

NOTES  
For Development Of  
A  
REVOLUTIONARY STRATEGY

- Don Hamerquist -

INTRODUCTION

"The development of modern industry, therefore, cuts from under its feet the very foundation on which the bourgeoisie produces and appropriates products. What the bourgeoisie therefore produces, above all, are its own grave-diggers. Its fall and the victory of the proletariat are equally inevitable."<sup>1</sup>

United States capitalism is such an imposing edifice that many radicals and revolutionaries despair of ever finding compelling reasons to accept the above statement and prediction by Karl Marx. In fact, a major accomplishment of U.S. capitalism has been its ability to keep its potential "gravediggers" from getting themselves together, and its ability to keep those who would lead the working class in a revolutionary challenge to the system in a constant oscillation between existential pessimism and imbecilic optimism.

The basic argument of this paper is a simple one. Far from disproving the essential components of the Marxist analysis of capitalism, the development of U.S. capitalism buttresses and substantiates this analysis. Despite the appearance of strength and stability, U.S. capitalism is a society in disequilibrium. For every strength, it has developed a corresponding weakness; for every wall it builds, it creates another man with a trumpet. Despite the great changes in the objective character and position of U.S. capitalism over the past fifty years, the problems facing a revolutionary movement in this country have been, and remain, primarily subjective - primarily the problems of building the popular consciousness and popular organization that can take advantage of the continuing and the new weaknesses of U.S. capitalism. So long as these problems are not solved, the objective weaknesses in the structure of U.S. capitalism will not lead to a revolutionary crisis of that structure. From a revolutionary point of view they will remain only potential weaknesses.

There have been, and continue to be, a great number of challenges to the Marxist critique of capitalism, particularly in its applicability to capitalism as it exists in the United States. In each case the foundation of the attack is an alternative to the Marxist model of capitalist society - an alternative model in which it is argued that class conflict, and social conflicts and struggles generally, have ceased to be the primary motivating force in the historical process (if they ever were such). The argument is that the development of capitalism has removed, or gravely eroded, the objective material base for class division and antagonism - it has removed the contradiction between the social character of capitalist production and the private character of capitalist appropriation. The real historical motivating force, then, is asserted to be some basic common interest which supercedes the objective divisions which Marxists claim are at the base of social conflict.

This paper is directed to debates within the left, not to the official or semi-official intellectual orthodoxy, and thus many of these consensus theories fall outside of its scope. However, there is a growing "left" attack on fundamental Marxist premises which holds, albeit reluctantly, that contemporary capitalism has created the material base for a consensus, a "coerced consensus", and that the system rests firmly on the pervasive false consciousness of men who are unable to see beyond the life-style and world-view, the values, priorities, and premises which U.S. capitalism imprints on their consciousness. An examination of some of the misconceptions on which this position rests will, as a by-product, expose the fallacies of the orthodox arguments.

<sup>1</sup>Communist Manifesto: (When I refer to selections which are found in a variety of works, editions, and selections, I will not give exact references.)



It should go without saying that these left positions must be treated very carefully by Marxists. The problems which motivate them are not pseudo-problems, in fact, they are the outstanding questions facing the development of a comprehensive revolutionary movement within "advanced" capitalist society, and they have been skipped over by orthodox Marxism at a very great cost. No revolutionary strategy for the United States can possibly be developed without the appreciation of two facts. The overwhelming majority of the people in this country are members of the working class - the only "truly revolutionary class"; but the overwhelming majority of these workers passively accept and acquiesce in the legitimacy and permanence of capitalism - if not consciously, then in the dominant patterns implicit in their lives.

## THE SYSTEM

### EXPLOITATION

In classical Marxism capitalism is defined by the social relationship between the class who owns private property in the means of production, and the class who must sell its labor power as a commodity. This is the relationship underlying the conflict of interest between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, and exploitation is the essential aspect of this relationship. Simply, exploitation involves the appropriation and accumulation of the surplus value created by a class of wage workers by a class of owners of productive property. The objective ins rationalized social contradiction based on capitalist exploitation is the contradiction between the social character of capitalist production and the "private appropriation" of the social product by the capitalist class.

There have been no changes in U.S. capitalism which have removed this essential defining relationship between worker and capitalist which is based on the exploitation of wage labor at the point of production. What has happened with the development of state monopoly capitalism is that this relationship has taken on new forms, has developed additional consequences, and generally, has become much more complex. Because of this increasing complexity, the false consciousness growing from the mystification and obfuscation of the exploitation relationship is also greatly increased in importance. It is still true that the laborer is dominated by the structure of capital which has its own internal logic and momentum, even though capital is the cumulative creation of human labor. "Living labor" is still the "prisoner of dead labor" embodied in capital. And, now, in increasing degree, the specific products of the laborer - specific commodities - oppress the laborer in his other social roles as citizen, taxpayer, and consumer. While the worker still remains an "appendage of the machine", he is becoming more and more an appendage of the products which he produces and which he then must consume, as well. The observation of Marx on this process in the 1844 Manuscripts is certainly much more applicable today:

"Industry speculates on the refinement of needs, but it speculates just as much on their crudeness, but on their artificially produced crudeness, whose true enjoyment, therefore, is self-stupefaction - this seeming satisfaction of need - this civilization contained within the crude barbarism of need: the English gin-shops are therefore the symbolical embodiments of private property."<sup>1</sup>

There is more still involved in the concept of exploitation in contemporary capitalism. Social labor is not a strictly economic category. The oppression and alienation of the worker that grow directly from the private appropriation of the product of his labor at the point of production should not obscure or be posed against the oppression and alienation that stem indirectly from the same source.

<sup>1</sup>Marx, 1844 Economic & Philosophical Manuscripts, (Foreign Languages Edition), ;age 122.



In a general sense the entire superstructure of the society is an alienated product of social labor. Political, religious, and aesthetic institutions and their ideological content - the entirety of capitalist culture - are also the products of labor in a class-divided society. Within such a society they, too, tend to take on an existence of their own that degrades and brutalizes the lives of real human beings - an independent existence that helps to keep the reality of human life far below the real potentials for human life.

### Relevance of Exploitation

The essence of the left challenge to Marxism revolves around this concept of exploitation. Many radicals in the United States would argue that even if it is historically true that non-economic forms of alienation and oppression developed from capitalist exploitation, this exploitation, itself, is no longer very relevant to an understanding of contemporary capitalism. Now, these non-economic superstructural phenomena must be the central focus of a revolutionary critique of capitalism.

But is it true that exploitation has lost its relevance and significance as a tool for gaining an understanding of the mechanics of contemporary capitalism? Here is the nub of the problem. Sections of the working class which Marxists have traditionally regarded as the decisive sections, appear to have become pillars of support for capitalism. These sections provide the essential mass markets for the products which capitalism must sell, and for them to fulfill this necessary function, their ability to consume, their real income, must increase. And it is true that real wages, particularly those of the organized sections of the industrial proletariat<sup>1</sup>, have increased in the advanced capitalist countries, even though their relative share of the social product has not.

To carry this argument further; given such conditions, what remains as the ethical content of the notion? Does it make any sense to talk of a steelworker or an autoworker being "more exploited" than a garment worker or an agricultural worker - and certainly in the traditional Marxist usage of the term, that is the case? In fact, the question arises, hasn't the improved material standard of living of the "privileged" sections of the working class taken all meaning out of regarding them as exploited? Haven't such workers become merely oppressed consumers, struggling only for economic demands, only for higher wages, that is, for a greater ability to consume socially unnecessary production, and, in this way, to integrate themselves still more fully within the capitalist system?

From this general kind of an analysis a number of different kinds of conclusions are possible. Their political character ranges from total passivity to the craziest kind of anarchism. But it is much too easy to use the possibility of such conclusions as a reason for disregarding the elements of the argument. The temptation to do this - or to use the similarity of such left positions with those of the professional apologists for capitalism as a sufficient refutation of the former - must be avoided because it obstructs any attempt to get at the real questions which motivate such positions.

So how should the argument be approached? Certainly, it is a mistake to get involved in a battle of statistics over real wages, or to present rival statistics about the number of man-days lost in strikes, etc. Many of these critics of Marxism do grossly overestimate the "affluence" of the working class, even in the United States, and many are quite ignorant of the form and content and the magnitude of the struggles in which workers are presently engaged, but that is more or less beside the point.

<sup>1</sup>This argument is sometimes distorted by equating the working class with the industrial proletariat or the trade union movement, which are only sectors of the class. However, the basic problems remain when the working class is correctly defined.

The real question is whether workers in the United States are in a position where they can experience the inherent contradictions of capitalism - whether they exist in circumstances that create the conditions in which revolutionary consciousness and organization can be created on a meaningful scale.

It is commonly, but erroneously, assumed by critics that Marxists believe that this revolutionary consciousness develops relatively spontaneously from the increasing poverty and misery of the workers, and that the functional role of the notion of exploitation is to provide a theoretical explanation for increasing misery. Thus, it is felt, also erroneously, that the concept of exploitation stands or falls with the existence or non-existence of a long-term trend towards the rich getting richer while the workers become increasingly submerged in absolute poverty and misery.

Of course, we must realize that it is not so clear that such a polarization is not taking place when capitalism is seen as a world system and its colonial and neo-colonial dependencies are included as an integral part of the calculations. Then, too, "misery" in the Marxist sense is much more than economic deprivation. Certainly the "misery" involved in socially meaningless labor and the sacrifice of human pursuits and potentials to a meaningless and often self-destructive pattern of consumption is increasing in this country. But no revolutionary critique of capitalism flows easily and logically, semi-spontaneously, from the mere fact of exploitation at the point of production. That is, exploitation does not lead naturally to the development of a moral indictment of capitalism as a system, an indictment that would impel people into revolutionary modes of thought and behavior. I think that on this point Gorz is essentially correct although he substantially overstates his argument:

"...immediate economic demands no longer suffice to express and to make concrete the radical antagonism of the working class to capitalism; and these demands, no matter how hard the struggle for them, are no longer enough to bring capitalist society to the point of crisis, nor to strengthen the autonomy of the working class within the society of which it is a part...the explicit and positive affirmation of class autonomy is one essential precondition for the attainment of revolutionary perspective in the working class movement."<sup>1</sup>

It is not that class power issues have been removed from the capitalist work process by the development of contemporary capitalism, but that they have been mystified in a variety of ways. They increasingly appear to develop as moral and ethical problems which are necessary concomitants of technological development and the division of labor - as inevitable features of any technologically advanced society, not distinctive features of capitalist society. It becomes increasingly difficult to relate the worker's sense of alienation, of powerlessness and lack of purpose, from his work, not to mention the multitude of forms of oppression that are involved in working for a living, to the fact of class divisions in the society. In fact, because it emphasizes quantitative issues and cannot project an alternative model of production, the spontaneous class struggle at the point of production can delay the realization of the class roots of the "misery" which increases with the development of capitalism. It can create that combination of illusion and cynicism among workers that is a real obstacle to the working class becoming a "class for itself", an autonomous class.

The critics of the Marxist concept of exploitation are hung up on an undeniable reality. In present conditions in advanced capitalist states it is very difficult to become outraged at the capitalist system simply or solely because of exploitation at the point of production, since, on the one hand, the worst of its consequences appear to be inevitable, and on the other hand, capitalism as a system appears to be able, if reluctant, to adequately meet the vital (biological) needs of the people.

<sup>1</sup>Andre Gorz, Strategy For Labor, page 20.



But none of this is germane to the criteria according to which the concept of exploitation must be accepted or rejected by radicals. The centrality of the concept in the Marxist model of capitalism lies in that it provides the grounds for an understanding of how capitalism works and develops, and thus of how capitalism can, not just why it should, be overthrown. The primary function of the concept is to help lay bare the inner dynamic, the "law of motion" of capitalist society. And on just these grounds I intend to argue in the course of this paper that the concept of exploitation is not only relevant, but that it is indispensable.

In the period when monopoly capitalism was a new and developing system, as it encroached on broader areas of economic and political life, a spontaneous popular opposition developed. In that period this popular anti-robber baron, anti-eastern financial interests consciousness created a process through which people could question the legitimacy and necessity of monopoly capitalism in a relatively spontaneous way. Now such sentiment is mainly relevant to peripheral aspects of state monopoly capitalism, and when it leads to anything, it leads to an attempt to bring some particular abuse under "public" control - under government regulation - ignoring Woodrow Wilson's shrewd insight that:

"When once the government regulates monopoly, then monopoly will have to see to it that it regulates government. We now complain that the men who control these monopolies control the government, and it is in turn proposed that the government should control them..."

Because this anti-monopoly consciousness leads only to the dead end of institutional reforms aimed at curbing some of the most obnoxious consequences of contemporary capitalism, it is even more important now than previously to develop a firm theoretical base for a popular movement against the system of capitalism. The concept of exploitation must be a central element in this theoretical base.

How does the basic class contradiction, the essence of which is the exploitation of wage labor, reveal the "law of motion" of contemporary capitalist society? The private ownership of capital and the private appropriation of the product of social labor are functionally related to the feature of capitalism which, enemies and supporters alike agree, distinguishes that system. This feature is the accumulation dynamic, the drive towards the accumulation of value, not in the form of goods, but in the form of productive capital. In the competition between the owners of capital which results from this dynamic, the index and the source of competitive success is profit. Mere survival as a capitalist necessitates a constant attempt to enlarge profit. Profit maximization provides the impetus for mechanization and automation; it is the cause of the concentration and centralization of capital.

But in this process, which, of course, rests on and is inseparable from the exploitation of wage labor, there is a dilemma for capitalism. The primary way to maximize profit is the reduction of costs, and, generally speaking, the cost of labor is the most susceptible to reduction. So the way to maximize profit is to force down the unit cost of labor, or, in other words, to force up the rate of exploitation. As competition forces the rate of profit to tend to fall, still more pressure is created for the reduction of costs. But though the immediate end and the motive force in capitalist production is the maximization of profit and the accumulation of capital, these goals cannot be isolated from the production and the consumption of commodities. Ultimately, capitalist production is still the production of items for consumption, items that must be sold to someone. If this sale cannot be made, the process of production will experience a crisis. Thus there is a different pressure on capitalist production than that of the accumulation dynamic, this grows from the necessity for a constant expansion of the market. But since one of the consequences of the accumulation of capital is the increasingly rapid proletarianization of the population, and thus workers comprise an increasing proportion of the entire population, the expansion of the market more and more involves the expansion of workers consumption, either directly or indirectly (through government spending based on the taxation of workers).



Capitalism and capitalists are caught between two contradictory pressures; the pressure to maximize profit, primarily by limiting the real income of labor, and the pressure for an expanding market, a market which can only expand substantially through the expansion of the real income of labor. This contradiction manifests itself as a conflict between the interests of the capitalists as a class and their interests as individual capitalists, and as a conflict between the long-term and the short-term interests of the capitalist firm. On the one hand, each firm needs the largest possible market, and, on the other hand, each firm does its best to reduce the amount that it contributes to this market by reducing its wage costs.

The interaction between these two pressures keeps capitalism from being a stable system. Because of this internal contradiction, capitalists are unable to meet the spontaneous struggles of the workers at the point of production with a unified and coherent policy. But the ruling class would have to have the ability to respond in such a "planned" way in order to meet the minimum requirements for a situation in which class antagonisms could be either eliminated or transcended, and so long as exploitation defines the relationship between the producers and the owners of capital, such a coherent policy is an impossibility. This is the essential relevance of the concept of exploitation to an understanding of contemporary capitalism. It enables us to see beneath the appearance of strength and stability to the underlying reality of a system in disequilibrium.

This has been an extremely sketchy treatment of a very complicated and controversial subject. It would have to be greatly modified and extended in order to concretely consider a number of the facets of contemporary U.S. capitalism that go beyond the rudimentary model of capitalism. For example; major amendments would be needed to adequately treat with the impact of the development of monopoly and state monopoly capitalism; with the development of technology; with the consequences of imperialism and the interaction of internal and external contradictions of the system; and with such specific and distinctive historical features of the development of U.S. capitalism as the existence of the frontier and the institution of chattel slavery. Most of these questions will be considered in some detail in later sections of this paper, but there is a further justification for the abstract treatment of the concept of exploitation in this initial section. The justification and explanation for the inadequacy of this section lies in its limited, but vital, purpose. Unless the concept of exploitation is explicitly affirmed, it becomes very difficult to conceive of capitalism as a distinctive historically developed social system, and consequently it becomes very difficult to conceptualize a systematic alternative to capitalism that is not utopian, and to develop a systematic approach to the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism. The main function of this section is to argue for the continued relevance of the concept of exploitation and of the Marxist model of capitalism to which it is vital, not to detail the actual ways in which exploitation is operative in United States capitalist society.

## MAIN AND SECONDARY CONTRADICTIONS

Once the reality and the relevance of the exploitation relationship, and of the main contradiction in capitalist society from which it is inseparable, is affirmed, there is a tendency to act as if it is a relatively easy matter to understand the nature and direction of the process of historical development in any particular capitalist society. But an abstract appreciation of the main contradiction, of the socio-economic base of capitalist society, is no key of keys making possible the comprehension of U.S. capitalism as an historically concrete system developing in a certain definite direction for certain definite reasons. There is much more to contemporary capitalism.



The reality with which revolutionaries must cope is that capitalism must be seen as a whole, as a concrete system. Social development is the resultant of the totality of the interactions and contradictions within the society. It is the resultant of:

"...innumerable intersecting forces, an infinite series of parallelograms of forces (which) give rise to one resultant - the historical event."<sup>1</sup>

What then is the essential fabric of contemporary capitalism? First, there is the socio-economic base, at the core of which is the defining contradiction of capitalism - objectively, between social production and private appropriation with its main subjective expression the antagonism between workers and capitalists. Rising above this base is the social superstructure which itself is divided into two main components<sup>2</sup>; the political society, and the "civil" society - the former including the state and the apparatus of class political domination, the latter including the religious, educational, and intellectual institutions, the culture which obscures and mystifies the essential political domination of the capitalist class. There is an obvious interpenetration of both components of the superstructure, and between the superstructure and the base of society. None of these elements can be adequately comprehended in isolation from any of the others. For example, the government under state monopoly capitalism plays an increasingly central role in the economy, while at the same time the governmental structures which have developed in response to such economic needs, as, for instance, the need for an organized and massive approach to technological development, tend to merge with the educational structure in the civil society. Thus we see such hybrid institutions as university centers for research in military technology which overlap between base and superstructure, and between the civil and the political society categories in the superstructure.

Both the base and the superstructure contain a variety of internal secondary contradictions that interact with each other, and that interact between the base and the superstructure. For example, there is the contradiction between monopolized and non-monopolized sections of capital, or that between those sections of capital which rely on foreign investments and those which do not. And there are the conflicts and contradictions between the church and the state, between the judicial and executive branches of government, between federal and local political authority within the superstructure.

It is very important to realize that the objective secondary contradictions within the superstructure are in no real sense simple "reflections" of analogous contradictions within the socio-economic base of the society. Though, historically, they may have developed from contradictions within the base, their historical origins are not a sufficient explanation of their nature, since they quickly develop a relative independence of the base. Thus there is no simple economic explanation for the divisions of the Christian Church, or for the institution of judicial review of legislation, and it is both futile and pedantic to search for one.

Beyond the division and contradictions between and within the base and the superstructure, there is another axis of contradiction which must be included for an understanding of the system of capitalism. This might be called the subjective. It includes the contradictions, conflicts, and distortions that mediate between reality and human consciousness, between that which is and that which is thought, both in regard to the base and the superstructure. This gets into the questions of human action and ideology. Here too the relationships are very complex and not at all determined by any simple economic causes.

<sup>1</sup>Engels to Bloch, 1890, Letters.

<sup>2</sup>Gramsci, Modern Prince, page 124.



Consider, for example, the contradiction between the general, and even in many cases the particular, interests of white workers and their propensity to identify politically with the racist reaction typified by a George Wallace. Or, for a different example, how can we explain according to any simple economic determinist scheme the contradiction between the political consciousness and the class positions and origins of many of the participants in the "new left" in this country?

Obviously, there is a relationship between base and superstructure, between consciousness and reality, between ideology and interest, between economics and politics, but just as obviously, the relationship is not simple and straightforward. How do all of these factors relate to each other to constitute a "system"? What is the basis of unity and coherence within the mass of divergent contradictory phenomena? To answer this question, we might begin with some important insights of Engels late in his life.

"It is not that the economic position is the cause and alone active, while everything else only has a passive effect. There is rather, interaction on the basis of the economic necessity, which ultimately always asserts itself."<sup>1</sup>

"According to the materialist conception of history, the determining element in history is ultimately the production and reproduction in real life. More than this neither Marx nor I have asserted. If therefore somebody twists this into the statement that the economic element is the only determining one, he transforms it into a meaningless, abstract and absurd phrase. The economic situation is the basis, but the various elements of the superstructure - the political forms of the class struggle and its consequences, constitutions established by the victorious class after a successful battle, etc. - forms of law - and then the reflexes of all these actual struggles in the brains of the combatants; political, legal philosophical theories, religious ideas and their further development into systems of dogma - also exercise their influence upon the course of the historical struggles and in many cases preponderate in determining their form. There is an interaction of all these elements, in which amid all the endless host of accidents, the economic movement finally asserts itself as necessary. Otherwise the application of the theory to any period of history would be easier than the solution of a simple equation of the first degree."<sup>2</sup>

Here we are given a first principle to determine the relationship between these various levels and aspects of social reality. The socio-economic base is determining, but only "ultimately", only "finally", while other factors are not just "passive", but "in many cases preponderate in determining the form (of historical development)". But, in itself, this is no solution. The question still remains, how is this first principle to be applied? Only in a theoretical, an "ultimate" sense, is the principle of the ultimate necessity of the "economic movement", a solution to the problem of the relationship between base and superstructure, between consciousness and reality. But we are faced with what is pre-eminently an immediate practical question. How can revolutionaries understand and operate on contemporary capitalism in order to make a revolution? Obviously, we can make little use of "ultimate" solutions to this question. The problem lies in what is thought and what is done now, immediately, not ultimately. And Engels has theoretically buttressed our practical intuition that what we do, or fail to do now, will have an active effect on what we can do "ultimately".

#### Overdetermination

Louis Althusser, the contemporary French Marxist and Communist, presents what seems to be the most plausible resolution of this practical question in his concept of the "overdetermination of the main contradiction".

<sup>1</sup>Engels to Starkenburg, 1894, Letters.

<sup>2</sup>Engels to Bloch, 1890, Letters.



But, though the problem is practical, Althusser's concepts are very difficult and unfamiliar. To avoid the confusion that would probably develop from referring to his position in piecemeal fashion, I would like to use two extended selections from his essay, Contradiction and Overdetermination, in the Jan. - Feb., 1967, issue of New Left Review. To my knowledge, this essay is the only selection from his work on this subject that is presently available in this language.

"Here, then, are the two ends of the chain: the economy is determinant, but in the last instance; Engels is prepared to say - in the long run, the run of History. But History "blazes its trail" through the multiform world of the superstructure, from local tradition to international circumstance. Leaving aside the theoretical solution Engels proposes for the problem of the relationship between determination in the last instance - the economic - and those determinations imposed by the superstructure, national traditions and international events, it is sufficient to hang on to what should be called the accumulation of effective determinations (deriving from the superstructure and special national and international circumstances) on the determination in the last instance by the economic. It seems to me that this clarifies the expression: overdetermined contradiction, which I am proposing, because the existence of overdetermination is no longer a fact pure and simple, for in its essentials we have related it to its foundations, even if our exposition has so far been merely gestural. This overdetermination is inevitable and conceivable as soon as the real existence of the forms of the superstructure and of the national and international conjuncture is recognized as existence largely specific and autonomous, and therefore irreducible to a pure phenomenon. We must carry this through to its conclusions and say that this overdetermination does not just refer to apparently unique or aberrant historical situations, but is universal; the economic dialectic is never active in the pure state; in history, those instances - the superstructure, etc. - are never seen to step aside when their work is done, or, when the time comes, as his pure phenomena, to scatter before His Majesty, the Economy, as he strides along the royal road of the Dialectic. From the first moment to the last the lonely hour of the 'last instance' never comes."<sup>1</sup>

If the economy is determining, but only in the "lonely hour of the last instance (which) never comes", then historical development is not impelled toward a situation where the secondary contradictions which obscure and complicate the main contradiction are dispelled and the main contradiction manifests itself in a simple form. On the contrary, it will always be inseparable from the fabric of social contradictions which it determines "ultimately" but which, for practical purposes, determine it at every point in time through the "accumulation of effective determinations" flowing from the superstructure and from the conscious and unconscious behavior of men.

"Of course, the basic contradiction dominating the period (when the revolution is on the 'order of the day' -D.H.) is active in all these contradictions and even in their fusion. But strictly speaking, it cannot be claimed that these contradictions and their fusion are merely the pure phenomena of the general contradiction. The circumstances and currents constituting it are more than its pure phenomena. They derive from the relations of production, which are, of course, one of the terms of the contradiction, but are at the same time its conditions of existence; from the superstructure, instances deriving from it, but with their own consistency and efficacy; from the international conjuncture itself which intervenes as a determination with a specific role to play. This means that if the differences constituting each of the instances in play group themselves into a real unity, they are not 'dissipated' as pure phenomena in the internal unity of a simple contradiction.

<sup>1</sup>Althusser, New Left Review, Jan.-Feb., 1967, page 32.

<sup>2</sup>Note on emphasis: whenever the broken underline is used in a quotation, the emphasis is mine.



The unity that they constitute in this fusion into a revolutionary rupture is constituted by their own essence and efficacy, by what they are according to the specific modalities of their action. In constituting this unity, they reconstitute and consummate their basic animating unity, but at the same time they also bring out its nature: the contradiction is inseparable from the total structure of the social body in which it is found, inseparable from its formal conditions of existence, even from the instances it governs; it is radically affected by them, determining and determined in one and the same movement by the various levels and instances and points of application of the social formation it animates; it might be called in principle overdetermined."<sup>1</sup>

It is very important to grasp the essential idea of the overdetermination of the main contradiction, even though the term, itself, is inherently unclear. The Althusser selections are much more than intellectually pretentious examples of bad sentence construction. The concepts that they present are crucially important for the development of Marxism in at least three different ways. First, they are theoretically important in that they provide a more coherent basis for Marxist historical materialism - a clearer separation of it from the various economic interpretations of history. Second, they are philosophically important in that they take the mysticism out of the relationship between determinism, the pattern of causality flowing from a definite social structure, and freedom, the ability of men, individually and collectively, to develop their own project and to "make their own history". Finally, these concepts are strategically important in a number of ways which I can only indicate now, but which will be treated more adequately in a number of the later sections of this paper. The first of these strategic implications concerns the question of crisis. If the secondary and subsidiary contradictions impinge on the main contradiction in a complex manner, of which it cannot be said a priori that it will either inhibit or accelerate the progress towards a revolutionary rupture of society, then fatalistic theories of apocalyptic crisis are ruled out as strategic *deus ex machinas*. Second, if the revolutionary situation obtains only when there is a particular relationship of economic, political and cultural circumstances, then the role of a conscious revolutionary agency - the revolutionary party - in both creating and interpreting the situation takes on greatly increased importance. Finally, if the secondary contradictions must be "recognized as existence largely specific and autonomous and therefore irreducible", in their effects on the main contradiction, then a great deal of emphasis in a revolutionary strategy must be put on these secondary contradictions - on counter-cultural counter-hegemonic approaches.

