal countries. It's a crisis determined in the first place by the shaking of the financial foundations of states following the financial crisis of 2007/2008. The tendency which seems to be asserting itself is the more or less painless transformation of representative democracy into plebiscitary democracy.
- 2) Plebiscitary democracy marginalises the social and political forms of organisation of civil society, aiming to completely eliminate their role of mediation between classes. The old political parties and trade unions fade away before the emergence of "total parties", parties of the nation or the people having the aim of representing in themselves alone a civil society which is homogenous and disciplined behind the figure of the charismatic leader.
- 3) Plebiscitary democracy in its numerous variants stretches from the extreme right to the extreme left of capital preparing the ideological terrain and ploughing civil society with a view to major economic, commercial and financial conflicts along with, eventually, serious armed conflicts. Plebiscitary democracy is the practical path from representative democracy to political and institutional forms which are more markedly fascist.
- 4) Sovereignism redefines unproductive public expenditure in a way appropriate to pre-war conditions. Today, most of the nationalist political forces of the advanced economies demand the overturning of the balanced budget defined and supervised by the various organs of the supranational command of capital such as the IMF, the World Bank or the European Commission. The declared objective is to restore to the people their purchasing power by various forms of generalised aggressive tax breaks, and even a guaranteed "citizen's" income.

This last development should be looked at carefully. As Bruno Caprettini, Fabio Schmidt-Fischbach and Hans-Joachim Voth noted in a recent study for the Centre for Economic Policy Research³¹:

"Why do people fight for their country? The risks are extreme, the payoff uncertain. In this paper, we argue that reciprocity is a key factor. Examining welfare spending in the US in the 1930s under the New Deal, we show that support for World War II became more common where welfare support had been more generous: war bonds were sold in greater volume, more men and women volunteered, and more soldiers performed heroic actions recognized by a medal." ... "The rise of mass armies coincided with the coming of the social welfare state. Since the late 19th century, governments have added old age pensions, health care, and education to their primary tasks. Some of this expansion took place during wartime: governments have often made lavish promises of creating "homes fit for heroes", by expanding the welfare state after victory." ... "In this paper, we ask whether areas that received more support under New Deal during the 1930s supported the war effort more enthusiastically after 1941. We use three costly actions to measure commitment to the national cause. First, purchases of war bonds, which required sacrificing part of current consumption. Second, we use individual-level data on the geographical origin of volunteers. Third, we collect information on the recipients of military awards, and use it to measure the spatial distribution of war 'heroes.' These

³¹ "From Welfare to Warfare: New Deal Spending and Patriotism During World War II". See: https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3149477

people typically performed very costly actions, well beyond the call of duty. While many factors affect heroism on the battlefield, we use them as an indicator of patriotic sentiment.” ...

“We believe that the case of the US provides an ideal testing ground for the welfare-to-warfare nexus. First, the New Deal³² represents the largest and most prominent example of public sector expansion in the history of the United States. It consisted of a set of programs that were explicitly intended to provide assistance to citizens in distress, a type of policy that has the potential to promote inclusion and gratitude among its beneficiaries. Second, the New Deal started almost 10 years before the United States entered World War II. This allows to measure the patriotic response to public spending at a time of extreme danger for the nation, when supporting the country was potentially very costly. Third, World War II allows us to collect different measures of patriotic support, and show that our results hold across a wide range of indicators of patriotism. Finally, because the New Deal happened after World War I, we can control for pre-existing levels of patriotism. This in turn allows us to capture changes in patriotic support caused by the expansion of public relief measures.” ...

Conclusion: *“Three key empirical facts support our argument: US counties receiving more relief payments during the 1930s bought more war bonds, sent more volunteers to the armed forces, and were home to more soldiers displaying conspicuous gallantry on the battlefield. The same pattern is visible for counties where income support for farmers was greatest because they were hit by adverse weather conditions. Because of the link between adverse weather and emergency relief, it seems likely that the relationship between welfare support and patriotism is causal.”³³*

The link between the “social” state and war is no surprise to communists. Modern war is only possible by means of the total control of civil society by the state. It’s a control which cannot be confined only to the organs of repression and the fear aroused by real or potential “enemies”. The people must be convinced of the benefit of armed conflict and for that there need to be well functioning mechanisms of integration. The permanent and well-oiled mechanisms of integration of social democracy are therefore indispensable to buy the popular consensus needed for warmongering policies. In the present framework it is interesting to stress that the believers in “globalised” capital are the guardians of the balanced budget, of the strict control of unproductive public expenditure, of austerity. On the other hand, most of the pro-sovereignty organisations put forward proposals for generous unproductive state spending. The nationalists of the right and the extreme right put forward significant and generalised cuts in taxes while the patriots of the left and extreme left put forward to some extent everywhere a guaranteed citizen’s income for all³⁴. The official motivations of one or other side are not important. On the contrary what is central is that both want to explode unproductive state spending to reinforce the weight of the state on civil society. This is indispensable to face the coming period of conflicts.

The emergence of new world powers has called into question the global capitalist hierarchy for several decades. The last financial crisis added an essential factor of destabilisation of the global order, which is the fiscal crisis of states with its associated commercial, monetary and budgetary tensions in every area of the world market and between them. Wars and the course to rearming, above

³² See: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Deal

³³ See: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dust_Bowl

³⁴ “Money as a gift and money as a loan, it was with prospects such as these that he hoped to lure the masses. Donations and loans — the financial science of the lumpen proletariat, whether of high degree or low, is restricted to this. Such were the only springs Bonaparte knew how to set in action. Never has a pretender speculated more stupidly on the stupidity of the masses”, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, Chapter IV, Karl Marx, 1851. See: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1852/18th-brumaire/>

all in the Middle East and North Africa and East Asia, sketch out scenarios of great geopolitical instability and accelerate, and amplify, movements of mass migration.

States of the most developed capitalist countries are having to face up to the detachment of whole layers of their respective civil societies because of the repercussions of the fiscal crisis on the institutions and mechanisms of social democracy. In the absence of significant class struggles, the lack of adhesion to the state and its order manifests itself more and more in a demand for authority, for pulling up the drawbridge, for a return to a sovereignty which has become impossible in the face of the reinforcement of international organs of command of the world market.

History never completely repeats itself, but the processes described here increase the chances of a planetary conflagration in the coming decade. The reactionary social bloc has already found political expressions adequate to represent itself and to influence the exhausted state executives. If the proletariat continues to remain on the defensive, the risk of a fascist evolution of the most solidly established democratic regimes will become very real. The fight to the death against nationalism in all its forms is more relevant than ever. Proletarian internationalists take note.

CONTEXTUAL NOTES ON THE “CRISIS OF POLITICAL LIBERALISM” TEXT

Introduction

Following some discussion about the “Crisis of Political Liberalism” text, it seems necessary to us to explain certain points by giving examples and clarifications and to take account of the rapid evolution of the situation.

From proletarian struggles to democratic movements and the crisis of 2007-2008

Historically, and up until the years of the financial crisis of 2007-2008, the development of capital had always brought back into fashion the conflict between labour and capital as its central driving force. The last revolutionary political cycle of the proletariat ended up with the triumph of the counter-revolution over its two last pre-revolutionary episodes, Iran in 1979 and Poland in 1980. The crushing of this rising wave of the exploited classes has not completely buried the perspective of workers’ politics. Despite the historic defeat of the 1970s, the class struggle has continued to express itself here and there with variable intensity. The revolt of the *townships* and the massive strikes in South Africa in 1984 and 1985, the Chinese spring in 1989 and the insurrectional strikes in South Korea in 1996 and 1997 upheld the torch of the workers’ cause. Significant moments of struggle followed in 1995, in France and in other capitalistically advanced countries. Yet none of these episodes of class struggle had the strength to overturn the dominant course to counter-revolution.

What’s more, several democratic movements³⁵ have indirectly and partially expressed the contradiction between classes, the fundamental antagonism between labour and capital, in the territories on the periphery of capital. These movements have not been capable of overcoming their limits, which situate them from the outset in the global framework of capitalism. But they have had to cohabit with the social question, with certain revolutionary aspirations of the exploited classes which express themselves through their intermediaries.

This scenario that existed up until the 1990s, where the obvious discriminating element was the class struggle, was an advantage that we did not fully assess, thanks to which we were able to easily enough at the end of the day leave behind all the imagery of class struggle imposed by Stalinism. And this notwithstanding the fact that the “red thread”³⁶ has been cut, on an international scale, twice in the twentieth century, by the victory of the counter-revolution in the 1920s and by the defeat in the 1970s. The visible primacy of the class struggle had been identified and interpreted by the yardstick of Marxism rapidly enough, during the 1950s and 1960s, by various intellectual and political currents which allowed it to be placed again at the heart of communist strategy and to read the present as something other than internal conflicts within the ruling classes. These economic, political, diplomatic and military conflicts have always taken place because of the very dynamic of competition, the real movement of capital. It was necessary, and it still is necessary, to study them attentively without, for all that, making them the lever of history, a role which in capitalism is played by the class struggle.

³⁵ Burma, Nepal and Tibet in 2008, Iran in 2009, the so-called Arab Springs starting in 2010, Ukraine in 2013 and Hong Kong in 2014. See the specific texts, available on our website, that we have devoted to each of these events. A text synthesising them all is also available, Letter no. 40. See :

<http://mouvement-communiste.com/documents/MC/Letters/LTMC1540%20ENvF.pdf>

³⁶ The red thread is a concept of Bordigist origin which invests the “party” with the continuity with the struggles of the past; the wonderful red thread which runs invariably from 1848. For us, there is discontinuity between the proletarian political cycles: this remark is therefore intended somewhat ironically.

It is within this framework that we analyse the present situation.

As far as the accumulation of capital is concerned, we can talk about a succession of financial crises of growing scale since the 1920s, and something new, that of 2007-2008 and the fiscal crisis of states which came out of it. The depth of the counter-revolution and these earlier financial crises, called into being the social democracy of the post-war period (without even mentioning the stupid mythologies of the Glorious Thirty Years: *Trente Glorieuses*). This had created conditions of total subordination – that we reckoned to be temporary – of the struggle between labour and capital to oppositions within capital. Let's remember that the two motors of capitalist development are the struggle of the proletariat against exploitation and competition between capitalists.

Since 1980, these conflicts within the dominant classes existed but they assumed other forms and were on a smaller scale. The former East-West post-war competition had not undermined the heart of global capitalism. The Western countries prospered, new mature capitalist powers emerged and the fatal crisis of the Russian colonial bloc allowed capitals in its component countries to profoundly restructure themselves with the aim of better competing on the world market. With the emergence of the “dragons” (South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore) and the supposed “computer revolution”³⁷, the 1980s were a fruitful period for capitalism.

One of the more significant effects of the fiscal crisis of states succeeding the financial crisis of 2007-2008 was the slimming down of the social democracy which had existed in the post-war period. Thus, we can define the basis of this crucial evolution of the modern state: “The formidable boom in the productivity of labour produced the result that, during long periods of economic growth, the real wage (direct and indirect) of the workers grows while the relative wage (relative to the added value produced) declines.”³⁸

In the course of the 2000s, after the industrial and financial crisis of 2001, a first crack appeared: the real wage began to stagnate in most of the developed countries. But the state continued to guarantee with great difficulty the social wage, income from state benefits, and the strong housing market guaranteed access to credit for a good number of proletarian home-owners. The fiscal crisis damaged these mechanisms of social stabilisation. How and in what sense did the crisis of social democracy produced by the fiscal crisis of the state modify the details of social and political control of capital's civil society?

The fiscal crisis accelerated the compression of the “social *minima*” and rendered this part of the redistributed (or social) wage more and more reduced. We saw an attack not only on the direct wage, but also against all sorts of indirect incomes which had compensated for the wage freeze. Before its entry into crisis, the “social” state, that is to say the state of social democracy, had created the material bases for the permanence of social-democratic policies, policies of expansion of the redistributed wage. Today, for the last ten to fifteen years, in all the developed countries, the individual wage continues to stagnate. The real difference in relation to before 2007-2008 is that the redistributed wage, whether it comes directly from the state or via the organs of social democracy is in noticeable decline.

³⁷ See the Working Document no.4, “Critique du concept de la nouvelle économie”:

https://mouvement-communiste.com/documents/MC/WorkDocuments/dtmc_4_critique_concept_nouvelle_economie.pdf

³⁸ See Letter no.11, “Unions and Political Struggle”:

<http://mouvement-communiste.com/documents/MC/Letters/LTMC0311EN.pdf>

This turn, unprecedented in the post-war period, has paradoxically put the question of the state at the centre of things. The state is not civil society, even if the state presupposes civil society just as civil society presupposes the state. In effect, a civil society without a state would be nothing other than the human community under communism. Civil society generates the intermediate bodies, and the state, justifying its role, represents civil society, certainly in an incomplete and contradictory manner. But is the state still capable of representing civil society, of which it is the expression and organiser?

