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**A POST-MODERN SOCIALISM?:  
THE PROMISE OF A REVIVED LEFT COMMUNISM**

**A thesis presented in fulfilment  
of the requirements  
for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
in Sociology at  
Massey University**

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**1999**

## ABSTRACT

The emergence of the post-modern heralds the eclipse of the two dominant modes of socialist orthodoxy in the twentieth century - social democracy and Leninism. These developments are often taken as signalling the exhaustion of socialism in general. The demise of orthodoxy, however, encourages a reconsideration of long marginalised strands of socialist thought and practice, the left communist tradition. Socialist orthodoxy was a statist project, conquered by the goals of capital accumulation, nationalism and social security. Breaking from this mode of politics and vision of the good society, post-modernism today stands as an inescapable intellectual and political horizon for socialists. Of particular note are the post-modern rejections of scientific guarantees, vanguardist representation and the vision of social transparency. Similar rejections figure within the left communist tradition. However, some aspects of post-modernism work against socialist aspirations; notably the tendency towards uncritical pluralism, a retreat from any explicit theorisation of capital and the state, and an often fragile utopian dimension. Left communism addresses these shortcomings. Believing that freedom and community can be achieved only through a collective project, left communists are committed to a radical extension of popular sovereignty against domination by the state and capital. They adhere to cosmopolitan values and to the goals of classical social theory, while rejecting vanguardism in all its forms. Most importantly, seeking a life beyond proletarianisation, left communism retains a robust sense of utopian possibilities. On these grounds, this thesis argues that a negotiation between left communism and post-modern leftism promises a future for socialism in the contemporary period.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would firstly like to extend my immense gratitude to my two supervisors, Brennon Wood and Gregor McLennan. Brennon's tremendous intellectual energy has never waned, and a significant chunk of this thesis developed through our Wednesday meetings, which I will miss horribly. With great sensitivity and generosity, Brennon has guided me through a rather drawn-out finishing-off period. Gregor, too, has been amazing. Never betraying any exasperation at having to read yet another of my long and tedious drafts, Gregor has always been able to extract himself from the tiresome detail of my text to "hit the cause". The level of encouragement and inspiration that Brennon and Gregor have offered me has been astounding and invaluable. I find it hard to imagine another PhD candidate being able to boast of supervision by two such impressive intellectuals and fantastic human beings.

Thanks must also go to the general and academic staff at the Massey Sociology Department - a great bunch of people. I would especially like to single out Associate Professor Peter Beatson whose sense of humour and intelligence have enriched post-grad life in the Department.

Warmest thanks, too, to the following post-grads whose camaraderie has aided my work immensely and made my three years at Massey so wonderful: Grant Allen, Helen Cain, Bruce Cronin, Francisca da Gama, Lincoln Dalhberg, Sarah Donovan, Becca Etz, Sheryl Hann, Jonathan Ibell, Angela Jury, Steve Kemp, Ruth McManus, Maureen O'Malley, Nick Roelants, Matt Shepherd, and Deb Thien.

Finally, special thanks to my terrific family - Hicham el-Ojeili, Margaret Cummins, Hana el-Ojeili, Craig Wattam, Serafine and Arshile - and to Kirsty Wild.

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# Chapter One

## Introduction

*“It is not what is, but what could be and should be, that has need of us” (Castoriadis, 1997a:417).*

The advent of the post-modern appears to signal the eclipse of the socialist project. Post-modernism is incredulous before socialism’s totalising and teleological narrative that posits liberation, harmony, and societal transparency at an approaching end of history. Post-modernists reject the totalising, determinist, and scientific approach to social theorising so characteristic of socialist thought. And, emphasising “the contingent, precarious, limited character of what remains” (Laclau, 1994:1,3), post-modernists have jettisoned the socialist belief in identity as mere recognition. Indeed, the two modes of socialist orthodoxy that have dominated the last eighty years - social democracy and Leninism - seem today to be “definitively exhausted” (Beilharz, 1993:3), leaving those on the left “bewildered and uncertain of the future” (Eberstein, Eberstein, and Fogelman, 1994:32).

However, this is only a part of the story. Contrary to the early anxieties of many Marxist thinkers, it is now clear that the socialist urge is far from dead within post-modernism. Pre-eminent post-modern thinkers such as Said, Foucault, Derrida, Spivak, Baudrillard, Deleuze, Guattari, Lyotard, and Butler remain(ed) left-progressive intellectuals, committed to the extension and deepening of democracy, and the post-modern mood or cultural orientation is decidedly *gauchiste*. More generally, as Beilharz (1993:54) notes, “socialism remains one of the narratives of modernity”. The ideals associated with the French Revolution and given radicalised content by the socialist project - liberty, equality, fraternity, and the “sovereignty of the people” - still preside in the post-modern imagination.

Rejecting, then, the commonsensical assumption that socialism<sup>1</sup> is finally deceased, in the following thesis I identify a still relevant tendency of communist thought - “left communism” - that is historically, politically, and philosophically separate from (though hardly unscathed by the failures of) social democracy and Leninism. Left communism offers a distinct alternative to the two dominant modes of socialism, and, moreover, it addresses

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itself to a consciousness that is still extant. I thus argue that left communism demands a hearing from progressive-left thinkers who, with the breakdown of socialist orthodoxy, have taken up political and philosophical positions of a broadly post-modern variety.

In his *Postmodern Socialism*, Peter Beilharz (1994:3,9) seeks to “rub” post-modernism and socialism against each other, to stage a conversation between these two broad fields.<sup>2</sup> According to Beilharz, such a coupling would mean an articulation of the substantive socialist elements that are still with us with the modest post-modern sensibility that demands a differentiated, skeptical, culturally-oriented, and “negative but persistent” socialism without illusions. I agree with Beilharz on the necessity and the result of such a conversation. It seems to me that this would be best achieved by a negotiation between left communism and post-modernist leftism.

I am arguing, then, that left communism is a socialist alternative to both of the strands of socialist orthodoxy that have dominated the twentieth century. I further assert that left communism has great contemporary relevance. Making this argument involves taking a stand on the uses of the past and the methods of historical inquiry. I will therefore deal here with questions as to the mode or field of the present thesis, attempting to provide answers as to the what and the why of this research. Given my argument for the present significance of left communism, this thesis uses historical investigation not as distraction, mere amusement, or “for its own sake” (Southgate, 1996:28). Nor am I seeking the anticipation of later doctrines in earlier works. My aim is not to generate a stirring revolutionary myth in the Sorelian sense; nor do I seek, in Nietzschean mode,<sup>3</sup> to keep alive the “fighters against history” as some kind of inspiring “epic poem” (Schulkind, 1972:27). Finally, I am not looking to develop either a sociology of ideas, intricately connecting left communist concepts to their conditions of emergence, or to fashion a contribution to sociological theory by rummaging through the “trash-can” of political history for one or two novelties that may solve some purely theoretical problem.