The conception of the historical dynamic of contemporary capitalist society for which I am arguing is that of the resultant of a...

"...vast accumulation of contradictions, (which) come into play in the same court, some of which are radically heterogenous - of different origins, different sense, different levels and points of application..."<sup>2</sup>

This conception is in opposition to two related forms of determinism, both of which have distorted Marxism from a science of praxis, of purposeful collective action, to a doctrine or a dogma of prediction.

First, it is in opposition to economic determinism. The economy is determining, but not as a totally independent entity, and only in the final analysis. In the short run, which is what must determine the concrete form and content of a revolutionary political program, the economy, itself, can only be understood as being determined in its interaction with the superstructure.

<sup>1</sup>Althusser, Op. cit., page 23.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid, page 23.



Therefore, even to gain an understanding of the economy, superstructural processes must be understood in their own terms, not as economic derivatives, although, as has been said earlier, they may have had, historically, rather clear economic causes.

Second, this conception is in opposition to that form of historical determinism identified with Hegel in which social development is pictured as the logically necessary "working out" of the main contradiction. When this Hegelian conception is held by socialists, this inevitable process becomes what impels capitalism towards a revolutionary crisis and a qualitative change into socialism. But this is Hegel, not "turned on its head" to find the rational kernel in the mystical shell, but Hegel brought down to earth without losing its essential mysticism, although this is disguised by a superficial substitution of materialist terms for idealist ones. Neither of these positions are Marxist historical dialectics, although either is commonly the position of professed Marxists.

Though Marxist dialectics must be opposed to crude determinism, this does not mean that the notion of causality is abandoned in favor of some variety of indeterminist voluntarism. Causality is retained, but not within any sort of mechanistic framework. Marxism puts human action within a framework of possibilities created by the motive internal contradictions in capitalist society. Indeed, human action is the indispensable medium through which these contradictions interact and develop. Conscious human action, the necessary ingredient of freedom is based on objective contradictions and processes in capitalist society, not on implausible general propositions about the nature of man in society. Human action is determined in the sense that it does not happen in a vacuum - out of nothing - it is caused. But at the same time, human action has a creative constructive content. It is more than the sum of the conditions which has "caused" it, and, in fact, it has the potential capacity of changing in a purposeful way the very conditions which have caused it.

As has been said earlier, it is certainly wrong to regard human consciousness as a "mirror" of reality in any literal sense. Consciousness is in a dialectical, not a mechanical, relationship with reality, and reality is not simple, not a mass of particular phenomena that is reducible to a simple elaboration of the main contradiction. Objective reality is complex and contradictory and individuals and social groups often identify their interests and orient their actions in terms of partial fragmentary aspects of reality, or even in terms of imagined aspects of reality.

If consciousness were just a derivative of material reality, and if this reality were purely an elaboration of the main class contradiction, then it could be plausibly argued that ideas and action based on partial interests and (or) on a false consciousness of true interests would tend in the long run to cancel each other out. Then, to understand the direction of social change, only actions and ideologies which reflected divergent class interests need be considered. While this might be a good first approximation for an historian, it is totally inadequate as a theoretical basis for the creation of a revolutionary strategy.

This is the case because, as Gramsci has pointed out:

"...men become conscious of the basic conflicts (in society) in the field of ideology."<sup>1</sup>

And the various ways that men think and act about basic social conflicts determines the specific shape of the society, or, in other words, these thoughts and actions are aspects of the overdetermination of the main - the class - contradiction.

A man may, at one and the same time, identify his interests, correctly or incorrectly, in terms both of his actual objective individual interests and of the interests of the relevant social group, with a family group, a national group, a political or a fraternal group, etc. This identification may, or may not, be harmonious with the individual's actual class position, and may, or may not, be internally contradictory. To all of this we must add again that the objective external side of society, which is determined and determines human actions, is in constant change and development.



And this change is not a straightforward quantitative matter. It involves transformations, qualitative leaps. This complexity of interaction and identification is responsible for the schizoid pattern of activity of individuals and social groups within capitalist society - for the absence, except in extraordinary times, of overriding unifying factors.

For the development of a non-utopian revolutionary strategy that can "create" the future, the point of beginning must be that there is a two-way relationship between consciousness and reality. Human action constantly modifies the concrete character of the class contradiction from which the revolutionary must interpret the objective and develop the subjective conditions for implementing a revolutionary strategy. The class contradiction cannot be conceived in abstraction from the constant interaction between base and superstructure, through the relatively autonomous development of both, and through the actions of conscious, partially conscious, and unconscious men.

#### Relevance of Overdetermination

The development of state monopoly capitalism is distinguished by a qualitative change in many features of capitalism, particularly those features which concern the role of the state and governmental apparatus. These changes exacerbate some of the conflicts within monopoly capital, itself, because of the tremendous advantages given those sectors of it which have direct access to government power and facilities. For similar reasons, the tensions between monopoly and non-monopoly sections of capital are also heightened. At the same time, these changes in the character of capitalism also change its requirements for self-preservation, although these changes are not translated immediately and directly into the consciousness of any section of the capitalist class concerning which approaches and policies are right, proper, and efficient for the maintenance of the system. Consider the implications for the main contradiction of such a situation.

The ideology of the "ultra-right", that is, of the United States variant of fascism, is rooted in the mythology of classical "free enterprise" capitalism. The Right slugs away at "big government", at the "erosion of individual initiative", at the "welfare society", at "creeping socialism", at government-regulated collective bargaining, and at the "integration" of the racial minorities. But to what do these terms actually refer, if not to basic features of state monopoly capitalism - such as "big government" - or to the sort of policies necessary to maintain state monopoly capitalism in some sort of a relative equilibrium - racial "integration" and the "welfare society"?

The politics of the entire ruling class are greatly affected by its right-wing, particularly since the Right has blundered into areas where it is able to gain tremendous popular support on the very questions where the equilibrium of state monopoly capitalism is most tenuous. It is quite conceivable that the Wallace movement could become a decisive influence on capitalist politics at a time when such a development greatly reduces the ability of the ruling class to respond to the particular problems which it faces, and, of course, this would happen in the name of preserving the system. Even though key individuals within the leadership of the Right undoubtedly realize the dangers inherent in their rhetoric for the very institutions that they wish to protect, the movement which they lead has a momentum of its own that cannot be quickly and safely turned around.

This is not a new problem for U.S. capitalism. To put it in some historical perspective, it can be said in retrospect that the New Deal reforms of the Roosevelt administration were reforms that were essential for the development - and perhaps even for the self-preservation - of U.S. capitalism. But these reforms had to be instituted over the strenuous opposition of important sections of the ruling class as a result of mass popular pressure, primarily pressure which grew from the organizational thrust of the labor movement.



Even now, minor counter-cyclical and social welfare measures are still opposed by important sections of capital, except to the extent that this or that anti-Keynesian capitalist circle happens to have an immediate vested interest in a particular measure. Presently, such attitudes, which are atavistic to be sure, but which are, nonetheless real and have real consequences, by delaying clever anti-inflationary measures and meaningful welfare programs in the ghetto even more than the objective situation entails their delay, are creating the objective conditions for a heightened class conflict at a time when this is not opportune in terms of the actual interests of the ruling class. Of course, this capitalist false consciousness will not be determining in the long run, but at any point it can be an important partial determinant of the main contradiction.

In short, it is impossible for revolutionaries to understand fully how to take hold of the main contradiction at this point in time unless they see that reaction in the United States has a certain measure of power and influence within the ruling class; that it is individualistic, rather than corporative in its rhetoric; that its social origins lie in populism, rather than syndicalism; and that these facts will be important partial determinants of the way in which the main contradiction manifests itself.

A related example of superstructural determination of the main contradiction that is close at hand can be seen in the attitudes of the regular Democratic Party organization to the McKennedy insurgency within the Party's constituencies. The politics of the past few years have created centrifugal processes that tend to pull important segments out of the motley coalition that makes up the voting base of the Democratic Party. One of these segments that is most obviously affected is the intelligentsia.

There can be no argument but that the Kennedy-McCarthy movement had the allegiance of the overwhelming majority of the intelligentsia, although there were other elements in that movement. It is certainly important for the political viability of capitalism that the two-party system retains its viability. This means that it is important for the preservation of the system that the alienation of the intelligentsia, particularly of the younger sections of it, be contained within the framework of the Democratic Party. The rational course for the ruling class would be to work so that an essentially (and essential) capitalist instrument, the Democratic Party, would be more, not less, flexible at this time of stress. But it is unable to get a coherent class approach on this vital question. However, in state after state, the Democratic Party machine used its mechanical control of the Party apparatus to virtually read out the McKennedy forces from the Party. The only way to understand how this could happen is to understand the historical factors involved in Democratic Party politics at the state and local level.

What has happened is that this experience has further eroded the identification of the "organic intellectuals" with the system. Their allegiance to, based on their illusions in, capitalism is being weakened. That this is happening even before there is a counter-hegemonic working class bloc with which these "organic intellectuals" may identify, makes the process all the more significant. Major impetus has been given to the attack on the superstructure of state monopoly capitalism, an attack which eventually will aid in giving the working class movement the counter-hegemonic character which is present, for example, within the Black Liberation movement. It should be obvious that this relatively independent and autonomous process within the political superstructure has important consequences for the main class contradiction. (An example which encompasses the one just given would be if, as seems likely, the two party system comes up with a presidential choice between Humphrey and Nixon - a "choice" which will guarantee a substantial expansion of the alienation from the two-party system and from capitalist electoral politics, at a time when, as I will show in a later section, these are increasingly important integrative mechanisms.)

These two examples should not be taken to mean that the practical implication of the concept of overdetermination of the main contradiction is that the ruling class is not together enough to exercise the options that it possesses to maintain itself. It would be a mistake to think that the processes previously mentioned are based on the stupidity of the capitalists.



Even if this were the case, it would be no reason for "revolutionary optimism", since stupidity and error can be found determining the main contradiction from the other side as well. What these examples illustrate, to repeat, is that both subjective and objective reality is complex and contradictory; that human actions have results other than those intended; and that the main contradiction, for the practical purposes of creating a revolutionary strategy is determined by this network of interacting contradictory phenomena.

Consider an aspect of overdetermination which affects the main contradiction primarily through its impact on the working class. The U.S. working class has never politically confronted the fact that, to simplify the complex racial and national mixture, it is a black and a white class. Yet this fact, and everything that follows from it, is a vital determination of the main contradiction. The U.S. working class certainly can never become a "class for itself" before it is able to resolve the practical question of the unity between black and white workers. But this unity will not grow out of any simple and straightforward process. The experiences and movements which black workers, but, for the most part, not white workers, share have their own internal dynamic - a dynamic which is continually changing the terms on which black and white working class unity is possible, and which is continually modifying the attitudes and organizations of all of the sections of the class. On the one hand, the division and antagonism between black and white workers is tremendously injurious to the overall interests of the working class, but on the other hand, the black workers, due to the dual character of their oppression and exploitation and to the unique content of their political experience, are much closer to understanding the systematic character of their oppression, and, consequently, they are much closer to seeing the need for a social revolution. The working class as a whole could potentially benefit from the ability of black workers to provide conscious revolutionary leadership for the entire class. And it is inevitable that unity between black and white workers will be on terms and in forms where black workers play a leadership role far greater than that which is merely equivalent to their proportionate numbers in the class.

Some practical strategic considerations follow from the black white split of the working class in the United States. For example, in most advanced capitalist countries, the combination of trade union organization and working class parliamentary organization, either or both of which may be under reformist or revolutionary leadership, has been able to secure a more or less comprehensive unity of the working class around immediate or intermediate reform demands and in a defense against capitalist reaction. The development of a roughly parallel approach has been a goal of the old left in the U.S. for so long that within these circles it is hardly even considered open to debate and discussion. But, ignoring for the moment whether such a development is even desirable in the light of Western European experience, is it possible in the United States, given the black white division in the working class? I think that it is not.

In other words, is a form of working class organization equivalent to a purified and better-led British Labor Party even a possibility in this country, or will class unity be impossible on any basis other than that of the hegemony within the class of revolutionary socialist ideology and the implementation of an anti-capitalist program, because of the different circumstances and levels of development in the black and the white sections of the class? Revolutionaries must begin to deal with such questions in order to develop a revolutionary strategy relevant to the conditions in this country. This, again, indicates the practical importance of a theoretical understanding of the concept of overdetermination of the main contradiction.

It is instructive to look at examples of "revolutionary" approaches which fail, both in theory and in practice, to grasp the relationship between main and secondary contradictions, between the base and the superstructure of society, between consciousness and reality. To use the ludicrous example first, the U.S. Socialist Labor Party has never seen anything to capitalism except the abstract main contradiction. This alone would be a sufficient explanation, although there are others, of the over fifty years of political irrelevance that this sect has enjoyed.



Another example of the same fallacy lies at the roots of many of the "turn to the working class" positions. If it is not recognized that the "simple" class contradiction is inseparable from the entire fabric of social contradictions - and thus is not in any sense, "simple" - then illusions will persist that all of the difficulties, the ideological confusion and conflict - the various vacillations - inherent in the struggle against the hegemony and power of capitalism can be avoided, if only the "true revolutionaries" will just ignore them and concentrate their attention on the "struggles of the decisive section of the working class". The functional consequence of this position, an avoidance of the difficulties of real struggle, clarifies its essential character. It is a variety of utopianism. The practical impossibility of abstracting the class contradiction from the total politics of the country becomes evident whenever any struggle is considered concretely, but until this practical understanding is generalized into a theoretical understanding of the overdetermination of the main contradiction, simplistic "return to the working class" positions will show their heads at every critical juncture of political struggle.

Then there is the opposite of this distorted emphasis on the main contradiction, there is what I would call the "stage" approach which characteristically places an exaggerated emphasis on secondary contradictions. In it class struggle and "democratic" struggle are put in their own separate compartments despite many words to the contrary. This takes place because the initial premise is that, although of course the spontaneous class struggle is occurring, the time is not ripe for conscious class struggle, and an "intermediate democratic" goal must be defined and fought for in order to season the main contradiction in preparation for the next "stage" of struggle, the assault on the power of capitalism as a system. Thus, for example, this approach would see the struggle for Black Liberation as a "democratic" struggle - which is partially true - but the ways in which this struggle determines the concrete potentialities and actualities of the class struggle are not seen as equally important aspects of the Liberation movement.

This position rests on all kinds of half-truths and simplistic thinking that will be dealt with in detail in another section of this paper. Now, I just want to point out the mistake with regard to the implied conception of the relationship between the main and the secondary contradictions. To put the question in a schematic way, the SLP would "solve" the main contradiction like a "simple equation in the first degree", despite the warning by Engels, and disregard everything else. The stage position imagines that it can somehow "solve" the secondary contradictions first and then take on the main contradiction. Both are wrong. The complex of social contradictions must be attacked and resolved as a part of one unified process. The class and democratic struggles must be waged simultaneously with a recognition of their interpenetration and with a constant attempt to gain hegemony for revolutionary socialist ideology and program in both areas. If this is not the nature of the struggle, then neither level of contradiction can be resolved.

#### CRISIS - Cyclical Crisis

As was indicated earlier, U.S. capitalism in its state monopoly phase is in no way able to transcend or to eliminate the internal contradictions which define capitalism as a social system - the same internal contradictions which have given a cyclical character to the historical development of the system. But though these contradictions still exist, contemporary capitalism has developed the capacity to affect the form in which they, and the economic processes which they create, manifest themselves. The most striking example of this new capacity, of course, has been the ability of U.S. capitalism to avoid the depression phase of the economic cycle since the beginning of World War II. This is the fact which all of the apologists and propagandists for capitalism take to mean that this country has finished forever with economic crises, and that Marx is finally and decisively refuted.



However, there is some reason to believe that economic crises have not been eliminated, but only deferred, and that this has been only because of a fortuitous, but temporary, combination of historical circumstances. Despite its position as the pre-eminent imperialist power, and despite all of the Keynesian maneuvers, U.S. capitalism is growing less and less able to keep itself on the thin ridge of adequate economic growth and relatively "full" employment - the conditions which, in turn, are a condition for the continued political stability of the system. The economy keeps weaving from one side to the other, between the twin chasms of chronic cumulative stagnation and uncontrollable inflation, until it seems as if soon there will be no middle ground left. The situation becomes even more desperate for the ruling class because every remedial measure for one problem tends to exacerbate another problem.

When U.S. capitalism is seen as the center of a world capitalist system as it must be, another challenge to its continued economic stability is clear - a challenge that provides still another reason for the argument that the partial "conquest" of the economic cycle is only a temporary conquest. Though there can be no actual separation of the internal and the external pressures on the economic stability of U.S. capitalism, I want to separate them for a moment in order to clarify some points concerning, first, the internal, and then the external, disequilibrating forces.

There is more than faith behind the argument that the very Keynesian policies which have modified and moderated the main manifestations of the economic cycle, have done so only at the expense of making the eventual economic crisis more severe. Without going into a lot of economic detail on this point, it is readily apparent that continued "prosperity" is greatly dependent upon the elasticity of the market for consumer's goods, and that this, in turn, rests on the credit system - in the first place on escalating mortgage and installment indebtedness that permits the demand for consumer's goods to increase much more rapidly than the increase in real income.

The credit system is tremendously overextended in this country, and it provides a very shaky foundation for prosperity, a foundation with an inherent limit. Weekly installment payments are permanently bounded by the size of the weekly income. The virtue of credit from the point of view of the capitalist, that it allows effective demand to increase faster than real income in a period of economic growth, becomes its defect since, in the event of any business setback, the existence of massive consumer debt would maximize the downward spiral of demand and employment as consumers used what remained of their income to liquidate debt.

In classical Marxism the effects of imperialism on the economic cycle are quite straightforward. By providing foreign outlets for capital, it reduces the pressure on the rate of profit inside the imperialist country. At the same time the superprofits derived from the oppression of the colonial peoples makes possible a further expansion of the parasitical sections of the domestic economy which also are a buffer against a rapid decline in effective demand. Of course, there are contradictory effects, too. The export of capital and its employment abroad is, in fact, an external restraint on the internal wage level and thus a curtailment on the expansion of the market. However, in general, it is clear that the net effect of the dominant position of U.S. imperialism has greatly increased the internal economic viability of U.S. capitalism.

In fact, along with the export of capital, the metropolitan country is able to export the depression to its imperialist dependencies. One of the consequences of avoiding a depression in this country, as well as one of the reasons why it was possible, has been the export of the depression to the third world accomplished through all of the political and economic instrumentalities available to imperialism. And in all of those areas the process of absolute impoverishment is a reality. The third-world is in a chronic and continuing economic crisis.



This third-world crisis has created the objective conditions for the growth of revolutionary anti-imperialist movements which challenge the power, particularly, of U.S. imperialism. The growing strength of these movements necessitates a moderation of a number of imperialist policies and practices, in order to maintain the viability of the sorts of client regimes which will provide a cover for the continued domination of imperialism. But these concessions undermine the freedom to export depression, and there is a consequent curtailment of the flexibility for maintaining a stable internal economic base which this freedom has given the dominant imperialist power, the United States. Of course, if such concessions to the states of the third world are not made, the resulting political instability threatens to totally remove these areas from the world capitalist system, and to end finally any possibility of U.S. imperialism benefitting from their exploitation, either directly or indirectly.

### Secular Crisis

Thus cyclical crises continue to trouble capitalism in this country, if not directly, then through the various strains incurred in the attempt to evade them. But beyond cyclical crises, the system is enmeshed in a different kind of crisis, a crisis that is also based on its internal contradictions. This is a crisis of the structure of contemporary U.S. capitalism. It is a long-term, a secular, not a cyclical, phenomenon growing from the cumulative consequences of the "anarchy" of capitalist production. It is a crisis unique to "moribund" capitalism and not present in developing capitalism - a crisis based on the fact that the internal dynamic of this form of capitalist production is still the maximization of profit, not the satisfaction of real human needs.

The advance of capitalist technology into the areas of automation and cybernation is at the root of the secular crisis. But the problem is still a social one, not one of technology. A lot of the talk about "crisis" - the phrases about "urban crisis" and "crisis of the cities" that are very loosely tossed around these days - actually obscure the secular crisis by focusing on structural issues in a technical-mechanical way, by considering them in abstraction from their functional relationship to the capitalist social system.

When the crisis is seen only as a combination of a housing "crisis", a transportation "crisis", an education "crisis", a recreation "crisis", etc., it is easy to conclude that the whole thing is nothing more than a collection of accidental features of the development of U.S. capitalist society - that they are problems which could be solved with relative ease through a redirection of resources towards these areas - towards the "public sector" - through, for example, a "domestic Marshall Plan". That is, the problems are seen as ones whose resolution can be accomplished far short of a revolution. But this is a failure to appreciate the systematic nature of state monopoly capitalism and the organic character of its crisis.

The real problem is not just that the cities are decaying, just that buildings are falling down and automobiles are driving people. The problem lies in that this is profitable, and, indeed, necessary for capitalism. From the point of view of Black people for example, the problem is that a whole section of the population is becoming marginal to the production process of an increasingly integrated and centralized production system in order to maximize the profit of the owners of capital. Technological change is making people redundant, and because of the peculiar overdetermined character of the main contradiction in U.S. capitalism, these people happen to be concentrated geographically in the center of the major urban areas, and racially among the black and the brown people. They form a modern, permanent "industrial reserve army of the unemployed". This surplus of people (the very phrase would be incomprehensible in a human society) is both a condition for, and a consequence of, the operation of contemporary capitalism.

Earlier, I discussed the impact of the black and white character of the working class - the fact of the racial split in the class - on the main contradiction. Now, we see a different consequence of the same historical phenomena of racial oppression that also affects the main contradiction.



Consider the meaning for the struggle for Black Liberation of the fact that a consequence of the development of state monopoly capitalism for black people is the proletarianization of the black masses directly into a permanent condition of unemployment and underemployment, and their physical and cultural containment in urban ghettos. Under such conditions the movement for Black Liberation, whose immediate motivations are usually democratic and nationalistic, has immediate revolutionary class implications.

The ghetto uprisings, then, are not just the delayed result of historical grievances stemming from slavery and the too-slow elimination of its aftermath, they are, as well, and more importantly, the result of the changing of monopoly capitalism into state monopoly capitalism in the concrete conditions of U.S. historical development. That is, they grow from an irreversible process, not from any "urban crisis" which can be ended simply by "rebuilding the cities". The appreciation that this process is necessary and organic to this society, and that it is not a question of historical accident or political policy, is what lends substance to the fear of genocide expressed by many black militants. This fear is not just loose rhetoric.

The situation of the urban racial minorities is only one example of the secular crisis. Others are easy to find. Consider, for example, the automobile industry and its economic and social periphery. It would be difficult to point to a more central aspect of contemporary U.S. society, or one where the essential "anarchy" of capitalist production is more apparent. Just one of the consequences of the ever-expanding production of faster cars is that in every major urban area, it takes longer and longer to get anywhere one has a desire to go - the likelihood of not living through the trip constantly increases - and, upon arrival at the destination, it is less likely that there will be any place to park. While cars make the society less and less livable, they grow increasingly necessary as a means of escaping the cities which they have particularly blighted - and the process of escape results in the spread of the blight. But the institutionalization of the automobile is certainly no accidental feature of U.S. capitalism, and the central position of the automobile complex in the whole profit structure poses a massive obstacle to even the consideration of alternative, more rational, systems for getting people and goods from place to place.

The automobile industry is a prime contributor to another aspect of the structural crisis. The noise and pollution from the production and the use of cars; the personal and property damage that they inflict; the part that they play in the so-called urban crisis; the natural resources that they unnecessarily consume or destroy; are all parts of the "social costs" which flow from capitalist production. Other examples of such social costs are the overall wastage of natural resources - look at wood and water - that follows from their private exploitation; the subordination and sacrifice of popular needs for collective services in the areas of health, education and welfare to the production of unnecessary, and even destructive, goods for private and collective consumption; the channeling of a growing amount of resources into parasitical sectors of the society, e.g., advertising, and pre-eminently, into the production of military equipment, much of which would be functional only in wars which couldn't be won, and none of which is needed. In the balance, it seems to be amply justified to say that the social costs of capitalist production are growing much more rapidly than are the historic social benefits of capitalist production. That is, those benefits to which Marx referred when he talked about the role of capitalism in "revolutionizing the means of production". In this very important sense, the distinctive capitalist relations of production, the private appropriation of the product of labor, have become a "fetter" on the development of the productive forces of society. Most assuredly, capitalist production relationships have become a "fetter" on the development of productive human beings, and the most important of the "productive forces" of society are productive and creative people. The essence of the social costs of capitalist production are the expansion of the suppression and oppression of human beings by inhuman institutions and processes.



## Disequilibrium

For U.S. capitalism, the reality of the secular crisis and the potential of a cyclical crisis cannot be considered separately. They form one complex problem, and approaches to the solution of one aspect turn out to be contributors to the worsening of the other aspect. The primary counter-cyclical tools of U.S. capitalism have all involved government intervention into the economy, most notably through government spending and subsidization of private business in the area of military production.<sup>1</sup> This has been the essential support for the level of effective demand, and thus for the rate of profit and for general economic stability. But at the same time this approach has increased a number of the social costs of capitalism mentioned in the previous section and has thus contributed to the worsening of the secular crisis. Any real approach, for example, to urban problems must be at the expense of the resources presently devoted to military production - resources which play the counter-cyclical function indicated above.

On the other hand, no move towards the solution of the problems growing from the secular crisis can be made without undercutting the profitability of vast existing structures of capital - without confronting private profit. The profitability of the automobile complex, of the military industrial complex, of the urban core complex, are all crucial to the maintenance of the general rate of profit. However, any effective approach to the secular crisis would have to regard the profits of these decisive sectors of capital as expendable. This, then, would have an immediate impact on the defense mechanisms against cyclical crises.

The point is that a real attack on the secular crisis would require a totally different direction of national resources and a totally different content to government intervention in the economy, than that direction and content which presently functions to keep the economy more or less stable. In order to make such a change without undermining capitalism, a functional substitute for the present counter-cyclical role of government intervention in the economy would have to be developed, but it must be a substitute that would not involve the production of goods that would compete with goods already on the market, and that would not involve any development of the public sector in a way that would undermine the profitability of existing capital structures. In general, it must be a substitute that would do nothing to limit or reduce the general rate of profit. In essence this means that in order to meet the secular crisis without exposing its flanks to the cyclical crisis, the ruling class in the U.S. would have to be able to subsidize itself on a massive scale with resources which it would have to obtain - given the more tenuous international position of U.S. imperialism - from an austerity program for the masses of working and poor people in this country. But politically this means that the people must be persuaded or hoodwinked into rewarding capital so that it will be able to profit from repairing the damage and destruction of the country for which it has been responsible and from which it has profited.