On a general level, there is a double answer: the state is always the organiser of the civil society of capital and for the benefit of the latter. Yet, it has a growing difficulty to represent the social whole, it has markedly less means for responding to the demand for indirect wages and is less able to balance the various social forces. We find ourselves in a strange situation where the state plays a more and more important role in civil society, while its very function as a social stabiliser is reduced. More and more of the areas of its social intervention receive insufficient responses on its part, quantitatively and qualitatively. The promptings which are addressed to it by civil society grow while its capacity to satisfy them diminishes. In this context, the absence of workers' struggles generates a relation of extreme dependence on the state for the sectors most affected by the upheavals of civil society. This relation comes down to a general demand for protection.

Expressing such a desire for protection comes back in the end to placing yourself under the tutelage of capital's state. This is the exact opposite of the "free spirited" movement incarnated in the working class of the post-war period. In effect, this movement neither uniquely nor principally expressed demands for wages, or even for better working conditions. On the contrary, it largely went beyond the dynamic of demands by asserting its political autonomy, which it practiced by pursuing objectives which were fixed by direct action. This movement also knew how to invade and criticise all aspects of the domination of capital, such as relations between men and women, the relation with children, education, sexuality, art, culture etc. In sum, it was a movement for workers' autonomy and communism. What we are experiencing from now on is in a completely different register. The demand for protection addressed to the state – even on the cheap – enters into frontal opposition with the element which was the keystone of the workers' revolt in the post-war period, knowing the practice of class autonomy, the desire to seize individual and collective freedoms which were lacking, and which still are.

Why on the cheap? Some examples: they no longer demand that the state gives jobs to all the unemployed, they demand that it gives them a *minimum* to live on. They don't demand general increases in wages (for example, in the public sector, SNCF), they limit themselves to calling on it to preserve the present status. Even when sectors of the proletariat struggle, they start out beaten in their heads, as happened in the last fight carried on in the French railway company. And that, while most of the developed countries are involved in equally ambitious and complex restructuring which creates an objective context which should be more favourable to a sizeable proletarian counter-offensive.

The present demand for protection, in the countries of the ex-colonial Russian bloc, is also in retreat in relation to the former social compromise, certainly matched by a severe repression. In the People's Democracies, order rested on the guarantee of a *minimum* wage and a job, in exchange for the suppression of individual and collective freedoms. Here we can see a parallel with the situation in the advanced capitalist countries, where you accept being deprived of freedom as long as the state assures a semblance of a "social safety net" in a civil society undermined by the fiscal crisis and the restructuring of the state which followed.

The political parties in crisis

The state is criss-crossed by violent tensions which spread across the whole of society. All the traditional apparatuses of politics turn bad. The system of parties is the system directly inherited from the clubs, when the clubs became real representative organs of whole sectors of the population in the nineteenth century. If, for revolutionaries, politics is the strategy of rupture with the capitalist system, for the bourgeoisie it represents the art of mediation. Contrary to what is commonly believed, it is not the exercise of the vote which is the element of political equalisation within the state but the relations which the parties establish between themselves, therefore the relations of mediation. In liberal democracy, the purpose of the system of parties is to absorb the demands and aspirations coming from various layers of society, to deal with them and re-elaborate them in such a way that the continuity of the state (including politics) is not called into question, whatever may be the changes in majorities, votes etc. The parties are social and political safety-valves. If they work properly, the policy most favourable to social capital succeeds in emerging beyond the different interests which coexist within the dominant classes.

It is this which was *de facto* produced in the post-war period. The efficiency of the system of parties in the advanced countries gave credence to the erroneous idea that the left and right of capital were becoming identical, that their policies were converging and that the way they took turns in government masked a single set of policies. The fall of the Wall in 1989 consolidated this belief. Yet the fall of the Wall was followed by the crises of 2001 and 2007-2008. The party system seemed to have before it a radiant future becoming congealed into a soluble bipolarism composed of democrats on one side and conservatives on the other, or the left and the right. These formations came close to having the same policies but with different ideological accents. This state of things ended badly.

Under the blows of the crises of 2001 and 2007-2008, of the fiscal crisis of states and their restructuring, the party system began to crumble. The most solid parties endowed with deeply rooted structures, many of which had survived two wars and multiple crises, like the Labour and Conservative parties in Britain, are critically ill. The Tory Party in power is completely split between pro and anti-Europeans, while Labour suffers an internal takeover bid by Corbyn – as his French equivalent Mélenchon tries to do from the exterior with the French PS, which is in meltdown. In Germany, the great party which is the CDU, with an unequalled leader like Merkel, tears itself apart to the point of splitting over immigration policy. And what can we say about the social-democratic and democratic-Christians in the Netherlands, Austria, and Italy, forced into overtures towards the “antisystem” nationalist and proto-fascist parties? Without even mentioning the United States, even if the two parties, Democrat and Republican, which have permanent nimble structures and can appeal to an activism which becomes more competitive as elections approach, are different from those of the big European parties. Trump only survives in a Republican Party of gangs at war with each other, while the Democratic Party, incapable of benefiting from this, continues to flounder.

The capacity of traditional parties to make a synthesis of the detailed and contradictory needs of civil society, as well as their function of best interpreting the interests of the dominant classes (particularly the most advanced sectors), is greatly diminished. Here and now, struggling to put forward a proposition for capital, they most often channel themselves into spewing out whatever civil society comes up with: the rejection of the other, the desire for state protection etc. Trump, who opposes himself to the big bosses of advanced and “globalised” capitalism, illustrates the phenomenon very well.

Politicians adopt caricatured popular postures, reducing political discourse to images taken from the sports bar and hooliganism. Warlike language comes to the fore, authoritarian in the true sense of the word. Far from being a simple matter of style, these semantic elements testify to the incapacity of the parties to act as instruments of elaboration and execution functional to social capital. This function is from now on restricted to the elites, to the inner circles of the bourgeoisie responsible for study and analysis. A sort of return to the era of the clubs.

A rebirth of the traditional parties is happening in adversity, at the expense of an offensive workers' movement, which is not the order of the day. The reason for it is simple: the exploited class is not acting for itself. When it rebelled, in the 1960s and '70s, the party system seriously tottered. But it hung on because it had an irreducible internal enemy to fight, workers' autonomy. Each time that the working class faced the bourgeoisie in its entirety, the party system rapidly reconstituted its united counter-revolutionary policy. Alas, this schema that we knew during the last global pre-revolutionary wave is not detectable in the perspectives of the dynamics at work here.

Evolution of the role of the state

In one sense, the "autonomy of politics"³⁹ seizes the state today. Despite the fiscal crisis, the capacities of the state are not weakened. Its domination over civil society which it exercises by means of its monopoly of force and its structuring capacity, is realised in some way by default. Before the fiscal crisis, the classes had their objects of reference composed of a dense tissue of intermediate political, trade union and associational organisations, well developed, rooted, stable and effective. A tissue now frayed and torn. The state, notably the central state, is still present and dominates civil society without having the pretention of interpreting the aspirations of the whole of civil society. Schematically, we have, therefore:

- States recovering after an acute fiscal crisis;
- A civil society made fragile both by the absence of struggles and by the withdrawal of the social wage;
- Intermediate bodies weakened, even dismembered;
- A multiplication of demands for state protection coming from all classes of civil society (including the dominant classes);
- An economic landscape still bearing the scars of the preceding period.

On this subject it's useful to note that:

- The productivity of labour has only grown by means of intensification of work and not thanks to generalised productive investments capable of increasing the quantity of production from a given quantity of work;
- The great bets on technology coming over the horizon, such as robots and artificial intelligence, have not, so far, born fruit;

³⁹ The autonomy of politics refers to the years 1960-70 when the movement of the proletariat asserted its political autonomy in the face of the bourgeoisie (to varying degrees according to country) with a view to social transformation. Today, while the reactionary parties advance towards power, their programmes do not represent the interests of advanced capital. The executive is not the whole state, nevertheless we can observe the tendency by which states, under the leadership of sovereigntist executives, seize a sort of autonomy with regard to their prior conditions which they are trying to get away from.

- The emergence over three decades of new economic and financial powers, whose beacons are China and India, accelerates;
- Regional powers like Iran, Turkey and Saudi Arabia, extend their transnational radius of action and get ready to take on, at least some of them, a role which goes beyond their region.

The world has become unstable and dangerous, claim the analysts of capital – which constitutes yet another source for reinforcement of the central role of the state. Local wars increase, along with commercial conflicts. We suggested in 2009⁴⁰ that the financial crisis of 2007-2008, which was followed by a deep but short industrial crisis and then a long and serious fiscal crisis, would end up, in the absence of a generalised rebound of social productivity (and therefore profitable growth for capital of its technical composition), in a monetary and commercial war. These phenomena are now appearing before our eyes. The commercial war of all against all rages while the monetary war plays out on the field of competitive devaluations, of tax cuts for businesses and the struggle to maintain or acquire the enviable status of international currency integrated into the reserves of central banks.

While the situation of global social capital is not great, the accumulation of capital is doing very well. In the belief of the economists of the bourgeoisie, the next cyclical crisis, an industrial crisis, is approaching. The years 2019 or 2020 are regularly bandied about. As for its intensity, it is difficult to predict because it depends on numerous variables, impossible to turn into a model. Until then accumulation will carry on, on the same technological bases as before, and consequently to the detriment almost exclusively of the total wage bill coupled with the extension and the intensification of work; an intensity of work which only comes from a higher pace and worse conditions. This situation, which we want to present an overall view of, creates a political monster.

Proto-fascism

The monster which is taking form is something that revolutionaries have not encountered since the 1910s and 1920s, at the dawn of fascism. It sports the traits taken from historic proto-fascism, in whose ranks we include the *Associazione Nazionalista Italiana*, the Union of the Russian People, *Action française* and the Proudhon Circle, the Austrian Social-Christian Party and the German National Popular Party (see the sections below). These movements had more or less brief existences but all of them provided the essential ideological elements, along with political cadres, to the fascist formations which succeeded them. This included, as the main ideological contribution, a frenzied nationalism mixed with racism, isolationism and warmongering. These proto-fascist groups encountered the workers' offensive of the end of the 1910s and passed on the testimony to the fascists, once the defeat of the revolutionary movement was completed. These days, on the other hand, the new nationalist movements which can be found to some extent everywhere have not had to survive proletarian autonomy, which was beaten well before their birth by social-democracy and its Stalinist variant.

It seems that their triumphant march will not encounter obstacles anything like the revolutionary movement which shook Spain in the 1930s. The defeat of this last, final glorious episode in the most powerful revolutionary wave of all times, involuntarily accelerated the course towards war, a war for which revolutionary Spain was the test bed. It's a difference of scale from the situation now, which has probably played against the transformation of an international war carried out in a particular part of the planet – like the war in Syria or the conflict in Ukraine – into a world war properly speaking. With due respect to the Vicar of Rome, the numerous regional wars which are rife today are not a world war. They do not necessarily lead to a general conflict, although it's a possibility that can't

⁴⁰ See: <https://mouvement-communiste.com/documents/MC/Leaflets/TR090501EN.pdf>

be completely ruled out. But these wars feed the fear and the tendency to retreat into your own state and your own nation.

What is the lever of these proto-fascist aggregations? It is precisely the demand for state protection, coming in particular from the sectors of civil society most threatened by the world market and by the crisis of social democracy. Those with no savings, commercial employees, small shopkeepers, small bosses whose conditions of life and work are worsened by the internationalisation of production and circulation of commodities, as well as by the diminishing availability of “wealth” redistributed by the state, are the layers most permeable to penetration by the contemporary proto-fascist message. This includes, unfortunately, important sectors of the proletariat. The proto-fascist organisations, which do not consider politics as a mediation between divergent interests in the service of advanced capital, owe their success to their capacity to express the worst impulses secreted by civil society.

Historical social-democracy, where it still exists, pleads the case for austerity. The social-democrats, just like the traditional conservatives, correctly interpret the problematic of state restructuring. On the other hand, the proto-fascist formations, with the wind in their sails, contest the political representation of the advanced bourgeoisie and generally plead for Keynesian policies. Or rather the Keynesian policies *avant la lettre* adopted by Italian fascism, German Nazism or even by the United States in the New Deal between the wars... Some of our somewhat mechanistic concepts therefore need adjusting. For example, those which wish that in the epoch of mature capitalism and the world market, the state should be from the outset and for evermore the committee for managing the affairs of the whole bourgeoisie or, even, that bourgeois democracy – being the best regime for interpreting the interests of capital and helping its development – can only triumph everywhere.

If the state is really the committee for managing the affairs of the dominant classes and bourgeois democracy the regime most adapted to the accumulation of capital, the particular conditions in which we find ourselves force us to introduce some complicating factors into our analysis. When the state, from the fact of the fiscal crisis, must give priority to individual capitals, it can end up losing its role as the guarantor of the general interest of social capital in the territory under its control. In addition, at the moment when the organs of political and social democracy are ruined and in decay, civil society is susceptible to generate movements which demolish the foundations of the democratic republic (or constitutional monarchy). Its essential political attribute, parliamentarism, is attacked by the proto-fascists in the name of a democracy which will be more real, less formal, a participatory democracy.

Participatory democracy

One of the ideologues of participatory democracy, Davide Casaleggio, son of the founder of the Italian 5 Star Movement (M5S), recently sounded the death knell of parliamentary democracy in an interview given to the racist daily *La Verità* published at the end of July.⁴¹ “*Today, thanks to the web and new technologies, there exist instruments of participation decidedly more democratic and effective in terms of popular representativity than any existing model of government coming out of the twentieth century. The surpassing of representative democracy is inevitable*”. For Casaleggio Jr, participatory democracy already exists: it is materialised in the electronic platform used for internal consultation in the M5S, which he runs. It is a platform developed by its own IT services company.