I do indeed believe that investigation of the left communist tradition is of intrinsic interest, and I feel that this thesis has worth as a contribution to the history of political ideas. However, I do not seek to rescue those defined as “obscure” out of some purely antiquarian urge. Against the positivist conception according to which historical study is undertaken for its own sake, I agree with Croce that “only an interest in the life of the present can move one to investigate past fact” (in Femia, 1988:169). As history is always read through the pressing needs of the times in which it is written (Keane, 1988:216), the historical moment is not

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easily separated from the critical-political moment, and it is hard, with this in mind, not to agree with Gunnell (1987:35) that the dominant rationale and mode for history of ideas is as a *therapeutic exercise*.

The present thesis is best placed within the sphere of *critical history*. I aim both to make a contribution to the history of ideas and also to intervene in the contemporary debates about the politics of post-modernism. With respect to such a political mode, while not wanting to fetishise defeat, my work assumes that defeat tells us *only* who lost and that history is not the judge or the ultimate tribunal (Camus, 1969:135; Jacoby, 1981:17). As Acton (1992:401) has said of “libertarian communism” (a tendency close to what I have called left communism): “Because of its polemical style, its sectarian associations and chiliastic overtones, the libertarian tradition has long been marginalised. Yet, to paraphrase Bacon, the origins of an historical approach do not determine its validity.” A largely forgotten strand of political thought may well be tremendously rich, and it may therefore offer us valuable resources for addressing “the question of society”.

More specifically, this study of left communism could be said to operate within the field of political contestation about the leftist notion of a “third way”. This phrase, deployed since the 1920s by a variety of socialist tendencies, denotes a particular variety of utopian thinking beyond the present by those who have sought to negotiate a path between and past bourgeois liberal democracy and totalitarianism. Today, I contend, with the decline of social democracy and Leninism, a new, radical third way might be constructed by bringing left communism and post-modernist political thought into political and theoretical negotiation.

Carl Boggs (1995:219) has recently argued that: “A future third road will have to follow something akin to a radical-left path running between two increasingly anachronistic poles of development - the capitalist world order and a disintegrating socialist tradition.” For Boggs (1995:184), the eclipse of “traditional party-centred, hierarchical, and productivist models of change may represent the end of one epoch and the beginning of another in which elements of a radical-democratic alternative might finally galvanize political opposition”. This radical-democratic alternative, having its recent origins in the socialist sub-traditions of syndicalism, council communism, and Western Marxism (Boggs, 1995:184), is almost co-extensive with the tradition I have called “left communism”. The following chapters identify what I believe to be the vital themes and contributions of left communism’s utopian project. My argument is that left communism posits a quite distinct socialist alternative to both social democracy and Leninism. Furthermore, I contend that, with the practical and

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theoretical eclipse of these socialist orthodoxies, left communism can be fruitfully reconsidered as a way of enriching post-modernist politics, which, at its worst, culminates in the various dead-ends of overly-aestheticised cultural sabotage, a tacit return to social democracy, or a flight into a shapeless pluralism that prevents itself from making strong political evaluations. Conversely, I argue that post-modernist thinking must be the intellectual basis for any reformulated socialism. To be relevant to contemporary times, socialism must - in post-modern mode - reject the submergence of politics by eschatological and teleological conceptions of societal change, it must move away from guarantees based on History, Doctrine, or Party, and it must jettison the obsolete privileging of the narrowly defined working class.

In Chapter Two - *The Post-modern Condition and the Retreat of the Socialist Project* - I trace the contemporary shrivelling of the socialist project. This shrivelling is evidenced in the collapse of “really existing socialism”, the withering of the social democratic project, and the advent of the post-modern. I contend that the attempts to re-state social democracy and Leninism in the contemporary period have proved a failure. Such attempts have failed to acknowledge the post-modern as a now inescapable intellectual and political horizon. They have failed to recognise that the project of socialist orthodoxy, as a statist mode of modernisation, as a solution to economic problems through a political-bureaucratic modification of capitalism, has come to an end. In the remainder of the chapter, I identify left communism’s essential landmarks. I highlight the facets and co-ordinates of a tradition that encompasses a not insignificant internal diversity. Despite such diversity, I note, in particular, the importance within the tradition of an aspiration to radically extend in political, economic, and social directions the demand for popular sovereignty. I argue that in order to appreciate the radical character of this demand our analysis must call into question the familiar ways of interpreting conflicts within the socialist tradition. In particular, I contend that appreciating the relevance of left communism means doing away with overly strict readings of the divide between not only Leninism and social democracy but also between Marxism and anarchism.

In Chapter Three - *What is to be Done? Intellectual, Party, Theory* - I look to questions around the role of intellectuals, political organisation, and the content and role of theory. Responding to the inadequacies of social democratic and Leninist answers, post-modernists have recognised our limitations in dealing with these problems, and this is expressed as an anti-vanguardist suspicion about representation (broadly conceived) and authority. Within socialist orthodoxy, the party-intellectual was posited as the bearer of a complete, scientific

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system, and as the unifier and educator of the working class. The party organisation represented the working class and ruled on its behalf. Left communism provides a way beyond both socialist orthodoxy and some of the defects of the post-modernist stance on questions of politics and theory. Within the left communist tradition, we discover a dilemma between emphases that tend towards substitutionism and vanguardism and those that posit pure spontaneism. The persistence of this dilemma, I contend, should not be read as a sign of failure. Rather, I believe that when this dilemma is left unresolved, a space is opened for an engaged and critical but non-authoritarian intellectual-political practise. Similarly, in the theoretical breaks that left communists made in response to the political bankruptcy of socialist orthodoxy, one discovers a tension running through the tradition - in this case, autonomy versus non-autonomy of theory, science versus history/class struggle, theory versus movement. Again, rather than treat such tensions as a sign of failure, I emphasise their productive possibilities, in particular, the way they allow for a theoretical practice that strives for a rational comprehension of society as a whole and that seeks the separation of truth from error, without ignoring theory's practical presuppositions and being aware of the dangers of theory and theorists dominating the socialist movement. Forced, then, by their scepticism of vanguardism to "advance without authority", left communists nevertheless make possible an ironic but engaged and confident politics of the present.