In fact, the political problems are even more awesome than this. We have been talking in this section in abstraction from the various conflicting partial interests within the capitalist class, and we have been ignoring the distinction between the reality of the situation facing U.S. capitalism, and the varying perceptions of U.S. capitalists as to what that reality is. The practical politics of a program of domestic reconstruction would develop very differently than the technical presentation of the problem given before would imply.

<sup>1</sup>Another element which must be considered here is that technological development has greatly changed the character of warfare and increased the danger that it represents for combatants and non-combatants alike. Though this factor was grossly exaggerated in the initial concept of "peaceful coexistence", it is true that these changes in the nature of warfare have reduced the willingness among all classes and strata to use military production as a primary economic stimulant, since the consequence of this approach is an increasing danger of actual war. This is no insignificant factor in determining the way that U.S. capitalism will respond to its crisis problems.



We are talking about a situation in which General Motors, General Dynamics, General Electric, General Foods, the Chase National Bank, and the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company would have decided that such a politically delicate proposition was sufficiently feasible to be attempted. But there is no external agency in a position to convince such huge capitalist conglomerates with so much at stake that such risks should be taken. Certainly the federal or the state governments in which they and their servitors are already the preponderant influence cannot fulfill such an independent role.

Even if conditions from the point of view of the objective interests of the ruling class were optimal, that is, if the taxpayers, consumers, and workers would allow such a massive project to even begin without questioning the legitimacy and the sanctity of private profit, as the project proceeded, capital would need to utilize its best efforts to disguise and distort the reality of what was happening. It would need a unified and coherent approach, but is any such a planned approach even a political possibility?

This brings us back to an earlier point. The development of the cyclical and secular crises could have been "foreseen" on the basis of an understanding of the dynamic of the main contradiction alone, but their concrete content could not. Since the main contradiction is not a simple phenomenon, the concrete content of the crisis is dependent upon the interaction between the base and the superstructure, upon the various partial and fragmentary interests that cut across and obscure class interest, and upon the actions of human beings based on their perceptions of reality. The likelihood is that this complexity prohibits an organized approach to capitalist crisis by the ruling class. The different perceptions of class interest within the ruling class, the placing of corporate over class interest, the exclusion of a significant portion of the capitalist class from the guaranteed profits of the state-underwritten sectors of the economy, and particularly, the institutionalized and organized presence of a base for fascism within the capitalist class - a base with its own history and historical project hostile for a variety of different reasons to any such domestic reconstruction - entail that such changes could only occur as a result of tremendous popular pressure. A mass mobilization of the people would be required to force such an about-face in the course of the nation. The likelihood of the change being imposed from the top, according to the Prussian model, is extremely remote.

But in this case, people and groups whose interests are opposed to those of the ruling class would have to be mobilized in a struggle in which they would find that the opposition to them came from the dominant and decisive sectors of capital. Could the outcome of such a struggle be a program of massive subsidization of these same sectors, or wouldn't the logic of such a struggle create conditions in which the masses of people would be extremely reluctant to subsidize capital to enable it to survive the process of a domestic reconstruction?

Let me indicate some more specific reasons why it is not likely that capitalism has the strength and the flexibility to make the kind of transition needed to escape the situation that it faces. Look at some of the token efforts that are presently being attempted. For example, the maneuvers of the Ford, Carnegie, and Rockefeller Foundations in urban ghettos are minor examples of the kind of responses which capitalism must make in order to get through the combination of racial-national and urban structural problems which are a part of the secular crisis. It is certainly relevant to the character of the crisis and to the possibility of its resolution that major sections of the ruling class regard these vital pilot programs as subsidization of revolution and vigorously oppose them.

To use the New Deal example again, one is struck immediately by the difficulties which were posed by the political structure - e.g., the Supreme Court - to the relatively minor changes which were made in response to that crisis of American capitalism. As has been said earlier, virtually every major reform was forced through popular pressure. Its enactment into legislation was a response to this actual pressure. The New Deal reforms were much more of an attempt to contain already existing mass movements, than an attempt to pre-empt potential mass movements. But in the present crisis, such mass movements cannot be allowed to initially develop.



Now, there is no plausible image of capitalist normalcy which could provide an alternative to an anti-capitalist orientation within such movements, consequently, the possibility of solving the crisis within the institutional framework of capitalism would be in even greater jeopardy to the extent that such movements gained momentum.

Consider another factor. Historically, political institutions in this country have developed more with the function of limiting the exercise of power, than of exercising it themselves. They are extremely open to the kind of obstructions which the capitalist Right is certain to present to those programs which may well be in the interests of the survival of the entire class. How can the problems of the secular and cyclical crises be met efficiently and effectively when the mood of elected majorities in most legislative assemblies - the bodies with the nominal responsibility for developing such programs - is still anti-Keynesian and anti-statist. Certainly, it is relevant to the possibility of resolution of the crisis of U.S. capitalism, that U.S. political institutions have their own history and momentum and are, at every governmental level, from local to national, virtually incapable of a positive attack on the problems which become political issues because of the crisis.

I suppose that only an optimistic bias has led me to give such emphasis to the factors which tend to limit or undermine the ability of capitalism to respond to the danger of cyclical crisis and to the actuality of the secular crisis in a coherent way. Though it would be very nice if it were the case, all of the factors don't go in the direction of a weakening of capitalism. To mention some previous examples, ones which will be handled in more detail in later sections, the docility and corruption of the trade union movement, and the existence of major racial and national splits in the working class are vital influences on the main contradiction which, on the whole, give the system more flexibility to deal with its internal problems. Then, of course, the false consciousness which pervades the working class - the major topic of the next section of the paper, gives the capitalist class an incalculable additional flexibility. If this section on crisis is considered in isolation, one might conclude that the fall of U.S. capitalism is imminent. This is not the case as the succeeding sections of this paper will make quite clear.

The point of all of this discussion of crisis is quite simple. It is a common feeling and argument that capitalism is a system in equilibrium, a system with enormous resiliency - with almost infinite capacity to meet popular demands for reforms, particularly for those reforms which are primarily quantitative. It is easy to understand the origins of such an impression when one contemplates the millions of people who go about their daily business in this country without, at least in any overt way, ever questioning that it is inevitable that things should be, and will remain, pretty much as they presently are. But though this impression is understandable, it is not an accurate reflection of the reality of contemporary U.S. capitalism.

The point of this entire section is that the overall analysis of capitalism as a national and a world system must be a disequilibrium, not an equilibrium, analysis. This disequilibrium is what puts talk about making a revolution - about launching a mass assault on a system which its rulers are unable to defend - within the realm of possibility and out of the realm of fantasy. The relative equilibrium of U.S. capitalism is within the context of an overall disequilibrium - its relative "planned" and orderly appearance cannot be allowed to obscure the essential anarchy.

Looking at the present situation of U.S. capitalism, the most "affluent" capitalism in the middle of the "longest period of uninterrupted prosperity in its history", the fact of this basic instability is clear. If it will ever be possible in any capitalist society, U.S. capitalism at this point in its history should be able to meet popular economic demands with pre-emptive concessions.

<sup>1</sup>I intend to argue in a later section that the capacity of capitalism to blunt, divert, and otherwise absorb popular demands is much more significant than its ability to meet such demands.



But what is the reality? First; the pressure on real wages has created the conditions for mass wage and income struggles, and we have already experienced a number of these. Second; the urban crisis and the Black Liberation movement have focused attention on the various inadequacies of collective services in the areas of health, education, and welfare in this country. Here, too, mass struggles are already in progress. Third; the pressure on real income has created the conditions for mass struggles against high prices, high taxes, and high interest rates; pressures which are certain to lead to mass movements in the near future. These are nothing but a series of rudimentary, easily understood, economic issues, but a movement that could raise such demands in a unified way<sup>1</sup> - the demand to cut taxes on the working people, to hold the line on prices, to raise wages, to build schools and houses - would strain the fabric of this most "affluent" capitalist society to near the breaking point, just as the demands for "peace, land, and bread" strained the fabric of capitalism in Russia in 1917.

Hopefully, no one will take this to mean that the demand for "more" is inherently revolutionary<sup>2</sup> in present circumstances. That is never true. The point is that such demands are not so easily absorbed, even in the context of U.S. capitalism. And if they cannot be absorbed by this capitalism, they cannot be absorbed by any less affluent one. The fact is that the ability of capitalism to utilize its productive capacity to maintain domestic tranquillity is based on its relative economic flexibility, and the key element in this is not its absolute productive capacity, much of which is devoted to self-maintenance, but the ability of the ruling class to make concessions at the points and in the forms necessary to meet the kinds of popular demands that are actually being raised. This ability, in turn, is dependent on a number of factors other than absolute productivity. When this fundamental fact is not seen, it is inevitable that the strategic strength of capitalism will be exaggerated. In fact, the inability to see this reality is really another one of the common forms of economic determinism. It is fetishism of the gross national product and per capita productivity.

#### CAPITALIST HEGEMONY

One of the most intriguing aspects of contemporary capitalism is the degree to which it dominates the consciousness of every social group, including those whose real interests are in direct antagonism to capital.. How can the system deform the consciousness of workers so that they not only passively acquiesce in the continuation of capitalism, but so that they express and define themselves politically, ethically, and aesthetically in terms of the world-view and life-style of the class which oppresses and exploits them? Is this process of such a character that it creates men who are unable to see beyond capitalism and who are thus unable to make a revolution for organic epistemological reasons?

<sup>1</sup>That we do not have a movement able to do this is another example of the overdetermination of the main contradiction in this country.

<sup>2</sup>It is instructive to look at the Russian parallel mentioned above to see what other ingredients existed there that made that situation revolutionary while this one is not. To partially answer that question, we should look at the other fundamental slogan that was used - "All power to the Soviets". The Bolsheviks in the course of the revolutionary process were able to build a popular consciousness of the necessity of the realization of this demand in order to guarantee the content of each of the other demands. Before there will be a revolution in this country, the objective and subjective conditions must exist for a functional equivalent for that slogan.



I would just like to indicate some issues on this subject, and leave the filling in of detail to the two following major sections of the paper.

Capitalism rules, not just overtly - through the exercise of its political and economic power - but also implicitly, through its dominance of the institutions and organizational relationships through which people from birth to death become socialized and interact with each other; the educational system, the church, the mass media, fraternal, nationality, social and recreational organizations, the family, etc. Beyond the exercise of power, capitalism rules through the weight of tradition and the force of habit, and it rules all of the time - continuously - because of its vast institutionalized and objectified momentum. As Lenin noted, even the spontaneous struggles of the working class lead to the domination of capitalist ideologically.

"But why, the reader will ask, does the spontaneous movement, the movement along the line of least resistance, lead to the domination of bourgeois ideology? For the simple reason that bourgeois ideology is far older in origin than Social-Democratic (working-class) ideology; because it is more fully developed and because it possesses immeasurably more opportunities for becoming widespread."<sup>1</sup>

While bourgeois ideology is omnipresent, the real challenges to the dominance of the bourgeois world-view and life-style are sporadic and discontinuous, because, short of a revolutionary situation, everyone must "play the game" to get by. Most people find it difficult to even conceptualize an alternative to any specific element of capitalist culture. This is particularly true of working people who lack the opportunity and the incentive to indulge in abstract speculative thought. How many times has everyone heard attitudes that are distinctly capitalist in origin expressed as universal truths by working people? For example, is it only the ruling class who would argue that, socialism or communism "wouldn't work" because people are "too selfish", "too lazy", "too greedy", "too stupid", "too complacent"? No, those are commonplace expressions by workers.

With this introduction, we come to the concept of hegemony, as developed by the Italian Communist, Antonio Gramsci, a concept which, I think, is as necessary for a revolutionary understanding of contemporary capitalism as is the concept of the overdetermination of the main contradiction. It, too, is a very difficult concept and needs an initial definition. The following comes from Gramsci, via Gwynn Williams, via John Canmett.

"(Hegemony is) an order in which a certain way of life and thought is dominant, in which one concept of reality is diffused throughout society in all of its institutional and private manifestations, infusing with its spirit, all taste, morality, customs, religious and political principles, and all social relations, particularly in their intellectual and moral connotations."<sup>2</sup>

The essential consequence of the hegemony of capitalism for the consciousness of the classes and strata which are subordinated by capitalism, is their inability to grasp real social relationships - their inability to see capitalist society as an historically evolved set of class relationships in a process of continuing change and development. Instead, capitalist society is seen as the only possible society, not as a specific form of society at all, but as the mass industrial society. In this situation, the possibility, much less the necessity, of a different sort of society, motivated by different principles and involving different kinds of men is more and more difficult to conceptualize.

On the trivial intellectual level this peculiar blindness supports the nonsense about the essential similarity and the necessary "convergence" of socialism and capitalism. But there are more important consequences.

<sup>1</sup>Lenin, What Is To Be Done, page 42, International Publishers.

<sup>2</sup>Canmett, Origins of the Italian Communist Party, page 204.



Capitalism has always been marked by what Marx termed commodity fetishism, the popular idea that the exchange value of a commodity, which actually masks the social relationship between the labor time necessary for its production and that required for the production of the unit commodity, is an inherent attribute of the commodity, itself. A relationship between people becomes a relationship between inanimate objects, or a relationship between people and inanimate objects. With the development of capitalism there is an extension of this illusion. Not only commodities, but the entire capitalist market system becomes reified; and, not only the market system, but the apparatus of political rule as well.

The consequence of this reification is an alienation that leads to passivity, a pervasive feeling of helplessness and powerlessness in the face of the institutions, which are the physical, intellectual and organizational products of human labor in a class-divided society, but which have taken on an impersonal life and logic of their own. If people feel aggrieved or oppressed, they are channeled into struggle against mechanisms, not against human antagonists. No one is responsible; there is little point to complain; it is futile to challenge...

The impression is created spontaneously, and it is assiduously cultivated by the apologists and propagandists for capitalism<sup>1</sup> that the market and the government are neutral objective mechanisms, not instrumentalities and agencies subordinate to the political struggles of men, as individuals and as members of social classes. Considerations of class; of class interest, class antagonism, class power, are hidden behind the mystifications of apparently autonomous inhuman mechanisms that are carrying out the "popular will" which, in fact, only their intricacies are capable of fathoming. Thus one's wages are what one is worth; cars wear out because people want to buy a new one every two years; the price of an item is what people are willing to pay for it; the government is no better and no worse than the electorate; bad laws grow from ignorant people voting for the wrong representatives, or horrors, from wise people overlooking the need to participate in politics.

There is a commonsense reaction against this mystification that is widespread among the people. Its character is suspicion and resentment. Prices are so high, because big business is profiteering; taxes are so high because the rich don't pay their share; the rich can, and do, buy politicians by the dozen; everything is rigged by, and for, the rich and the powerful. These are healthy attitudes, but in themselves, they are no basis for a revolutionary class perspective. They rest on a shaky moralizing foundation and a general feeling of malaise, not on an analysis of social forces, and they are found in immediate conjuncture with the most medieval superstitions and prejudices and the grossest illusions. Thus they don't contain the essential ingredients for the projection of a comprehensive alternative form of society, a projection which must be at the core of a revolutionary strategy.

The essential social base for capitalist hegemony - for the dominance of capitalist consciousness throughout the population - is this reification of the economic and political institutions of capitalist society. It is as a consequence of this process that modes of thought and patterns of behavior which are functional only to capitalism appear to be the logically necessary boundaries of human thought and action. Still, just a cursory look at U.S. society over the past few years indicates a growing quantity and quality of dysfunctional (to capitalism) thought and behavior. The youth and hippy cultures are mass phenomena that involve the "best sons of the ruling class" as well; the student movement increasingly aims at using the university as an enclave challenging the priorities and values of the general society; in the black and brown communities there is a growing movement for a national identity that is anti-capitalist in a number of respects.

<sup>1</sup>Model systems such as Samuelsonian economics and Lipsetian politics attempt to give the impression that the values and institutions that they project are above history and above class. But at the same time they constantly imply that the U.S. "mixed economy" and the U.S. "representative democracy" conform almost ideally to the normative systems.



Of course, the system attempts to neutralize these developments - to contain the youth rebellion with the a-political, and even profitable, psychedelic culture trap; to channel the student rebellion into institutional reforms and a future of social work; and to stimulate cultural nationalism within the black and brown movements.

But the important fact is that these containment processes are not working very well. Overt alienation from capitalist culture and the beginnings of the creation of a counter-culture continues and grows in importance. This is both an important aspect, and an important consequence of the secular crisis of U.S. capitalism. It is a spontaneous counter-hegemonic response to the operation of capitalist hegemony. The development of state monopoly capitalism stimulates two processes which are very important for an understanding of the nature of both capitalist hegemony and of the reaction against it. First, there is an accelerated proletarianization of the population; and, second, there is a change in the role of the state and government apparatus, and the increasingly overt political character of the basic socio-economic conflicts in the society.

### Work Process

It is empirically evident that capitalism progressively forces a greater proportion of the people into participation in, dependence on, and subordination to, the capitalist work process. This is the outcome of the elimination of the independent small capitalist, of the industrialization of agriculture, of the inclusion of more and more of the middle strata - professionally and technically trained people - within large industrial organizations. At the same time, more and more spheres of social life are sucked within the orbit of the capitalist work process. Education increasingly becomes shaped by the need for job training, popular culture is subordinated increasingly to capitalist criteria of utility - that is, efficiency in the creation of profit. But the other side of this process is that the entrance of new and broader sections of the people into the working class, objectively, and their participation in the capitalist work process, places immense social strains on the framework of capitalism.

What is the character of the capitalist work process? Through the sale of his labor power, through the labor contract, the worker's creativity becomes a standardized commodity, and his individuality is nothing more than the wrapping on the package, a necessary problem to be handled as efficiently and impersonally as is possible. The power relationship in the work process turns the worker into a piece of property, another factor of production that is under the control of the capitalist. The worker becomes an appendage of the machine, a competitor with machines, and is increasingly forced to function as if he were, himself, a machine. That is, he is essentially unfree and inhuman when he is at work. There are some inherent limits on the uses of the worker, he cannot be treated in a completely arbitrary and capricious fashion, but then neither can any other factor of production. Maintenance men are needed for the machinery, toilets and human relations departments are needed for the workers.

More is involved here than the increasingly boring and repetitive nature of "work" that stems from technological change and the social division of labor. The content and the direction of production are involved. The worker can be building hula hoops, or bombs, or cars designed to fall to pieces; and whether or not he thinks that it is important, that it makes sense, or that it is a right thing to do, is monumentally irrelevant. He can be a social worker reproducing the culture of poverty; he can be a teacher turning out well-packaged thoughtless students; or he can be in the mass media, devising ways to persuade people to waste their leisure as totally as they now waste their labor; and in each case his only real option is to withhold his labor until he is forced to get another job, where, in this respect, he will be just as powerless.

The basic degradation contained in the capitalist work process is that it warps and confines the worker's potential creativity. A contradiction develops here, one that is based on the contradiction between social production and private appropriation, that becomes particularly acute as capitalism develops. This is the contradiction between the human possibilities of automated production and its reality under the hegemony of private profit.



The contemporary relevance of Marx's charge that under capitalism the "worker has nothing to lose but his chains" is not that the worker's house, his TV set, and his car do not exist, or that they have no meaning or value to him. It lies in the fact that the worker loses himself in the capitalist work process and that he can only find himself within the alternative hegemony of the working class, a hegemony based on human needs and potentials, not on the logic of profit. It is in this sense, as well, that the "emancipation of the worker contains the emancipation of all mankind". The conditions for the human fulfillment of the worker are the general conditions for human fulfillment.

#### Parliamentary Process

Capitalist concentration and centralization of economic power fragments and proletarianizes the social groupings which, because of their ownership of private property in the means of production, have been the historical mass base of political support for capitalism. The consequence, as has been pointed out before, is the enlargement of the working class with new categories of workers whose labor is also social and who are subject to alienation and exploitation just as is the rest of the class. Thus the historical base of support for capitalism is transformed into a potential base of opposition to it.

At the same time this concentration and centralization is not restricted to the economy. It extends to all areas of society, blurring many of the distinctions between economic and political. Particularly important in this process is the merger of the government apparatus with the "private" economic structure. This merger socializes the role of the private entrepreneur, the capitalist, the social role which is the historical justification for private property in the means of production, and which is the moral pillar for all plausible apologies for capitalism.

Not only does capitalist development render the capitalist superfluous:

"The capitalist process pushes into the background all those institutions, the institutions of property and free contracting in particular, that expressed the needs and ways of truly private economic activity."<sup>1</sup>

But though the capitalist becomes objectively redundant to the process of production, private appropriation still goes on. Now, however, it is necessary for the ruling class to use public or semi-public political mechanisms to maintain the system and to guarantee and enlarge the profits of capital.

This dual process contains a potential danger to capitalism. The mystifying veil of the market system surrounding the private appropriation of the product of labor begins to lift. Private appropriation now begins to appear as a pattern of political issues where the resources of the entire society, and particularly, the resources of the working people, are used to maintain the corporate elite. That is, private appropriation becomes a potentially explosive political issue. To prevent this potential from materializing, capitalism needs mechanisms which can absorb popular political movements before these can develop a clear consciousness of the possibility of a society that is not determined by the priorities and values of capitalism. That is, the capitalists must have a popular false consciousness, an implicit consensus, a passive acceptance of their rule, to substitute for the mass political base of support which has been eroded away in the process of capitalist development. In the words of Basso:

"Neo-capitalism must find a basis for agreement (political support) on the very terrain from which class conflicts were supposed to emerge."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Schumpeter, Capitalism, Socialism & Democracy, page 141-142.

<sup>2</sup>Basso, selection in final issue of Studies On the Left.



Parliamentary structures are an invaluable instrument for maintaining this popular false consciousness. As Lenin and Gramsci both observed, parliamentary democracy is the ideal form of bourgeois rule since it mediates class conflicts in a way that disguises the exploitation of the workers and the essential dictatorship of the bourgeoisie. However, problems have developed with parliamentary democracy from the point of view of the ruling class. Capitalism now has serious business that must be handled through the government apparatus. That government which "governs least" is not any longer the ideal government for the bourgeoisie. In fact, such a government would pose ominous dangers for the survival of capitalism. Serious decisions on military budgets, fiscal and monetary policies and the organization of education and technology cannot be made "privately" any longer, but they must still be made. But at the same time, these serious decisions are not safely put before the people, or left in the hands of officials elected by universal franchise. Under present conditions when the mass base for private property has disintegrated, such elected officials could question the basic priorities of a system that sacrifices the collective needs of their constituents to a mindless, but highly profitable, drive to increase production, even when this production leads to self-destructive consumption.

Here is the conflict. As the "natural" support for capitalism disappears, electoral politics and parliamentarism is increasingly necessary to maintain the illusions which keep the working class from uniting against the dominance of capital; but authoritarianism is needed to keep the state monopoly capitalist apparatus operating to maximize profits. To balance these two requirements is a very delicate political task.

I would argue that the increase in conscious alienation from capitalist culture and the growth of a counter-hegemonic consciousness in this country are directly related to the development of these contradictions within the reified market and parliamentary bureaucratic institutions - the institutions which provide the social base for capitalist hegemony. With the clarification of these two contradictions; the contradiction between the potentiality and the actuality of modern capitalist production, and the contradiction between the need for capitalism to rule firmly, but to rule legitimately, we have the basis on which it becomes possible for people to learn about the contingent character of the system and their personal stake in overthrowing it.

Capitalist ideology is historically continuous and it cannot be transformed like some kind of plastic substance in response to the quantitative and qualitative changes in contemporary capitalism. Many of the myths and values central to the historical development of U.S. capitalist culture are no longer functional to the maintenance of contemporary capitalism, and, in fact, are an embarrassment to it. Now, acceptance of the rhetoric of "free enterprise" and "individual self-reliance" and a suspicion of large bureaucratic structures, leads to a questioning of what U.S. society has become and to an opposition to the way in which it must function. Now, the contradictions in the work process and the political process make the gap between the rhetoric - individual freedom - and the reality of an unfree society more clear; and they make the gap between this reality and the real possibilities more intolerable.

Because such contradictions and limitations are tangible and operative in the lives of people, we have a basis for concluding that the "bourgeois consciousness" among people who are oppressed and exploited by the bourgeoisie is a false consciousness, not just in some meaningless "ultimate" sense, but in terms of the practical content of their lives<sup>1</sup>, in terms of their ability to perceive a gap between the way that they do actually live and the way that they should and could live, if the social institutions were more just and humane. This whole process, of course, demonstrates the importance of understanding the relative independence of human consciousness from the economic base of the society, and its ability to determine the direction of development of that base.

<sup>1</sup>The meaning of this assertion will be treated in detail in the next major section of this paper.



## LIMITS ON RULING CLASS POWER

In the previous section we have been dealing with the sources of the strengths and weaknesses of capitalism that are relatively independent of the conscious and partially conscious actions and intentions of capitalists, both as individuals and as a ruling class. That is, the point of reference has been certain general patterns of thought and behavior that flow from an historically developed "mode of production" (in the broadest sense). Now, however, we are concerned with the class actions of the capitalists to maintain themselves and the system in which their interests are determining. I want to handle this subject somewhat differently than was done in the earlier section on crisis. Here I would like to deal with the issues in terms of ruling class tactical options.

It is a Leninist truism that capitalism rules with two tactics, the tactic of selective repression, and the tactic of selective concession. These tactics can be combined in an infinite variety of ways to meet any particular challenge, and they can be implemented in forms - often through the reified market and parliamentary mechanisms described in the last section - that disguise their nature and class origins. What I want to do in this section is to consider some of the conditions for, and the limitations on, the exercise of these two tactics.

## Concession

There are two general boundaries to the use of concession as a tactic of rule. First, the flexibility and objective potentiality must exist within the system to make the concession a material possibility. Second, the motivation to grant the concession must be present, and it must be operative at the proper moment, to make the concession a possibility.

The imperialist position of the United States has a great deal of influence on both of these conditions. In a period of inter-imperialist rivalries and anti-imperialist revolutions, the need for domestic tranquillity is particularly acute, and, although some sections of the ruling class may resist, the pressures which are created go in the direction of meeting the demands of the internal working class with concessions to prevent internal divisions from threatening the international posture of the imperialist power. At the same time, the profits derived from the favored imperialist economic position of the United States provide the economic flexibility to meet the demands of the internal working class with material concessions. That is, an expanding imperialism provides both the objective and the subjective potential for the distribution of some of the profits of imperialism among sections of the internal working class - a distribution designed to inhibit and divide the internal class struggle - particularly to prevent this struggle from taking a direction which might pose a serious challenge to the logic of profit or to the private control of the entire economic structure. This, of course, is the basis of the concept of the aristocracy of labor which played such an important role in Lenin's examination of the social base for the opportunism in the working class movements of the early twentieth century.