⁴¹ See: <https://inunfuturoaprile.it/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/intervista-casaleggio.pdf>

Less than a month after him came an echo from Giancarlo Giorgetti, an ideologue of Matteo Salvini with the job of Secretary to the Presidency of the Italian Council. After having stressed “*the crisis of all intermediate bodies, from the world of cooperative credit through professional associations to the trade unions*”, on 20 August, he stated that “*parliament no longer counts for anything because it is perceived by the citizen voters as the site of the ineffectiveness of politics. If we continue like that to defend the fetish of representative democracy, we are not doing what’s good for democracy.*” Not so different from the declarations of Viktor Orbán, the Prime Minister of Hungary, who, on being confirmed in his post for the third consecutive time in May 2018, claimed loud and clear that “*the era of liberal democracy has reached its end.*”⁴²

In what way does the participatory democracy thus put forward play a role in the project of mutation of parliamentary liberal democracy? A central instrument of the political constitution of the people in the hands of the proto-fascists, it serves their aim of conquering cultural hegemony. The people, associated by the demand for protection addressed to the state, fuses with the state, renouncing all political autonomy. It declares as its enemies those which are internal (immigrants) and external (competing states, or even Europe) indicated by the proto-fascists who take over executive power, by means of elections organised in the formal framework of liberal democracy. The coming of the fascist regimes did not happen in any other way. The elections in Italy in 1921 and 1924 consisted in reality of a vote for or against Mussolini and, from 1930 to 1933 in Germany, in a vote for or against Hitler.

The referendum, the mutation of parliamentary elections into a plebiscite for or against a man, for or against a nationalist and racist policy, make up part of the arsenal of the proto-fascists. The American case is exemplary. Trump entirely personalised the American presidential campaign. He incarnated the desire to be protected by the state by the most backward sectors of civil society, notably some fractions of the working class. By transforming them into a plebiscite for or against himself, he fundamentally transformed the democratic elections while preserving their form.⁴³ Italy was the theatre of a comparable process. The M5S won the elections there thanks to its proposal to give everyone a “citizen’s income” instead of the existing benefits and free services from the state. And Salvini’s *Lega*, which shared the government with the M5S, established itself with a promise to throw illegal immigrants into the sea and introduce a flat tax of 15% for everyone. In Italy they hardly discuss anymore how to reduce the debt of 2,300 billion euros, the equivalent of 140% of GDP, but they promise to throw out the immigrants. And the last elections, held on 4 March 2018, were certainly a referendum for or against them.

The extreme left variant of participatory democracy (*Nuit debout*, Notre-Dame-des-Landes, No Tav etc.) can merge into the plebiscitary democracy that we find today. When you convince the electors to pronounce by referendum for or against a nuclear power plant or an airport, you reduce a complex question to a binary choice which constitutes a pretence of reflection and whose execution is not controlled by those who participated in the consultation. And this in spite of the legitimacy of the cause. The Swiss Confederation is a past master in the matter of referendums piloted by politicians and without notable consequences for civil society. The other corollary of the participatory democracy of the extreme left, which makes it an appendix of the plebiscitary democracy of the proto-fascists, is the idea that direct participation creates an acting community cemented by chosen affinities. The constitution of a community will thus be made by and in action. Without regard for class belonging, it is action which will form the people. It’s a vision which, stripped of leftist mythologies, is incredibly

⁴² See: http://lesalonbeige.blogs.com/my_weblog/2018/05/viktor-orban-a-la-place-de-la-d%C3%A9mocratie-lib%C3%A9rale-naufrag%C3%A9-nous-avons-l'intention-de-b%C3%A2tir-la-d%C3%A9mocr.html

⁴³ See Bulletin no. 13 “The US presidential election consolidates the global tendency towards reactionary social blocs”: <http://mouvement-communiste.com/documents/MC/Leaflets/BLT1612EN%20vG.pdf>

like the Nazi, fascist and Stalinist myths of the new man, enlightened elites coming from the “community of fighters”.

Meanwhile, immigrant-hunting gets under way

It is not only the national or regional elections which indicate a progressive swing towards the extreme-right in all its variants. Two alarming events marked 2018, in Italy and in Germany.

First of all, in Italy, against the background of an election campaign, on 1 February in Macerata⁴⁴, an Italian prostitute drug addict, Paola Mastropietro, was raped by four Nigerians. She was then killed and cut up by her drug supplier, Innocent Oseghale, 29 years old, also Nigerian and incidentally a buyer of human organs. As soon as the facts were known, there was an explosive reaction. It was not just extremists of the right but also “ordinary citizens”, not hiding their names, who demanded a halt to immigration, harsh sentences, deportations etc. On 3 February, an extreme-right activist, Luca Traini, enraged, took his car and his gun (a Glock), and criss-crossed the town shooting at African immigrants as well as the local office of the PD (Democratic Party – a “centre left” party). He seriously injured six people. After his arrest, he received thousands of messages of support – some argued that “*if he’d wanted to kill, he would have got out of his car!*” – and donations of money. On 7 February, CasaPound organised a demonstration in Macerata in support of him, imitated the next day by Forza Nuova. A counter-demonstration was planned for 10 February. The mayor, Romano Carancini, convinced the PD, FIOM and ANPI (an association of former partisans) to not join it. Nevertheless, twenty thousand protesters came from all over Italy to participate.

Subsequently, in Germany, in Chemnitz, there were spontaneous pursuits of immigrants from 29 August, when a German was killed the day before. On the 30th, more than thousand extreme-right protesters marched shouting “*Merkel resign*”. On 1 September, an official demonstration gathered ten thousand people, from “ordinary citizens” to Nazis, via the AfD and Pegida.⁴⁵ Unfortunately, this episode testifies to a “qualitative” jump in which part of the services de the state⁴⁶, opposed to Merkel, surreptitiously support the AfD, which itself protects Pegida, and therefore the Nazis. This explains the surprising rapidity of the organisation of the demonstration. Since that date the extreme right have marched in the city every Friday to demand the expulsion of immigrants from Germany.⁴⁷

These acts of anti-immigrant hatred are not isolated, all the more so as the despicable crimes which some immigrants commit excite them. Thus, in the little town of Kandel (Rhineland-Palatinate), a 19-year old Afghan stabbed his 15-year old German girlfriend to death the previous year. On the anniversary of the murder, pressure was building up against migrants.⁴⁸ All this despite big press coverage (newspapers, radio, TV) generally “pro-immigrant”. In Köthen, in Saxe-Anhalt, there was a march of 2,000 people on 9 September, following the death of a 22-year old German during a brawl with two young Afghans while leaving a nightclub. In addition, other demonstrations took place in Hamburg and Munich.⁴⁹ As well as the actions of Nazis, there is the emergence of a phenomenon of spontaneous pogroms that strikes us about these anti-immigrant reactions. They do not involve, for the moment, a reinforcement of fascist groups or parties which attack immigrants systematically, or even workers on strike, but they prepare a terrain favourable to such developments.

⁴⁴ Prefecture of the province of the same name, in the Marches region, this town of 43,000 is a PD municipality.

⁴⁵ The march took place with plenty of Nazi salutes, under the impotent gaze of a large bust of Marx.

⁴⁶ The chief of the German secret service, Hans-Georg Maassen (1962-), in the hot seat for his complacency towards the extreme right, was finally sacked on 8 November.

⁴⁷ See: <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/31/world/europe/germany-far-right-immigration-protests-chemnitz.html>

⁴⁸ See: https://www.lemonde.fr/europe/article/2018/04/04/kandel-foyer-des-angoisses-identitaires-allemandes_5280488_3214.html

⁴⁹ See: https://elpais.com/internacional/2018/09/10/actualidad/1536579836_765027.html

A very provisional conclusion

“‘The Commune’, Marx wrote, ‘was to be a working, not a parliamentary, body, executive and legislative at the same time..’”, (cited by Lenin in *The State and Revolution*). And Lenin added: “The Commune substitutes for the venal and rotten parliamentarism of bourgeois society institutions in which freedom of opinion and discussion does not degenerate into deception, for the parliamentarians themselves have to work, have to execute their own laws, have themselves to test the results achieved in reality, and to account directly to their constituents. Representative institutions remain, but there is no parliamentarism here as a special system, as the division of labour between the legislative and the executive, as a privileged position for the deputies.”⁵⁰

The social organisation of communism is founded on the convergence of executive power, legislative power and judicial power. The soviets, the councils do not just decide to change a machine, they change it after being given the means to do it. It is a social organisation where the three powers are totally unified at all levels.

Yet, in the conception of participatory democracy, it is the opposite. First of all, the limit of social organisation is defined uniquely by action carried out in common. Secondly, participation in action does not create social organisation. It is not because you have participated in the action that you get to determine or decide the execution of the action. The action is a pure expression and not a means of transformation. Under the cover of a very grassroots way of functioning, it is really a matter of an elitist functioning. Only those who are in the action have the right to carry out what has been decided. For communists, the post-capitalist society is not a society of direct democracy reserved for the elect united by affinities. On the contrary, communist society will inherit the liberal system of electivity, correcting it by the rotation of tasks, revocability, mandates that must be followed. It is therefore an elective system. Thirdly, it must cover the whole area of the revolutionary social bloc, the proletariat and its allies, not only the restricted space of those who act. The dictatorship of the proletariat is not the dictatorship of the Party. For the adherents of participatory democracy, social links are reduced to relations of affinity between isolated individuals. Also, such links are not political, programmatic links, expressing a project of large-scale social transformation, to the extent that the capitalist social relation is destroyed. They are just ephemeral coincidental manifestations between private individuals.

For communists, there is no social organisation without social transformation.

Why are the three powers (executive, legislative and judicial) separated in liberal democracy? Because the whole *raison d'être* of liberal democracy is the specialisation of the mechanism of decision-making and the confiscation from society as a whole of prerogatives which are delegated to others on the basis of the constitution of separate functional bodies for the maintenance of capitalist order. It is a conception of the state that we fight against. Our conception of the transition foresees that each proletarian, each social individual belonging to the exploited class and its allies, has the faculty to be at the same time conceiver, realiser and supervisor of what the collectivity has decided by and with its own organs. To finalise the social transformation on the scale of billions of human beings demands the adoption of mechanisms of representation. It imposes the construction of a complex political and social organisation which does not tolerate any specialisation and prevents abuses in the mechanism of delegation. How do we fight these tendencies of autonomisation of one part in relation to the whole, the confiscation of workers' power by some people? We don't have any ready-made recipes.

⁵⁰ V. Lenin, *The State and Revolution*, chapter 3, “The experience of the Paris Commune of 1871. Marx's Analysis”. See: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/staterev/ch03.htm>

The revolution is not a question of organisation. The revolution is first of all an act of collective consciousness. There is a moment where collective consciousness expresses itself in acts in keeping with it. Then, it organises itself starting from the new balance of forces established. And the organisation must itself be functional in the pursuit of objectives fixed by the movement of revolutionary transformation. This new political and social organisation has an essential task to fulfil: to produce a plan for overcoming capitalism which is shared by the great majority of social individuals. A plan elaborated and applied from below and not by geniuses from above. The gymnastics of the workers' dictatorship begin here and do not wait for the storming of the Winter Palace. Autonomous workers' organisation, when it asserts itself by and in the political struggle of the class, is already the prefiguration of the new society. It is its practical anticipation, it carries away and convinces the indecisive, the hesitant, by reconquering time and space from capital in places of production and reproduction.

The present situation, its potential evolutions, do not yet impact the activity of communist minorities. However, if the proto-fascist tendency shows itself to be moving in the direction of fully developed fascism, something which is not yet established, it is obvious that changes will need to be planned for. We must study the analogous experiences of the past, reflecting on what revolutionary organisations did when confronted with proto-fascism and nascent fascism, imagining the details of recruitment, agitation and suitable propaganda. What cannot be denied is the marginality in which the struggle between labour and capital finds itself for the moment. It is still a fact that it fails to take account of the growing danger of the advance of proto-fascism, conscious as we are that the resistance of the advanced fractions of capital does not constitute a rampart against it, as the 1930s and 1940s showed. Only communism has the capacity to bury fascism and, with it, the democracy whose bowels it emerges from.

ABOUT A FEW PROTO-FASCIST MOVEMENTS

Introduction

To complement the preceding texts which deal, amongst other things, with plebiscitary democracy, here we are offering a few notes to the reader on the proto-fascist or prefascist movements of the inter-war period (even if some of them existed before the First World War). The choice of these movements is obviously not exhaustive, nor is their description, but it is sufficient to show a certain number of common traits found in certain movements today. Hopefully this will lay the foundations of other works.

We have therefore chosen *Action française*, the *Associazione nazionalista Italiana* of D'Annunzio, the DNVP – German National Party of the People – and the DHV – National German Association of Commercial Employees, the Austrian Social-Christian Party and the Union of the Russian People.

We can see the common traits: Christian religious origin, conservatism, anti-Semitism and an attempt to re-associate the working class with the nation, not as a class but as a sum of isolated individuals.