The contemporary scene is marked by an apparent universalisation of liberal ethical postulates, a trend which is clearly visible within post-modernism itself. However, in Chapter Four - *Left Communism and the Crisis of Socialist Values* - I note the growing signs of dissatisfaction with liberal conceptions of economics, individualism, and democracy, a dissatisfaction forcefully expressed in the rise of communitarianism. I argue that both the communitarians' coercive politics of the common good and liberalism's prioritisation of the individual chooser can be overcome by left communism's political and ethical contributions. And while socialists should heed the radical anti-foundationalism and constructivism of communitarians and post-modernists, left communism helps move beyond the over-valuing of difference and relativism that such constructivism can bring. The socialist tradition has often lacked an adequate ethical dimension. Its orthodox strands have emphasised pragmatic expediency, administrative concerns, and scientific or naturalistic arguments. Some left communists, however, have consciously emphasised sociality and history as the origin and basis of justice and value. For these socialists, an adequate value dimension can only be achieved within a socialist political community. Thus, in order to achieve those laudable democratic goals of liberty, equality, and fraternity, capitalism must fall. Within left communism's "ethics of emancipation", I argue that a tension between freedom in a

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liberal and in a democratic-socialist sense proves productive in terms of the possibility of more adequately evaluating competing values. Left communists have insisted that the possibility of more freely and justly considering societal organisation and weighing conflicting goods requires a collective project that reconstructs those freedom-limiting macro-structures (state and capital) and institutions of bourgeois society.

While I quarrel with post-modernism's apparent withdrawal from the field of debate around class and capital, I agree with the post-modernist contention that socialist orthodoxy presented no decisive break from the coercive postulates of modernity. Most importantly, neither Leninism nor social democracy were able to break from the premises of capital and the reality of class domination. Chapter Five - *The Problem of "Really Existing Socialism" and the World Without Wages* - uses the advent of "really existing socialism" as the still-resonant basis upon which to investigate the domination of socialism by exchange value and to examine left communism's challenge to this domination. Insisting that socialists must still get to grips with the question of the Russian Revolution, I argue that left communism provides both a cogent *analysis* of "really existing socialism" and a compelling *vision* of an alternative socialist order. Left communism analyses "really existing socialism" as state capitalism, dividing socialisation from nationalisation, and arguing that class exploitation and struggle continued to exist in Russia. Leninist and social democratic ideas of post-capitalist organisation reinforce the domination of the economic and the rule of property and exchange. In contrast, left communism breaks with such ideas and thus sustains a utopian space for the consideration of the possibility of an economic democracy.

If post-modernism has been somewhat reticent about the critique of capital, it has been explicitly anti-statist, anti-bureaucratic, and enthusiastic about democracy and autonomy. In stark contrast, both of the dominant registers of the socialist movement of the twentieth century were progressively conquered by the state. In Chapter Six - *The State, Revolution, and Socialist Democracy* - I argue that, on the questions to do with the state, transition, and post-capitalist administration, left communists have advanced on the statism of socialist orthodoxy. I also argue that left communism has something to offer a post-modernism that, at times, suffers from particularism, an ambiguous anti-statism, and a lack of specification regarding the institutional configuration of the democracy "to come". Overcoming the Marxist-anarchist scission, left communists have insisted on an immediate end to state and capital by way of directly democratic, popular organisational forms. While frequently burdened by a sectarianism that is out of sorts with post-modernism's emphasis on the political, the left communist insistence that democracy, government, and politics do not

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necessarily imply the state and bureaucracy is still highly relevant and important today. Similarly, left communism's internationalist hopes, its commitment to a broad unity of humanity across the divisions of nationality and ethnicity, are worthy of rediscovery by left intellectuals. Finally, for those serious about the implications of democracy as an ideal, the left communist argument for direct democracy through popular administrative bodies such as workers' councils and people's communes remains an essential planting of flags.

The post-modern has often been viewed as the irruption of the broadly cultural into the supposedly higher realms of the economy and polity, and thus as involving the politicisation of everyday life. In opposition to socialist orthodoxy's obsession with *haute politique* and with the industrial development of the forces of production, left communism has made a cultural turn that is in many ways congruent with post-modernism. In Chapter Seven - *The Turn to Culture and Utopia at the End of History* - I examine this cultural turn. Post-modernism has often developed further those early heretical socialist insights on culture, as well as insisting that socialists exercise caution in privileging any social agent. On the other hand, left communism's cultural turn has retained a robust political orientation and utopian vision that post-modernism frequently lacks. This cultural dimension, provoked by the defeat of libertarian socialism and the non-fulfilment of the expectations of left communists, has had both a pessimistic and an optimistic moment. In pessimistic mode, left communists have attacked socialist orthodoxy's triumphant progressivism, looking to the cultural obstacles blocking the development of libertarian socialism. I argue that the potentially one-sided and demobilising conclusions of such culture critique need to be paired with an optimistic moment. This other side of left communism's cultural turn has theorised daily life and the various expressions of subjectivity as the locations of possibilities for social change, emphasising the necessity of an end to the condition of proletarianisation and insisting that socialism is not simply a new mode of production - it is a *new mode of life*.

Frequently, and perhaps increasingly, the turn to culture has been burdened by a pessimism both about the objective and the subjective progress being made towards a better, socialist society. Such pessimism is more broadly evident in the post-modern age, as an apparent waning of the utopian dimension. I argue that the often tacit and feeble utopian vision of post-modernist politics could be enriched by attention to the tenaciously propounded, rational utopia of the left communist tradition. Encompassing a powerful critique of the present, an attention to the possibilities in the here-and-now, and a vision of alternative ways of organising social life, this impressive mixture of rational-intellectual and imaginative-creative "thinking beyond" is a central virtue of the left communist tradition.

To recap, then, the central argument of this thesis is that what is still alive within the socialist project can be best developed by an engagement between post-modern leftism and left communism. Despite its chronic marginality, left communism provides crucial resources for thinking about socialism after the eclipse of social democracy and Leninism. Both of these orthodox strands, I believe, represent forms of state capitalism. This state capitalism embodies a commitment to national development, managerial authority, and security, and it has signalled not emancipation and a new life, but the aspiration for a well-managed dictatorship of good sense (Sirianni, 1982:260; Acton, 1992:400). Insisting that socialist emancipation is self-emancipation and that popular sovereignty is to be most thoroughly applied to all of social life, left communist thought has promised an alternative future in which politics would be everybody's business, and in which political and ethical deliberation and questions of culture would no longer be subordinated to those macro-structures of domination, the state and capital. When articulated with what is of value within post-modernism, left communism opens up a way forward for libertarian socialism in the contemporary period.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Although I take socialism and communism to denote the same thing, in keeping with current usage, throughout this thesis I use "socialism" as the generic term under which to classify all thought claiming to be socialist or communist, and I use "communism" only to apply to revolutionary socialism. I refer to as "Marxist" all thinking that views itself as an inheritor of Marx's legacy. I thus make no attempt to differentiate true from false Marxism, socialism, or communism.

<sup>2</sup> In a similar mode, May (1994) seeks to join post-structuralist philosophy with the anarchist political tradition; and Ryan (1982) attempts to articulate Marxism and deconstruction.