But what is the situation with a declining imperialism? As the imperialist position of the United States becomes more tenuous, and there is reason to believe that this process is already well begun, this external source of potential to make concessions will be eroded away even though the motivations to make concessions because of the requirements of maintaining the empire, may well be more compelling. This, of course, is not any simple process which may be accurately predicted in advance. Not only is there a complicated relationship between the potential to grant concessions and the motivations to grant them, but there are also a number of conflicts of interest, both objective and subjective, within the ruling class, and a number of particular interests and motivations operative in various sections of the class, all of which combine to create a vast number of conflicting pulls and pressures on the overall class attitudes and policies.



For example, to continue more concretely in the same context, the construction industry is suffering in several important areas - housing construction is one - from the escalation of the interest rates caused by the imperialist involvement in Vietnam. Employers in this industry are not likely to be willing to make wage concessions to their workers in order to inhibit opposition to a war which may well be vital to the interests of the entire capitalist class.

Another factor which must be considered is the fact that as the trade union leadership becomes more committed to class-collaborationist positions on the issues of imperialism, it becomes less able to defend the worker's interests on the job, and the motivation for individual employers to take advantage of such a situation to break the union becomes very compelling, even if the existence of a docile trade union movement is a valuable political factor from the point of view of the interests of the ruling class as a whole. On another level, as the labor movement accepts a junior partner status in foreign relations, it is less able to maintain its independent political stance - such as it is - and corporation-dominated legislative bodies seldom are able to restrain themselves from taking advantage of the situation to wreck what exists of social legislation, even though it may mean wrecking important capitalist integrative mechanisms.

Another related external influence on the potential and the willingness to grant concessions is the existence of an institutionalized alternative to capitalism in the socialist state system. The growth in the strength of the socialist systems makes the international class struggle sharper and more crucial to the U.S., in part, because it strengthens the socialist component of the anti-imperialist movements throughout the third world - the movements which already are threatening the material base for concessions - its imperialist superprofits. This obviously contributes to a further limitation on concessions. There are also some secondary effects of the socialist state system. It increases the motivations to grant a certain type of material concession to the internal working class - concessions which keep this country competitive in standards of consumption, etc. Another different effect, though, is the attempt to crush the movements which identify with the socialist alternative inside the imperialist country.

Overall, as the dominance of U.S. imperialism is increasingly challenged on all fronts, the erosion of the material potential to grant concessions will outweigh increased motivations to grant them, and the likelihood of major concessions will be greatly reduced at the same time as the internal class struggle sharpens. While I have been talking about the impact of the changing imperialist position of this country on the ability of the ruling class to make concessions most of the considerations apply equally as well to the internal circumstances determining the possibilities for using concession as a tactic of rule. The previous discussion of capitalist crisis indicated no basis for the assumption that U.S. capitalism has internal resources to make pre-emptive concessions to the working class that can compensate for what it is losing in external resources. In fact, an argument about the potential and the willingness to make concessions in the conditions of developing internal crisis can be made that runs parallel to what has been said above about imperialism.

So far in this section I have been talking exclusively about economic - quantitative concessions. Obviously there are other sorts of concessions. There are concessions which grant "rights"; and there are concessions which legitimate "power". The "rights" concessions need little additional treatment. Often they are primarily important as a potential lever for gaining future economic concessions, and their form is based on bourgeois individualism and designed to foster parliamentary illusions. "Power" concessions are something a little different. I will deal with them from time to time through the rest of the paper. Here it is sufficient to say that this is an area in which some of the grossest reformist illusions operate. The ruling class is always happy to make a "power" concession which gives those who demand it the power to participate in their own oppression in exchange for their organizational independence. This is the nature of many of the ruling class responses to demands for "student power" or "community power" or "black power".



Some further points need to be made on the form of concessions. I talked about the tactic of selective concession, and beyond the issue of the quantity of concessions, there is still the issue of their selective nature. There are two main points here. The ruling class makes concessions whenever it can in a direction and a form that will maximize the economic, racial, national, etc. divisions in the working class. It is always anxious to penalize one section of the class to provide the base for rewarding another. This is the essence, for example, of almost all collective bargaining agreements covering the process of automation. This selective and discriminating approach to concessions will probably grow more pronounced as the flexibility to make concessions diminishes. The ruling class will try to get more mileage for the same price.

Concessions are always a response to pressure, and, in general, the best organized and most aggressive sections of the working class win the maximum concessions. This has created the paradox which a reformist can never understand, it is precisely the best organized sections of the working class which are most susceptible to opportunism (organized in a trade union sense, that is). From the thirties to the present this section has been the industrial working class in the basic industries. But now, in a number of ways the most pressing demands are coming from the black and brown underemployed and unorganized sections of the working class. That is, they are coming from the sections of the class which have been passed over in previous major concessions. If there is no giving before these demands, major political problems for the system will ensue. If there is a meaningful response, some of the material benefit of the past concessions, which expanded the aristocracy of labor and widen the gap between the privileged and the underprivileged sections of the class, will be lost to the ruling class. It is an interesting dilemma for the capitalists.

Finally, and perhaps most important, it is not inevitable that meeting insurgent demands with concessions will have social consequences that the ruling class will be happy about. People may just demand larger and more frequent concessions. Reform victories of any kind do not have an uniform and automatic impact on the consciousness of the people who benefit from them. For example, the economic gains involved in Medicare and those involved in the War on Poverty which were roughly comparable in magnitude, have had very different impacts on the social movements which forced these concessions to be granted. Beyond the actual variations in the impact of reform victories, different groupings within the ruling class will have different estimates and interpretations - some based on particular partial interests and some based simply on their mistakes - of the subordination factor involved in any particular concession. These differences, too, have a major impact on the willingness of the ruling class to utilize the tactic of concession.

This all leads to the conclusion that the tactic of concession is limited, not only because of a weakening in the material base for making concessions that grows out of the crisis of U.S. state monopoly capitalism at home and abroad, but also because of the operation of a variety of conflicting pressures upon and attitudes within the ruling class which prevent it from acting in a completely coherent and cohesive way, according to an unitary conception of its self-interest.

### Repression

In one sense, all of the institutions of capitalism are repressive. They all support exploitation and oppression, and they all lead to the acceptance of a false consciousness which obscures real human needs and potentials. The system is based on repression. But repression, in the narrower sense, is also a particular tactic of capitalist rule - a tactic based on the use, or the threat of the use, of overt force - the reliance on police and military power and on the institutions which support them.

In the U.S., the immensity of the overt coercive power apparently at the command of the state immobilizes many people. This is a small illustration of a point of Debray's, force does not have to be exercised for it to be a potent political factor in society.



In fact, it is more potent when it is not exercised, because the power is more appearance than reality. It can never be fully actualized. It is a hollow potentiality of the same character as that which provides the element of truth to the "paper tiger" concept of imperialism. When overt force is used against the people, it tends to create problems of greater magnitude and longer durability than those which initially prompted its use.

When extraordinary force is employed, it does harm that may be irreparable in terms of the future ability of capital to absorb opposition to the effects of its rule within the framework of the perpetuation of its rule. At the same time, once repressive force is used it takes on a human, and thus a much more vulnerable, character. Normal police functions gain much of their efficacy just because they are "normal" - because they can focus the overwhelming impersonal power and authority of the entire civilization of capitalism on isolated groups and individuals, and, can in this way, avoid the danger of creating the solidarity of a common experience of oppression.

As real democratic content in the political institutions becomes more and more threatening to the ruling class, and as the social problems that the class faces become sharper and more complex, it becomes increasingly necessary for the stability of their rule that they not expose the essential facade of democratic and voluntary participation in the society. There is nothing that would more certainly jeopardize the implicit consensus on the legitimacy and permanence of capitalism - a consensus based on just such a set of illusions - than the promiscuous use of police power.

Of course, it would be wrong to lose perspective on this issue, and to conclude that the use of extraordinary police power should be deliberately provoked. In fact, this is the best way to give the use of force a durable legitimacy. The inability of the ruling class to rule without massive overt repression is an index of the instability and the weakness of the system - of the objective limits on its power to rule legitimately. But this instability is an objective fact, it either exists or doesn't exist. It cannot be created by maximalist acts separated from any political context<sup>1</sup>. Even if the system is gravely weakened, such acts will not translate into increased power for the working class unless there is an organized working class force capable of capitalizing on the weakness of the system. If capitalism is still able to rule without massive repression, then for revolutionaries to launch a series of provocative actions is just self-defeating. Acts of provocation neither build an alternative force, nor provide a situation where it is possible to demonstrate and clarify the weakness of the system in a form that is relevant to the people who must understand this weakness in order to understand their own strength, and thus in order to see the possibility of a revolution. Provocations are more likely to lead to the popular acquiescence in the repression of the left than to any constructive end.

With the conclusion of this section on the limits of capitalist power in the United States, we are ready to go to the second major section of this paper - a detailed examination of the possibility of building a movement in this country that has both the will and the social base to make a revolution.

<sup>1</sup>This point will be treated in detail in the consideration of various approaches to the reform-revolution dilemma.



## REFORM AND REVOLUTION

## SCENARIOS

A good deal of the weakness of the American left flows from its historical inability to implement a clear and relevant revolutionary perspective when and where it has been the effective leadership of mass insurgent reform movements. At the times when the mass movement has existed, either the left was isolated and not in effective leadership, or in its leadership it accommodated itself to reformism, in fact, if not in rhetoric, and was unable to focus the mass movements in a way that would pose a concrete challenge to the root institutions of capitalism and would constantly expand the base of revolutionary consciousness and organization.

A theoretical question, the relationship between reform and revolution has always been a central factor in these difficulties. A mechanical conception of this relationship leads into one of two opposite errors; elitism and sectarianism, or reliance on spontaneity. Conversely, these errors in political approach stimulate mechanical theoretical pseudo-answers to the reform revolution dilemma. This dilemma is a central issue in the development of a revolutionary strategic perspective, and the various attitudes towards it must be considered in a good deal of detail.

A schematic treatment can separate out three general approaches to the issues of reform and revolution.<sup>1</sup> Traditional reformism equates the struggle for reforms with the struggle for a revolution and thus revolutionary struggle loses all distinctive content except for adventurism, while the revolution, itself, loses all real significance. Then there is the opposite approach which views reform struggles as either irrelevant or as a hindrance to the revolutionary struggle. Finally, there are a number of positions that are based on varying conceptions of the role of the conscious revolutionaries in reform movements, and which present a corresponding range of views on the relationship between reform and revolution.

Classically, reformism denies the existence of fundamental class antagonisms - particularly in terms of the conception of the character of the state - and opts, explicitly or implicitly, for some kind of consensual conception of capitalist society. In its pure form the reformist position is outside of the presuppositions of the U.S. left, which largely accepts some type of a conflict model of society even when this is not put in a Marxist class framework, and thus it is beyond the scope of this paper. Consequently, I will deal with the reformist position only where it affects other conceptions of the relationship between reform and revolution. This it does in two areas which will come up later: the first is in the stress laid on attaining reform "victories", and the second is in the approach to the development of a popular revolutionary consciousness.

The "pure" revolutionary position, however, does have a direct impact on the U.S. left that must be critically examined. This impact is apparent in the various left trends that base themselves on the undeniable Cuban maxim that, "the duty of a revolutionary is to make the revolution", an admonition which, unfortunately, while true, leaves a good deal more to be said - like how. The initial premise, often unstated, of all such positions is that in one way or another, the "revolutionary action" or the "exemplary action" creates both revolutionary consciousness and the revolutionary situation - that the action is a substitute for both an analysis and a strategy and that emulation will make any approach to leadership beyond that of "exemplary action" unnecessary.

<sup>1</sup>Since these different approaches are not questions of abstract theory, but are manifested in the political practice of different individuals and groups, these clear distinctions usually break down when they are applied to specific practical approaches. Their importance lies in the general question which they make it possible to clarify.



Following from their grotesque overestimation of the importance of tactics, these positions spend an inordinate amount of time distinguishing between those tactics which are alleged to be "revolutionary" and those which are merely "liberal". Such categories, however, have little meaning or reality independent of a general strategic perspective. This is true even if the tactic under consideration is some variety of armed struggle, a current source of titillation in the U.S. left. No tactic or action, including any and all variations of armed struggle, is intrinsically revolutionary. Tactics must flow from an implicit or explicit political strategy which may, or may not, be revolutionary, and may or may not, be valid. Those who argue that the only relevant issue for a revolutionary is the tactical approach to the revolutionary seizure of power, irrespective of any analysis which shows that this seizure is possible, or that it would be seen by the people as being in their interests - irrespective, that is, of whether the system is unable to continue to rule in the old way and whether the people are unwilling to be ruled in the old way - are not revolutionaries, they are just posers.

This is no put-down of militant tactics. In many situations dramatic actions by small groups of people have helped to crystallize a revolutionary crisis or have played an important catalytic role in launching a revolutionary struggle. This will doubtless be true in the future as well. But actions have this kind of impact only when they are directly related to and articulate the needs and grievances of masses of people, whether or not the participants in the action understand this. Their impact stems from objective and subjective conditions which they, in turn, affect, but which they can neither create nor totally transcend.

The real strategic issues for the left in this country lie in the area between reformism and orgiastic revolutionism. They lie within the different conceptions of the distinctiveness, but inter-relatedness, of reform and revolutionary struggle. Outstanding among the issues in this area is the clarification of the role of a revolutionary and of revolutionary organizations in a situation which is not a revolutionary situation - a political situation in which the popular understanding of the need for, and the possibility of, a revolution is constantly diffused and aborted by the capacity of capitalism to absorb and contain reform movements and ideologies, even when these involve very militant struggles.

### Reform Victories

It is a truism that, except in a situation of total desperation, people will not enter into struggle with all of the attendant hazards unless and until they can see a possibility of attaining their demands - a possibility of materially improving their situations. That is, people must perceive a gap, not only between what is, and what should be, but between what is, and what can be. Even though it may be, and usually is, the case that people define their needs in terms of the values and norms of the capitalist system which exploits and oppresses them, the revolutionary strategy must still begin from the real demands and grievances, and not from some intellectualized picture of what these should be. Political struggle necessarily begins with such "impure" demands for immediate improvements in the conditions of life, and, if revolutionaries are not concerned with such needs and grievances and with the popular movements which develop around them, they will never be in a position to lead a revolutionary movement. However, this is just where to begin, the real problem is - what should be the direction?

What importance should revolutionaries attach to the attainment of reform "victories"? Two extreme answers to this question must be rejected, but for very different reasons. We must abandon from the outset the reformist notion that reform movements should be channeled into "realistic" programs - into demands which can be "won". For anyone with a Marxist perspective and analysis, this position is theoretically untenable for the same reason that reformism as a whole is untenable. It assumes that a revolution is nothing more than an accumulation of reforms which gradually lead to a qualitative change in the nature of the system. This criticism of the reformist approach, of course, is not particularly persuasive to those whose primary concern is with what is immediately necessary, not what is ultimately possible. It is a lousy agitational approach.



However, this reformist position is vulnerable in its own, eminently practical, terms - in terms of it being able to obtain the maximum in reform victories. The source of this vulnerability lies in the construction put on the term "realistic", within the framework of the emphasis on raising "realistic" demands. "Realistic" according to whom - according to those with the real needs and grievances, or to those who are responsible for them - those who profit from the conditions which underlie these needs and grievances? Such reformists as Bayard Rustin and Michael Harrington characteristically confine their demands to the concessions which, in their estimation, the "enlightened sector" of the ruling class is willing either to grant to condone, or even to surreptitiously support. That is, they adapt their demands to the criteria of "realism" that are set fundamentally by the requirements for the preservation of capitalism in this country, and they always find themselves implementing programs designed to perpetuate capitalism. But it is empirically apparent that it is those movements which are willing to break with the assumptions of capitalism, not those which limit themselves from the outset, that are able to wring the maximum concessions from the ruling class - just as it is theoretically evident that the good life for the majority of people is on the other side of capitalist property relations.

All the same, it is also a mistake for the revolutionary to take the position that reform victories are irrelevant, or that, because of the illusions created in their beneficiaries, they are a positive danger to a revolutionary perspective. Of course, it is true that popular illusions are buttressed by reform victories; in particular, the illusion that all problems can be solved within the system. But people may also gain the absolutely necessary appreciation of the power of collective action and of the weakness of the system, through winning partial victories from the system. If there were never any partial victories, this understanding would be very hard to come by. In the absence of partial victories, people will tend to despair of winning the ultimate victory. While despair may lead to good poetry, it leads to bad politics.

However, there is a more basic theoretical fault in the position that reform victories are an obstacle to the growth of a revolutionary movement. Its underlying presupposition is that the "worse the better" - the worse the conditions of life, the better the conditions for revolutionary struggle. This is wrong for a number of reasons. First, if it means that there is some revolutionary potential inherent in material poverty and deprivation - the opposite is the case - the potential there is for a combination of fatalistic passivity and all sorts of illusions. If "worse" is meant more generally, in terms of the kind of "misery" discussed earlier, then it has revolutionary potential only to the degree that those who experience it realize that there is a concrete and attainable qualitative alternative to the present state of affairs. This consciousness is not based in any way whatsoever on losing reform struggles. In fact, it develops much more from reform "victories" when people begin to see their limitations.

But, if there is no inherent revolutionary potential in reform movements that fail, then revolutionaries need not feel hypocritical in the slightest about their participation in reform movements. Every improvement in the conditions of life, even within capitalism, then, is intrinsically valuable.

While the attainment of victories, if they are real gains and not just frauds, is not an unimportant aspect of reform struggles, the revolutionary is primarily interested in the content of the struggle for the reform, not in its attainment or non-attainment as such. The struggle for the demand, and, if it is won, the struggle for its proper implementation, creates the potential in which people may gain an understanding of who is their ally and who is their enemy; an understanding of the limitations of the victory, and of the next steps that are necessary, and, ultimately, of the need and the possibility of a revolution. The key word is potential. There is no necessity, only a possibility that this potential be realized. The general role of the revolutionary is to relate to reform movements in such a way that the growth in popular revolutionary consciousness and organization is maximized.

But how should this be done? Here again there are a number of different conceptions current in the U.S. left. I would like to make an arbitrary attempt to isolate the major variations.



## The Organizer

In the "New Left" radical existentialism and anti-capitalist humanism are the intellectual roots of the "organizer" conception of the revolutionary role. This position is the lineal descendent of the narodnik approach, and it is buttressed by the same class factors. In it, the objective existence and centrality of class antagonisms and class conflict is muddled over. People are seen, not so much in terms of their class position, as in terms of some over-riding view of the human condition. They are seen as being alienated from their human potential, but not through their exploitation and oppression by a determinate class-based social structure. The image of man, then, becomes the image of a more or less successfully domesticated animal - of a passive potentiality which the organizer makes human and active through his creative intervention. The presence of the organizer becomes a precondition for meaningful political activity.

The idealization of the relationship between the "organizer" and the constituency in which he organizes is that of the Mastroanni role in the Italian film the Organizer. The organizer is a different and superior, kind of being from those who are to be organized. The consequence is a patronizing and messianic - a priest-flock - approach to the role of the revolutionary, thinly disguised within a variety of folk mystiques. The fact is that the exploited and oppressed are always involved in struggle, but that it is struggle that accepts the permanence of capitalism by default, through the failure to develop the framework in which capitalism can be challenged. The failure of this perspective is that this is not understood, and the organizer is given responsibilities to generate activity that are unnecessary, while the real problem of transforming narrow, spontaneous, semi-conscious struggle into a conscious revolutionary movement is subordinated.

Despite the rhetoric about participation and the humble self-effacing public style that are common accompaniments of this position one does not have to be exceptionally sensitive to see an essential elitism in it. The elite is constituted by "full-time" organizers who compose a sort of aristocracy of commitment. It is usually forgotten that under present conditions the opportunity to devote full time to political or community organizing is an option open only to those with independent sources of income. This is certainly not the best criterion for singling out the future leaders of the revolution.

Though this position is easy to caricature, it contains valid insights and has opened up a number of extremely important issues. Counter-community and para-politics concepts, an aspect of this general position, when they are not distorted to utopian nonsense, bring out a number of extremely important aspects of the role of the revolutionary. First, they stress the importance of making the reality of power and powerlessness tangible and immediate to people, whatever the specific character of the immediate struggle. Second, they put emphasis on the quality of the participation in the activity as opposed to quantitative or manipulative approaches, although this feature is lost when the organizer role becomes merely one of "bringing people together" a la Saul Alinsky. Third, based on the two previously-mentioned features, this position approaches the understanding that a strategy for the overthrow of the hegemony of capitalism must be based on the development of a counter-hegemonic force.

In a sense it is true that the process of "raising consciousness" is a process of creating different kinds of human beings - men who no longer accept the values and norms of a dehumanized and dehumanizing society, and who have gained, through a collective struggle against this society, an appreciation of the possibility of a different quality to human relationships. This awareness, I think, must underlie any revolutionary strategy. It has no necessary connection with the other elements of the "organizer" conception of the revolutionary role.

## Technical Approaches

There are two, more traditional, approaches to the role of the revolutionary in popular reform movements. Though at first glance they appear to be exact opposites, they rest on a common fallacy. They both put the role of the revolutionary in a technical, a social engineering, and not an ideological, framework.



One line of argument holds that involvement in the struggle for the attainment of one reform demand contains the necessary and sufficient conditions for the consciousness of the subsequent demand. Revolutionaries, therefore, should not attempt to impose preconceived patterns on this process, but should attend to the mass scale and the unity of participation in the given struggle so that the largest possible number of people may discover through their participation what is to be done next. The assumption is that people eventually will discover that what is to be done next is to make a revolution.

Practically this "capitulation to spontaneity" amounts to an evolutionary variety of reformism. The role of the revolutionary is narrowed until it involves no more than the seeking out of certain lowest common denominators of reform struggle around which the maximum number of people can be mobilized and unified. It is immediately apparent that these lowest common denominators will involve those forms of struggle that are more "legitimate" and those demands where "victory" is more attainable. In other words, when the search for lowest common denominators becomes the over-riding function of revolutionaries in a non-revolutionary situation, this entails the subordination of the goal of a social revolution to the vicissitudes of the immediate reform struggles. It entails an accommodation with reformism.

But if the participation of revolutionaries in reform movements does not involve a critical approach to the character and goals of these movements, then the essential process of mass political education cannot take place within them. If revolutionaries do not project the goal of a social revolution within struggles for more immediate objectives, then it will not be projected, and its possibility and necessity will never be understood.

The other argument is also based on the fallacy that people learn from their involvement in activity, per se. It realizes, however, that contradictory things may be "learned", and attempts to channel people into those activities in which they will learn the "correct" things. Usually this means involving people in unsuccessful reform struggles - ideally in confrontations with the power structure in which they get their heads cracked. The corollary, of course, is that reform movements that might attain their demands are a positive danger to the development of a revolutionary movement. They will build illusions. That part of the argument has been dealt with earlier.

Here again the role of the revolutionary is cast in a technical not an ideological framework. His role becomes, not just mobilizer and unifier, but, primarily, manipulator and provocateur, promoter of confrontation and tactical defeat in the interests of the ultimate victory.

Both of these and all other technical approaches rest on a mechanical understanding of the ways in which contemporary capitalism maintains itself. This system is sufficiently flexible to suppress mere confrontations and to absorb mere reforms. Though people may learn what is to be done from their participation in popular reform movements, they may also "learn" that they can live with, and within, the system. Though people may learn through participation in struggles that are smashed by the police power of the state that the system rests on a systematic denial of their freedom, they may also "learn" that it is futile and painful to challenge such a system. In short, there is no necessary and automatic relationship between reform movements, whatever their concrete character, and revolutionary consciousness such that the latter will develop spontaneously among participants in the former.

### Impending Crisis

There is another factor that directly affects all of the concepts of the role of a revolutionary that I have mentioned and a number of additional variants and combinations that I haven't gone into. This is the Crisis<sup>1</sup> theory.

<sup>1</sup>This use of the term is capitalized to distinguish it from other, more restricted uses.



For a whole host of reasons, some valid and some not, revolutionaries in the advanced capitalist countries tend to resolve the problem of the role of the revolutionary in a non-revolutionary situation with a concept of an impending apocalyptic Crisis. Often this concept has lost any real theoretical foundation and has become an article of religious faith - the basis of the "wait until the depression" cults.

Given the validity of the assumption of the inevitability of such a Crisis, the interim task for the revolutionary can be viewed in a number of ways. It can be that of combatting the illusions gained through the temporary ability of capitalism to provide concessions to reform movements, or it can be viewed as one of mobilizing the maximum number of people in reform struggles to develop the widest possible popular organization prior to the Crisis. These different approaches can be combined and modified in a variety of ways and additional elements can be introduced. An example of such an additional element is the type of utopianism that calls on revolutionaries to "begin living the model of the new life" - to begin the creation of the superstructure of socialism prior to the coming of the Crisis - a Noah's Ark approach.

But, in any case, the argument is that the Crisis will create the circumstances in which all illusions about the permanence and the flexibility and responsiveness of capitalism can easily be smashed, and in which the conditions for the virtually instantaneous development of a revolutionary consciousness will be created. The impending Crisis becomes a *deus ex machina*. When it materializes, it will convince people beyond any possibility of a doubt that their interests lie with the revolution, while, at the same time, it will disrupt the system to the point where it is no longer able to function.

This concept of Crisis is at the root of both the position that "socialism is not on the agenda", and of the position that the task of the revolutionary is to "agitate for socialism". By providing a convenient mechanistic way of uniting the day to day reform struggle with the struggle for a socialist revolution at some future date, it makes it unnecessary to worry about linking them organically in the struggles of the present. Consequently, it creates simultaneously a potential for both opportunism and sectarianism. The revolutionary may either adapt himself to the backwardness of popular consciousness and organization, or he may keep himself in comfortable sectarian isolation from the real struggle against this backwardness. In fact, nothing prevents him from doing both.

The impending Crisis theory is a great convenience for shaky theoretical structures and for those revolutionaries who must know that "history" is with them and will right all of their mistakes, but it has no real substance to it. By this I don't mean that the objective situation of U.S. capitalism is of no importance or that it is not subject to major changes. As previous sections have made clear, I think, on the contrary, that the capitalist economic cycle has not been "controlled" in any basic sense, and would be one of the last to say that in this country there will be no more of the traditional cyclical capitalist crises with their characteristic mass unemployment and overproduction of commodities or under-utilization of economic capacity.