Action française

Beginnings

Action française was born in reaction to the Dreyfus affair in 1898. The idea of creating the movement was launched by Maurice Pujo on 19 December 1898. Maurice Pujo⁵¹ came with Henri Vaugois⁵² from the Union for Moral Action and the republican spiritualism led by Paul Desjardins⁵³. It was a circle of intellectuals who wanted to “install the reign of Virtue and Morals”. It was opposed to the Union’s support for Dreyfus⁵⁴. On 20 June 1899, the movement was officially born⁵⁵. The *Revue d’Action française* was founded in July. For the founders of *Action française* it was a matter of learning lessons from the fiasco of the *Ligue de la patrie française* (“League for the French Homeland”)⁵⁶ which it considered weak on the doctrinal level despite its success (a hundred thousand recruits in 24 hours and the patronage of half the *Académie française* but also numerous artists like Degas and Renoir, politicians like Déroulède or Cavaignac, etc.). The aim was to bring about an intellectual reform of nationalism “reaction first of all”.

If Vaugois was republican, he associated with Charles Maurras (1868-1952) a monarchist, but also with Catholics and freethinkers. The common slogan was “Only France” and their *leitmotiv* was reaction against the anarchy which they claimed “results from the proclamation without any precaution or any counter-balance of human rights”. From 1899, the review declared itself anti-Semitic, hostile to democracy and it rejected “freedom as the basis of social order”. *Action française* was, from its creation, radically engaged in the anti-Dreyfus camp. It was pleased with his conviction and fought against the pardon he was finally given, calling him the “traitor Jew”. After the pardon for

⁵¹ Maurice Pujo (1872–1955) journalist, first classified as on the left, founder in 1908 of the *Camelots du Roi*, put out the daily *L’Action française* from 1908 to 1944. Supported the Vichy regime with Maurras, imprisoned from 1944 to 1951.

⁵² Henri Vaugois (1864–1916), professor of philosophy, originally a Left Republican.

⁵³ The Union had existed from 1892 to 1904 then transformed itself into the Union for Truth from 1904 to 1940. Paul Desjardins (1859–1940). See: https://www.persee.fr/doc/mcm_1146-1225_1999_num_17_1_1203

⁵⁴ At the same moment, the League for the French Homeland (anti-Dreyfus) was created, to oppose the League for Human Rights (pro-Dreyfus) which had just been created. Some of the founders of *Action française* participated in the League for the French Homeland.

⁵⁵ Participants included Maurice Barrès and François Césaire de Mahy.

⁵⁶ An anti-Dreyfus movement founded 31 December 1898, dissolved in 1904.

Dreyfus (1899) and long after his rehabilitation (1906), *Action française* never ceased, taking up the word used by Maurras, to “review” the matter. Thus, from 1906 to 1911, it led an uninterrupted campaign and a rare level of violence which several times earned it serious condemnation following legal complaints brought by commander Dreyfus himself.

Following the Law of Separation of Church and State passed on 9 December 1905, there was a Catholic reaction against secularism, organised with anti-government demonstrations. Many Catholics considered themselves to be dispossessed of their citizenship and *Action française* was there to re-establish their rights over the nation. But they also saw in *Action française* a rigorous defence of the dogma of the Christian faith.

The condemnation of the Sillon⁵⁷ by the Pope in 1910 fed the interest of Catholics in *Action française*. The Maurras movement, because of the Christian faith shared by its members and because of social and political considerations, saw in the, Apostolic and Roman, Catholic Church the bringer of French political equilibrium and a guarantee that the French social body was in “good health”.

Ideology

Charles Maurras⁵⁸, the head of the *Action française* movement, distinguished the “real country” from the “legal country” (the Republican institutions). These expressions allowed him to say in the beginnings of the Third Republic that French political life (“legal country”) was completely foreign to the preoccupations and needs of France. Here are several ideological points relating to *Action française*.

The electoral principle and universal suffrage

Electors are incapable of pronouncing in favour of the public good, incompetent to discern it, unfit to choose good governors. Maurras thought that universal suffrage was conservative and therefore not to be suppressed, but *Action française* violently opposed democracy, the Republic and parliamentarism. “*Democracy, is evil; democracy is death*”. Paradoxically, from 1910, Maurras supported access for women to higher education and called for votes for women from 1919.

Economic and social thought

Starting from 1908, *Action française* was for “*the necessity of incorporating the proletariat into society, of giving to the workers in big industry serious guarantees which are part of the national statute.*” Thus, already favourable to corporatism, on the economic plane it became close to the bosses. In addition, in 1909-1910, disappointed with the CGT, Georges Sorel was for a while close to *Action française* – without however sharing the nationalism or the political aims. Its ideas inspired the initiators of the Proudhon Circle, formed in December 1911, with the aim of gathering revolutionary syndicalists and royalists around public salvation through a monarchy which is federative, and therefore social. There were also attempts at rapprochement with the “yellow unionism” of Pierre Biétry⁵⁹. But these efforts to win over the world of the workers remained in vain. Maurras never made,

⁵⁷ The Sillon (“the furrow”) was a movement founded in 1894 by Marc Sangnier (1873–1950) which aimed to reconcile Catholicism with the Republic and workers with religion.

⁵⁸ Charles Maurras (1868–1952), journalist, academic, leader of *Action française*. Supported the Vichy regime, imprisoned from 1944 to 1951.

⁵⁹ Pierre Biétry (1872–1918), watchmaker, first an activist in the POF (French workers party that existed from 1882 to 1902. Founders were Jules Guesde and Paul Lafargue) and a trade unionist, he did a U-turn in 1901 and joined the *Federated Association of Unions and Professional Workers’ Groupings of France and the Colonies* (a far-right and anti-Semitic federation whose motto was “Work, Family, Country”. He broke from it and founded the *National Federation of Scabs [Jaunes] of France* (1902-1912). Biétry was for reconciliation of classes against class struggle.

like Georges Sorel and Édouard Berth⁶⁰, a systematic case against the bourgeoisie, because he saw in them a possible support. To the struggle of classes, Maurras preferred to oppose, as in the United Kingdom, a form of national solidarity in which the king constitutes the keystone. In opposition to a mass politics, he hoped for the flowering of the intermediate bodies freely organised and not stultified, the egoism of each turning towards the benefit of all. The social themes that Charles Maurras dealt with were in concordance with social Catholicism and with the magisterium of the Church while also relevant to a political strategy to pull its hold over the working class to the left.

State anti-Semitism

From its creation, *Action française* proclaimed a virulent anti-Semitism against Dreyfus. Charles Maurras theorised a new form of anti-Semitism, “state anti-Semitism”, a form which would be different from “anti-Semitism of the skin”. The First World War softened this position. This was the birth of the qualifiers “Well-born Jews” and “Low-born Jews”. The first are the “patriots” or “French Jews” who have shown that they can “mend their ways” from the fact of their engagement in the Great War, the second are the foreign Jews. The anti-Semitism of *Action française* evolved by displacing its target to beyond the frontiers of France. Starting in 1933, Maurras made the distinction between “German anti-Semitism” whose “tradition of brutality” was explained by the biological foundations of the notion of race, by the ideology of the pure race, and French anti-Semitism whose racist character he denied on the grounds of its absence of biological foundations. It was not a matter of saying “Death to the Jews” who had a right to life like all creatures but: “*Down with the Jews because they stand too high among us. Our state anti-Semitism consists in taking back from them, in forbidding them from taking too much and firstly, French nationality, when they have it indelibly, and that they always keep in fact. I will not be stripped of a natural friendship for the well-born Jews*”.

“Armed pacifism”

Action française always devoted its existence to the material salvation of the French homeland. It is in this spirit that it always denounced disarmament because, by its logic, disarmament kills peace. For example, it explained in a special edition for the parliamentary elections of April 1932: “*All the candidates will tell you they are partisans of peace. But to make peace, it is necessary to have the means! These means number two: the strength to prevent aggression and the wisdom which prevents the causes of conflict*”. The slogan of armed peace meant respected peace. Disarmed peace meant the violated peace of Prince Henri d’Orléans⁶¹, then war.

Evolution

After 1920, the *Action française* activists, “the hawkers of the King” (*camelots du roi*, that is, people who sold the monarchist paper), intervened in a violent and systematic manner against the political meetings of the left and extreme left or during their street sales, looking for a punch-up. In 1926, condemnation by Pope Pius XI stopped this dynamic. *Action française* still achieved a few victories during the demonstrations of 6 February 1934, where they mobilised, with other organisations of the extreme right⁶², close to 60,000 people in front of the parliament, provoking the resignation of the

⁶⁰ Georges Sorel (1847–1922). Engineer, inspirer of revolutionary syndicalism, theoretician of the general strike, supported the *Union sacrée* in 1914 and, paradoxically, Lenin and the Bolsheviks. Édouard Berth (1875–1939), translator from German, disciple of Georges Sorel, revolutionary syndicalist, he participated in the founding of the Proudhon Circle in 1911, but joined the Communist Party in 1920, then returned to revolutionary syndicalism in 1935.

⁶¹ Henri d’Orléans (1908–1999), Count of Paris and pretender to the throne, he broke from *Action française* in 1937.

⁶² Among the protesters there were also those belonging to ARAC, Republican Association of Former Combatants, satellite organisation of the PCF. See: Daniel Guérin, *Front populaire, révolution manquée*.

government. The decade finished badly for *Action Française* with, in 1937, its disavowal by Henri d'Orléans, pretender to the throne of France.

After the defeat of France in 1940, Charles Maurras rallied to the National Revolution of Marshall Pétain. This divided the activists. Thus we find members of *Action Française* on the side of Marshall Pétain, with de Gaulle, in the Resistance movements not affiliated to London, and with the collaborationists. The latter were rejected by the leaders of the movement who invoked the slogan: "Only France". On its side, the journal, around Maurras violently denounced the internal Resistance and the Free French before ceasing to appear after the occupier demanded the right to censor it.

Proudhon Circle

The Proudhon Circle was founded by Georges Valois in 1911. Starting in January 1912, it published notebooks of that name at the rate of one every quarter. Their appearance ceased in summer 1914. The main contributors were Édouard Berth, friend of Georges Sorel, the young King-hawker Henri Lagrange (1893-1915), Georges Valois and Gilbert Maire. Nevertheless, Charles Maurras made sure that the Proudhon Circle was not integrated into *Action française*: in effect he rejected the contractualist legalism of Proudhon. In addition, Maurras did not share either the Nietzscheism of Valois, or the activist fever of Lagrange that he had dispelled from *Action française*.

But whatever may be on the "surface" of the Proudhon Circle, we can take up the point of view of the historian Zeev Sternhell and one of his books, *Neither Right nor Left: fascist ideology in France*⁶³. The aim of this book, written in 1983, republished and improved in 2000, is to criticise the vulgarisation of history which, starting in 1950, denied that fascism could be a French phenomenon (in the logic of denying responsibility for the Vichy regime). For him, fascist ideology was born in France before 1914. It was born from the encounter between two currents, one coming from the monarchist and nationalist extreme right (Maurras, Barrès, etc.), the other from the extreme left (Sorel, Valois, Hervé, Lagardelle etc.). For the latter, democracy is consubstantial with capitalism, therefore if you want to fight capitalism you must fight democracy. Therefore, those "on the left", like the SFIO (beyond the ministerial participation of Millerand), who allied themselves (at the time of the Dreyfus Affair⁶⁴) with the radicals, the liberals and the republicans were not revolutionaries.

What's more, they considered that the working class was no longer essential to the revolution and that other classes could contribute to it, from where we get the idea of reconciling Labour and Capital (for the more "radical", it was necessary to push forward the conditions of capitalism which allowed the revolution, therefore the more the working class would be active, the more it pushed the capitalists to advance). Sorel also developed the theory of the revolutionary myth, he criticised materialism and the economic analysis of Marx and anchored the revolutionary process on the moral terrain of the critique of the degeneration of bourgeois society. Action, movement, the struggle against the intellectuals and the tools of bourgeois democracy became the motor of history and no longer the class struggle. It is starting from these moral questions that the unity of these groups towards fascism came into being. It was a matter of a strong nation with a new lease of life going beyond the mediocrity of bourgeois society⁶⁵.

⁶³ See: <https://press.princeton.edu/titles/5869.html>

⁶⁴ As is well-known, the SFIO had been created in April 1905. What we are talking about here, in 1898, is Jaurésiens, Possibilists and Allemanists. The Guesdistes of the POF were reluctant to defend Dreyfus.

⁶⁵ To know more it's also worth taking a look at another Sternhell book, *The Birth of Fascist Ideology: from Cultural Rebellion to Political Revolution* (<https://press.princeton.edu/titles/5306.html>). Unfortunately for Sorel, it is this aspect of moral questions which interests modern fascists like Alain Soral and company: <https://www.egaliteetreconciliation.fr/Georges-Sorel-un-socialiste-revolutionnaire-42623.html>

Finally, anti-Semitism (denouncing the rich Jews as capitalists and the Jewish workers as non-national revolutionaries) pushed for the defence of a national socialism and united all components in the tradition of Proudhon. The war involved the disappearance of the working class as an actor (until 1917!) pushing some to theorise the nation rather than the proletariat as the motor of change. Everything was ready therefore, from 1918, on the ideological terrain to give birth to a French fascism.