<sup>3</sup> "History is necessary above all to the man of action and power who fights a great fight and needs examples, teachers, and comforters; he cannot find them among his contemporaries" (Nietzsche, 1957:12).

## Chapter Two

### The Post-modern Condition and the Retreat of the Socialist Project

*"The end of the twentieth century is not an easy historical moment" (Burbach, Nunez, and Kagarlitsky, 1997:139).*

*"The problem is to shed light on an existing historical movement" (Barrot and Martin, 1974).*

#### Introduction

To champion communism as a panacea for the ills of the late twentieth century would appear to be a ridiculous exercise. As Negri and Hardt (1994:4) assert: "Today, in fact, Marxism, socialism, and communism are terms that are so compromised in dark historical developments it seems that they cannot be rescued from their polemical reductions and that any attempt to repropose a significant usage, rediscover the pregnancy of the terms, or develop a new theory appears perfectly delirious." The language of socialism, now "embarrassingly unreal and naïve" (Bauman in Smart, 1992:219), seems nearly dead. And the reality of socialism, either as the broken remnants of "really existing socialism" or as Western social democracy, looks ever less appealing and feasible. Once the bearer of technical and cultural progress, the left as a whole is apparently "backward-looking, conservative, bereft of new ideas and out of time" (Jacques in Perryman, 1994:13). This situation has elicited a pervasive "left melancholy", summarised by the resignation of the popular incantations - "the only game in town" and "there is no real alternative" (Smart, 1992:2; Cameron, 1996:viii). Never, it appears, has communism seemed such an unlikely prospect, discredited both theoretically and practically. Perhaps, then, the spectre - if such a spectre ever did haunt Europe - has finally been exorcised.

I seek to trouble the notion that in the post-modern age the socialist urge is once-and-for-all dead and buried. Not concurring with the assumption that "Success confirms the truth of the theory; defeat is its own verdict" (Jacoby, 1981:3), I argue that neither the enthusiastic triumphalism from the right nor the current left melancholy are justified. The contemporary period is not historically unique in assuming that it is post-socialist. In 1877, for instance,

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after the crushing of the Paris Commune and with the subsequent wilting of French socialism, Adolph Thiers asserted that “Nobody talks of socialism anymore, rightly. We are rid of it” (in Joll, 1966:12). Furthermore, neither should the post-modern period be viewed as the sole occasion of socialist pessimism. Communists have frequently felt themselves, and humanity at large, to be trapped within an “impregnable fortress of reaction”, a “cesspool”, indicating that, despite their hopes and efforts, “evil has triumphed” (Bakunin, 1972:355). As a disappointed Bakunin (1972:354), at the end of his revolutionary career and close to the end of his life, contended: “The time for revolution has passed not only because of the disastrous events of which we have been the victims ..., but because, to my immense despair, I have found and find more and more each day, that there is absolutely no revolutionary thought, hope, or passion left among the masses; and when these qualities are missing, even the most heroic efforts must fail and nothing can be accomplished.” In contrast to the triumphalism of the right and the despair of the left, I believe that the socialist urge remains central to the popular imagination.<sup>1</sup> In this thesis, I argue that the socialist project can be reinvigorated by articulating post-modern leftism with marginalised currents of twentieth century communism.

This chapter surveys the present ideological-historical conjuncture as it pertains to the situation of socialism, and it introduces the category “left communism”, charting its essential landmarks and the coordinates of its unity. I initially consider the collapse of socialism - both as Eastern bloc communism and as Western social democracy - and the apparent “end of history” that this signals. The theoretical crisis that has accompanied these practical defeats indeed goes further than the “crisis of Stalinism” to disturb the central tenets of socialist thought (Held, 1996:289). This crisis is most powerfully expressed by the challenge of post-modernity. When cast in post-modern terms, socialism’s apparently life-threatening predicament involves: a general skepticism towards essentialism - in particular, the class essentialism that had attained hegemony on the left; the emergence of the “new social movements”, which replace the hitherto privileged bearer of socialism - the working class; an incredulity towards the meta-narratives of enlightenment and progress, one of which is the universal emancipation promised by socialism; and the disaggregating and disorienting effects of “hyper-real”, “fast”, or “spectacular” capitalism. I then examine the socialist response to these post-modern challenges. First, there are those who seek to reformulate the social democratic project. A second response has come from those more or less politically unrepentant Leninists who wish to retain the much maligned core of their Marxian conception of communism and who reject claims that we live in such “New Times”. I argue that such efforts at socialist reassertion fail. They fail to acknowledge the

emphatic defeat that socialism in its social democratic and Leninist modes has suffered; they fail to think beyond capitalism, and they fail to constructively negotiate with the post-modern turn.

Arguing that many post-modern conclusions are inescapable for socialists, I examine the attempt by post-Marxists to link post-modernist and socialist thought. The various shortcomings of post-Marxism indicate the need for another way forward, and it will be my argument that there are resources within the left communist tradition that promise a socialism that both surpasses the defects of socialist orthodoxy and remains open to the important insights developed by theorists of post-modernity. With the problems and uncertainties that the collapse of the two dominant modes of socialism and the rise of post-modernism brings, I assert that left-progressive thinkers would do well to consider a socialist tradition that has never known anything but marginality and defeat. In the chapter's final section, I consider the contours of the left communist tradition and discuss the difficulties involved in identifying its characteristic features.

**“The liberation from capital is nowhere on the agenda of politics” -  
The Defeat of Socialism and the Rise of Post-Modernism**

Journalist Christopher Hitchens (1993:1) has called the 1989-91 dissolution of the East European Communist bloc the “axis, pivot and subtext of all commentary since”. The dominant discourse surrounding these events - found in concentrated form in the media's coverage of the “victory of capitalism” - has been, as Derrida (1994:52) notes, manic, jubilatory, and incantatory. The principal conclusion for commentators has been that “After the upheavals of 1989-91, it is hard to present communism ... as anything but a collection of outdated nostrums” (Femia, 1993:114).