Indeed, I argued in the earlier section on crisis that the development of modern capitalism in the United States reveals new weaknesses in the entire civilization of capitalism. These weaknesses have already led the country into a period of chronic crisis - a crisis that will get much worse, I believe. Finally, my position is that U.S. capitalism lacks both the resources and the will to resolve the contradictions at the root of these crises. But none of this will lead necessarily to the destruction of capitalism, or even to the creation of a mass movement which seeks its destruction. None of this leads, necessarily, to a Crisis. Gramsci's observation on this point is, I think, absolutely correct.

"(Crises) can only create a more favourable ground for the propagation of certain ways of thinking, of posing and solving questions which involve the whole future development of State life."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Gramsci, Op. cit., page 172.



Capitalism will always be able to scrape up the resources to continue to rule until masses of people are unwilling to continue to live under its rule. Revolutionaries must build and articulate this unwillingness. Reliance on the impending Crisis to create the subjective conditions for making the revolution amounts to an acceptance of "History" in some metaphysical Hegelian sense, and not the class struggle waged by real men, as the source of a revolutionary movement. Given the degree to which the legitimacy of capitalism is embedded in the consciousness of the social groups whose material interests and human potentials are directly and indirectly thwarted by it, is it reasonable to expect that there would be any response to a crisis in this country beyond the demand - a demand that might very involve tremendous militant struggles - for a return to capitalist normalcy?

Revolutionaries cannot afford to wait, in any way whatsoever, for a future crisis. To be in a position to take advantage of a crisis, revolutionaries must build, on the basis of the needs and demands which develop in contemporary capitalism, a mass revolutionary social bloc that is contesting for working class hegemony and power now, not waiting for better conditions in the indefinite future. If this is not done, we will never have the subjective requirements for making a revolution - mass revolutionary political consciousness and mass political movements led by a disciplined revolutionary vanguard party.

#### DUAL POWER

It is possible to develop a strategic perspective for a revolution in this country that is much more concrete and plausible than any of the afore-mentioned alternatives. The essence of this perspective involves putting more content into the conception of the role of the revolutionary and the organization of revolutionaries, the party, in order to give some practical programmatic meaning to what presently is a catch phrase - "raising revolutionary consciousness".

I intend to argue that it is possible to build within existing and possible popular reform movements a base of autonomous working class power, exercised through working class organizations and institutions in a manner that is hostile to capitalism - that deliberately confronts and undermines the foundations of capitalist equilibrium, particularly those aspects of it which rest on false consciousness, on the passive acceptance of, and acquiescence in, the continuation of capitalism on the part of those whom it oppresses and exploits. All of these terms are susceptible to a great deal of misinterpretation, and I intend to spend a good deal of time defining them more carefully in the course of this paper. First, however, I want to return to a consideration of popular reform movements under contemporary capitalism.

All movements for reform demands have two aspects, which, though they are inextricably intertwined in reality, can, and must, be kept theoretically separate. To put this dualism in a class context, every reform movement contains both a thrust for an "improvement" in the circumstances of working class existence within the framework of capitalism, and a thrust which implies, usually very vaguely, the possibility of, at least, a partial alternative to that framework.

The first aspect is usually, but not always, a quantitative one. It often relates to the standard of consumption and the related issues of material security, and it is usually the demand that is explicitly formulated. The second aspect relates basically to questions of relative power between classes and social strata - it involves the "qualitative" issues, the issues of the maximization of freedom and class and individual autonomy. While this second aspect may be manifested in the content of the demand; for example, in the demand of the Black Liberation movement for "freedom" which is much more than rhetoric, its real significance lies within the content of the struggle for the demand. The former aspect of the reform demand can be neutralized and absorbed by the integrative mechanisms of contemporary capitalism, but the latter cannot in any meaningful way be so absorbed.



## Integrative Mechanisms

Since the concrete impact of capitalist exploitation varies to a great degree, even within the working class, all demands for an "improvement" have a differential attraction across the social groupings which must be united if the system is to be overthrown. The flexibility of capitalism to absorb the former aspects of reform movements (which for purposes of simplification will be treated as separate demands for "improvements" - primarily economic improvements - although more is involved in every reform movement than the demand, and there can never be a rigid separation of the quantitative from the qualitative elements) is based in large part on the way that these demands are posed. They are seldom, if ever, really class demands. That is, they are seldom made in an unified way by any substantial sector of the working class, or even by any grouping which sees itself as representing the interests of the entire class.

As has been made clear in an earlier section of this paper, to say that capitalism can absorb demands for immediate improvements cannot mean that capitalism has unlimited flexibility to grant concessions, or, a fortiori, that the ruling class doesn't mind making such concessions. The point is only that capitalism has a tremendous capacity to divide and divert those popular reform movements whose effective leadership cannot see beyond their immediate, and usually quantitative, demands. Thus there must be absolutely no reliance on any spontaneous tendency of such movements, no matter how great the degree of militance that they manifest, to develop into revolutionary patterns of struggle.

Because the effect of capitalist hegemony is to fragment and atomize the working class and the general population, the demands and grievances which underlie the spontaneous political movements will be particularistic. They will be unable to lead to the working class acting in its own name and in its own interests, and to it making alliances and coalitions on that basis. On the contrary, the spontaneous reform movements will create a number of obstacles to the working class becoming a "class for itself".

Even a unified demand for a wage increase from the entire trade union movement in this country would directly benefit only a minority of the working class, and the ruling class possesses a variety of ideological tools which could be used to obstruct class unity around such a hypothetical demand. They could demonstrate, for example, that such a concession to the organized labor movement would adversely affect a number of other sections of the working class. And this would actually be the case, if the control of capital over the content and direction of production were not challenged at the same time as the quantitative demand was placed.

Arguments which attempt to wish away this basic political reality and that hypothesize, for example, that the economic demand for an immediate doubling of all real wages could not be absorbed and would unite the working class are just silly. Such an "economic" demand is, in reality, a demand for revolution. Demands for revolution do not arise spontaneously, nor can people be duped into supporting them under the guise that they are only reform demands. For such a demand to have more than minimal agitational and propagandistic value masses of workers would have to be brought to a realization of the possibility and necessity of a revolution. But the problem before us is the achievement of that realization, it is an obvious logical fallacy to assume the attainment of that level of consciousness which has previously been placed as a vital strategic objective.

Beyond its ability to meet quantitative demands with concessions capitalism has a whole variety of mechanisms to grant the shell of the demand but not the content; for example, by rendering wage increases illusory because of the redistribution of income through government fiscal and monetary policy and through ruling class control over pricing policies. Then, in addition, there are a number of possibilities for absorbing and co-opting the movement that initiated the demand to prevent it from posing a real challenge to the hegemony of capitalism. Class domination of the mass media and of the educational institutions, both of which have a great influence over popular concepts of value and right, are particularly important in this regard.



Of course, nothing that has been said should lead to opposition to reform movements around demands for immediate improvements. That would be equivalent to opposing reform struggle as such, and that, in turn, is about as productive as opposing gravity or inertia. The possibility of real gains, particularly economic gains, will always be a major initial motivation for involvement in political struggle. However, this too, can be carried to an extreme, to a crude self-interest kind of economic determinism. In this respect, Lenin's devastation of the Economist position that the "workers will only struggle for demands which promise 'palpable results'", should be remembered.

When we say that the demand for "improvements" in capitalism can be absorbed, absorbed should be understood in the most general sense. To some, this may appear to be nothing but a tautology - the self-evident statement that movements that cannot in some way see beyond capitalism will be contained within capitalism. But like Descartes' famous tautology, this one has the virtue of shedding a great deal of light on some real problems. It raises the prime question - how can revolutionaries relate to reform movements so that participants in them can begin to see beyond capitalism? This brings us to the second, the qualitative, aspect of reform struggle.

### Qualitative Elements

Capitalism has no built-in mechanisms to absorb the demands for a redistribution of power between classes with co-optive concessions. Either such movements must be crushed, or this aspect of the reform struggle must be diverted into different channels. If one of these is not accomplished, capitalism is faced with the fact of the creation of a base of power from which the working class can further undermine and disrupt the equilibrium of capitalist society.

It is tempting to treat this question abstractly and to counterpose reform demands and movements that are "qualitative" (read revolutionary) to those that are "quantitative" (read reformist). But as was indicated earlier, what we are talking about are different aspects that are common to all reform struggles and movements, not different kinds of reform demands. All reform struggles have aspects which can potentially be absorbed and latent aspects which cannot. This is shown most clearly when the reform movement is examined in terms of the nature of the struggle for the objective, and not just in terms of the nature of the objective. For example, the struggle in the South for the formal bourgeois democratic right of the franchise for black people was waged in such a manner that at a number of points it manifested a qualitative alternative to U.S. capitalism, southern style. In retrospect, from a revolutionary point of view, it is apparent that this qualitative aspect was of far greater importance than the attainment of the stated goals. It is this aspect which provided a continuing momentum for the Black Liberation movement, and which began to lay the base for the counter-hegemonic consciousness of that movement.

In fact, in most circumstances the qualitative elements of a reform struggle never become sufficiently explicit to allow them to be articulated in terms that are comprehensible to the participants in the struggle. Even when this is done, concessions in these qualitative areas can only be won with extreme difficulty, and, once won, there is a constant attempt on the part of the ruling class to subvert them. In fact, there is little real difference between the struggle to win and the struggle to maintain such qualitative demands once they are won. A constant mass mobilization is the price of such victories. It is because of these difficulties that qualitative demands are hard to formulate and to project as concrete goals of struggle. They usually appear as the expendable elements, the agitational issues, in a struggle; they appear as demands which are raised for tactical purposes, but which are not regarded as "realistic" political goals.

The politicization of these qualitative elements contains the revolutionary potential of the reform struggle. This is where the revolutionary must concentrate his attention and his political energy. The truth of this is clear if we pose as a question, in what sense is there a revolutionary potential in reform struggles?



The U.S. is no exception from the general Marxist maxim that the ideas of the ruling class are the ruling ideas. The bourgeois world-view and life-style provide the dominant pattern of behavior for all oppressed and exploited groups and individuals in this country, except, and this is a crucial exception, in those "extraordinary situation", those situations that are sharp breaks with the "normal" conditions of working class life under capitalist hegemony. There is nothing unusual or mystical about such a schizophrenia. It follows from the fact that bourgeois consciousness among the increasing proportion of the people who have no vested interest in private property in the means of production, is a false consciousness, is in contradiction with the real interests of these people. In political struggle people find themselves acting in ways that fall outside of capitalist values and norms; ways that fall outside of their own perceptions under "normal" conditions of what is right and proper; ways that in a fundamental sense take on an implicit counter-hegemonic character. They violate Kant's categorical imperative as applied to capitalism. If everyone always acted as people involved in political struggle do act, then life would be much better but capitalism would be impossible.

Gramsci devotes a good deal of attention to this particular issue. His argument is summarized in the following extended selection.

"What then will be the real conception of the world: the one which is logically affirmed as an intellectual fact or the one which results from the real activity of a certain person - which is implicit in his actions? (A rhetorical question which Gramsci answers in the affirmative - D.H.) And since actions are always political actions, can we not say that the real philosophy of anyone is contained in his politics? This conflict between thought and action, that is the co-existence of two conceptions of the world, one affirmed in words and the other explaining itself in effective actions, is not always due to bad faith. Bad faith can be a satisfactory explanation for some individuals taken singly, or even for more or less numerous groups, but it is not satisfactory when the contrast shows itself in the life of large masses: then it cannot be other than the expression of more profound contradictions of an historical and social order. It means that a social group, which has its own conception of the world, even through embryonic (which shows itself in actions, and so only spasmodically, occasionally, that is, when such a group moves as an organic unity) has, as a result of intellectual subordination and submission, borrowed a conception which is not its own from another group, and this it affirms in words. And this borrowed conception it also believes it is following because it does follow it in "normal" times, when its conduct is not independent and autonomous, but precisely subordinate and submissive."

Popular insurgencies are continually creating situations where the participants consciously or un-consciously break with the cultural patterns that are functional to the survival of capitalism. This break can be seen in the attitudes of workers in a tense picket line situation; attitudes towards the police, towards management, towards management prerogatives, and towards private property itself - and in their attitudes towards one another. In such situations the potential exists to clarify what usually remains only implicit, the possibility and the meaning of worker's self-rule as a qualitative alternative to capitalist culture.

This sort of qualitative issue is projected more or less clearly by a number of reform movements under conditions of U.S. state monopoly capitalism. The demands for power; power over the police in the ghetto by the residents of the ghetto, self-determination of the university by the educators and students; control over the content of production by the workers (this demand has not really been raised in the U.S., but it is a major issue in other capitalist nations), are extremely important in this respect.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>The warning mentioned in the section on concessions about the way the ruling class relates to power demands is relevant here. These can easily be turned into something that is quite their opposite. The test of a power demand is whether its attainment would increase the autonomy of the working class, or whether it would involve a further integration and subordination of that class.



It is a major mistake to see them as just reform struggles - struggles where the emphasis on power is just rhetoric - or where it is based on a childish confusion about the nature and divisibility of state power. On the contrary, these struggles challenge the superstructure of capitalism - they are counter-hegemonic even if that is not yet the understanding of the participants in them.

There is a great difficulty involved in maintaining and focusing these qualitative counter-hegemonic elements of a reform struggle. Since, for the most part, they are a concomitant of political mobilization, and such mobilization is extremely difficult to maintain, they are inherently transient and unstable - present in the heat of battle, in the flush of victory, in the bitter clarity of defeat. Until they can be incorporated within a general counter-hegemonic framework, they remain isolated and sporadic. Capitalist hegemony quickly regains dominance after the dramatic peak of a struggle and people lapse back into patterns of behavior in which the permanence of capitalism is accepted implicitly.

In part these corroding forces can be countered by implementing reforms in a form which entails a constant tension and conflict with capitalist institutions and ideologies. There are possibilities of this sort in virtually every genuine reform demand. The key element lies in linking every reform demand with the demand for a popular institution, an institution which gives the beneficiaries of the reform power over the manner in which it is administered. Then the reform victory, instead of amounting to the integration of a potential threat within the system, will provide the basis for a constant continuing struggle against the system. The demand for such institutions will also isolate and expose some mechanism through which the system maintains hegemony - for example; domination of the media, control of the courts, control of the school system - and, to the degree that the demand is attained, the operation of this mechanism will be limited and undermined. Such popular institutions, and the political force that grows from the popular appreciation of their possibility and necessity, comprise an important part of the dual power.

#### Role of the Revolutionary

This brings us back to the problem posed in the opening pages of this section - what is the role of the revolutionary in a non-revolutionary situation? The answer that I have been developing is that the essence of this role is the creation and development of the popular understanding that there is no necessity - in the sense of inevitability - that things be as they are now; but that things are necessarily as they are - in the sense that they are not accidental, that they are caused. This understanding can only become real within the framework of the qualitative aspects of the reform struggle. Revolutionary leadership of reform movements can, and should, be designed to demonstrate to people that their common effort and organization can create a political force which gives them real power over their lives, and, in fact, nothing else can. In this way it is possible to begin to create a popular consciousness of the vast gulf in this society between the way that things are, and the way that they should be, and could be, if there were a revolution.

Revolutionaries begin the synthesis of a counter-hegemonic consciousness by working in reform movements so that their participants develop the social and human characteristics which capitalist society warps and deforms. First of all, this means that stress must be put on the element of conscious participation, on the element of active involvement in struggle. A central grievance with contemporary capitalism, one which cuts across all class and ethnic lines though it is strongest in the working class, is the perception of people that they have no way to participate meaningfully in the processes that determine what the country looks and feels like. This alienation from public life must be concretely related to class structure. It must become psychologically immediate to people that the "freedom" of U.S. capitalism for the working people is freedom only in regard to the trivial details of personal life - the freedom to choose between different pastel shades of toilet paper.



Then, an awareness of the possibility of expanding this arena of freedom can grow with the increase in the consciousness of the collective solidarity and strength that accompany all real struggles, including many of those which are not immediately successful in obtaining their goals.

Revolutionaries must also be aware of how important it is that people gain a sense of their individual responsibility and worth in the course of reform struggles. Thus organizations must be responsive and democratic, and tactics must place priority on developing individual creativity and not rely on social engineering techniques. People must be treated as subjects, not as objects. It is of tremendous importance that people be helped to discover in the course of struggle that they have brothers and sisters and comrades, and that they, and the people that they know, have the capacity for heroism and compassion and the strength to remake themselves through remaking the conditions in which they live.

### Revolutionary Social Bloc

In this conception of the counter-hegemonic role of the revolutionary, it is apparent that the "vanguard" role of the organization of the revolutionaries, the party, goes far beyond the role of leading, purely by being at the head, the various reform movements and struggles. The party is the ideological and organizational core of an alternative to the hegemony of the ruling class.

When U.S. capitalism is seen as being in a phase which:

"...progressively destroys all forms of democratic life, all forms of collective responsibility, all forms of authentic social participation..."<sup>1</sup>

then the party must project the counter-image of a possible society in opposition to these features of the existing society. This is an image of a society where people can live a meaningful life embodying individual responsibility, dignity, and creativity. The belief in the possibility of such a transformation of society must be consciously built by the party on the foundation of the collective and individual self-realization and the awareness of actual self interest that is possible within the context of popular reform struggles.

In the struggle of opposing hegemonies, that of the autonomous working class manifested "sporadically" in the qualitative aspects of the reform struggle, and that of the ruling capitalist class "imprinted" on every aspect of social life through capitalist "civil society", the revolutionary attempts to socialize and make coherent the alternative standards posed in the practical development of the class struggle. That is, he attempts to make these standards into:

"...a basis for live action, an element of co-ordination and of intellectual and moral order...(leading) a mass of men to think coherently and in an unitary way about present-day reality."<sup>2</sup>

The classical Marxist position that an idea which grips the minds of masses of people becomes a material force is at the base of this conception of the role of the revolutionary. Seeds of the ideas that revolutionaries wish to become material forces are nurtured in reform struggles within a system of capitalism that is still not comprehended as a system by the participants in the struggle. As these ideas begin to take on the character of a material force, people gain "...the awareness of being a part of a determined hegemonic force"<sup>3</sup> - the autonomous working class - a force which presents a categorical alternative to the existing order, even before they can personally articulate this alternative. The progression from this point is towards an increasingly critical self-consciousness and class consciousness.

<sup>1</sup>Basso, Op. cit.

<sup>2</sup>Gramsci, Op. cit., page 60.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid, page 67.



This brings us to a point where it is possible to be more concrete about the concept of a dual power within capitalist society. This dual power rests on the politicization of the qualitative elements of spontaneous and semi-spontaneous reform movements in order to supplant bourgeois consciousness among classes and strata whose interests are not reflected by such a world-view and life-style. This dual power is a composite of revolutionary and mass political organization, of institutions that operate according to a logic and a set of priorities that are hostile to capitalism, and a set of attitudes, a life-style and world-view, that confront bourgeois ideology with a comprehensive alternative. From this base, and the use of the term "base" should not be taken to imply a stable entity, the revolutionary movement can gain leverage with which to undermine and disrupt capitalism in increasingly wider spheres of social life.

At the core of the revolutionary social bloc is the revolutionary vanguard party, the source of a systematic and comprehensive alternative to capitalist civilization. The party is able to create this rival hegemony because it is able to function as the conscious component of the working class, a potential ruling class. A class, that is, whose emergence as an autonomous "class for itself" will imply and entail an entire civilization that is qualitatively distinct from the civilization of United States capitalism.

Around the party as the center, in concentric circles of diminishing coherence, ideologically, and cohesiveness, organizationally, are grouped people, organizations, and even institutions that have either explicitly or implicitly, permanently or temporarily, broken with the assumptions and premises on which the hegemony of capitalism is dependent, or which have been created to oppose this hegemony. This, then, is the dual power. These capitalist assumptions and premises, of course, are not just ideas. They are ideas which, because they are the "ruling ideas", have become a part of a material force manifesting its efficacy in the determination of the form and content of the superstructure of capitalist society, and in its determination of the concrete form of the socio-economic base of capitalist society.

The dual power can become a single institution at a time of revolutionary crisis. This was the situation in revolutionary Russia after the Bolsheviks became the decisive power in the Soviets. In a non-revolutionary situation, however, the more general Gramscian designation of a "revolutionary social bloc" properly indicates the range of organizations and institutions within the framework of the dual power. It is possible to speculate a good deal about the particular organizations and institutions that might constitute the dual power in this country. Some of this I will be doing in the course of the paper, but for the present I would like to defer those points.

#### ANTI-CAPITALIST REFORM STRATEGY

The strategy which flows from this picture, for want of a better designation, I will call an anti-capitalist reform perspective. Such a designation will inevitably lead to misinterpretations from those who are driven to read all kinds of things into isolated words and phrases. All that it necessarily implies or entails is that the proper relationship between revolutionary organizations and reform movements can create an anti-capitalist movement which is conscious of itself and is becoming conscious that while its immediate goal may not be the seizure of state power, that is the ultimate -- and perhaps not so "ultimate", necessity.

This perspective, I would argue, is not just a "sharpening of the conflict" approach, but also is that strategy that will maximize reform victories within the framework of capitalism. This is particularly true in regard to those issue-areas in which needs and grievances that are peculiar and organic to an "advanced" capitalist society are concerned; the needs for time and space, for a "meaning and purpose to life". Finally, this strategy is also designed to build the constellations of organization and popular consciousness that will compose a popular force, willing and able to take revolutionary steps to meet the various crises inherent in capitalist development.

There are a couple of simplistic objections to the perspective that must be pushed aside immediately. An anti-capitalist reform strategy in no way implies that the only relevant issue is "anti-capitalism", that is, socialism. It does not narrow down the participation in reform struggles. Part of my argument has been that socialism is "on the agenda", that it is an immediate issue, but not that it is the immediate issue.



The function of this perspective is to set out some principles which can guide the actions of revolutionaries in the development of political consciousness within reform movements, not to attempt to define a certain minimum level of understanding as a requirement for participation in reform struggles. The real basis of such a charge against the anti-capitalist perspective is a disguised evolutionary reformism. Revolutionaries must always ask themselves two questions with regard to every potential issue of political struggle: first, how can we get participation on this issue; second, what is the way to raise revolutionary class consciousness on this issue? If only the former question is considered, the effect is to liquidate the distinctive role of the revolutionary and, ultimately, to fail to see the need for a revolution. This particular attack on the anti-capitalist reform perspective comes from those who are unable to see beyond the need to mobilize people in reform struggle to the need to get people to transcend this level of organization and consciousness.

Nor does the anti-capitalist reform strategy imply anything about the possibility or probability of a peaceful transition to socialism. It is not based on any reformist notion of state power - though as with most notions, it can be maintained by people who are essentially reformists. The attributes of capitalist power that can be curbed or eliminated within the framework of capitalist property relations are those which stem from its domination of civil society. In no real sense does the undermining of these attributes amount to a nibbling away of ruling class control over the coercive state apparatus, nor is the goal any form of "sharing" of power. This strategy is designed to create the optimal conditions for a struggle for state power, not to be a substitute for such a struggle.

In a sense this perspective is a "decentralization" approach, but not because of any inherent value in decentralization. The strategy emphasizes the development of counter-power at the weak points, the points of stress, of the increasingly concentrated and centralized capitalist system. The focus is on winning bases of power to use in the weakening of the centralized power structure. To accomplish this, the approach must be concretely anti-capitalist. A stress on decentralization which does not at the same time challenge the centralized power of capitalism will become a kind of neighborhood reformism, a non-class communalism which gives people the opportunity to "participate" in their own domination, the chance to administer policies and programs which they do not develop and which are opposed to their interests.<sup>1</sup>

#### Stage Theories

-If we disregard, and we should, the "revolution now" people and the eclectics, there is basically only one alternative to the anti-capitalist reform strategy that is relevant in advanced capitalist countries. This alternative can be described in any number of different ways, but its single unifying feature is that it poses a stage of organized struggle of a distinct character prior to the concerted struggle against capitalism and for socialism.

Of course, if one is an historian, there are any number of distinctive stages of any specific historical process, but we are looking at the problem from the vantage point of revolutionary activists. In this context, a revolutionary may only speak of stages, if it is argued that there is an historically necessary goal of struggle whose attainment is a precondition for the socialist revolution. If such an intermediate strategic goal is posited, then this goal implies an intermediate stage of struggle with distinctive tasks and responsibilities for the revolutionary - separate from the tasks and responsibilities of the revolutionary when socialism is "on the agenda".

There are a number of closely related forms of this stage theory with a number of different names; popular front, people's government, democratic realignment, etc. I would like to clarify the distinctive features of the anti-capitalist reform strategy, indirectly, with a critique of the clearest and most comprehensive of the intermediate stage strategies, the "anti-monopoly coalition" strategy outlined in the draft program documents of the U.S. Communist Party.

<sup>1</sup>The same criticism applies against many of the community control and separatist schemes of black militants and nationalists.



This critique will, I think, illustrate the problems with all stage theory strategies, and will support my conclusion that the only possible revolutionary strategy in an advanced capitalist country is the strategy of anti-capitalist reforms.

First, two clarifying points. An anti-capitalist strategy must not fail to see that contemporary capitalism is state monopoly capitalism. That is, it must be seen that the decisive sector of capital oppresses social classes and strata beyond the working class, creating a broader self-interest base for a movement against monopoly capitalism than that created by capitalism, per se. In this sense, the strategy that I propose is more accurately, if clumsily, called an anti-state monopoly capitalist reform perspective. Second, it should not be concluded that a proponent of the anti-capitalist strategy would regard popular fronts, anti-monopoly coalitions, etc. as improper goals of struggle. They all imply possible tactics, demands, programs, etc., some of which may be very important. But none of them are a necessary and defining stage of a revolutionary strategy, because none of them are intermediate objectives whose attainment in an historic task, necessarily prior to the victory of the revolution.

The Draft Program presents the anti-monopoly coalition as the goal of a stage of "democratic" struggle. The argument begins from a firm base, from the undeniable objective oppression and exploitation of the overwhelming majority of the people by the monopoly section of the capitalist class, and by the political and social institutions in which this section is the dominant power. The next point also follows logically. The spontaneous political actions and movements of the people are almost universally caused by reactions against their experiences with the effects of monopoly capitalism, and thus they are objectively actions and movements against monopoly capitalism. But here the troubles with the position begin.

It is clear that the orientation and consciousness of these spontaneous movements is directed against particular consequences of monopoly capitalism, and not against the system of monopoly capitalism. Then, it is also clear that, far from there being any inherent tendency towards the merger of these movements with each other into a united front against the effects of monopoly capitalism, they remain fragmented and even hostile to each other.

Consider some examples of what are objectively anti-monopoly struggles. (I want to give them in pairs for reasons which will become apparent.) The political movement of the poor for collective services, guaranteed income, welfare rights, etc., grows from the social costs of monopoly production and from monopoly controlled technological change which has created a pool of permanently unemployed. The political movement for tax relief grows from the ability of monopoly to redistribute the national income in its direction through taxation. The movement for more job security develops from increasing insecurity that is a consequence of technological change when it is dominated by the logic of profit maximization. The movement for jobs and community power for black people grows from the peculiar dual oppression and exploitation which is their lot under monopoly capitalism.