D'Annunzio's Associazione nazionalista Italiana

The *Associazione Nazionalista Italiana* (ANI), was a political party founded in December 1910 in Florence, which was the main expression of pre-war Italian nationalism. Its founder, Enrico Corradini⁶⁶, strongly influenced it. Intellectuals like Gabriele D'Annunzio⁶⁷ and Giovanni Verga⁶⁸, lawyers like Alfredo Rocco⁶⁹ and the admiral Costanzo Ciano⁷⁰, all took part. The ANI dissolved itself into the National Fascist Party in 1923.

It tied itself to a nationalism which wanted to make the Mediterranean into an “Italian sea” and which implied the colonial conquest of North Africa and the Adriatic coast. Its ideology was founded on the exaltation of heroic morale and the denunciation of socialist cowardice. During the Bosnian crisis of 1908, the association supported irredentism, that is to say the return to Italy of Trentino and Trieste (*Trst* in Slovene), Istria (*Istra* in Croatian) and the Dalmatian coast. It opposed the socialists and Giolitti (1848–1928), the president of the Council. It is at this time that Corradini developed the concept of “proletarian nation” and guided the ANI towards an opposition to socialism as well as liberalism.

It's also at this time that it built links with the syndicalist-revolutionaries. After having studied the condition of Italian workers emigrated to Tunisia and Argentina, it professed indifference to those countries. It proposed to transform the migratory spirit into a colonial and imperialist spirit. In parallel with its concept of proletarian nation (Italy being such *par excellence*), it concluded that the development of Italy must be based on labour and no longer on capital. From that, it transformed the Italian nationalist discourse by infecting it with socialist ideology. The Corradinian theses on the Proletarian Nation would be spread by the fascist movement then replaced by corporatism.

On 1 March 1911, ANI began publishing the journal “*L'Idea Nazionale*”, which immediately started a campaign in favour of the Italian intervention in Libya against Turkey (29/09/1911-18/10/1912). The ANI stood in the elections of October-November 1913 and won five seats. At this time the activist forces of the ANI consisted of intellectuals and students from the middle bourgeois layers of society and a few workers from Milan.

Starting in 1915, the ANI campaigned for intervention and presented itself as the most substantial nationalist group so as to isolate the “left” interventionists like Mussolini. Its political programme exalted Greater Italy: national unity, security of borders, fortifications on the Adriatic

⁶⁶ See the biographical details below.

⁶⁷ Gabriele D'Annunzio (1863-1938), writer, poet and adventurer. Joining up voluntarily, he became a pilot. With revolutionary syndicalists, like Alceste De Ambris, he attempted the operation in Rijeka (*Fiume* to Italians), a town which he occupied with a corps of mercenaries starting in September 1919, up until December 1920. He was with De Ambris, the publisher of the “Charter of Carnaro” whose programme was corporatist and had certain points in common with the programme of the National Fascist Party. Returning to Italy, he stayed on the side-lines from 1923.

⁶⁸ Giovanni Verga (1840-1922), writer representative of the literary movement of *Vérisme*. He became a nationalist and colonialist from 1896 and broke with Zola.

⁶⁹ Alfredo Rocco (1875-1935) lawyer, professor of law and political figure. He joined the National Fascist Party in 1922 and would be the Minister of Justice (1925-1932).

⁷⁰ Costanzo Ciano (1876-1939), naval officer then an admiral, personal friend of Mussolini, minister in the Mussolini government (1924-1934), chaired the fascist parliament (1934-1939).

(taking back Istria and Rijeka from Austria-Hungary), in the Mediterranean (Ottoman heritage in the Eastern Mediterranean), economic expansion (replacing Austria and Germany in the East with Italy), penetration into the Balkans (replacing Germany in Asia Minor), emancipation of the Italian industry and economy, in steel and shipbuilding, from German capital. To this expansionist ironmongery, the ANI added anti-parliamentarism: “*The parliament is against Italy*”. Naturally, the ANI supported entering the war.

On 10 April 1919, during the proclamation of a general strike by the PSI, ANI activists organised a counter-demonstration in Rome which swelled with ministerial employees who didn't like the strike. In the elections of November 1919, the ANI stood with the war veterans' party and won 10 seats. After the March on Rome, the ANI entered Mussolini's government. At its sixth congress, in 1923, the ANI dissolved itself into the PNF. Many of its members went on to be ministers in various fascist governments (Luigi Federzoni, Costanzo Ciano, Alfredo Rocco – author of the civil code of 1931 – and Umberto Guglielmotti).

DNVP

The National German People's Party (*Deutschnationale Volkspartei*, usually abbreviated to DNVP), was founded on 24 November 1918, by the fusion of the German Conservative Party and the Free Conservative Party. In great part it took over the organisational cadres and the ideological foundations of the old German Conservative Party⁷¹, active under the German Empire.

Hostile to the Weimar Constitution, the DNVP passed most of the inter-war period in opposition. It was supported by some industrialists, but also by numerous big landowners from the east of the Elbe. But there were also civil servants, teachers, Protestant clergy, farmers, employees and some workers. The DNVP was electorally very strong in the East of Germany and above all in Pomerania. It was favourable to the return of the monarchy, and was opposed to retaliatory measures taken against Germany in the Versailles Treaty.

After the failure of the Kapp putsch, in March 1920, where the DNVP had had an ambiguous attitude (neither for, nor against) they afterwards condemned the use by the government of the general strike as “illegal”. When Rathenau (1867-1922) became Minister for Foreign Affairs in February 1922, the DNVP launched an anti-Semitic campaign against him (“the international Jew” traitor) which ended in his assassination, on 24 June 1922, by a member of the Consul organisation, a paramilitary extreme right group. In reaction to its isolation, the DNVP excluded its radical right, *völkisch*⁷², wing in October 1922.

The DNVP was very divided on the submission of the Dawes Plan (August 1924) which arranged the instalments of reparations to be paid by Germany. It abandoned its monarchic orientation and declared itself for a presidential regime. Supported by the Hugenberg press group, the party

⁷¹ This was founded on 7 June 1876 by people from various backgrounds: nobles, big landowners, partisans of the Otto von Bismarck government – for example, Moltke - Protestant traditionalists and Social-Christians. The architects of this foundation were Wilhelm von Rauchhaupt, Friedrich Wilhelm von Limburg-Styrum and Otto von Heldorff-Bedra. The latter was a landowner and MP, and became the president of the new party. Their objective was to be a counter-weight to the liberals in German political life. They particularly defended the interests of the big farms in the East (the *Junkers*, that is to say the aristocratic landowners east of the Elbe). After 1898, this party only got around 10% of the votes. It recognised the constitution of the Empire and agitated for the preservation of the monarchy, the reinforcement of religion, against centralism and parliamentarism, as well as social-democracy. It also opposed the principle of equality between citizens, natural law and the domination of reason. It followed on from the Prussian Conservative Party, that were called the “old conservatives”, but unlike them the German Conservatives spread beyond the Prussian kingdom. The programme of the party agreed even in the smallest details with Bismarck.

⁷² The German word *Völkisch* means more than popular and doesn't really have a precise English equivalent, but in practice means something like “racial nationalist”: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/V%C3%B6lkisch_movement

gained 950,000 members the following year. From then on it agreed to support some governments (Cuno, from November 1922 to August 1923) or even participate in them (Luther, from January 1925 to December 1925), with its 20.5% of the votes gained in the elections of December 1924. This participation was accepted because of a electoral decline and the party went over to being a radical opposition to the regime after the ascent of Hugenberg⁷³ (1865-1953) to its leadership in 1928. In 1931, the party formed an alliance with the National-Socialist Party and the *Stahlhelm* (a paramilitary organisation of right-wing veterans). The DNVP participated in a coalition with the Nazi Party after its accession to power at the start of 1933. It dissolved itself on 29 June 1933, under pressure from Adolf Hitler. Many of its members then joined the national-socialist party. Those who refused were forced to leave political life.

The party was monarchist, *völkisch*, Christian and social. It was for a Germany freed from the control of the Jews, from French domination, from parliamentary games and from the mass culture of Big Capital. This represents a lot of points in common with Nazi ideology. This explains why so many of its voters and activists, peasants, employees and workers, so rapidly turned towards the NSDAP starting in 1930, the latter being perceived as less of a defender of the old aristocracy and the monarchy.

DHV

The confederation of German employees, Gedag, (*Gesamtverband Deutscher Angestellten-gewerkschaften* – General Association of Unions of German Employees) had more than 400,000 members in 1930. Among the affiliated unions was the *Deutschnationaler Hanflungsgehilfen Verband*, the commercial employees' union. This union was founded in 1893, in Hamburg, by a Protestant pastor. From the beginning the DHV opposed the employment of Jews and women. The former because the union was declaredly anti-Semitic and the latter because their work was “unfair competition”⁷⁴. The DHV was opposed in workplaces to organisations that were liberal, social-democratic and, naturally, to “big cosmopolitan Jewish capital”. It fought for respect of Sunday as a day of rest and for a system of assurance for employees. In 1914, the DHV could count 1,300 local sections and 150,000 members (including 10,000 in Austria).

During the strikes of 1919-1920, the DHV refused to participate in the general strike against the Kapp putsch (March 1920). It participated, while maintaining its independence, in the 1919 founding of Gedag, the association of unions of Catholic right-wing employees (including civil servants).

While until 1930 the DHV supported the DNVP in elections (without being a simple transmission belt for it), the coming to power of the NSDAP made the DHV move closer and closer to the NSDAP. Its vice-president, Hermann Miltzow, a Nazi elected in June 1932 to the vice-presidency of the union, stated in March 1933 that: “*For us, the colours black-white-red and the Swastika have always been the symbols of the national ideas of our movement*”. The DHV was one of the key elements in making employees vote for the NSDAP and helped its coming to power.

⁷³ Adolphe Hugenberg (1865-1953) was a big publishing boss, in the press and advertising. In 1916, he founded from the *Hugenberg Konzern* a collection of right and extreme-right publications. Politically, he had founded the pan-Germanic League in 1891, then he joined the DNVP. An MP since 1925, he became a minister of the first Hitler government from March 1933 to July 1933. He was sacked and the DNVP dissolved. At the end of 1933, all his companies were “ceded” to the NSDAP. Arrested in 1945, he was interned from 1946 to 1951.

⁷⁴ The DHV supported anti-feminist associations such as the *Deutsche Bund zur Bekämpfung der Frauenemanzipation* (“German League for Fighting Women’s Emancipation”) founded in 1912.

While in May 1933, the Gedag dissolved into the Nazi Labour Front, the DHV conserved a formal autonomy (all the leaders not members of the NSDAP were dismissed) until 1934.

Austrian Social-Christian Party

The Social-Christian Party (in German: *Christlichsoziale Partei*, CS) was a conservative political party important in Cisleithania (north-west part of the empire), at the time of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, and during the First Austrian Republic, created in 1891 and dissolved in 1934. It is the predecessor to the present Austrian People's Party. Led by Karl Lueger (1844–1910), inheritor of the Christian social movement, it aimed from the start at Catholic petty-bourgeois and peasant voters (helped in this by the numerous priests in its ranks). It was opposed to the “godless” social-democrats. Under the leadership of Lueger, it took an anti-liberal and anti-Semitic turn which enabled him to be elected the mayor of Vienna, from 1897 to 1910. It was also a monarchist party.

In the parliamentary elections in Cisleithania, in 1907, it came first, a position which it then lost to the social democrats in the elections of 1911. It supported the war but, in 1918, refused the fusion of Austria and Germany. It participated in the coalition government of the social-democrat Karl Renner⁷⁵, until July 1920. After the elections of November 1920, it became the biggest party (41.8% of the vote) and led the country when the SPD ran “Red Vienna”. As a result of the crisis of 1929-31, the party evolved towards “austro-fascism” so much so that Engelbert Dollfuß⁷⁶ created the Patriotic Front on 20 May 1933, fusing the party with the *Landbund* (peasant organisation), the *Heimwehr* (ex-soldiers organisation) and various small conservative parties. This front would be dissolved at the moment of the Anschluss, in March 1938.

The party evolved from a conservative, monarchist and anti-Semitic one into a fascist party.

Union of the Russian People

The Union of the Russian People (*Союз русского народа*) was a conservative and monarchist organisation which existed from 1905 to 1917. The movement appeared at the beginning of the twentieth century, coming out into the open after the 1905 Revolution, when various known personalities who wanted to reconcile the monarchy decided to draw on the historical and religious base of former Russia to give the country a dynamism which seemed to have been lost since the Russo-Japanese war. It was therefore a movement of religious ideology, based on Tsarism, opposed to political liberalism and which adopted reactionary and anti-Semitic positions.

The founding meeting took place on 8 November 1905 in Saint-Petersburg, on the initiative of the doctor Alexander Dubrovin⁷⁷, the painter Apollo Maykov⁷⁸ and the monk Arsen Alexeyev. Dubrovin was named president of the Council of the Union, and Maykov vice-president with the engineer Trishatny and the merchant Baranov. Among the members of the Council were Pavel Bulatsel⁷⁹ and Georgy Butmi⁸⁰. The first important rally took place in Moscow at Manezhnaya Square

⁷⁵ Karl Renner (1870-1950), jurist, joined the Social Democratic Party in 1896. Deputy in 1907, he became Chancellor and Minister of Foreign Affairs from 1919 to 1920. President of Parliament from 1931 to 1934. He supported the *Anschluss* in 1938 and retired from politics until 1945, when he was Chancellor then President of the Republic until his death.