Amongst conservative intellectuals, one observes an anti-utopian realism that demands an acknowledgment of the unsurpassable gains represented by the free market and liberal democratic institutions. For these thinkers, “socialism is dead, and ... none of its variants can be revived in a world awakening from the double nightmare of Stalinism and Breznevism” (Dahrendorf, 1990:38). Capitalism has won the day because of the abundance it is able to promise and because of the ineradicability or depth of contemporary commitment to the institution of private property (Yoder, 1991; Pipes, 1994:56,67). In particular, the happy coincidences of market transactions have won out against the arrogant and misguided attempt to know and organise human life in accordance with some

predetermined purpose (Pipes, 1994; Dahrendorf, 1990:63-9). In the political realm, it is alleged that we have witnessed the victory of “what we already have, of old truths and tested models” (Garton Ash in Pierson, 1995:69). Today, democracy can only be conceived of as “multi-party, parliamentary democracy as practised in contemporary Western, Northern and Southern Europe” (Garton Ash in Pierson, 1995:69). As post-foundationalist Richard Rorty has declared, given contemporary liberal society’s ability to solve problems within its own framework, we have perhaps witnessed the last conceptual revolution we need (McLellan, 1995:74). Coming to a rather similar conclusion (with his now famous “end of history” thesis) is Francis Fukuyama. For Fukuyama (1989:3; 1992), the exhaustion of viable systematic alternatives to Western capitalism and liberal democracy brings a “remarkable consensus” and an end to ideological evolution - in short, a post-historical period.

Leftists have ridiculed Fukuyama’s arrival, through second-rate philosophy and patriotic apologetics, at the hyper-ideological conclusion that “the age of capital is eternal” (Singer in Kaye, 1991:142). More generally, as left critics have asked, are not the increasingly overblown claims made for the market and a classless “end of ideology” simply a neurotic repression of the Real, of bitter struggle and an ever more threatening global situation, rife with nationalist conflict, immanent ecological catastrophe, and economic collapse?

The apparent close of two hundred years of modern revolutions that the 1989 collapse of communism brings has, though, proved a seductive notion. It is rather easy to agree with Zizek’s (1997a:35) contention that, so dominant is the logic of capital, it seems easier to imagine the “end of the world” than the more moderate end of the capitalist mode of production. As Aronowitz (1992:125) has pointed out, the tenets of liberal capitalism - the market, entrepreneurship, private ownership and control of the means of production, and possessive individualism - appear extremely strong at present. In such an environment, it is perhaps unsurprising that numerous commentators on the left have been ready to agree with assertions positing an end to the revolutionary tradition. According to Anthony Giddens (1994:1,68), “the spectre which disturbed the slumbers of bourgeois Europe, and which for more than seventy years took on solid flesh, has been returned to its nether world”.<sup>2</sup> The collapse of really existing socialism, concludes Fred Halliday, means “nothing less than a defeat for the Communist project as it has been known in the Twentieth century and a triumph of the capitalist” (in Lane, 1996:189). Jean Francois Lyotard (1993:112) contrasts the “militant praxis” of his days in *Socialisme ou Barbarie* with the “defensive praxis” that alone is available today, arguing that “The only interventions we may envisage take the form in the publication of papers and collections”. Ralph Miliband (1994:188) likewise concedes

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that “The liberation from capital is nowhere on the agenda of politics”, while Carl Boggs (1995:11) maintains that: “The very idea of revolutionary change has become submerged beneath the postmodern disorder of the 1990s”.<sup>3</sup> And the tremendous intellectual upheaval amongst the left is signalled by the various titles and topics of leftist journals around the events of 1989-91: “The End of Communism?”, “Are Radical Politics Still Possible?”, “Does the Idea of Revolution Make Sense?”, “Can one Still be on the left?”

The “death of socialism”, however, pertains not only to Eastern bloc-style communism. It is meant to apply to social democracy as well. For instance, David Miliband (1994:2) has asserted that: “The revolutions of 1989 marked the end not just of a seventy year challenge to capitalism as an economic system ... but [also] to the reformist orthodoxy predominant on the Western and Northern European left”. The collapse of faith in economic planning and the historical mission of the working class, together with the tendency towards individualism and the desire for innovation and consumerism, are taken to mean that the socialist project of which social democracy was part is now “unambiguously finished” (Dahrendorf, 1990:63; Pierson, 1995:74).

For a start, the traditional working class, that class that socialists believed would - by their central position in capitalism’s economic base and by their sheer weight of numbers - be able to take control of the productive forces and establish socialism, has apparently declined in numbers. Such a claim is, of course, hardly novel. In his famous “revisionist” heresy, Edward Bernstein (1995:8) had asserted that, contrary to Marx’s theory, the intermediary class strata were not in decline and nor were the proletariat becoming poorer. However, with the arrival of what has been called the post-industrial society, the assertion that the industrial working class is no longer a key historical actor is more compelling. A post-industrial society is held to encompass: a shift from the production of goods to services; a growth in the weight of the professional and technical class *vis a vis* the productive industrial class; a shift to the primacy of theoretical knowledge, control, and technical assessment; and the creation of a new “intellectual technology” (Smart, 1992:33). In terms of class, the key features of such a society include a diversification of the working class, the growth of a new middle class,<sup>4</sup> increasing social mobility, the rise of individual rather than group conflict, and the achievement of citizenship rights (Giddens, 1971). Further, these changes in class composition and structuring are evidenced in the decline of those two vital forms of working class organisation - the trade union and the political party. The end of the “Golden Age of social democracy”, the period of the welfare state and Keynesian economic success, brings a shrinkage in trade union membership along with a crisis of identity and a series of electoral

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misfortunes for social democratic parties (Pierson, 1995:23-4,33-9). Such post-industrial facts appear entirely discouraging for socialists. As Andre Gorz (1994:vii) has argued: “As a system, socialism is dead. As a movement and an organised political force, it is on its last legs. All the goals it once pronounced are out of date. The social forces which bear it along are disappearing”.

One result of the simultaneous deaths of social democracy and communism has been an “austerity consensus” or “new realism”. When it comes to an evaluation of political feasibility, for many on the left, the dominant image of socialism - characterised by bureaucracy, inefficiency, surveillance, state control, red tape, the concentration of power within a bureaucratic elite, and terror - is too popular to deny. It is, then, not only the right that finds in Stalinism “the perfect embodiment of the spirit of Communism” (Walicki, 1995:417). With no apparent constituency anymore, confronted by an apparent repudiation of the emancipatory role of the state in favour of individualist competitive activity, faced with the irony of history running, contrary to expectations, *from socialism to capitalism* (Lane, 1991:191; Pierson, 1997:27), and disturbed by the apparent end to the old verities of leftist national liberation movements,<sup>5</sup> a desperate pessimism or a violent re-orientation seems perfectly understandable. Reality has, it is argued, rudely impinged upon the dream. Just as Hegel’s optimistic historical scenario collapsed under the weight of an antiquated and authoritarian Prussian state (Grumley, 1989:38), so, it seems, Marx’s hopes for a communist world are dashed by the life and death of “really existing communism”, the failures of social democratic aspirations, and the comparative benefits and opportunities of liberal democracy. Socialism, then, seems little more than an interesting but now eclipsed moment in history. Thus, the old social democratic left are condemned to rather feebly clutch at memories of Budapest, the Prague Spring, May 1968, a temporarily successful Eurocommunism, or to hope for an electoral surprise (Perryman, 1994:15-16). Meanwhile, as Davey (1994:202) notes, “The far left is now living through its swansong”, stubbornly engaged in the same old forms of action for the same old causes.