These two pairs of reform movements which grow from the same general cause, are, almost everywhere, in opposition to each other. Often this reaches the point where they regard each other, and not monopoly capitalism as they see it, as the real enemy. What is required to unify these spontaneous movements against the effects of contemporary capitalism? Is there any "democratic" basis on which they can be unified, or will unity be impossible on any basis less than that of an understanding of the systematic nature of their own social origins? Less, that is, than an understanding, even if fragmentary and distorted, that monopoly capitalism is a system, and that this system must go?

Certainly, it is significant that at the present time few political activists on the left see any relevance in the concept of an anti-monopoly stage of struggle. The facts are that struggles which may be objectively anti-monopoly have not created even a modern parallel to the old "trust-busting" consciousness, unless it is to be found in the hostility to the tax exempt foundations funded by the big corporations that is exhibited by the constituency of the political right. In fact, the consciousness of most active participants in political struggle contains even less of the popular anti-big business sentiment than is the case for the people generally. This is particularly apparent in the case of the black movement.



The anti-monopoly coalition concept outlined in the C.P. drafts does not handle these kinds of questions in any adequate manner. The assumption throughout is that movements with the same objective roots will tend to unite, and that, once united, they will stay united and will progressively advance in organization and consciousness until they are able to launch an attack on the foundations of capitalist rule. But this is much too pat. It is not a legitimate assumption - it amounts to assuming one's way from a reform movement to a revolutionary movement, and that has never been done successfully yet. There is no reason to believe that such a transition will occur spontaneously, and if some conscious agency is going to play a necessary role, the methods and programs that it will use are vital to the strategy. They must be spelled out so that they may be evaluated. But this is not done.

Even the initial step of the development of a unified movement against the effects of monopoly will not happen easily, but even this first step is not dealt with in the C.P. drafts. There is a reason for the oversight. This minimal unity is inconceivable, except in the context of a definite course of action by revolutionaries. In fact, for it to be possible on any but an accidental basis, the leadership of revolutionaries must begin to supplant that of reformists within the potential constituent movements - that is, these movements must begin to be focused in an anti-capitalist direction. Nothing less is able to counter the ability of modern capitalism to set reform movements which are under reformist leadership against each other.

It is true that in a number of capitalist countries there have been periods of a "popular alliance against monopoly by all who are oppressed and exploited by it."<sup>1</sup> But this has almost always happened in the wake of an internal or an external catastrophe: a coup, a war, the threat of fascism, a major depression, and usually it has been a defensive response to this catastrophe. What kind of a program develops from an alliance made under such conditions of the forces objectively "oppressed and exploited by monopoly? If the coalition is of movements that previously did not understand that the common source of their grievances was monopoly capitalism, how could they be expected, in a period of crisis, to see that monopoly capitalism as a system was responsible for the policies of capitalist reaction; for war, fascism, depression, genocide, etc? Unless we believe in miracles, the program of such an alliance would necessarily be minimal. In one way or another it would be a program for a return to capitalist "normalcy", for a return to bourgeois democracy and capitalist "prosperity". In such a "popular front", the only way to create a durable unity directed against the roots of monopoly power is for revolutionaries to gain hegemony.

However, assume for the purposes of discussion that real progress is possible, notwithstanding the immense difficulties, towards unifying the forces objectively arrayed against the particular effects of monopoly. What will be the organizational character of the unified movement according to this argument:

The Draft states:

"As the concentrated political expression of such an alliance (anti-monopoly), we call for the creation of a new popular party."<sup>2</sup>

Further:

"Such a party, as we envision it, will fight for a program of radical reform, that is, of measures designed to alter class relationships, to make inroads on monopoly power."<sup>3</sup>

The Draft would be better off to leave aside attempting to "envision" a hypothetical party, and to spend some time examining the concrete historical experiences of formations which have no ascertainable substantive difference from the proposed "popular party". I am referring to European social democracy, and, in particular, to the British Labour Party.

<sup>1</sup>C.P. Draft Program (Second), page III-39.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid, page III-39.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid, page III-41.



Can anyone deny that these parties were initially formed by, and still are based on, elements objectively opposed to monopoly capitalism in their respective countries, but that, nevertheless, they have become vital props - in many cases the public administrators - of monopoly capitalism? Obviously, the only protection against this fate would be a revolutionary, that is, an anti-capitalist leadership, of the "popular party". Without any program to combat the reformism within the essential components of the new popular party, the trade union movement and the Black Liberation movement, how is it to avoid the British Labor Party model?

Certainly, "envisioning" that the new party will fight to "alter class relationships" is just that. We have seen an argument for a political party that will be constitutionally unable to do any such thing, except by accident. It takes some "envisioning" to get past that. Isn't it clear that in order to "design" a program to make "inroads on monopoly power" - to "design measures to alter class relationships" - this "power" and these "class relationships" must be understood? And if the issues of class power and class relationships are understood by an anti-monopoly movement, that movement is class conscious. That is, in order for the new popular party to have the prescribed program, the coalition on which it rests must be a class-conscious coalition - it must be an anti-monopoly capitalist coalition and not just a "democratic" coalition against the effects of monopoly. If a program were presented for the attainment of such a coalition, then I would have no argument with this strategic approach, but, as I have shown, no such argument is presented and, in fact, we have no revolutionary strategy at all.

The sequence of developments in the anti-monopoly coalition is all wrong. Unless a mass movement exists whose hegemonic leadership is anti-capitalist, there is no possibility for the creation of a parliamentary party which could have a meaningful program "designed" to alter class relationships. To have a viable anti-capitalist parliamentary party, you must have a corresponding viable anti-capitalist mass movement. Otherwise, the whole thing is a fraud. It is as simple as that. To argue, in essence, that the conscious struggle against capitalism must wait until the attainment of a "vital strategic objective" of the democratic struggle, and then to have this "democratic" goal turn out to be a mass anti-capitalist parliamentary party, which can only come through a conscious struggle against capitalism, is an absurdity of the first water. What I am saying, of course, is that in order to build any meaningful anti-monopoly coalition, it cannot be seen as a democratic stage of struggle needed to create the objective and subjective conditions for a mass assault on the power of capitalism. It must, instead, be put within the framework of an anti-capitalist reform perspective which recognizes no such "necessary stages" or "intermediate goals".

There is a different weakness in this anti-monopoly coalition approach. It is no accident that the concrete form of the anti-monopoly coalition that is proposed is a parliamentary party. The entire approach is heavily biased to parliamentary forms of struggle, despite some rhetorical gestures in the direction of diversification. The actual unification of the anti-monopoly coalition comes through the participation of its major social components in a parliamentary party outside of the two party system. No other organizational form is proposed for the coalition. But parliamentarism is the strong point of the bourgeoisie, and to bias the struggle in this direction is extremely rash. This issue will be considered in detail in a later section of the paper.

Another point that comes to my mind is that the development of a new popular party presupposes a specific critique of the Democratic Party. The development of any such new party is impossible, unless it presents a clear alternative to the Democratic Party, since it is presently the parliamentary home, more or less, of the constituencies that are vital to the new party. Experience has shown that it is difficult to move them out of this framework. But no clear alternative to the Democratic Party exists on the left short of an anti-capitalist alternative. To be plausible, any critiques of the Democratic Party would have to demonstrate the class character of that institution, and no such critique is to be found in the Draft.



The source of the weakness of the anti-monopoly coalition strategy is a combination of economic determinism in theory and reliance on spontaneity in practice. The crux of this weakness, and its consequence as well, is a gross understatement of the role of the revolutionary party. This role is not articulated at all in the Draft, but the implications for it are rather clear. The Draft sees the role of the revolutionary party to be the mobilization and unification of all of the forces objectively aligned against monopoly into a parliamentary party. The entire strategy presented is one designed only to create a new parliamentary party - almost any kind of party might do; a British Labour Party, a Negro-labor-liberal party, etc. However, without a much greater definition of the role of the organization of the revolutionaries, none of this can lead towards the revolution, except accidentally, and most of it will clearly never happen. We can drop the question of whether it should happen for the moment, but that is a question.

#### THE PARTY

The organization of revolutionaries, the party, is the core of the anti-capitalist reform strategy. Without it, the strategy is an impossibility - it becomes meaningless. This follows from the fact that, by themselves, the objective processes that shake the modern capitalist structure, and the spontaneous popular movements which strain its elasticity, will not lead to the overthrow of capitalism. In the anti-capitalist reform perspective, the party organizes and leads movements around reform demands so that they contribute to the formation of a dual power within capitalist society. This involves a constant mass mobilization, a mass mobilization that must be maintained in conditions where the bulk of the working class accepts the central premises of capitalism the bulk of the time. Without the centralized leadership of a revolutionary party, there is no way in which the "intellectual subordination and submission", the "borrowed conception of the world" accepted by the working class, can be effectively challenged. A revolutionary vanguard party is necessary to develop the ideological and organizational terms that can give the spontaneous class struggle coherence and cohesiveness - necessary to translate the objective conflict of interest between social classes and strata into conscious revolutionary struggle.

In this country it is particularly clear that there is such extreme diversity and differentiation within the groups whose material needs and human potentials are thwarted by capitalism that a disciplined and conscious organization is a necessity in order to unify the different levels and kinds of activity and understanding, even on an immediate tactical basis. Consider the difficulties in unifying, for example, the black and the white components of the working class on a tactical basis. In the absence of a vanguard party with hegemony over the left, there will be a chaotic complex of activity cycles in these various sectors with as much likelihood that they will cancel each other out, as that they will eventually converge and merge.

Earlier, I indicated that the issues raised by the "organizer" school of thought had a number of important and valid features. In particular, I think that the elitism in that position is not just an aristocratic conceit. Instead, it has real significance in terms of the immense qualitative difference between the individual with a revolutionary socialist consciousness, whatever his objective class position or background, and the individual who has not yet attained this consciousness. This gulf is widening constantly with the development of the mystificatory aspects of capitalism. False consciousness becomes more pernicious and deforms wider areas of human activity because of the diversification and multiplication of the forms of oppression and alienation which flow from the development of modern capitalism.

What the organizer position failed to do was to outline the internal relationships of the cadre of organizers, and to outline the political relationship of this organization of organizers to the working class, to the development of a revolutionary program, and to itself, as a self-conscious collective organism. That is, the position was never really able to transcend bourgeois individualism.



## Collective

The first prerequisite for party organization is a disciplined collective. The party must be disciplined and centralized, if for no other reason than that its destruction is a primary requirement for the self-preservation of the capitalist class - and it will take steps to preserve itself. A revolutionary party cannot work, indeed, it will have trouble surviving, as a loose federation of individuals. But this internal cohesion cannot be based on a military-administrative discipline. Organizational discipline will only work if it can be internalized, if it is basically self-imposed. This may not be the case in the army, but, for a whole host of reasons, which will be clarified in the course of this section, it is beyond dispute in the revolutionary party.

The party will only gain a truly collective character when it develops a pattern of relationships within the organization based on mutual respect and affection and on a certain basic trust. This combination allows for non-competitive, but critical, consideration of complicated and sticky aspects of practical work and theoretical analysis with the maximum quality of individual participation, and where every participant is confident that decisions, once reached, will be conscientiously implemented even under the most adverse conditions. It is apparent that such relationships must hold, not just at every organizational level of the party, but also between the higher and the lower bodies of the party. People will look with justifiable scepticism at those revolutionaries whose total organizational life-style fails to foreshadow the kind of a society that they project as an alternative to capitalism. Just like devout Christians, members of revolutionary parties are continually judged according to whether they "practive what they preach". Thus participation in the party must also contribute to the creation of free men, conscious autoactive individuals who appear as such in their behavior both inside and outside the party.

Still, it is extremely important that the concept of collectivity and of discipline be seen more broadly than this individual autonomy framework. Freedom has a positive constructive content that must, and, in a sense, can only be, embodied in the party. This involves the ability to act in the light of the knowledge of the consequences of possible alternative actions. A tight-knit collective is a precondition for building the organizational will necessary to outline and implement a revolutionary course of action against a system with the vast hegemonic resources of U.S. captialism. And it is also an invaluable form in which to focus joint resources of education, training, experience, and creative insight to the problem of understanding the consequences of, and alternatives to, any possible course of action.

Only through participation in a counter-hegemonic disciplined collective can individual actions begin to foreshadow a general society in which free men can create and fulfill human potentiality as the end of social existence. The various utopian counter-communities, just because they are "utopian" - whatever their virtues - cannot embody a generalizable alternative to any aspect of capitalism, at least not an alternative which masses of people can identify with as something that is attainable. Individual actions that do not conform to capitalist norms also cannot embody a generalizable alternative to capitalist model of man. They are always susceptible to elitist, or even mystical popular interpretations - things of the "saint-like" man variety.

## Party And Class

Marxists say that the revolutionary collective must be the vanguard party of the working class. This, of course, does not mean that all members of the party must be, or have been workers, or, a fortiori, that they mast be, or have been some particular type of worker - a trade unionist, for example. This position entails reliance on the spontaneous struggle of the working class for the creation of revolutionary consciousness and organization, when the most that this can accomplish in itself is trade union organization, and the development of the "capitalist consciousness of the working class" - trade union consciousness.



Such a position can only be based on mechanical determinism and, in fact, must bring up the very arguments which Lenin polemicized against in What Is To Be Done. Of course, many, probably the majority, of the party members will be workers - after all, the vast majority of the people in this country are workers - but they will only become revolutionaries when they have critically transcended the "working class ideology" which spontaneously develops under capitalism.

Beyond the issue of class origins, all of the members of the party must be intellectuals in the sense that they must be the organizers and articulators of an alternative to capitalist culture and that they must project a program for attaining the social conditions in which the alternative culture of the working class can gain hegemony. The members of the party must be the core of the "organic intellectuals" of the working class. A part of the party's concrete demonstration of its vanguard role consists in its ability to appropriate the best of historically developed intellectual production, its ability to compete with, and defeat on their own terms, the most imposing of the intellectual systems of the bourgeoisie; and its ability to begin the conscious development of an independent and original culture based on the needs evident under capitalism - where the working class is subordinated - and on the potentials open in a society where the working class has power.

It is obvious that this approach differs from all of those conceptions of "working class" culture which find the basic content of a working class ideology in some distillation of the current attitudes and concepts of workers. Lenin had some very explicit things to say on this question.

"Since there can be no talk of an independent ideology being developed by the workers in the process of their movement (trade union spontaneous struggles), then the only choice is either bourgeois ideology or socialist ideology. This does not mean, of course, that the workers have no part in creating such an ideology, but they take part, not as workers, but as socialist theoreticians...and in order that workers may be able to do this more often, efforts must be made to raise the consciousness of workers generally."<sup>1</sup>

When the necessity to "raise the consciousness of workers generally" is subordinated, this can, and usually does, involve the glorification of pragmatic and a-critical materialism, and of the narrow moral ethical and aesthetic norms which working people have not developed independently, but which have been imprinted on their consciousness in a haphazard fashion by virtue of their living in a society where capitalist ideology is the ruling ideology.

If it is true that the working class will never spontaneously develop a consciousness of the need for a revolution, it is all the more true that it will never spontaneously develop an alternative model of civilization with different priorities and values than those of capitalism. How could it be otherwise when the great bulk of the working class implicitly accepts the premises of capitalist hegemony except in situations that are sharp breaks with the "normal" patterns of class behavior?

The idea that the party is the vanguard of the working class does not involve any kind of cult of the worker, or any mechanical conception of the relationship of class position to political consciousness, but it does have a meaning that goes beyond the question merely of whether people who happen to call themselves revolutionaries are providing the effective operative leadership for the politically active sections of the working class. In order to play its revolutionary historical role, the working class must be conscious of itself as a potential ruling class. The dialectical relationship between the party and the class is central to the development of this consciousness of class autonomy, and thus to the development of a mass revolutionary movement. The essential feature of the vanguard role is the capacity of the party to act as that component of the entire working class which is constantly conscious of its potential to become a ruling class, and which, because of this, is able to direct its activities in such a way as to prevent the day to day reform struggle from being absorbed and contained within contemporary capitalism.

<sup>1</sup>Lenin, Op. cit., page 41.



The link between the party and the working class does not entail the gradual merging of the former with the latter as historical development creates conditions in which the main contradiction becomes "simple". Instead, it is the condition for finding and using the practical handles on the overdetermined main contradiction through which the entire class can be led to act in a unified way - in its own name and in its own interests.

How does this work? In the first place, the problems which the vanguard must "solve" - must resolve in a practical-critical activist way - flow from the circumstances in which the working class exists and develops in contemporary capitalist society. As Lenin argued, the fact that these circumstances have led to mass political movements and struggles does not end this responsibility. In fact, it makes it more urgent.

"...the mass movement sets before us new theoretical, organizational and political tasks, far more complicated than those which might have satisfied us in the period before the rising of the mass movement...the mass movement (has not) relieved us of clearly appreciating and fulfilling the tasks it sets before us."<sup>1</sup>

Then, as the party implements the programs that it develops in response to these new circumstances, in the degree to which they are valid programs, the result in the words of Gramsci is to:

"...raise the intellectual level of ever-widening strata of the people, giving personality to the amorphous elements of the masses, which means working to produce cadres of intellectuals of a new type who arise directly from the masses though remaining in contact with them."<sup>2</sup>

This is the other side of the link between the party and the class. The party not only discovers in the actual conditions of class existence the problems to which it must address itself politically, it also functions to give "personality" and individuality - political and class consciousness, and a culture in harmony with actual class interests - to the subordinated mass of working people. In this process the party recreates and broadens its own base and membership.

The party, then, is organically, not mechanically, related to the working class and to its own program for a revolutionary transformation of the society. The following quote from Gramsci, relative to a more limited situation (explaining the use of the hypothetical "if") puts this relationship very well.

"On the other hand, organism of thought and cultural solidarity could only have been brought about if there had existed between the intellectuals and the simple people that unity which there should have been between theory and practice: if, that is, the intellectuals had been organically the intellectuals of those masses, if they had elaborated and made coherent the principles and problems which those masses posed by their practical activity, in this way constituting a cultural and social bloc."<sup>3</sup>

What we are saying is that the party is the necessary base for a synthesis of theory and practice into a revolutionary praxis. That is, in the absence of the party, a practical - an activist - resolution of the reform-revolution dilemma will be impossible. In its absence, the left is destined to be plagued with misconceptions about the relationship of the revolutionary to his constituency going in the polar directions of reliance on spontaneity or manipulative sectarianism. At the same time, the other side of these misconceptions, the tendency to artificially make priorities between theory and practice where one or the other becomes the "most important" will be difficult to resolve practically except in the context of a revolutionary program.

#### "Science" and the Party

A common weakness of Marxists and Marxist parties, but not of Marx or Marxism, has been the adoption of a mechanical determinist posture in order to justify the claim that Marxist parties operate "scientifically".

<sup>1</sup>Lenin, Op. cit., page 46.

<sup>2</sup>Gramsci, Op. cit., page 73.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid, page 64.



This leads to the presentation of so-called "laws" of social development, that are assumed to operate in a fashion parallel to that of the physical laws governing the behavior of inanimate matter. Thus the growth of capitalism and its decline are presented as rigidly predetermined by an internal necessity inherent in capitalist property relations and independent of human action and human will. This is another variety of the Hegelian historical mysticism that we have encountered at a number of other points in this paper. From the point of view of the party, the "science" gives it the tools to be able to apply its understanding of the "laws of social development" to concrete social phenomena. This, then, gives the party the key to the truth about capitalism. The Marxist party can "predict" the future course of social development. Marxists do then, despite Engels, have "history in their pockets" as the answer to a "simple equation of the first degree".

Such claims give the various critics of Marxism lots of chuckles. They argue, quite logically, that there is a basic inconsistency between the assertion that the shape of the future is already determined, and the constant exhortation to people to work harder or in a different manner to change their conditions of existence. What can this be but an attempt to guarantee that the future comes out as it is "scientifically" predicted that it must? We must be clear on this point. Either there are "laws" which determine the way people must act, and thus the future, or there are "laws" which determine the ways people can act, but the future rests on the content and direction of actual human action. If the former, then a proper analysis of society can enable the party to "foresee" the future, but, since the positive significance of human action is denied effectively, the party, itself, is historically unnecessary. One wise man could fill the oracle role as well as a party. If, however, the latter position is adopted, we must drop all pretensions that the party can possess the truth and can operate scientifically, *a priori*. The party must demonstrate these capacities through the implementation of a revolutionary program.

It is true that there is a basic structure of society which develops according to understandable and predictable patterns. Because he analyzed this structure correctly, Marx was able to predict the development of capitalism entailed the development of monopoly capitalism. The further clarification of this structure; and of the phenomena which it underlies, is parallel to the further clarification of natural phenomena. It can be scientific in the same sense that the natural sciences are scientific, although the variables are much more complex, and the danger of the investigator becoming an influence on what he is investigating is much greater.

However, the most that such an analysis can do, although that is no small accomplishment, is to provide an understanding of those historical changes which can, and those which cannot, take place, not those which will, and those which will not, take place. Rather than making it possible to "predict" the future in any concrete sense such an analysis can give a clearer appreciation of the various different kinds of futures which human action can create. It can provide a basis on which to:

"...predict whether there exist in the society the necessary and sufficient conditions for its (society's) transformation...(to determine) the reality and attainability of the different ideologies which have come into existence on the basis of the contradictions which it has generated in the course of its development."<sup>1</sup>

What can be predicted, more or less accurately, are the circumstances within which real men must, and will, make their own history.

The necessity still remains, however, for the development of the political program which can create the people and the organizations, the understanding and the will, that is sufficient to materialize an ideology which social development makes objectively possible as the real world-view and life-style of a defined autonomous working class social bloc. It is on this collective historical project that the shape of the future depends, and it is rash to regard its success as somehow fore-ordained by "laws of social development". But this is exactly what those people who claim that socialism is "inevitable", tend, inevitably, to do.

<sup>1</sup>Ibid, page 169.



## Historical Experimenter

There is another context in which the party, if it is working properly, can be called scientific. Depending on one's point of reference, this can be seen as either a down-grading or an up-grading of the conception of the revolutionary party. I think the latter. But first, since the party, no more than any human organization, is not a self-regulating mechanism, and can fail to do what it has the potential of doing, I want to spend a little more time on the definition of the conditions for the proper functioning of the party.

Lenin, the initial and basic theorist of the revolutionary party, sets extremely high standards for the operation of the party and of its individual members as the following selection from What Is To Be Done demonstrates:

"In order to become a Social Democrat, a working man must have a clear picture in his mind of the economic nature and social and political features of the landlord, of the priest, of the high state official, and of the peasant, of the students, of the tramp, he must know their strong and weak sides; he must understand all of the catchwords and sophisms by which each class and stratum camouflages its egotistical strivings and its real "nature", he must understand what certain institutions and certain laws reflect and how they are reflected."<sup>1</sup>

Since such a "clear picture" cannot be obtained solely through involvement in struggle, it must have been clarified by a conscious ideological grouping. And, since, as Lenin emphasizes, this picture comes not from a solely intellectual process, not just from "books", but from the "experience of political life", this grouping - the party - must be more than a collection of wise men. It must have a political program and a political will developed in the course of a struggle against capitalism. I am arguing that the development of this program and this will is accomplished in a manner that is essentially "scientific" - that it is accomplished through the party acting, in Gramsci's term, as a collective historical experimenter, and through its conscious development and implementation of its own collective projects.

The party as a collective organism is potentially able to function scientifically in the same way as does the natural scientist. In a general sense, the goals, humanizing the natural or the social environment, and the methods, testing alternative hypotheses in a conscious practical-critical way, are parallel. But while the experimental scientist has a more or less controlled arena in which to work, the whole of capitalist society is the laboratory for the revolutionary party, and its ability to isolate the variables is extremely limited. This, however, doesn't negate the potentially scientific character of the party, it just makes deviations from it more difficult to avoid. The scientific element, to repeat, lies in the mode of operation of the party - it lies in the way in which it proves out its theories, rather than in some inherent truth in these theories. It lies in its ability to set, act out, and evaluate its own collective project.

This brings us back to the previous discussion of the party as a conscious collective organism. Its collective character is what creates the possibility of the party acting scientifically: If the party is to project the proper programs of struggle against the system, it must have the organic connection with the content of exploitation, oppression, and alienation as it is experienced in the daily life of the working people. It is a cliché that a fundamental problem for all sciences is to ask the proper questions. The "proper questions" for the historical experimenter are posed by the real conditions of working class life under capitalism. If it is isolated from these realities in any way, the party is immediately in trouble.

Alternative programs of struggle are parallel to alternative hypotheses of an experimental scientist, and, as is true in that case as well, to be functional, they must be seen as hypotheses, that is, they must be conceived, developed, implemented, and evaluated in a rational, analytical, non-dogmatic intellectual and organizational context.

<sup>1</sup>Lenin, Op. cit., page 68.



To do this job, the functional component of the party mentioned in the earlier Gramsci quote, the "cadre of intellectuals of a new type who arise directly from the masses though remaining in contact with them", is vital. This cadre is the bond between the articulation of a revolutionary program and its implementation and evaluation. Without it, the implementation of program and policy becomes a social engineering process, unable to lift people out of subordination to values and norms borrowed from the bourgeoisie, unable to lead people to challenge and undermine the hegemony of capital, and through this, to enter into creative participation in making the revolution. And, since the only criterion of truth or validity relevant to the elements of the revolutionary program, is their relative ability to make people class conscious and revolutionary, without this bond between the working class and the party that is provided by the "intellectuals of a new type", there is no way to judge the validity of various alternative programs. This discussion of the scientific character of the party - what it is, and what it is not - also leads back to a point made in an earlier part of this section. That is, the point that participation in the party must create "free men" who can foreshadow in their life-style the society that they project as an alternative to capitalism. One of the forms of alienation most damaging to the individual personality, a form which follows from the character of "work" under capitalism, is the increasing difficulty for an individual to set his own goals, create his own alternatives, and then create his own project for realizing them. Increasingly, these possibilities are restricted to the extraordinary individual and the extraordinary situation, and increasingly, the acts of decision are separated in time, space and dramatic personel, from the acts of implementation.

The party as a collective organism is able to reunify these acts and transcend this form of alienation within the framework of capitalism. And it can do this in non-trivial areas. Participation in the party contains the potential of allowing people to consciously and collectively create the future. It provides the essential feature of freedom, the ability to act in the light of knowledge.

#### One Problem

One final question must be considered. The experimental scientist must always have the option within the framework of his discipline, to reject, if only for purposes of self-clarification, the basic assumptions and premises of his discipline. Does the same option exist within the party, and, if it does, how may it be exercised without disrupting the ability of the party to function in an unified, disciplined way as the collective will of a potential ruling class?