⁷⁶ See the biographical details below.

⁷⁷ Alexander Dubrovin (1855-1921), paediatric doctor and fervent believer. Split from the Union in 1911, he supported the pogroms of the Black Hundreds. Arrested by the Cheka, imprisoned in 1920, shot in 1921.

⁷⁸ Apollo Maykov (1866 – 1917), painter and son of a well-known poet. Split from the Union in 1909. Killed after October 1917.

⁷⁹ Pavel Bulatsel (1867-1919), lawyer and journalist.

⁸⁰ Georgy Butmi (1856-1917), officer, journalist. Leader of the Union of the Russian People of the Archangel Michael, from 1912 to 1913, notorious anti-Semite (one of the authors of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*) and denouncer of Freemasons. Died in 1917.

and gathered 20,000 people, including two bishops. The Union was organised in groups of ten, a hundred and a thousand people. It sent delegates to Nicholas II, on 23 December 1905, to pledge their loyalty. At the Kyiv session of monarchist associations which took place from 1-7 October 1906, it had 67 out of the 166 delegates present. Starting from 28 November 1905, it published a journal *Russian Flag* with a rather feeble print run of 3,000. On 26 November 1906, in Manezhnaya Square, John of Kronstadt⁸¹ solemnly came to bless the banner of the Union representing Saint George, protector of Moscow, in front of 30,000 people.

Vladimir Purishkevich⁸² took on a very influential post within the Union, considering that he was not very effective. He dismissed Dubrovin, while taking the publications of the movement into his hands. Starting in spring 1908, there were also splits in the provinces. On 8 November 1908, Purishkevich created a new organisation with the dissidents that he named Union of the Russian People of the Archangel Michael, significantly more radical. In the Manifesto of October⁸³, Dubrovin had already stated that any split in the ranks of the monarchist organisations would weaken the regime, but Dubrovin and his friends found themselves marginalised. In place of *Russian Flag*, the new members published the journals *Zemshchina* and *Vestnik*. Between 1909 and 1912, the Union became unmanageable and more and more extremist and Dubrovin was kicked out, in 1911, by Nikolay Markov. In August 1912, Dubrovin founded a new association, while the leaders of the Union of the Russian People leaned more and more towards the Black Hundreds who sowed terror among the revolutionary socialists, but also committed numerous attacks and pogroms against the Jews. After the Revolution of February 1917, all monarchist organisations were banned.

The programme of the Union of the Russian People was defined during the session held on 7 August 1906. It consisted in making the Russian People conscious of its historic identity and uniting all the Russian forces around the imperial idea of the indissolubility of the Empire and the union of its various peoples and nations. Its catchwords were “Orthodoxy, autocracy, nationality” taking up the principles of Count Sergey Uvarov (1786-1855), Minister of Education in the time of Nicholas I.

For the Union, parliamentarism had to be limited. It could not be an organ of power, but rather an assembly (like the ancient *Sobor*⁸⁴, from before Peter the Great) from which, like the States General, the Tsar could take counsel and above all be supported. The Union was opposed to a Duma provided with full legislative powers and opposed to the tsarist bureaucracy. On the other hand, the Union was favourable to freedom of the press, freedom to hold meetings, freedom of association, etc., in the limits of a reasonable legislative framework, and had a rather overt conception of free will.

Rapidly, the Union fell into internal crises and divisions. Incapable of evolving, it could not avoid a split with the more and more radical elements, as the more pragmatic elements turned to the KD movement (cadets) and the idea of a new Constitution which never saw the light of day.

Biographical details

Enrico Corradini (1865-1932)

From the beginning of the century he edited the literary review *Il Marzocco*, founded in 1896 by Angiolo Orvieto. With Giovanni Papini, Vilfredo Pareto and Giuseppe Prezzolini he founded the

⁸¹ John of Kronstadt (1829-1908) was a « saint » of the Russian Orthodox Church.

⁸² Vladimir Purishkevich (1870-1920), noble from Moldova, Duma deputy, anti-Semite. He participated in the murder of Rasputin (December 1916). Joined the White Army, died of typhus.

⁸³ A text signed by Tsar Nicolas II, 17 October 1905, in response to revolutionary agitation since January which seemed to propose and promise to put in place democratic freedoms.

⁸⁴ The *Sobor* was an assembly of bishops, clerics and lay people.

review *Il Regno* in 1903. In 1910, he helped to create the *Associazione Nazionalista Italiana*. In 1911, he supported the campaign in favour of the Italo-Turkish war and, with the collaboration of Alfredo Rocco and Luigi Federzoni, he published the weekly *L'Idea Nazionale*, which spread his warmongering ideas.

Favourable to a foreign policy which was imperialist, colonialist and expansionist, in 1914, *L'Idea Nazionale* became a daily thanks to financing by soldiers and arms companies. He elaborated a nationalist theory fed by populism and corporatism. Obviously, he was an interventionist during the First World War, first in favour of the Triplice⁸⁵, then he supported the Triple-Entente⁸⁶, leading violent campaigns against the neutralists and in particular against Giovanni Giolitti.

He belonged to the National Fascist Party. He distanced himself from the most controversial actions of fascism, even when Mussolini appointed him a senator and then a minister in 1928. Corradini saw a Europe in which, under the two plutocracies, British and French, there were proletarian nations. Italy and Germany, according to him, could no longer accept being second-rate powers. He thought that Italy must have its colonial policy, the poor countries must seek out, by means of imperialism, a “place in the sun”, and Italy was a poor power, but it must not let itself be walked all over by the plutocratic nations.

He considered nationalism as socialism applied to nations, where there had to be a kind of class struggle between proletarian nations and plutocratic nations: “*Socialism is our master but our enemy*”, adversary because pacifist, master because it teaches how to use the instrument of class struggles in an international dimension. Pacifism is only destined to maintain the status quo in Europe, in response it is necessary to exalt the international class struggle. The nation must be cohesive and non-individualist, the good citizen must be ready to sacrifice themselves for the country.

Corradini envisaged a conception materially proletarian, but spiritually aristocratic: to prove its spiritual grandeur, Italy must be guided by the best men and not through a democratic process. The management of public affairs must be entrusted to the aristocracy: it is not true that we are all equal, consequently the foundations of democracy no longer make sense. Making up part of human nature, the fight against each other, the desire to subjugate your enemy is a natural instinct, the warlike instinct must be exported for the national good.

Karl Lueger (1844-1910)

Lawyer, was born in Vienna where he became the mayor from 1897 until his death in 1910. He practised as a lawyer for the “little people”, a profession he pursued until 1896. He founded and led the Austrian Christian-Social Party (*Christlichsoziale Partei*, CS). In 1886, in the *Reichsrat*⁸⁷ in Vienna, he denounced the Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867, talking about “Judeo-Magyarism”, financed by the cosmopolitan banks. He renewed his attacks in 1891, which led to him being excluded from the *Reichsrat*. In 1890, Lueger was elected to the Landtag of Lower Austria, becoming one of the figureheads of the struggle against economic liberalism and corruption, particularly developed at this time in Vienna. The Christian-Social Party won the municipal elections in Vienna in 1895. After three refusals, Emperor François-Joseph resigned in 1897, while Lueger became mayor of Vienna,

⁸⁵ Alliance between Germany, Austria-Hungary and Italy from 1882 to 1914.

⁸⁶ Alliance between France, the UK and Russia established in 1907.

⁸⁷ Parliament of Austria-Hungary.

following the success of the Christian-Social Party in the *Reichsrat* elections⁸⁸. Lueger was reelected mayor in 1903 and in 1909. He died from the consequences of diabetes during his third term in 1910.

Lueger was an admirer of Édouard Drumont⁸⁹ and in 1887 he voted in favour of the proposal for the law of von Schönerer which aimed at restricting the immigration of Jews from Romania and Russia, who then made up 10% of the population of Vienna. Karl Lueger influenced Adolf Hitler during his stay in Vienna and played (indirectly) a crucial role in the birth of Hitlerian anti-Semitism. Hitler had a great admiration for him and returned to it a few times in *Mein Kampf*.

Engelbert Dollfuß (1892-1934)

Born on 4 October 1892 and died on 25 July 1934. He was the Federal Chancellor of Austria from 20 May 1932 until his death, setting up a dictatorship from 4 March 1933. Coming from a very devout family of Catholic peasants, he considered becoming a priest. But, in 1913, he studied law at the University of Vienna. The following year, he joined up as a volunteer and was mobilised. Dollfuß started by fighting the Italians, winning promotion to senior officer cadet and then lieutenant. In August 1919, Dollfuß, then the holder of a doctorate in law, became the secretary of an agricultural cooperative. One of his first missions was to encourage the creation of farm workers' unions. In 1922, he threw himself into politics as a member of the conservative "social-Christian party". His conservative and nationalist ideas, advocated a "corporatist and Christian" authoritarian state, in which the independence of Austria would not be called into question. On 4 March 1933, the President and the two Vice-Presidents of Parliament resigned so as to be able to take part in the particularly close vote on a law. Engelbert Dollfuß declared Parliament dissolved, arguing that it was incapable of functioning. Austria became an authoritarian, corporatist and Catholic state. From then on he governed only by decrees. This dictatorial power meant he could suppress the right to strike and freedom of association, along with the established courts, and could ban the Marxist press. Austro-fascism began.

On 30 May 1933, the Communist Party of Austria was dissolved, along with the Nazi Party on 20 June 1933. Its numerous active members were arrested and put in concentration camps. In response, German radio tried to discredit Dollfuß, using the fact that his father was unknown to accuse him of being a "half-Jew". He became the target of attacks by Austrian Nazis. On 3 October 1933, Chancellor Dollfuß narrowly escaped an attack by the Nazis. On 19 January 1934, the socialists, the last legal opposition party, called for a peaceful general strike. Dollfuß replied by arresting more than 200 social-democrats, who mostly held key posts in the administration. These people nevertheless stuck to their pacifist position and tried to negotiate.

Deciding to sort out the economic situation, he set out, not without difficulty, to re-establish financial equilibrium, stabilising the schilling and reorganising the Creditanstalt, one of the principal Austrian banks. The workers, exasperated, launched an insurrection in Vienna on 12 February 1934. The confrontations between armed civilians and the police were a massacre: there were around 1,500 to 2,000 deaths and almost 5,000 wounded. On 16 February, the insurrection was put down and the Chancellor banned the Socialist Party. Dollfuß attempted a last rapprochement with the social-democrats, on 11 July 1934, and dismissed his extremely unpopular Minister of the Interior, Emil

⁸⁸ In these elections, the CS Party got 35.15% of the votes, ahead of the social-democratic party with 23.13%.

⁸⁹ Édouard Drumont (1844-1917), journalist and politician. He published *La France juive* in 1886. Founder, in April 1892, of *la Libre parole*, creator of the *Ligue nationale antisémite de France* (1889), Alger deputy (1898-1902), leader in the House of the group of 28 anti-Semitic, anti-Dreyfus deputies. He was the conceptual father of anti-Semitism under the Third Republic.

Fey⁹⁰. On 25 July 1934, some Austrian Nazis, members of SS Regiment 89, disguised as soldiers, attempted a *coup d'Etat* which failed, but Dollfuß, surprised by the Nazis, was seriously injured and died within a day from his wounds.

Georges Valois (1878-1945)

Journalist, first an anarchist, then a Sorelian, he became close to *Action française* and in 1911 founded the Proudhon Circle to reconcile the workers with royalism. Having broken with *Action française* in 1925, he founded a fascist party (the first overt fascist party outside Italy), *Le Faisceau*, which disappeared in 1928. Following this he created the Republican Syndicalist Party (PRS) and then in 1934 demanded to be active in the SFIO, which refused him. He participated in the Resistance from 1940, was arrested in May 1944 and died in Bergen-Belsen.

⁹⁰ Emil Fey (1886-1938) was an officer, head of the *Heimwehr* (paramilitary organisation), Minister of the Interior responsible for the crushing and repression of the social-democratic insurrection in Vienna in February 1934. Arrested by the Nazis after the Anschluss in March 1938. Freed, he committed suicide after murdering his wife and son.

ANNEXES

On the Question of Free Trade

Gentlemen⁹¹,

The Repeal of the Corn Laws in England is the greatest triumph of free trade in the 19th century. In every country where manufacturers talk of free trade, they have in mind chiefly free trade in corn and raw materials in general. To impose protective duties on foreign corn is infamous, it is to speculate on the famine of peoples.

Cheap food, high wages, this is the sole aim for which English free-traders have spent millions, and their enthusiasm has already spread to their brethren on the Continent. Generally speaking, those who wish for free trade desire it in order to alleviate the condition of the working class.

But, strange to say, the people for whom cheap food is to be procured at all costs are very ungrateful. Cheap food is as ill-esteemed in England as cheap government is in France. The people see in these self-sacrificing gentlemen, in Bowring, Bright and Co., their worst enemies and the most shameless hypocrites.

Everyone knows that in England the struggle between Liberals and Democrats takes the name of the struggle between Free-Traders and Chartists.