These practical defeats find theoretical expression in the rise of post-modernism and its critique of socialist practice in general and of Marxist theory in particular.<sup>6</sup> The rise of post-modernism has been traced to the spectacular events of 1968. Just as the “springtime of the peoples”, the revolutions of 1848, gave way to the reactionary 1850s, so the hopes of the generation of 1968 were left in ruins by the “enormous capacity of capital after these struggles to reconquer the terrain it had initially lost” (Hobsbawm, 1962:13; ICC, n.d.c). 1968 is thus paradoxically, as Homer (1998:74) notes, a period of “euphoria *and*

disillusionment, liberation *and* dissipation". The centrality of 1968 in the crisis of socialism is exemplified in New Philosopher Bernard Henri Levy's imaginary dictionary entry for the year 2000: "Socialism: masculine noun, a cultural genre, born in Paris in 1848, died in Paris in 1968" (in Reader, 1987:111). From this pivotal point, the Marxification of French culture began to collapse, and by the mid-1970s a "crisis of Marxism" was announced. This post-'68 malaise has often been seen as symbolised in Poulantzas's suicide and Althusser's descent into madness and criminality.

Perhaps, as Kellner (1995:34) argues, rather than being seen as a cause for alarm, denial, or pessimism, "crisis" should be acknowledged as having been a consistent and progressive feature of Marxism and socialism from the very beginning.<sup>7</sup> Surely, any theoretical paradigm must constantly renew and readjust itself in response to changing realities. However, many post-modernists have argued that a number of socio-cultural changes to the post-1968 landscape have permanently undermined the fundamental axioms of socialist thought. The working class failed to bring about revolutionary change, and that class has declined in numbers and coherence. "Really existing socialism" emerged as a decidedly unappealing reality. The "new social movements" have challenged socialism's class-based practice, as is indicated by Marxism's hamfisted attempts at theorising their place within the socialist project. Third World revolutionary movements have drifted away from the Marxian vision of liberation. Lastly, post-modernist anti-foundationalism has undermined Marxian realism and the Marxist claim to scientificity, post-modernists have sought to trouble confidence in progressivist and teleological meta-narratives, and some post-modernists have claimed that we have moved into an era of "simulation", an order subversive of Marxian truths and not amenable to Marxian theorising.

Post-modernists have argued that the character of political struggle has changed beyond socialist recognition. 1968 has been viewed as discrediting or exposing the limitations of the trade unions and the Communist Party, once the only hope of "salvation" for artists and intellectuals in post-War France. These organisational forms of the traditional labour movement appeared reactionary and irrelevant when faced with a social revolution that was spontaneous, outside of the limits of methods of struggle and demands of traditional politics, particularistic, and informally organised (Smart, 1983:6). Out of 1968, and in contrast to the formerly hegemonic politics of class, emerged the "politics of identity" and, with this, a set of "post-materialist values" (Sarup, 1996:47). For instance, for Habermas, "the new conflicts are not ignited by *distributional problems*, but by questions having to do with the *grammar* of forms of life" (in White, 1991:10). Neither work nor workers, it is argued, are

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central in structuring contemporary social life. Identity is now far more complex and fragmentary, and consumption rather than production is apparently at the core of social life today<sup>8</sup> (Lyon, 1994:66; Gorz, 1994:viii). The demise of the old forms of solidarity, and group life makes the idea of societal transformation by a proletariat that has attained its “ascribed class consciousness” and that acts in accord with its unified class interests an increasingly unreal scenario (D. Miliband, 1994:127; Pierson, 1995:16,11; Scott, 1990:61).

For thinkers like Andre Gorz, the decline in numbers and importance of the Western working class has been accompanied by a shift to new agents of social change: youth, the Third World poor, those on the margins of work. Again, the rise of these “new social movements” has been linked with those dramatic events of 1968 (Scott, 1990:1; Sarup, 1996:47). Marxism, it is alleged, can evaluate social movements only in terms of their proximity to or distance from class movements, and it was thus unable to recuperate such developments - most importantly, the discovery of such *difference* - within its determinist logic (Scott, 1990:2). This shift has made *subjectivity* and *difference* essential, as old political constituencies and social allegiances are broken up and the centrality of work is displaced by questions of value, culture, and lifestyle, heralding an *extension of politics* (Sarup, 1996:49; Scott, 1990). In this vein, a contrasting set of demands and modes of struggle seem to emerge, permanently separating the old workers’ movement from the new social movements. On the one hand, we have quantitative demands, concerns with distribution, security, and material equality. On the other hand, contemporary movements seem to demand autonomy, concern themselves with identity, oppose control, manipulation, and regulation, and frame their demands in terms of qualitative concerns with being and freedom (Offe, 1987:22). Lastly, the claim that any one moment of a subject’s identity could be forever fixed and privileged is impatiently treated with ironic scorn: essentialism today can only be strategic.

Post-modernists have taken the pluralism inherent in these new social movements as fundamental, both as a claim about the way things really are and as an ethical ideal by which to operate. The post-modern typically evinces an *incredulity towards the meta-narratives of modernity*. These meta-narratives organise and legitimate knowledge and history in such forms as: “Marxism will free the proletariat from bondage, by means of revolution” or “the creation of wealth will free human kind from poverty, through the technological breakthroughs of free market capitalism” (Readings, 1991:60-5). However, under the immense pressure of modernity’s manifold disasters, these meta-narratives have lost their authority: “What kind of thought”, asks Lyotard (1989:7), “is able to sublimate Auschwitz in a

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general process towards a universal emancipation?" Socialism's totalising theoretical and historical practice is understood as terroristic and totalitarian. Its reduction of the heterogeneity of "language games" to a fundamental identity - class - is coercive, say post-modernists, who instead champion the proliferation of world views or little narratives (Docherty, 1990:213; May, 1994:44; Lyon, 1994:49; Boyne, 1990:132; Best and Kellner, 1991:57).

The drive towards a single total truth that one finds in Marxism is jettisoned by adepts of post-modernism who assert that in the post-legitimation era, with the chronic instability of ethical and epistemological foundations, one can only "advance without authority" (in Bauman, 1995:241; Thiele, 1997:87).<sup>9</sup> Marxism's pretensions to objective science are derided as epistemologically and morally dubious. Relatedly, the socialist conception of ideology, as some sort of "mystification" that serves class interests is rejected as relying on an untenable ideology/science distinction (Barrett, 1991:183,198). Similarly, the Marxian attempt at a "total history" - with the assumptions of the possibility of recovering the past, of separating fact and value, of identifying underlying laws and causal relations, of distinguishing history from fiction, based on correspondence and coherence rather than morality, politics, or aesthetics - is rejected by post-structuralist and post-modernist historians and social theorists who emphasise instead the *discursive* nature of all knowledge (Barrett, 1991:132; Lloyd, 1993:33; Weinstein, 1990:12).