On the one hand, it is evident that the party, and its individual members, have the right and indeed the duty to constantly examine and re-examine the basic premises and goals of the party, within, of course, the struggle for the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism. If this is not allowed, it will not be possible to develop such crucial new insights as Lenin's concept of the possibility of the seizure of state power at the "weakest link" of international capitalism, not at its points of highest development, was crucial and new half a century ago. But, on the other hand, consider the problems if such an option is allowed, when a condition for the party to operate properly is that its programs be fully implemented, since there is no possibility of determining if they are right or wrong unless they are fully implemented.

There is no pat resolution of this contradiction. But to recognize that it is a real contradiction is a major step in itself. In general, it can be said that the party needs to be very precise about which questions are policy questions, and which involve underlying theoretical issues. Thus the party should demand a disciplined implementation of a trade union or an electoral policy once it is established (subject to the normal organized review). This demand should extend to all members, including those who disagree with the policy and those who carry their disagreement to differences over the theoretical conception of the role and nature of the trade union or of capitalist parliamentarism. But at the same time, debate and discussion must always be in order on these more basic questions. To suggest that a "party line" could even conceivably exist on them is Stalinism, and Stalinism is a perversion of both Marxism and of science.



This argument holds even more strongly on those theoretical issues of over-riding strategic importance; the nature of contemporary capitalism, the relationship between reform and revolution, etc. These issues must always be under discussion and review, or the internal life of the party will atrophy, and it will be unable to perform any of its necessary functions. Will this freedom create dangers of undermining the implementation of agreed upon program? Of course it will, every realist must accept that. Certainly, it will create problems, but only death will free us from them, and the problems of failing to allow, and even to promote, this kind of discussion are much more ominous for a party.

The party will have to live with this contradiction, but then capitalism has lived with its grave-diggers for some 400 years. All this really means is that party members will have to understand the reasons for a disciplined organization, in terms of a basic understanding of how the party must operate, if it is to be a functioning party. Administratively imposed obedience justified by such clichés as, "If everyone raised such questions in such a way, the party couldn't function", is no substitute for this understanding. In the absence of such a proper basis for organizational discipline, the likelihood is that people will find it difficult to think and act creatively within the party, and, therefore, the party will be unable to function as the conscious component of a potential ruling class - the working class - and nothing will work worth a damn.

## STRATEGY

### INTRODUCTION

The previous sections have spent a great deal of time on the issue of mass political and cultural consciousness. But there has been a basic weakness in my treatment of this phenomena that I want to indicate and do something about in this final section. Popular consciousness has been treated in a static way, functionally, and not as an historically developed empirical reality.

It is valid and necessary to say that the popular political consciousness of the working class in the United States is basically a false consciousness, and to keep the explanations of the exceptions within the framework of the explanation of this general truth. But what this amounts to is a statement about the functional relationship between class position and class interest and class political consciousness. It does not point out specifically what is "false" and why, and what is not "false" and why. It does not point out what is healthy and what is not, what is anachronistic and what is not. It does not tell us about the content, as opposed to the social role of the false consciousness. It does not point out concrete causes, and thus it does not clarify concrete solutions.

I have said a number of times in the course of this paper that the United States working class acquiesces in capitalism - that most people, explicitly or implicitly, except in extraordinary situations, act according to principles, priorities, and premises that derive from the requirements of capitalism as a social system. But this tells us how the historical experience of the class is interpreted or misinterpreted, it does not tell us anything clear about the object of that experience. To repeat, it says about how experience is sorted out and evaluated, than about what that experience is.

The United States working class has some particular historical experience that, within the framework of the conflict between the alternative hegemonies of the working class and the bourgeoisie, creates some particular obstacles and possibilities for the development of a revolutionary strategy and the practical programs relevant to such a strategy. Consider some examples of these fundamental class experiences: The major section of the U.S. working class - excluding the black and brown component - has just experienced thirty years of capitalist "affluence". This has been a period of unprecedentedly rapid development of bureaucracy, particularly military and para-military-based bureaucracy, with a consequent widening and deepening of the phenomena of alienation. The working class has experienced a massive technological revolution which is constantly and rapidly changing the very meaning of work.



The U.S. working class has never developed an independent parliamentary political party in which it was the decisive force. This has been an important historical reason for the peculiar experience of the class with a government structure which constantly grows more remote from the electorate, but which contains the latent disaffection through an extraordinarily flexible parliamentary apparatus. Finally, the workers in this country have a concrete experience over the past few decades with a class organization, the trade union, that lacks a class ideology - an organization which can lead very militant struggles, but not in any clear political direction.

In this final section, I want to relate some of these areas of historical class experience - and some of the others which have been mentioned previously - to the strategy whose framework is already apparent in order to put some more programmatic substance into it. Most of what I intend to cover can be put within one of two general categories, based on the two distinctive manifestations of the overdetermined main contradiction mentioned in an earlier section of the paper.

The categories which I intend to use are those of the capitalist work process and of the capitalist parliamentary political process. These categories are not ideal. Some of the basic historical experiences of the U.S. working class fit well in neither, even with the very loose interpretation of the scope of the categories which I have. But that is a necessary limitation of a preliminary treatment of the subjects involved, and there is a reason for using these categories, instead of treating these subjects in a completely topical way. I want to keep the treatment close to what I believe to be basic internal contradictions in the system. These contradictions, to repeat, are between the increasingly social character of production and the increasing objective proletarianization of the people and the anti-social content and direction of production under the hegemony of capital; and between the needs of the ruling class, where there is an increasingly narrow objective base for private property, to rule firmly - with a plan - but to rule legitimately also - with at least the facade of popular sanction.

These are not clearly separated categories. There is a good deal of overlap and interpenetration. Beyond this, it is apparent as well that this is no traditional separation between economic and political, between base and superstructure. Both categories are essentially political, and both involve an understanding of the entire structure of capitalist society. They are different arenas in which the reality of the existence and the exercise of class power is manifested and in which it is mystified and distorted.

My primary intention is to clarify the relevant issues of power and the transfer of power in each category and to relate this to the historical experience which people have gained from their working and their political relationships in this country. The programmatic stress will be on the ways in which it is possible to demystify the questions of power; and these two categories are also helpful in that regard because they revolve around the areas where social processes appear to have taken on an independent life and logic of their own - the reified market and government institutional structures - a life and logic which appear to be necessary and just, and against which human action is impotent.

I would like to make one last introductory clarification. The material available in this section is potentially as rich and varied as politics itself. The particular examples and illustrations that I use are just that - examples and illustrations. In no sense should they be taken to exclude other possible tactics and actions unless that point is explicitly made. I would also not like to have the particular examples that I am going to use taken to imply tactical and programmatic priorities. To some extent, it will be apparent, they do imply such priorities, but there is too much left to be said and done in these areas for such value judgements to be offered in any but the most tentative spirit, and that is how they should be taken.

#### WORK PROCESS

An encompassing strategy relevant to the contemporary capitalist work process must be based on the contradiction between the technological and human potential of social production and the actual content and direction of social production under the hegemony of contemporary U.S. capitalism.



Implementation of this strategy in the work process situation requires a variety of new political forms and formations - new to this country at least. These forms are necessary to facilitate the articulation of needs and grievances created at the point of production in order to help project a categorical and qualitative alternative to capitalist production, and in order for the most rapid growth in the participation and consciousness developed around the issues of the work process. That is, we are talking about political forms which can be the framework of a movement that is able to fight for a different power relationship at the point of production. But before we can get meaningfully into such questions, an examination of the existing economic organization of the working class - the trade union - is in order.

### Trade Union

Contemporary capitalism changes both the environment in which the trade union operates and the content of its social function. In the state monopoly phase of capitalism, opportunism and class collaboration in the working class take on a distinctive character and importance. They become inter-twined with trade union structures and attitudes in a manner that makes the trade union an increasingly important objective and subjective base of support for a capitalism that has lost its "natural" base of support.

Though there has always been a great deal of reluctance to accept the fact among some left circles in this country, trade unions have, and have always had, a dual role in capitalist society. On the one hand, they are the organized agency of the working class in obtaining "better terms in the sale of its labor power" - in the initiation and implementation of class struggles in which the conditions for the development of revolutionary class consciousness are developed. On the other hand, they serve to integrate the class struggle within the framework of capitalism. They help to provide a disciplined and stable work force and, in this country, they help to enforce the labor contract on the workers, the contract whose very essence involves the worker's de jure acceptance of private property in the means of production, his acceptance of capitalist relations of production. Thus, at best, the spontaneous trade union struggle leads to an enclave of unstable autonomy for the organized sections of the working class. An enclave that is subordinate to the "criteria of rationality and practicability"<sup>1</sup> compatible with the preservation of the system. If the labor movement begins to challenge these criteria, even this limited area of autonomy is placed in immediate jeopardy.

The institutionalization and legitimization of the "rights of labor" tenuous as these "rights" often turn out to be when they are exercised, create a vital objectified base for false consciousness in the working class. This process creates the material foundation for the difficulty workers and, particularly, their trade union leaders have in seeing the possibility and necessity of an entirely different social order - for their inability to see class organization in any way except in the context of the trade union as another "interest group" within the framework of a capitalist society.

In Great Britain, an example of this contradictory role of the trade union organization, and the particular character which it assumes within the framework of state monopoly capitalism, is evident in a "Labour Government" based on organized trade membership in the Labour Party, which implements economic policies against which massive and militant trade union struggles are waged. In the U.S., the dualism is not quite so apparent, but it is there, for example, in the political dependence of labor on the capitalist two-party system, and it is functionally equivalent in its consequences to the parliamentary reformism of the British trade union movement, if it is not even more damaging to the development of a revolutionary movement - or even, for that matter, of an effective reform movement.

<sup>1</sup>Andre Gorz, Strategy For Labor, page 7. This point and many others in this section, including the concept of "social costs" are taken from this extremely valuable essay of Gorz.



The various changes in the form and content of U.S. capitalism have produced changes in the function and character of trade union organization. In the first place, the wage struggle has been put in a new context. The control of the dominant sections of capital over the fiscal and monetary policies of the government, over the direct economic role of the government (military production), and over the government attitude towards collective bargaining (incomes policies, wage guidelines, etc.) has given them a number of levers with which to influence the collective bargaining process from the outside. In this way, apparent trade union gains through collective bargaining can be quickly turned to dust through the combinations of controlled inflation, regressive taxation, and the direct subsidization of capital.

Perhaps as important, these additional levers give the ruling class much more ability to obscure the common interest of the entire working class in a given trade union struggle. In fact, the popular impression can be created with relative ease that trade union gains are against the general interest of the people. These all are processes against which traditional trade union patterns of behavior are, at best, impotent, and at worst, a distinct liability. Assumption of an interest group stance has its own particular drawbacks, even from a reformist perspective. This is one of them.

The dominant response of the trade union movement to these circumstances has been the adoption of an increasingly corporative, a non-class, approach. This has a number of aspects. The most straightforward is the sacrifice of all other considerations for the immediate, usually the narrowly economic, interests of the present work force. The concept of an injury to one worker being an injury to all workers is very seldom operative in the present U.S. labor movement. Beyond this response, for which the examples are too numerous to require any citations - in fact I would be hard pressed to cite any examples of any other approach in recent years. The class position has been abandoned in another general way. Recently, there have been a whole variety of collective bargaining agreements which give the union the illusion of gain in exchange for an erosion of its organizational independence. These agreements range from profit-sharing plans, to joint employer-union pension funds, to time-off insurance, to automation agreements. Their common character is that they allow the union to participate as a junior partner in the implementation of decisions in which they have no real voice; and they "give" the union the "right" to assume some of the responsibilities towards the workers which should remain with the employer. These agreements, of course, are examples of some of the fraudulent "power" concessions which were mentioned earlier.

On a different level, the corporative spirit and style within the labor movement is manifested in trade union political action that works in harmony with the lobbying pressures of the firms in their industry and, quite often, in antagonism to the interests of the working class and the people as a whole. It is commonplace to find, for example, the IBEW working against public power; the Pulpworkers arguing for a go-slow policy on pollution control legislation, and the Building Trades arguing for a "better business climate" to stimulate new construction. Or one may find the Teamsters working for lower freight tariffs for the trucking firms, and the NMU arguing before Congressional Committees that U.S.-owned and operated ships and U.S. seamen would be more dependable supporters of this country's imperialist involvement in Vietnam, than cheaper foreign operators.

There are reasons for these developments that go beyond the fact of the direct and indirect bribery and corruption of the trade union leadership and much of its bureaucratic structure by their relative affluence and relative privilege which the dominant position of U.S. imperialism has made possible. The growing concentration of the economic and political power of capital entails an increasing size of the primary collective bargaining units of labor or the union will be totally at the mercy of the management. But this process also feeds the institutionalization of the trade union movement - the development of a top-heavy bureaucracy in which great power is concentrated in the hands of a few officers and administrators who grow progressively more isolated and estranged from their union rank and file, while the character of the work and life patterns into which they are fitted becomes more and more similar to that of the leadership of the great corporations.



They can easily grow to "talk the same language" as the corporate elite, while the language used by the worker at the point of production becomes a ritualized rhetoric used only for ceremonial or public relations purposes, at conventions, press conferences, and in other places where the "tough labor leader" image serves some function.

Such a union leadership structure and style does not see the dangers inherent in the trend towards long-term contracts with no-strike clauses and their inevitable result, the emasculation of grievance procedures at the shop level. In fact, the union bureaucracy has its own different interests on this point. It favors long contracts, because they stretch out the period between the times when they will have to justify themselves to the union membership. In this process, the issues of industrial democracy which, as opposed to those of wages and fringe benefits, are primarily local and particular, are certain to get lost. They cannot possibly receive the proper attention from a union leadership that is not under the direct pressure of the workers on the job and that is many years removed from the work process, if they have ever worked in their industry - consider the examples of ex-Steelworker President McDonald and of many of the research and education people on union staffs, for example. Their distance from the rank and file and the narrow and parochial careerism of much of the present labor leadership, causes them to view with suspicion and hostility any actual development of on-the-job union participation and leadership. Such developments have the potential of upsetting some good things and might become a threat both to the serenity of their jobs and to their continued possession of their jobs.

Not only is there a tremendous possibility for overt corruption in this kind of a situation, it is inherently corrupt. What happens is that the union, instead of being the instrument of the workers in the day to day struggle against the employer, becomes a buffer between the workers and the employer that absorbs the sharpness of the class contradictions. More and more workers are coming to experience collective bargaining, in particular, and trade unionism, in general, as a process of bargaining and negotiating with their own union leadership who regard themselves as "the union", and who undertake to discover and present to the workers what the employer will accept - what is "realistic" - not to fight for what the workers demand and need. The same thing happens in the sphere of political action as well as in collective bargaining. Then, it takes the form of the union leadership presenting a program to its membership which is based on what is "politically possible" in a ruling class dominated political framework, not of fighting for what is politically necessary to meet the immediate needs of the workers.

It is this process of the alienation of the union structure from the union's actual and potential membership, which is the underlying cause of the passivity or hostility of many workers towards the union. For young workers and black and brown workers, particularly, their understanding of their collective experience of the past few decades does not lead them to see the union as their instrument through which they can act out their politics.

### Trade Union Revitalization

If this has become the functional character of trade unionism in this country, then two things are required of the left. First, there must be a critical re-examination of the traditional left priority in the United States on the role of the trade union movement in a revolutionary strategy; second, a program must be projected for "revitalizing" the trade union movement so that it is actually able to fulfill its potential role.

It has become almost an article of faith in sections of the left that the organization of the working class into trade unions in "advanced" capitalist countries is an historical pre-requisite for socialism. In fact, whenever one speaks of "organizing" workers, the usual assumption is that the reference is to organizing them into trade unions. Of course, this position is never put in terms of the labor movement as it is now, but in terms of a labor movement that has become a "movement" again. The amount of reform and renewal that is needed to achieve this transformation varies depending on how critical one is of the present form and content of trade union organization. The extreme version of this position is that left leadership of the labor movement is the "necessary and sufficient" condition for socialism.



But it is a real question whether the trade union is some kind of building block which must necessarily be the basic unit of class organization. If this position is taken, it becomes extremely difficult to make the necessary critique of the trade union as a concrete insitutional form within contemporary capitalist society, a critique that is distinct from criticisms of the present leadership and policies of the trade unions. In fact, such a position is a variant of syndicalism. It presses functions on the trade union that it is unable to fulfill, and in the process damages its ability to fulfill its proper, more limited, functions. Is this not what happens, for example, when the trade union, as such, is seen as the basic component of a parliamentary party?

This kind of syndicalism is a major danger, not only explicitly in its approach to the trade union movement, but, implicitly, in its tendency to evaluate every other phenomena in terms of the trade union as a basic point of reference. For example, the working class character of any political formation cannot be determined solely with reference to the attitude and the involvement of any section of the trade union movement within it. This neo-syndicalism, of course, is a variant of economism, and if economism was an error of serious proportions in an earlier stage of capitalist development, now, for revolutionaries, it has become an error of criminal proportions.

The point is not that it is not necessary to organize the working class, but that class organization is much more than trade union organization. Class organization must be seen as encompassing trade unions, organizational forms within trade unions, and organizational forms separate and distinct from the trade unions. In fact, the initial steps towards the revitalization of the existing trade unions will only take place, if there is a conscious programmatic approach towards building organizational instrumentalities independent of the trade union structure to do the revitalizing.

The spontaneous response to the bureaucritization of the trade union movement described earlier has been the development of rank and file movements and organizations. These have developed around almost every major strike struggle of any duration, either as a form of organized criticism of the way the strike was being handled, or, more specifically, in order to focus some power on particular local grievances. The issue around which they often crystallize is the demand for some degree of local autonomy in the use of the strike weapon in order to handle the power issues at the point of production.

Although such rank and file formations are extremely important in helping to broaden the challenge to capitalist power over the production process, as well as in their effect on the trade union structure, in themselves, they are insufficient to do either task adequately. In recent years many such formations have developed spontaneously, but very few of these have been able to sustain themselves, except as an anti-leadership caucus within the existing trade union framework. Not that there is anything wrong with such inner-union struggle, it is good and healthy, but it is not sufficient. The cynicism and passivity of workers, particularly young and black workers, extends to the union structure, not just to its leadership. For rank and file groups to maintain the participation and allegiance of such people, and to surmount their cynicism about trade unionism, a continuing program of job action, not just inner-union maneuvering and resolution passing, must be sustained. This is very difficult, not just because of the inherent problems and dangers in it, but because the initial antagonist of the rank and file movement even in the so-called progressive unions, will be the bulk of the official union leadership. This creates great pressure to forget the employer and concentrate on an inner organizational struggle. This is a pressure which the workers in the rank and file movements, many of whom are often new and inexperienced in such matters, have trouble understanding and resisting.

What are some of the opportunities to add the necessary ingredients to these rank and file movements that will enable them to both expand and extend the class struggle, and to permanently revitalize the trade union movement? The answer to this question will determine the programmatic approach of the left towards the trade union movement, and, beyond this, towards the entire area of working class organization.



The left, of course, must develop its approach to the trade union within the context of its approach to the working class. It must not get stuck so that it is approaching the workers on the job through the medium of that fraction of the workers who have developed the habit of hanging around the union hall. It is not necessarily true - and in an increasing number of cases it is definitely false - that the active union members are the core around which the left's program at the point of production must revolve. A number of left people have come to see revitalization as a purely quantitative thing, as the process of getting more people to participate in their union. But it must also be a qualitative process, a transformation of the content of the union. It is not right, for example, to see a black caucus or a youth caucus as a means of getting black or young workers to participate in the union as it is. These must be a means to the transformation of the unions.

Look at the problem this way. In most organized industries, the combination of militant trade union struggles in the past and the system's ability to make differential concessions, both economic and status concessions, at the points of greatest pressure, have created a relatively privileged stratum of workers. These workers, while they may be very militant on trade union issues, tend to be opportunistic or even reactionary on general class questions. Such workers, for a number of rather apparent reasons, play a disproportionately large role in the trade union. If rank and file organization amounts only to factional groupings within this stratum for purposes of trade union politics, or if the rank and file organization has no goals other than to get new forces to participate in a framework and style determined by such stratum, then it will have only limited and temporary results.

This is not a new problem for the left. It is much the same problem as the one addressed by Lenin during the period of the disintegration of the class position of the Second International. There was a clear programmatic response for the left indicated then, and I think, that it is still the proper response in terms of developing a revolutionary class perspective and movement. Revolutionaries must "go deeper among the masses". They must concentrate their work among the most oppressed and the most exploited workers in every given area - and they must choose their areas of concentration according to the objective and subjective possibilities for the development of class consciousness.

It is possible in advance to point out two general features of most of the workers in such areas of concentration - they are more likely to be young, and they are more likely to be black or brown. I would argue that, for a number of reasons, the left approach to the development of rank and file organization should be basically an approach to the development of organizations in which black and young workers play the dominant and decisive roles; that is, organizations which rest on the very workers who are most likely to be spontaneously anti-union.

In the introduction to this section, I mentioned a number of the basic features of the historical experience of the U.S. working class. Young workers have a particular relationship to this body of experience. It is the source of the organizing potential among them, not only inherent revolutionary attributes of "youth". Older workers relate their consciousness of U.S. "affluence" to their memories of the depression, but younger workers have no such experience and are much more likely to be motivated by the particular kinds of needs and grievances that have been created by this deformed "affluence". Older workers are likely to identify the militarization and bureaucratization of the society with relatively full employment, but younger workers have had the immediate experience with the draft, the army, the war in Vietnam, and with the repressive educational structure. Older workers in organized industries have sufficient seniority so that they are not immediately hit by automation, but their sons tend to be, particularly if they happen to be black. The whole phenomena of alienation - the development of a more or less distinct youth sub-culture - affects youth who work as well as students, although the manifestations take somewhat different forms. All of these factors make it easier for the young workers to identify their interests with a comprehensive alternative to capitalist civilization that is relevant to the issues of power at the point of production.



The unique position of the black worker, as has been said, makes it easier for him to appreciate the systematic character of his oppression and exploitation, and easier for him to see the possibility and necessity of a comprehensive counter-program to change his situation. Since black people are oppressed in very clear ways in their communities - where they live - the artificial separation between the worker and the taxpayer - consumer, which supports the narrow guild mentality among white workers, is much less of a factor with black workers. This removes one obstacle to the ability of black workers to appreciate the necessity for a confrontation with the ruling class that represents the interests of the class and of black people as a whole, and not just small components of these categories. Black workers are much less susceptible, then, to the corporative style and mentality. In the same way as is true with young workers, the black worker orients towards the class experiences of the past decades differently than most workers. "Affluence" for him has meant a steadily worsening relative position economically, and an increasingly possibility, whether he is in the rural South or in the urban North, of finding himself permanently outside of the production process. Finally the world revolutionary movement, particularly among people of color, has been a special influence on black workers, again, especially the younger ones, making them more open to a revolutionary approach than are the workers generally.

In general, both the black and the young workers have some characteristics of a latent counter-hegemonic consciousness, some special abilities to transcend capitalist false consciousness. The point is to utilize these potentials to build working class organization which, not only can begin to mount a constant and organized collective confrontation with the ruling class, beginning at the point of production and extending to every political arena, but which can do this so it provides an alternative style and content for the trade union movement to that of the collaborationist parliamentary orientation of the present leadership. This is the way, not only to the revitalization of the trade union movement, but to the extension of trade union organization into unorganized areas, and to the spinning off of other complementary and harmonious organizational forms in the work process.

#### Anti-capitalist Issues

Only a class conscious revolutionary organization is able to develop a comprehensive alternative to capitalist civilization that is relevant to the issues of power at the point of production - that is able to challenge and undermine the power of capital over the process of production in a way that makes sense to the people who work for a living. And without such an alternative it is very difficult to sustain a struggle against capitalist priorities and values as they are manifested in the work process.

What are some of the programmatic aspects of such an alternative?

Capitalist production separates the decisions which set the conditions and the objectives of social production from the act of producing itself. Workers, and trade union organizations in particular, are excluded from any real power over these former decisions. In fact, they often do not even realize that such decisions can be, and are being, made by the ruling class. As was said earlier workers, usually through their trade unions, are sometimes "given" power to share in the implementation of such decisions, but this power does not extend to a sharing in the initial determination of the decisions - nor can it, within the framework of capitalist property relations. The union may win some concessions, for example, about the terms of mechanization and automation, without a great deal of difficulty, but the decisions about whether or not to automate are management prerogatives. The management is the sole arbiter of what share of the total product of labor will be allocated to mechanization and automation, that is, what share will go to rendering workers redundant. The union presently may "participate" in making this process as painless as possible to its present membership, for example, through attrition agreements, but that is about the extent of it.



The function of the revolutionary leadership is to formulate and implement a challenge to all such "management rights and prerogatives". Power must be demanded over every aspect of production; over what should be produced, how it should be marketed, the rate and character of technological change, the rate of accumulation of capital, etc. None of these challenges should be abstract and formal. They all must be concrete, although some of them will have an initial value mainly in an agitational and propagandistic sense. Some of the challenges can lead to reform victories that are "tangible", although such victories will come hard. The important feature that all such demands and struggles share, however, is that they all bring into question the issue of the sanctity of the private ownership of productive property, and by doing this, they make real the possibility of social ownership of productive property. They all pose a concrete challenge to capitalism by, as the Communist Manifesto urges;

"...(bringing) to the front, as the leading question in each case, the property question, no matter what its degree of development at the time."<sup>1</sup>

The potential issues in such a challenge extend all of the way from workers in a department demanding control over shift and vacation schedules - a right that has been won in a number of areas - to newspaper workers putting corrections at the bottom of newspaper editorials as they did in France during the recent general strike - a "right" that will never be won under capitalism. These kinds of issues are not in opposition to the more traditional economic demands. Such demands create a substratum of organization and activity on which the power demands can be raised. In fact, economic and power demands must be integrated, if it is to be possible to begin to demonstrate the general class interest in the success of the struggles of segments of the class, a demonstration which is a vital step towards the development of working class autonomy.

When the demand is raised by workers for control over the content and direction of production, it cuts through an aspect of the popular false consciousness created by the cultural mechanisms of capitalist hegemony. This is the artificial division and segmentation of the working class according to different partial interests, different status positions, and different social roles until the same individual becomes nothing more than a segmented set of roles; a taxpayer, a worker, a consumer, a recipient of government services - each with its own particular character and requirements. A major function of the capitalist media, for example, is to prevent people from gaining the ability to transcend and synthesize these roles intellectually and thus to gain an appreciation of his overall objective individual and class interests.

This fragmentation creates surreal antagonisms between social groups with fantastic overlaps in membership and interest, and, which in any case, are no more than component parts of the same whole - the working class. The worker - as worker - is hostile to the worker - as taxpayer - is hostile to the worker - as consumer - is hostile to the worker - as parent, tourist, handicapped, sick, etc. This, of course, is both an example, and a consequence, of the overdetermination of the main contradiction. More accurately, it is a collection of different overdetermining features.