Let us now see how the English free-traders have proved to the people the good intentions that animate them.

This is what they said to the factory workers:

"The duty levied on corn is a tax upon wages; this tax you pay to the landlords, those medieval aristocrats; if your position is wretched one, it is on account of the dearness of the immediate necessities of life."

The workers in turn asked the manufacturers:

"How is it that in the course of the last 30 years, while our industry has undergone the greatest development, our wages have fallen far more rapidly, in proportion, than the price of corn has gone up?"

"The tax which you say we pay the landlords is about 3 pence a week per worker. And yet the wages of the hand-loom weaver fell, between 1815 and 1843, from 28s. per week to 5s., and the wages of the power-loom weavers, between 1823 and 1843, from 20s. per week to 8s.

"And during the whole of this period that portion of the tax which we paid to the landlord has never exceeded 3 pence. And, then in the year 1834, when bread was very cheap and business going on very well, what did you tell us? You said, 'If you are unfortunate, it is because you have too many children, and your marriages are more productive than your labour!'"

"These are the very words you spoke to us, and you set about making new Poor Laws, and building work-houses, the Bastilles of the proletariat."

To this the manufacturer replied:

⁹¹ This speech was made at a public meeting of the Democratic Association of Brussels on 7 January 1848 and is taken from the text of the original pamphlet published in Brussels in 1848, paid for by the Association.

"You are right, worthy laborers; it is not the price of corn alone, but competition of the hands among themselves as well, which determined wages.

"But ponder well one thing, namely, that our soil consists only of rocks and sandbanks. You surely do not imagine that corn can be grown in flower-pots. So if, instead of lavishing our capital and our labour upon a thoroughly sterile soil, we were to give up agriculture, and devote ourselves exclusively to industry, all Europe would abandon its factories, and England would form one huge factory town, with the whole of the rest of Europe for its countryside."

While thus haranguing his own workingmen, the manufacturer is interrogated by the small trader, who says to him:

"If we repeal the Corn Laws, we shall indeed ruin agriculture; but for all that, we shall not compel other nations to give up their own factories and buy from ours.

"What will the consequence be? I shall lose the customers that I have at present in the country, and the home trade will lose its market."

The manufacturer, turning his back upon the workers, replies to the shopkeeper:

"As to that, you leave it to us! Once rid of the duty on corn, we shall import cheaper corn from abroad. Then we shall reduce wages at the very time when they rise in the countries where we get our corn.

"Thus, in addition to the advantages which we already enjoy we shall also have that of lower wages and, with all these advantages, we shall easily force the Continent to buy from us."

But now the farmers and agricultural laborers join in the discussion.

"And what, pray, is to become of us?"

"Are we going to pass a sentence of death upon agriculture, from which we get our living? Are we to allow the soil to be torn from beneath our feet?"

As its whole answer, the Anti-Corn Law League has contented itself with offering prizes for the three best essays upon the wholesome influence of the repeal of the Corn Laws on English agriculture.

These prizes were carried off by Messrs. Hope, Morse, and Greg, whose essays were distributed in thousands of copies throughout the countryside.

The first of the prize-winners devotes himself to proving that neither the tenant farmer nor the agricultural labourer will lose by the free importation of foreign corn, but only the landlord.

"The English tenant farmer," he exclaims, "need not fear the repeal of the Corn Laws, because no other country can produce such good corn so cheaply as England.

"Thus, even if the price of corn fell, it would not hurt you, because this fall would only affect rent, which would go down, and not at all industrial profit and wages, which would remain stationary."

The second prize-winner, Mr. Morse, maintains, on the contrary, that the price of corn will rise in consequence of repeal. He takes infinite pains to prove that protective duties have never been able to secure a remunerative price for corn.

In support for his assertion, he cites the fact that, whenever foreign corn has been imported, the price of corn in England has gone up considerably, and then when little corn has been imported, the price has fallen extremely. This prize-winner forgets that the importation was not the cause of the high price, but that the high price was the cause of the importation.

And in direct contradiction to his co-prize-winner, he asserts that every rise in the price of corn is profitable to both the tenant farmer and the labourer, but not to the landlord.

The third prize-winner, Mr. Greg, who is a big manufacturer and whose work is addressed to the large tenant farmers, could not hold with such stupidities. His language is more scientific.

He admits that the Corn Laws can raise rent only by raising the price of corn, and that they can raise the price of corn only by compelling capital to apply itself to land of inferior quality, and this is explained quite simply.

In proportion as population increases, if foreign corn cannot be imported, less fertile soil has to be used, the cultivation of which involves more expense and the product of this soil is consequently dearer.

There being a forced sale for corn, the price will of necessity be determined by the price of the product of the most costly soil. The difference between this price and the cost of production upon soil of better quality constitutes the rent.

If, therefore, as a result of the repeal of the Corn Laws, the price of corn, and consequently the rent, falls, it is because inferior soil will no longer be cultivated. Thus, the reduction of rent must inevitably ruin a part of the tenant farmers.

These remarks were necessary in order to make Mr. Greg's language comprehensible.

"The small farmers," he says, "who cannot support themselves by agriculture will find a resource in industry. As to the large tenant farmers, they cannot fail to profit. Either the landlords will be obliged to sell them land very cheap, or leases will be made out for very long periods. This will enable tenant farmers to apply large sums of capital to the land, to use agricultural machinery on a larger scale, and to save manual labour, which will, moreover, be cheaper, on account of the general fall in wages, the immediate consequences of the repeal of the Corn Laws."

Dr. Browning conferred upon all these arguments the consecration of religion, by exclaiming at a public meeting,

"Jesus Christ is Free Trade, and Free Trade is Jesus Christ."

One can understand that all this hypocrisy was not calculated to make cheap bread attractive to the workers.

Besides, how could the workingman understand the sudden philanthropy of the manufacturers, the very men still busy fighting against the Ten Hours' Bill, which was to reduce the working day of the mill hands from 12 hours to 10?

To give you an idea of the philanthropy of these manufacturers I would remind you, gentlemen, of the factory regulations in force in all the mills.

Every manufacturer has for his own private use a regular penal code in which fines are laid down for every voluntary or involuntary offence. For instance, the worker pays so much if he has the misfortune to sit down on a chair; if he whispers, or speaks, or laughs; if he arrives a few moments too late; if any part of the machine breaks, or he does not turn out work of the quality desired, etc., etc. The fines are

always greater than the damage really done by the worker. And to give the worker every opportunity for incurring fines, the factory clock is set forward, and he is given bad raw material to make into good pieces of stuff. An overseer not sufficiently skilful in multiplying cases of infractions or rules is discharged.

You see, gentlemen, this private legislation is enacted for the especial purpose of creating such infractions, and infractions are manufactured for the purpose of making money. Thus, the manufacturer uses every means of reducing the nominal wage, and of profiting even by accidents over which the worker has no control.

These manufacturers are the same philanthropists who have tried to make the workers believe that they were capable of going to immense expense for the sole purpose of ameliorating their lot. Thus, on the one hand, they nibble at the wages of the worker in the pettiest way, by means of factory regulations, and, on the other, they are undertaking the greatest sacrifices to raise those wages again by means of the Anti-Corn Law League.

They build great palaces at immense expense, in which the League takes up, in some respects, its official residence; they send an army of missionaries to all corners of England to preach the gospel of free trade; they have printed and distributed gratis thousands of pamphlets to enlighten the worker upon his own interests, they spend enormous sums to make the press favourable to their cause; they organize a vast administrative system for the conduct of the free trade movement, and they display all their wealth of eloquence at public meetings. It was at one of these meetings that a worker cried out:

"If the landlords were to sell our bones, you manufacturers would be the first to buy them in order to put them through a steam-mill and make flour of them."

The English workers have very well understood the significance of the struggle between the landlords and the industrial capitalists. They know very well that the price of bread was to be reduced in order to reduce wages, and that industrial profit would rise by as much as rent fell.

Ricardo, the apostle of the English free-traders, the most eminent economist of our century, entirely agrees with the workers upon this point. In his celebrated work on political economy, he says:

"If instead of growing our own corn... we discover a new market from which we can supply ourselves... at a cheaper price, wages will fall and profits rise. The fall in the price of agricultural produce reduces the wages, not only of the labourer employed in cultivating the soil, but also of all those employed in commerce or manufacture." – David Ricardo, *Des principes de l'économie politique et de l'impôt*, Traduit de l'anglais par F. S. Constancio, avec des notes explicatives et critiques par J.-B.- Say. T. I., Paris 1835, p.178-79

And do not believe, gentlemen, that it is a matter of indifference to the worker whether he receives only four francs on account of corn being cheaper, when he had been receiving five francs before.

Have not his wages always fallen in comparison with profit, and is it not clear that his social position has grown worse as compared with that of the capitalist? Besides which he loses more as a matter of fact.

So long as the price of corn was higher and wages were also higher, a small saving in the consumption of bread sufficed to procure him other enjoyments. But as soon as bread is very cheap, and wages are therefore very cheap, he can save almost nothing on bread for the purchase of other articles.

The English workers have made the English free-traders realize that they are not the dupes of their illusions or of their lies; and if, in spite of this, the workers made common cause with them against the landlords, it was for the purpose of destroying the last remnants of feudalism and in order to have only one enemy left to deal with. The workers have not miscalculated, for the landlords, in order to revenge themselves upon the manufacturers, made common cause with the workers to carry the Ten Hours'

Bill, which the latter had been vainly demanding for 30 years, and which was passed immediately after the repeal of the Corn Laws.

When Dr. Bowring, at the Congress of Economists [September 16-18, 1848; the following, among others, were present: Dr. Bowring, M.P., Colonel Thompson, Mr. Ewart, Mr. Brown, and James Wilson, editor of the *Economist*], drew from his pocket a long list to show how many head of cattle, how much ham, bacon, poultry, etc., was imported into England, to be consumed, as he asserted, by the workers, he unfortunately forgot to tell you that all the time the workers of Manchester and other factory towns were finding themselves thrown into the streets by the crisis which was beginning.

As a matter of principle in political economy, the figures of a single year must never be taken as the basis for formulating general laws. One must always take the average period of from six to seven years – a period of time during which modern industry passes through the various phases of prosperity, overproduction, stagnation, crisis, and completes its inevitable cycle.

Doubtless, if the price of all commodities falls – and this is the necessary consequence of free trade – I can buy far more for a franc than before. And the worker's franc is as good as any other man's. Therefore, free trade will be very advantageous to the worker. There is only little difficulty in this, namely, that the worker, before he exchanges his franc for other commodities, has first exchanged his labour with the capitalist. If in this exchange he always received the said franc for the same labour and the price of all other commodities fell, he would always be the gainer by such a bargain. The difficult point does not lie in proving that, if the price of all commodities falls, I will get more commodities for the same money.

Economists always take the price of labour at the moment of its exchange with other commodities. But they altogether ignore the moment at which labour accomplishes its own exchange with capital.

When less expense is required to set in motion the machine which produces commodities, the things necessary for the maintenance of this machine, called a worker, will also cost less. If all commodities are cheaper, labour, which is a commodity too, will also fall in price, and, as we shall see later, this commodity, labour, will fall far lower in proportion than the other commodities. If the worker still pins his faith to the arguments of the economists, he will find that the franc has melted away in his pocket, and that he has only 5 sous left.

Thereupon the economists will tell you:

"Well, we admit that competition among the workers, which will certainly not have diminished under free trade, will very soon bring wages into harm, only with the low price of commodities. But, on the other hand, the low price of commodities will increase consumption, the larger consumption will require increased production, which will be followed by a larger demand for hands, and this larger demand for hands will be followed by a rise in wages."

The whole line of argument amounts to this: Free trade increases productive forces. If industry keeps growing, if wealth, if the productive power, if, in a word, productive capital increases, the demand for labour, the price of labour, and consequently the rate of wages, rise also.

The most favourable condition for the worker is the growth of capital. This must be admitted. If capital remains stationary, industry will not merely remain stationary but will decline, and in this case the worker will be the first victim. He goes to the wall before the capitalist. And in the case where capital keeps growing, in the circumstance which we have said are the best for the worker, what will be his lot? He will go to the wall just the same. The growth of productive capital implies the accumulation and the concentration of capital. The centralization of capital involves a greater division of labour and a greater use of machinery. The greater division of labour destroys the especial skill of the labourer; and by putting in the place of this skilled work labour which anybody can perform, it increases competition among the workers.

This competition becomes fiercer as the division of labour enables a single worker to do the work of three. Machinery accomplishes the same result on a much larger scale. The growth of productive capital, which forces the industrial capitalists to work with constantly increasing means, ruins the small industrialist and throws them into the proletariat. Then, the rate of interest falling in proportion as capital accumulates, the small rentiers, who can no longer live on their dividends, are forced to go into industry and thus swell the number of proletarians.

Finally, the more productive capital increases, the more it is compelled to produce for a market whose requirements it does not know, the more production precedes consumption, the more supply tries to force demand, and consumption crises increase in frequency and in intensity. But every crisis in turn hastens the centralization of capital and adds to the proletariat.

Thus, as productive capital grows, competition among the workers grows in a far greater proportion. The reward of labour diminishes for all, and the burden of labour increases for some.