Post-modernism's scepticism towards the claims of objective science, to totalising designs, and its emphasis on contingency and difference have inclined it to be very critical of socialist plans for the good society. Indeed, in some post-modernist accounts, socialist theory and the resulting communist system are the most decisive attempts not to transcend modernity but, rather, to make it work (Bauman, 1992:221). The end of modernity, thus, signals the end of the idea of a "designed society" and, therefore, of socialism (Bauman, 1992:221). That is, post-modernity as epoch and post-modernism as social theory tends to be not only philosophically anti-modernist but also politically anti-utopian, with an ironic eye fixed on the dangerously naïve and earnest plans for the good society.

The various themes of post-modern destabilisation come together in a strand of thought that emphasises the extent to which contemporary reality involves an ironic/destructive mood, a life now bereft of truths and ideals, an overabundance of meanings, and an increasing experience of speed. For example, Baudrillard (1983a) rejects the "hermeneutics of suspicion", that is, depth models of reality such as Marxism that seek to reveal the reality

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behind the illusion. In this age of “simulation” and “hyper-reality”, “illusion is no longer possible because the real is no longer possible” and everything becomes “entirely impregnated by an aesthetic” (Lyon, 1994:74; Featherstone, 1991:68). In the words of Baudrillard’s disciples, Kroker and Cook, the post-modern signifies a “depth-less culture”, “sensory overload”, and the “effacement of the boundary between the real and the image” (in Featherstone, 1991:65). The mood this “obscene” world calls forth is characterised primarily by panic, by a sense that having reached “the end of history ... [, we] are now arching back toward a great fatal implosion” (Kroker and Cook, 1988:279). Thus it is, for example, that Sharrett (1993) finds post-modern film - the predominant contemporary art form - full of signs of death, decay, catastrophe, and forced irony.

In this epoch, all references seem unstable, all identity transitory and tenuous - “Everyone can be anyone”. As the overproduction of signs continues inexorably, time is fragmented into a series of perpetual presents that leave us no longer able to connect the multitude of signs and images into narrative sequences (Featherstone, 1991:83,123). The typical post-modern experience, then, is *schizophrenic*, connoting the “vivid, the immediate, the isolated ‘presentness’ of the world” (Featherstone, 1991:123). In these accounts, the masses are not attaining ascribed class consciousness in order to prepare for the final assault on capitalism. They are either busy attending the “postmodern carnival” - enjoying the freedom that lifestyle choices offer, absorbed with spectacular images and the rapid turnover of fashions (Featherstone, 1991) - or they are passive and bored “hyper-conformists” who cannot be properly socialised by the media, turning banality, inertia, and a-politicism into forms of resistance (Baudrillard, 1983b).

On these terms, clearly the prognosis for socialism is not good. The combination of practical and theoretical defeats crushes socialist aspirations, bringing to a close the period in which communism could appear a troubling spectre. Socialists today are thus confronted by a number of extraordinarily perplexing difficulties. “Really existing socialism” has collapsed. Social democracy has lost its constituency, and the conditions in which it thrived have withered. The prestige of Marxian theory has been worn away both by practical shortcomings and by the loss of faith in foundational thinking, science, essentialism, and teleological visions of liberation. What, in the contemporary period, remains of the socialist project?

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### **“Making socialist values count” - Socialist Orthodoxy Restated**

In response to post-modern realities and theoretical problems, a number of socialists have attempted to look again at what would constitute a good and feasible socialist society, trying in the process to distance themselves from the undesirable aspects of old socialist positions. A socialist commitment, for these thinkers, remains viable and necessary in the post-modern age. This renewed effort to look for a third way beyond totalitarianism and bourgeois liberal democracy finds both social democratic and Leninist proponents. I shall first consider those attempts to revive the social democratic tradition within the context of triumphant liberal capitalism. I shall then investigate the effort at re-asserting Marxist-Leninist revolutionary socialism as a way beyond the entrenched difficulties of liberal capitalism and the horrors of Stalinism. I will argue that, because of the weight of the practical defeats of socialist orthodoxy and in view of the immense pressure exerted by the post-modern challenge, such socialist restatements are importantly inadequate. One possible answer has been the articulation of post-modernist and socialist thinking in the post-Marxist current of social thought. And I will outline and evaluate this post-Marxism in a section to follow, before considering, in a further section, the contours of the left communist tradition.

Beilharz (1993:54-5) has contended that, although communism is now off the agenda, social democracy remains “a major political current of modernity”. Indeed, it would appear that the same dissatisfactions with *laissez faire* that animated late nineteenth century social democracy are still at work today. Even a formerly convinced neo-liberal such as philosopher John Gray (1998:194-6) has recently warned of the descent into slash-and-burn capitalism and the threats to international peace represented by disintegrating nation-states, run-amok rivalry, and zones of stateless chaos. In response, Gray (1998:202) seeks a rehabilitation of the nation-state and a regime of global governance.

Gray’s concern with Britain’s declining fortunes and cultural distinctiveness is replicated in Will Hutton’s (1995) influential *The State We’re In*. Surveying growing bureaucracy, corrosive individualism, the rise of a “new corruption”, and economic and social collapse, Hutton (1995:1-9,24,323) hopes to reinvigorate social market capitalism and, in the process, Britain’s self-esteem and sense of direction. According to Hutton (1995:17,25), successful capitalism requires “careful economic management and institutions that foster co-operation and commitment”. Thus, “The state must act to assert common purpose”. Among other things, Hutton (1995:326) urges the adoption of a written constitution, the democratisation of civil society, management and regulation of the market both nationally and

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internationally, reforms towards a stabilisation of the international financial order, and a welfare state that embodies the idea of social citizenship.

Part of the same wave of social democratic revival is Anthony Giddens' *The Third Way*. Giddens (1998:3-5) contends that the decline of both communism and social democracy reflects socialism's inadequate economic dimension, an inadequacy fully revealed by globalisation and technological change since the 1970s. Socialists have mistakenly believed that capitalism is inefficient, socially-divisive, and doomed to collapse. However, with the neo-liberal utopia looking more and more precarious, the ideals for the good life that drove socialism continue to haunt us (Giddens, 1998:1,15). For Giddens (1998:1), "the challenge is to make these values count where the economic programme of socialism has become discredited". A genuine third way and a renewed social democratic alternative must, argues Giddens (1998:16,21-3), take account of a host of new realities and realisations. For a start, the market brings increased production and provides data and innovation. Further, voting has fragmented, and politics has moved away from parliaments and is now a "sub-politics". And, with the decline of the husband-headed family, a homogeneous labour market, the centrality of mass production, the legitimacy of the elitist state, and the dominance of national economies, there has been a shift to post-materialist values. The essential aspects of a renewed third way are, for Giddens (1998:64-9,100-2,127-9): equality as inclusion (an equality that does not restrict diversity); a revival of civic culture with an emphasis on citizenship (with rights *and* responsibilities equally emphasised); a more than gestural concern with environmental issues; a positive attitude to globalisation (a cosmopolitan nationalism); a written constitution; and a renewed community, evidencing a recognition of the importance of individualism and pluralism.