But the base of these conflicts and tensions between teacher and parent, ADC mother and homeowner, grocery clerk and housewife, only exist so long as the bounds and limits of capitalism are observed. These are real bounds and limits that will not evaporate with some sort of mental effort, but it is possible to raise demands which clarify that they are not necessary limits - that it is not fated that things be as they are. This again raises the paramount importance in a revolutionary strategy of shaking the security of capitalist hegemony through the projection of a set of priorities and a distribution of resources that do not conform to capitalist criteria of rationality and practicability, but that do conform to real human needs.

<sup>1</sup>Marx, Communist Manifesto.



Two general kinds of issues can be raised which begin to overcome the fragmentation and disorientation of working class self-identification that capitalism engenders. First, there is the demand that the "social cost" of production be a deduction from the economic surplus. Second, there is the demand that the real social needs and possibilities for "time and space, for collective services and cultural possibilities" (Gorz) be given proper priority. These demands clarify the limits of capitalism.

Consider the applicability of this approach to education: Contemporary capitalism needs trained scientists and technicians, and it needs workers that can read and write. Thus a minimal popular education, no matter how distorted and deformed, is a requirement - a social cost - of capitalist production. The general demand should be raised that the capitalist pay all of the education bill. After all, they control the entirety of the social production which is what makes this education apparatus necessary.

At the same time, capitalism does not need, and, indeed could not survive, people able to think critically and creatively. The reality of capitalist education is that it manufactures docile and adaptable workers and narrow "specialists". It is job-training, product-development oriented education, not education whose end is the creation of rounded and thoughtful individuals. But this latter potential for education is obviously within technical reach, at least in U.S. society. Thus the general demand should also be made for an approach to education that conforms to the cultural possibilities and collective needs of the people - an approach that treats education as a right, not as a privilege, and that opts for the self-determination of education by the educators and the students as a part of the overall revolutionary counter-hegemonic bloc. It is easy to see that the failure to develop political force behind both of these demands simultaneously will gravely weaken both of them. Either, taken alone, is basically utopian and will not be able to involve those people who are not immediately affected by this particular aspect of contemporary capitalism.

Of course, it is naive to expect that social and governmental services might become a deduction from capitalist profits, so long as the capitalists maintain control over the state machinery and over the mains of production. The same is true of any illusion that the education system might be allowed to become dangerously dysfunctional to the preservation of capitalism. But the projection of these issues will dramatize and make more real to people the possibility and the necessity of their taking action to end the capitalist control of the state and cultural machinery. It will sharpen to the point of "revolutionary rupture", the contradictions inherent in contemporary capitalism. At the same time, as a byproduct of what is essentially a revolutionary struggle, maximum pressure will be created for both quantitative and qualitative reforms. Of course, these two demands are "unrealistic" within the framework of capitalism, but that should become an urgent and pressing concern of the capitalists, not of the people, and certainly not of professed revolutionaries. The demands correspond to palpable needs. That is the basic fact. That articulation of such needs implies a revolutionary critique of capitalism should not prevent those people who have no stake in the continuation of capitalism from acting. Indeed, it should impel their action.

This gets back to one of the points of the second section which has been repeated a number of times. We must remember that capitalism has confusing and contradictory aspects which have a differential impact on different social groups which are objectively part of the working class. Teachers, parents and taxpayers have different interests with respect to education - workers and consumers have different interests with respect to wages and prices - welfare recipients and taxpayers have different interests with respect to tax rates and benefit levels - so long as their various and diverse special interests cannot be disciplined and centralized within the framework of a rival hegemonic force. This, again, indicates the primary importance of a comprehensive and coherent, a systematic, alternative to the system of contemporary capitalism to the development of a revolutionary movement in this country.



## PARLIAMENTARY POLITICAL PROCESS

I referred earlier to the way in which the British Labour Party has been put in the position of implementing a set of governmental programs designed to preserve British capitalism at the immediate expense of the British working class. (I wouldn't want to imply in any way that the Labour Party resisted this role - on the contrary, it welcomed it.) Much the same transformation has been undergone, for example, by the German Social Democratic Party, the party of Engels, Liebknecht, and Luxemburg.

This points up another of the links between the work process and the parliamentary political process. Inability or lack of interest in developing a revolutionary struggle at the point of production is paralleled by political subservience to capitalism. It leads to seeing labor as just another "interest group" within the framework of capitalist hegemony, not as a potential ruling class. The inability to fight against the economic integration of the working class within the capitalist relations of production is paralleled by the inability to fight against the political integration of the working class within the capitalist superstructure. It is only a short step from implementing a no-strike contract against one's rank and file to the implementing of an "austerity" program against the entire working class.

Let me return to a contradiction within contemporary U.S. capitalism which was discussed earlier. In order to maintain profit levels and to handle challenges to its power generally, contemporary capitalism must make concerted and massive use of the governmental apparatus. For the ruling class, it is no longer true that "that government which governs least, governs best". At the same time, that political base, which once made it possible for capitalism to rely on the parliamentary process for getting those things which had to be done publicly, done "safely", no longer exists. Democratic parliamentary institutions constitute a much more immediate threat, though it is still a potential threat, than they did previously. But, on the other hand, they have also gained a much more immediate and important functional role in the system as a whole. The ending of the democratic facade means the loss of an invaluable instrument for integrating opposition to the effects of the system within the framework of the system. In this sense bourgeois parliamentary democracy is still the ideal form of bourgeois rule.

The capacity to contain the political expression of the working class within the framework of capitalist parliamentary politics, an arena of struggle where the realities of the distribution and the class character of power are most effectively obscured, is a vital prop of capitalism. It is hardly worth saying that in the U.S. under conditions of state monopoly capitalism, the important political decisions are not made within the public political institutions. The popular suspicions that the government is a conspiracy in which the really important things happen in the various nooks and crannies of the private and semi-public capitalist administrative technical structure - far from public view and the normal electoral legislative processes - are largely valid suspicions. Traditional electoral politics grows increasingly formalistic because of the growing gulf between the possession of elective office and the possession of real power, but this happens at a time when real power must be increasingly exercised through the public and semi-public governmental apparatus. Thus gulf between the possession of office and the possession of power, which holds at every governmental level, is the reality which many "realists" chronically forget. It is the reason why putting "good" people in the elective roles in the political structure can never, in itself, lead to a real challenge of that structure and of what it represents. It is the reason, ultimately, why a revolution must smash the state apparatus.

U.S. parliamentary politics are a magnificent, but a functional - (functional from the point of view of the ruling class, that is) confusion between the real decision making apparatus and the public political decision making apparatus, which both mirrors and hides the former. Each have their various levels, divisions, and sections; each have their different parties, factions, and personalities. Within such a confusion, it grows increasingly difficult to clarify what is necessary and what is possible.



Who should be pressured; who has the real responsibility; who deserves a vote; who deserves confidence? Then, the individual must relate to all of these questions, primarily, through a passive individual act, through the vote, not through a form of collective action in which he can gain a direct experience of his own power.

But there is another side to the situation. If there is a fundamental challenge to the hegemony of capital, then the absence of real democratic content to the formally democratic parliamentary institutions can become an important part of this assault on the entire system. Then, creative forms of parliamentary politics can become very important parts of a revolutionary strategy.

A revolutionary strategy must immediately break through the bounds and limits of parliamentarism which confine the "authoritarian majority" to a state of essential passivity and restricts political struggle to the "orderly competition of elites for political office". While it is important in this process to replace bad "representatives" with ones that are more radical and responsive, this is not the essential task. Revolutionaries must aim at more than giving traditional electoral and legislative politics some radical content. The arena of the political struggle must be expanded far beyond this. The primary need is to develop popular political self-organization, not just as a bloc of voters - just as an interest group, but as the self-conscious symbol of, and potential for, a radically different way of wielding power.

The heart of this approach involves the development of forms of political participation in which the essential powerlessness of the "authoritarian majority" can be directly confronted. Forms in which people can speak and act for themselves, not consign their right to take political action to some "representative". Only such forms can overcome the cynicism and resignation which dominates the popular attitudes towards "politics and politicians", and can capitalize on the popular frustration with the inadequacy and fraudulence of the existing channels for political expression. Therefore, the scope of the parliamentary political process as an arena for revolutionary struggle must be seen very broadly. It encompasses all of the forms in which capitalist power is wielded and legitimized except for those which spring from the work process, and there is a great deal of overlap with the work process as the previous section has indicated. In any case, though the categories may be arbitrary, I intend to consider a number of questions under this heading which are quite a distance removed from what is normally regarded as parliamentarism.

### Three General Questions

Since the ruling class has the dilemma of ruling legitimately, but maintaining a situation of essential dominance, when the legitimacy would end if the fact of the domination were appreciated, it is possible for a conscious revolutionary leadership, operating within an adequate strategic framework, to capitalize on this dilemma to attack the weak spots in the machinery of capitalist social control. This attack can neutralize some aspects of capitalist hegemony and power, it can challenge and clarify the nature of other aspects, and it can appropriate other aspects and exercise them independently in a program to undermine and weaken capitalism.

I have mentioned that the revolutionary strategy must dispel the bureaucratic facelessness of the institutions which serve capitalist hegemony. The impersonal character of these institutions stands in the way of people seeing the class and human content of capitalist politics. The personnel of the official bureaucracies should be denied the prerogatives and privileges that have come to be considered their due in normal times. Revolutionaries have a clear interest in challenging these prerogatives and privileges by forcing politicians and bureaucrats to function with people looking over their shoulders, critically, challenging at every possible point the right of bureaucrats and politicians to make decisions that determine other people's lives; refusing to grant any "right to rule", refusing to abide by the "rules of the game", and always asserting, implicitly and explicitly, that an entirely different "game" is possible.



After participating in struggles which involve such confrontations people gain a better understanding of their capacity for collective self-rule. Questions and issues that previously could hardly have been conceived, now become explicitly articulated. If ADC mothers dominated the welfare commission would there be so much trouble with investigators and caseworkers? If the black community controlled their own police, would so many people be shot and beaten by the cops? If the workers had control of production, would so much junk be produced? When struggles emphasize this kind of confrontation, both in terms of how demands are posed and how reform victories are implemented, it makes it apparent to people that concessions are really concessions, and not the largesse of the rich and well-born, whose virtues have been rewarded with possession of power and affluence, or the Delphic response of some inhuman and impersonal "system". In this way, through the collective solidarity of common struggle, it makes people conscious of their collective responsibility and of their united strength.

It is beside the point to raise the question of whether any of these things are possible so long as state power is held by the capitalist class. The point is to conduct activities and struggles in a manner that helps people to see that while the capitalists do have power and hegemony, real alternatives to the present order of things do exist and are within the realm of possibility, and that they are not just utopian fantasies. This understanding is a necessity, if the people are to become aware that their own exploitation and oppression is a concrete reality, but an inevitable reality only until the revolution.

One arena of political struggle that is often overlooked is the day to day conflict between individuals, families, and other small apolitical groupings against an overwhelmingly more powerful antagonist; the finance company, the insurance company, the various utilities, the landlord, the tax assessor, the courts and the cops. It is difficult to develop a mass approach to these unequal conflicts because, although they symbolize the oppressive nature of the society, each issue is unique and particular, and has just a tiny constituency. The fight is heavily biased in favor of the antagonist, who always has power sanctioned and legitimized within the hegemonic framework of capitalism.

To avoid a cumulative piling up of resentment, the system presently provides some channels for the redress of the grievances that grow from such conflicts. But these tension management devices, be they private charity or public welfare, legal aid or ward heeling, always handle the grievance within the framework of the system. This means that each concession - for the resolution of each grievance is essentially a pre-emptive concession - is given with all of the trappings of charity, a captious charity that benefits only an arbitrarily chosen section of the aggrieved - only a fraction, even, of those who keep their noses scrupulously clean. The aggrieved always remain supplicants petitioning an omnipotent power, and are forced deeper into subordination by the handling of their particular problem - whether or not it happens to be resolved in their favor.

The revolutionary strategy must give attention to taking the redress of grievance function from the official and semi-official bureaucracies and placing it in a parallel or a counter-structure that is within the rival hegemonic force - within the dual power. At times this function can be exercised by a trade union, at times by a community organization, at times by an independent political formation, the specific form is not the decisive matter. The important fact is that the particular grievances are handled through a parallel structure, a structure that is able to eliminate the flavor of charity, the degrading and dehumanizing nature of the entire process. Then, while the need for the system to provide concessions to prevent an accumulation of resentment will still exist, these concessions will no longer necessarily buttress capitalist hegemony.

Not only would such an approach guarantee more, and more substantial, victories, but it would be clear that these victories came from the power structure, not through it. Tangible evidence of the power of collective action would be provided, and more people would be brought into conscious and creative participation in collective struggle. At the same time, the root causes of the particular grievances could be exposed and mass support for a movement against them could be developed which possessed a much broader basis.



The point was made earlier that selective repression is a necessary tactic for the maintenance of capitalism, but that its use is increasingly limited by the conditions and the consequences of its employment. A revolutionary strategy should further narrow down the limits within which selective repression is effective by constantly undermining its legitimacy. In this regard, the intrinsic value of mass civil disobedience and of the spread of the mood of "resistance" must be appreciated. But of much more importance is the development of a conscious approach to the neutralization of normal police power in selected instances and conditions.

This neutralization is a responsibility of the revolutionary in every struggle; in strikes, boycotts, mass demonstrations, etc. If it is not fulfilled, the full potential of the activity will not be realized. For many people, their relationship to the police and the courts capsulizes their oppression in this society. Turning this relationship upside down is of tremendous importance in giving them a proper appreciation of their own strength. To repeat, the consequences of the unlimited use of police power, of the military suppression or containment of a struggle, are so damaging to the ability of the capitalists to rule "normally", that the possibility is created for a skilled revolutionary leadership to make substantial inroads on the police power without bloody massacres ensuing. Of course, the risk of such promiscuous police violence always exists and should never be allowed to lead to paralysis, just as it should never be consciously provoked.

Consider the possibility to neutralize some of the options for using repressive tactics on some large college campuses, or in the black and brown urban ghettos. In both areas the legitimacy of the police power is already under serious challenge and, at moments of crisis, popular obedience to the authority of the police evaporates and the popular attitude towards them is that they are an occupying force. In these situations, a combining of citizen's patrols, citizen's courts, para-police, armed self-defense groups and concerted mass resistance under revolutionary leadership can permanently disrupt the normal use of police power. Often such a course will also raise a challenge to other central aspects of contemporary capitalism; for example, the militarization of the campus or the sanctity of private property in the ghetto. This brings us back to parliamentary politics in the more narrow sense.

### Electoral Politics

Since capitalism needs to maintain the parliamentary facade in order to contain conflicts within the system - thus making it potentially more than just a "facade" - the opportunity is created for a conscious revolutionary grouping to use the electoral framework to openly challenge and disrupt from within this parliamentary system. The basic practical distinction between a revolutionary and a reformist approach to the utilization of the parliamentary electoral framework is that the former must always base such activity on the understanding that the point is not the election of more and more officeholders. It must be kept clearly in mind that the election of "good" people to office will not automatically be translated into good things for the people. Possession of office cannot be substituted for, nor equated with, the possession of power.

Quantitative statistical categories such as "votes" are completely inadequate criteria for judging the relative strengths of social movements, just as they are of no decisive importance, in themselves, in weakening the power of capitalism. Though this does not entail a policy of boycott of electoral politics, it does mean that the goal of such involvement cannot be the maximization of votes leading to the magical 50% plus one of the seats in parliament. Revolutionaries must never forget that the goal of their activity is the development of a larger base of politically conscious individuals. That is, the goal is to develop people qualitatively in the course of struggle. The vote, no matter who it is cast for, is a basically passive role, inadequate for people who must become aware of their ability to play active, purposeful, conscious roles in order to become class-conscious revolutionaries.



So what, if any, is the function of electing people to political office while the capitalist essence of the political institutions still remains? The clear first principle of Leninism is that the elected official can, and must, act as the "tribune of the people" - exposing the essential dictatorship of capital behind the democratic trappings. The potential for the tribune role has increased since the early years of this century, because of the processes which have been indicated in this paper. All questions now have become "political" questions, although it would be difficult to discover that fact from an examination of the behavior of political bodies in this country. Now, the illusion of democracy and of political representation is of much more importance in the complex of illusions which constitute the popular false consciousness. Thus, for these two different reasons, parliamentary politics is more necessary to contemporary capitalism, and, consequently, there is more possibility to expose it.

This can be seen practically, if the single question of taxation is considered. In early 20th Century U.S. capitalism, taxation of the working class was quite light. Now, it is very heavy and rapidly growing. Tax issues are inherently public questions that must be handled through the government apparatus, and they are an essential and tremendously unpopular prop of capitalism. But mass taxation is so unpopular that it needs every shred of popular legitimacy it can get. Thus the ruling class must develop the illusion that there is no alternative to constant escalation of the tax burden. It is very important in this venture to have a public assembly that is popularly elected "democratically decide" that a tax increase is necessary, and that this sort of a body propose a tax measure in which everyone will "pay their fair share".

The elected "tribune" should expose both sides of this dilemma of the ruling class. He must show that massive taxation is designed to subsidize the survival of the dominant sections of capital, that the democratic decision making process is a myth from high school civics, and that arguing "equity" while increasing the tax burden on working people is a threadbare fraud.

But, if there is now more potential in electoral politics, so long as the situation remains non-revolutionary, there are also greater dangers. The attraction of holding office and of participation in government in non-elective capacities is much greater because of the greater power which such positions now entail for those who play the game of the ruling class. Then, since the role of the government has increased in both qualitative and quantitative terms, and since it commonly must act in opposition to either sections of the ruling class, or in favor of the long term, not short term, class interests, there is a greater tendency to see the government as an above-class instrumentality which can be directed to whatever ends are desired by those in the formal seats of power. In this way the essential Marxist premise of the class nature of the state is subordinated opening the gates for all kinds of opportunism, and stimulating nominal Marxists to rush into parliamentary politics like any reformist social democrat, and even, sometimes, like any "politician".

The outstanding fact that must never be forgotten is that the vast institutional structure of government in this country is function to the maintenance, and not to the overthrow, of U.S. capitalism. It is no neutral mechanism, and to get to socialism, this structure will have to go. The dangers of forgetting this fact are apparent throughout Europe where socialist and pseudo-socialist parties have participated in, and even formed, governments without ever shaking the power of capitalism.

The ability of the elected "tribune" to disrupt the normal functioning of government is much greater when an organic relationship has been built between the officeholder and his electoral constituency - a relationship that utilizes his office to stimulate the articulation and politicization of their needs and grievances. This, in turn, more concretely and clearly defines the responsibilities of the officeholder. But even in this optimal situation, there is a pervasive pressure towards accommodation with the system. To combat this, the revolutionary must always act so that the office-holder constituency bond does not hide the fact that all demands must be won from the system and implemented against the system, even though they may appear to have been obtained through the system as a dividend of the possession of the office.



In a revolutionary strategy elected officials must always be used to facilitate the development of mass struggle and not as a substitute for it. This seems clear enough, but in practical situations there is tremendous pressure to reverse the relationship and to use mass struggle as a vehicle for the election of officials. There is a great ideological compulsion on everyone who becomes politically active in this country, including those who become radicals and revolutionaries, to regard electoral politics as the "highest" or the most "general" form of political struggle, just because it is the area where capitalist power is most difficult to isolate and challenge. At the same time the obviousness of that reality leads many people, when they become radical, to take a simplistic anti-electoral stance. This is extremely important, because although this is an area where the essential relationships are difficult to isolate, it is also an area where they are extremely vulnerable.

### Para-politics

On the periphery of the formal parliamentary system, there are political institutions and processes in which the same internal contradiction, between the needs of the ruling class for social control and for popular legitimacy, is manifested. These, too, are based on the need to maintain at least the formal consent of those who are ruled, their passive acquiescence in their own subordination. In this category there are a number of seldom used democratic mechanisms and a number of important political structures and institutions with only a tenuous democratic legitimacy. The former should be activated within a real hegemonic force before they atrophy, while the latter should be challenged before they get deeply rooted. Consider some examples:

The initiative and referendum procedures still retain a certain viability, particularly at the state level, but at the local level as well. Politicians and bureaucrats, to say nothing of the ruling class, are not anxious to have the idea that people should have the right to vote directly on substantive issues become widespread. Accordingly, they do their best to limit the initiative and referendum to those issues where their identification on either side would undermine their position, or, if possible, they completely eliminate the procedures. Thus items placed for a direct vote are usually either trivial, or are choices between unpalatable alternatives that have already been carefully screened and selected. It is commonplace to have a direct vote, for example, on an issue where the options are higher taxes versus an even more grossly inadequate level of government services.

But the initiative and referendum can be used to expose the essential disenfranchisement of the people beneath the facade of representative democracy. It can be used to bring the premises of the system into question, and to insure that reform concessions will be won in a form which can allow the promotion and focusing, not the dulling and diversion, of class conflict and class consciousness. The use of the advisory referendum on the war in Vietnam is an example of a creative approach to the use of this instrument. The additional possibilities are limitless. The question of politician's salaries can be attacked; radical tax the rich schemes can be projected; all of the "publically-regulated" private monopolies can be frontally challenged. A valuable exposure of the character of politics on the national level can be gained with such agitational demands as, for example, for a plebiscite



This might mean a counter school board based on an alliance between parents, students, teachers, and taxpayers as a framework for a comprehensive challenge to the job-training bias in the content of education, to the role of the administrative superstructure in the educational system, to the various pressures to keep the teachers in line, to the efforts of the big corporations to shift the cost of the education of their future work force onto their present work force through a regressive tax structure.

Another example of a weak spot in the political structure is provided by the neighborhood boards which nominally direct the community action programs of the "War on Poverty" in many areas of the country. The War on Poverty relies upon its ability to place certain "community people" in roles where they become apologists for the system - roles where they are forced to counsel patience, to radiate optimism, and to overestimate the progress. To maintain the credibility of such people within the community, the popular sanction of the informal neighborhood elections is of great importance. To sacrifice the elections means to sacrifice the appearance of popular participation in the programs. Given the reluctance of the ruling class at this time to make major economic concessions to the unorganized poor, the group who now fill the vital function of holding down the general wage level, sacrifice of this appearance would take all of the utility out of the entire program. This dilemma of the power structure allows the election of people to the neighborhood boards who refuse to perform their appointed tasks and who refuse to accept the program as it is given to them. This, in turn, creates the climate and the constituency for militant independent organizations of the poor as a component of the alternative hegemony.

Still another example of the same kind of weakness in capitalist control can be found in the multitude of extra-parliamentary advisory bodies which are attached to the administrative and executive sectors of government at every level of government. These appointive bodies add some plausibility to the idea that there is popular control over policies outside of the normal "representation" channels. This is an important function in view of the increasingly obvious farce of the control that is supposed to be provided over policies by being theoretically able to vote down the representatives who don't actually represent their constituents. These bodies provide the ways in which the "good citizen" can "participate" in government outside of the normal electoral process.

In this area we find the welfare commissions, wage and hours commissions, development commissions, human relations commissions, interim study committees, investigating panels, planning commissions, etc. These bodies seldom have any plausible claim to legitimacy other than that they are usually composed of a "blue-ribbon" crowd of the "best citizens", with a liberal sprinkling of political hangers-on. But, despite the lack of legitimacy, they often have a good deal of power. They too, are a haven for the civic-minded elite, and most important, they constitute an institutional step towards corporatist fascism.

A revolutionary strategy should seek out such bodies and confront them with parallel bodies with more democratic legitimacy as a part of a campaign to systematically destroy them. The civic-minded elite should be frightened back to their own private affairs, and no opportunity should be lost to raise the demand that the people directly affected by the particular issues should have the operative control over the programs aimed at that issue. Then, either these demands are rebuffed, in which case the program is imposed on the people and loses the bulk of its legitimacy, or the demands are met, and the



That is, they are amorphous and inclusive in terms of the vote, but narrow, exclusive, and strictly controlled in terms of the practical functioning. They are the ideal political institutions to support popular illusions of non-ideological pluralistic-democratic mechanisms operating like the "hidden hand" to insure that the best possible of everything is available for everyone, without ever allowing such nonsense to affect the way that class power is wielded.

The amorphousness is one of the reasons for the extreme difficulty in developing a class based electoral party. Particularly, the Democratic Party has such an ideological flexibility that it makes it extremely difficult to define a clear left alternative to the left positions and rhetoric allowed within the party without becoming silly and sectarian. But whenever the alternative is not made clear, the Democratic Party swallows the insurgent issues and much of their constituencies.

But now the two-party system is caught in the same trap as the political system generally. Capitalism has lost its mass social base. It is forced to use the government apparatus to maintain the economic equilibrium. All issues are becoming overtly political. All of this requires integrative mechanisms to keep the working class securely within the framework of capitalism, and the peculiar advantages of the two party system are now showing their limitations. More is needed now than the diffuse and apathetic political cynicism that was so functional in the past and that the two party system played such an important role in building and maintaining. Now, electoral institutions that can lead and move workers are needed in order to prevent the articulation into an anti-capitalist program of the needs and grievances which lie just below the surface of the working class's political consciousness. Now, good old organized mass social-democratic political parties are needed to integrate the social conflicts of the immediate future within the social framework. The massive cynicism about, and frustration with, the entire political process, then is a base of class experience which may be very helpful in the development of a counter-hegemonic movement, even though it develops from an historical weakness of the U.S. working class.

There will be a couple of responses from the two-party system to these developments. First, there will be a multiplication of reform and club movements that will attempt to put some reality into the myth of popular participation in the two party framework. Second, there will undoubtedly be attempts to form new liberal and social democratic electoral formations which will remain as functional appendages of the two-party system. What should the response be to these developments?

Here, as in the general electoral arena, revolutionaries should not take a moralizing abstentionist approach. They should participate discriminately in the establishment political parties and their appendages and satellites with the clear goal of destroying as rapidly as possible the viability and popular credibility of these as political instrumentalities of the ruling class. The goal must never be that of "taking them over" as deluded "radicals" have argued for years.

Actually, when the garbage is stripped away, it can be seen that most of the popular participation inside and on the periphery of the two-party system is essentially social work and role playing. (the exception, of course, are the machine controlled areas where the gangsterism and thus the popular participation is of an entirely different order)) Generally, so far as the real interests of the



## CONCLUSION

This final section has put some meat on the bones of the schematic revolutionary perspective sketched in what preceded it. In doing this, it relied upon the operative contradictions in contemporary U.S. capitalist society that also were indicated in earlier sections. The whole point that is involved is the argument for the possibility and the necessity of building a revolutionary dual power within the framework of contemporary capitalism - a dual power able to neutralize the strengths and focus an attack on the weaknesses of United States capitalist civilization. Hopefully, the perspective presented is one which can take us from where we are now, to the point at which:

"The immense majority of the popular masses are grouped in an assault on a regime which its ruling classes are unable to defend."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Althusser, Op. cit., page 22.

Author's Note: Though I am and have been for some time a member of the Communist Party (U.S.), this document does not necessarily represent the position of the Party on any point.

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