In 1829, there were in Manchester 1,088 cotton spinners employed in 36 factories. In 1841, there were no more than 448, and they tended 53,353 more spindles than the 1,088 spinners did in 1829. If manual labour had increased in the same proportion as the productive power, the number of spinners ought to have reached the figure of 1,848; improved machinery had, therefore, deprived 1,100 workers of employment.

We know beforehand the reply of the economists. The men thus deprived of work, they say, will find other kinds of employment. Dr. Bowring did not fail to reproduce this argument at the Congress of Economists, but neither did he fail to supply his own refutation.

In 1835, Dr. Bowring made a speech in the House of Commons upon the 50,000 hand-loom weavers of London who for a very long time had been starving without being able to find that new kind of employment which the free-traders hold out to them in the distance.

We will give the most striking passages of this speech of Dr. Bowring:

"This distress of the weavers... is an incredible condition of a species of labour easily learned – and constantly intruded on and superseded by cheaper means of production. A very short cessation of demand, where the competition for work is so great... produces a crisis. The hand-loom weavers are on the verge of that state beyond which human existence can hardly be sustained, and a very trifling check hurls them into the regions of starvation.... The improvements of machinery, ...by superseding manual labour more and more, infallibly bring with them in the transition much of temporary suffering.... The national good cannot be purchased but at the expense of some individual evil. No advance was ever made in manufactures but at some cost to those who are in the rear; and of all discoveries, the power-loom is that which most directly bears on the condition of the hand-loom weaver. He is already beaten out of the field in many articles; he will infallibly be compelled to surrender many more."

Further on he says:

"I hold in my hand the correspondence which has taken place between the Governor-General of India and the East-India Company, on the subject of the Dacca hand-loom weavers.... Some years ago, the East-India Company annually received of the produce of the looms of India to the amount of from 6,000,000 to 8,000,000 of pieces of cotton goods. The demand gradually fell to somewhat more than 1,000,000, and has now nearly ceased altogether. In 1800, the United States took from India nearly 800,000 pieces of cotton; in 1830, not 4,000. In 1800, 1,000,000 pieces were shipped to Portugal; in 1830, only 20,000. Terrible were the accounts of the wretchedness of the poor Indian weavers, reduced to absolute starvation. And what was the sole cause? The presence of the cheaper English manufacture.... Numbers of them dies of hunger, the remainder were, for the most part, transferred to other occupations, principally

agricultural. Not to have changed their trade was inevitable starvation. And at this moment that Dacca district is supplied with yarn and cotton cloth from the power-looms of England... The Dacca muslins, celebrated over the whole world for their beauty and fineness, are also annihilated from the same cause. And the present suffering, to numerous classes in India, is scarcely to be paralleled in the history of commerce." - Speech in the House of Commons, July 28, 1835. (Hansard, Vol. XXIX, London 1835, pp.1168-70)

Dr. Bowring's speech is the more remarkable because the facts quoted by him are exact, and the phrases with which he seeks to palliate them are wholly characterized by the hypocrisy common to all free trade sermons. He represents the workers as means of production which must be superseded by less expensive means of production. He pretends to see in the labour of which he speaks a wholly exceptional kind of labour, and in the machine which has crushed out the weavers an equally exceptional machine. He forgets that there is no kind of manual labour which may not any day be subjected to the fate of the hand-loom weavers.

"It is, in fact, the constant aim and tendency of every improvement in machine to supersede human labour altogether, or to diminish its cost by substituting the industry of women and children for that of men; or that of ordinary labourers for trained artisans. In most of the water-twist, or throstle cotton-mills, the spinning is entirely managed by females of 16 years and upwards. The effect of substituting the self-acting mule for the common mule, is to discharge the greater part of the men spinners, and to retain adolescents and children." – Dr. Andrew Ure, *The Philosophy of Manufactures*, London 1835. Book I, Chap. I, p.23

These words of the most enthusiastic free-trader, Dr. Ure, serve to complement the confessions of Dr. Bowring. Dr. Bowring speaks of certain individual evils, and, at the same time, says that these individual evils destroy whole classes; he speaks of the temporary sufferings during the transition period, and at the very time of speaking of them, he does not deny that these temporary evils have implied for the majority the transition from life to death, and for the rest a transition from a better to a worse condition. If he asserts, farther on, that the sufferings of these workers are inseparable from the progress of industry, and are necessary to the prosperity of the nation, he simply says that the prosperity of the bourgeois class presupposed as necessary the suffering of the labouring class.

All the consolation which Dr. Bowring offers the workers who perish, and, indeed, the whole doctrine of compensation which the free-traders propound, amounts to this:

You thousands of workers who are perishing, do not despair! You can die with an easy conscience. Your class will not perish. It will always be numerous enough for the capitalist class to decimate it without fear of annihilating it. Besides, how could capital be usefully applied if it did not take care always to keep up its exploitable material, i.e., the workers, to exploit them over and over again?

But, besides, why propound as a problem still to be solved the question: What influence will the adoption of free trade have upon the condition of the working class? All the laws formulated by the political economists from Quesnay to Ricardo have been based upon the hypothesis that the trammels which still interfere with commercial freedom have disappeared. These laws are confirmed in proportion as free trade is adopted. The first of these laws is that competition reduces the price of every commodity to the minimum cost of production. Thus, the minimum of wages is the natural price of labour. And what is the minimum of wages? Just so much as is required for production of the articles indispensable for the maintenance of the worker, for putting him in a position to sustain himself, however badly, and to propagate his race, however slightly.

But do not imagine that the worker receives only this minimum wage, and still less that he always receives it.

No, according to this law, the working class will sometimes be more fortunate. It will sometimes receive something above the minimum, but this surplus will merely make up for the deficit which it

will have received below the minimum in times of industrial stagnation. That is to say that, within a given time which recurs periodically, in the cycle which industry passes through while undergoing the vicissitudes of prosperity, overproduction, stagnation and crisis, when reckoning all that the working class will have had above and below necessities, we shall see that, in all, it will have received neither more nor less than the minimum; i.e., the working class will have maintained itself as a class after enduring any amount of misery and misfortune, and after leaving many corpses upon the industrial battlefield. But what of that? The class will still exist; nay, more, it will have increased.

But this is not all. The progress of industry creates less expensive means of subsistence. Thus, spirits have taken the place of beer, cotton that of wool and linen, and potatoes that of bread.

Thus, as means are constantly being found for the maintenance of labour on cheaper and more wretched food, the minimum of wages is constantly sinking. If these wages began by making the man work to live, they end by making him live the life of a machine. His existence has no other value than that of a simple productive force, and the capitalist treats him accordingly.

This law of commodity labour, of the minimum of wages, will be confirmed in proportion as the supposition of the economists, free-trade, becomes an actual fact. Thus, of two things one: either we must reject all political economy based on the assumption of free trade, or we must admit that under this free trade the whole severity of the economic laws will fall upon the workers.

To sum up, what is free trade, what is free trade under the present condition of society? It is freedom of capital. When you have overthrown the few national barriers which still restrict the progress of capital, you will merely have given it complete freedom of action. So long as you let the relation of wage labour to capital exist, it does not matter how favourable the conditions under which the exchange of commodities takes place, there will always be a class which will exploit and a class which will be exploited. It is really difficult to understand the claim of the free-traders who imagine that the more advantageous application of capital will abolish the antagonism between industrial capitalists and wage workers. On the contrary, the only result will be that the antagonism of these two classes will stand out still more clearly.

Let us assume for a moment that there are no more Corn Laws or national or local custom duties; in fact, that all the accidental circumstances which today the worker may take to be the cause of his miserable condition have entirely vanished, and you will have removed so many curtains that hide from his eyes his true enemy.

He will see that capital become free will make him no less a slave than capital trammelled by customs duties.

Gentlemen! Do not allow yourselves to be deluded by the abstract word *freedom*. Whose freedom? It is not the freedom of one individual in relation to another, but the freedom of capital to crush the worker.

Why should you desire to go on sanctioning free competition with this idea of freedom, when this freedom is only the product of a state of things based upon free competition?

We have shown what sort of brotherhood free trade begets between the different classes of one and the same nation. The brotherhood which free trade would establish between the nations of the Earth would hardly be more fraternal. To call cosmopolitan exploitation universal brotherhood is an idea that could only be engendered in the brain of the bourgeoisie. All the destructive phenomena which unlimited competition gives rise to within one country are reproduced in more gigantic proportions on the world market. We need not dwell any longer upon free trade sophisms on this subject, which are worth just as much as the arguments of our prize-winners Messrs. Hope, Morse, and Greg.

For instance, we are told that free trade would create an international division of labour, and thereby give to each country the production which is most in harmony with its natural advantage.

You believe, perhaps, gentlemen, that the production of coffee and sugar is the natural destiny of the West Indies.

Two centuries ago, nature, which does not trouble herself about commerce, had planted neither sugar-cane nor coffee trees there.

And it may be that in less than half a century you will find there neither coffee nor sugar, for the East Indies, by means of cheaper production, have already successfully combatted the alleged natural destiny of the West Indies. And the West Indies, with their natural wealth, are already as heavy a burden for England as the weavers of Dacca, who also were destined from the beginning of time to weave by hand.

One other thing must never be forgotten, namely, that, just as everything has become a monopoly, there are also nowadays some branches of industry which dominate all others, and secure to the nations which most largely cultivate them the command of the world market. Thus, in international commerce cotton alone has much greater commercial importance than all the other raw materials used in the manufacture of clothing put together. It is truly ridiculous to see the free-traders stress the few specialities in each branch of industry, throwing them into the balance against the products used in everyday consumption and produced most cheaply in those countries in which manufacture is most highly developed.

If the free-traders cannot understand how one nation can grow rich at the expense of another, we need not wonder, since these same gentlemen also refuse to understand how within one country one class can enrich itself at the expense of another.

Do not imagine, gentlemen, that in criticizing freedom of trade we have the least intention of defending the system of protection.

One may declare oneself an enemy of the constitutional regime without declaring oneself a friend of the *ancien régime*.

Moreover, the protectionist system is nothing but a means of establishing large-scale industry in any given country, that is to say, of making it dependent upon the world market, and from the moment that dependence upon the world market is established, there is already more or less dependence upon free trade. Besides this, the protective system helps to develop free trade competition within a country. Hence we see that in countries where the bourgeoisie is beginning to make itself felt as a class, in Germany for example, it makes great efforts to obtain protective duties. They serve the bourgeoisie as weapons against feudalism and absolute government, as a means for the concentration of its own powers and for the realization of free trade within the same country.

But, in general, the protective system of our day is conservative, while the free trade system is destructive. It breaks up old nationalities and pushes the antagonism of the proletariat and the bourgeoisie to the extreme point. In a word, the free trade system hastens the social revolution. It is in this revolutionary sense alone, gentlemen, that I vote in favour of free trade.

Notes on J.S. Mill

This passage is the conclusion of the text “*Comments on James Mill*”⁹² written during the first half of 1844⁹³.

Let us suppose that we had carried out production as human beings. Each of us would have *in two ways affirmed* himself and the other person. 1) In my *production* I would have objectified my *individuality, its specific character*, and therefore enjoyed not only an individual *manifestation of my life* during the activity, but also when looking at the object I would have the individual pleasure of knowing my personality to be *objective, visible to the senses* and hence a power *beyond all doubt*. 2) In your enjoyment or use of my product I would have the *direct* enjoyment both of being conscious of having satisfied a *human need* by my work, that is, of having objectified *man's essential nature*, and of having thus created an object corresponding to the need of another *man's essential nature*. 3) I would have been for you the *mediator* between you and the species, and therefore would become recognised and felt by you yourself as a completion of your own essential nature and as a necessary part of yourself, and consequently would know myself to be confirmed both in your thought and your love. 4) In the individual expression of my life I would have directly created your expression of your life, and therefore in my individual activity I would have directly *confirmed* and *realised* my true nature, my *human nature, my communal nature*.

Our products would be so many mirrors in which we saw reflected our essential nature.

This relationship would moreover be reciprocal; what occurs on my side has also to occur on yours.

Let us review the various factors as seen in our supposition:

My work would be a *free manifestation of life*, hence an *enjoyment of life*. Presupposing private property, my work is an *alienation of life*, for I work *in order to live*, in order to obtain for myself the *means* of life. My work is *not* my life.

Secondly, the *specific nature* of my individuality, therefore, would be affirmed in my labour, since the latter would be an affirmation of my *individual life*. Labour therefore would be *true, active property*. Presupposing private property, my individuality is alienated to such a degree that this *activity is* instead *hateful* to me, a *torment*, and rather the *semblance* of an activity. Hence, too, it is only a *forced* activity and one imposed on me only through an *external* fortuitous need, *not* through an *inner, essential* one.

My labour can appear in my object only as what it is. It cannot appear as something which by its nature it is *not*. Hence it appears only as the expression of my *loss of self* and of my *powerlessness* that is objective, sensuously perceptible, obvious and therefore put beyond all doubt.

⁹² “Comments on James Mill, *Éléments d'économie Politique*”, Karl Marx, 1844

⁹³ See: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/james-mill/>

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“By cowardly giving way in their everyday conflict with capital, they [the workers] would certainly disqualified themselves from the initiating of any larger movement”

Karl MARX,
Wages, Prices and Profit, 1865