Posing a not dissimilar ideal from this re-stated social democratic position are adherents of "market socialism", what Pierson (1995:129) summarises as "social ownership plus markets". In an age of apparently fast-declining prospects for socialism, market socialists' big claim is that their model is "feasible" (Pierson, 1995:135; Schweickart, 1993:336). This "feasible socialism", according to Alex Nove, means a society "which might be achieved within the life time of a child already conceived" (in R. Miliband, 1994:3). Such appeals to feasibility have meant that the market socialist strand has provided a mass of detail regarding the possible workings of the future society, in sharp contrast to Marx's refusal to provide recipes for the socialist kitchens of the future.

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Market socialists insist that we reconsider the stark opposition between socialist economies and the market. It is not markets *per se* that are the problem but *capitalist* markets (Pierson, 1995:84). For some, this tilt towards the market comes down to the reluctant acceptance that “there is no alternative”. For others, the market potentially gives rise to such laudable features as efficiency, freedom of choice, and diversity of lifestyles (Schweickart, 1993:68; Pierson, 1995:88-9,124).

Frequently, however, in these accounts, the concentration of economic power would be assuaged by some degree of public or social ownership (Pierson, 1995:92,96). Ralph Miliband (1994:110), for instance, proposes that the economy consist of three sectors: (1) a predominant and varied public sector; (2) a substantial cooperative sector; (3) an enduring and sizable private sector, restricted mainly to small and medium firms. In market socialist accounts, one often finds some variety of projected capital-labour partnership in profit-sharing, or a degree of workers’ self-management - though there are those, like Roemer, who feel that workers’ management may impede economic maximisation and efficiency (Pierson, 1995:101,199).

Characteristically, despite arguments for decentralisation and participation, market socialists, like the new social democrats, accord a considerable role to the central state (Pierson, 1995:97,162,177). Nove, for example, sees the state’s function in the future socialist order as “very great” in such areas as: (1) major investments; (2) the monitoring of decentralised investments; (3) the role of administering electricity, oil, and rail; (4) setting the ground rules for the autonomous and free sectors (Pierson, 1995:105). Similarly, Schweickart (1993:340) envisages the state as continuing to make decisions concerning the generation and allocation of investment funds and the provision of public goods, and he “reconciles” this, in what can only be described as a very idiosyncratic reading, with Marx’s comments on a post-capitalist social order: “Marx’s claim that the state will wither away is really nothing more than the claim that in a democratic society where everyone has a decent job and everyone is incorporated in a significant way into the community, there will be little crime or violence.” In like manner, Miliband (1994:179,186) argues that “the nation-state must remain for the foreseeable future the crucial point of reference for the left”. It is only the state, Miliband believes, that can tackle the numerous problems of capitalism and move us towards an egalitarian and democratic society.

Both market socialism and “third-way” social democracy emphasise the state as the essential means of making the transition from capitalism to socialism,<sup>10</sup> and both are, in fact, species

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of electoral socialism (Pierson, 1995:193). Ralph Miliband (1994), for example, maintains that the task of the elected socialist government is to intervene powerfully to advance the country towards socialism, without waiting for world revolution. Likewise, for Schweickart (1993:282), all hope is pinned upon the election of a socialist government endowed with a sufficient mandate to carry through the legislative changes required for “economic democracy”.

In the end, this “feasible socialism” is as weak as it is hopeful. It avoids convincingly addressing the power of the state and capital. It flees before the task of specifying what a “democratic socialism” might mean, a flight which is understandable given the continuing statism and elitism of their theory of political transition. Reformulated social democracy tends towards a utopianism that cheerfully ignores the power of capital, that both appeals to and shrinks from the state, or that simply accommodates itself to the current order of things, hoping to soften the edges of neo-liberalism by appealing to the equalitarian and democratic forces immanent in civil society.<sup>11</sup> Thus, market socialist James Yunker admits that the differences between socialism and capitalism are “so minor as to be almost negligible” (in Pierson, 1995:189). And, in similar fashion, Schweickart (1993:282) happily asserts that: “The important thing to notice is that the day after the ‘revolution’ most people could continue doing exactly what they were doing before.”

Rejecting such reformist pragmatism and scandalised by the retreat of post-modernist intellectuals from socialist ideals, a handful of obdurate Leninists - Wood (1986), Eagleton (1985; 1991; 1996), Callinicos (1989; 1990), Geras (1987), and Anderson (1983), for example - have sought to muscularly reassert the viability of Marxism as a theoretical paradigm and communism as a preferable and possible alternative to capitalism. Like Derrida (1994:52) in his recent *Spectres of Marx*, these Marxists argue that the currently celebrated social system has, in fact, never looked so dark and threatening or so threatened. The ghosts of Marx and communism will return again and again to haunt a world troubled by crises of overproduction, wars and genocide, inequality and exploitation. As Mandel (1995:445) says, “One does not see hundreds of medical doctors gathering day after day at the cemetery, to prove that a given casket contains a corpse”. The problem for these socialists is that “post everything” may well mean “capitalism forever” (Singer in Pierson, 1995:14).

These stubborn socialists have rejected the post-modernist retreat from theorising class as a key category, a retreat that is seen as especially unfortunate given the appearance through

the 1980s of bitter class warfare (Wood, 1995:1; Geras, 1987). Contrary to post-industrial and post-Marxist assertions, the working class has not come apart or declined. In fact, if one avoids the mistake of identifying the working class with manual factory labour,<sup>12</sup> the class of wage labourers has grown considerably this century (Callinicos, 1987:8). Abandoning the terrain of class analysis and organisation is thus unjustified and disabling.

Furthermore, these Marxists insist, class inequality has a different historical status from those inequalities on which the new social movements are based. Class is more *fundamental* and more *universal*. Whereas the abolition of sexual, racial, and other inequalities is not in principle incompatible with capitalism, the same cannot be said of class exploitation, which is at the very heart of the capitalist mode of production (Wood, 1995:259-262). These particularistic identities are far more contingent and voluntary than class, and, in contrast to these particularistic politics, which are exclusively about and for the particular group involved (defining themselves negatively against others), the political project of the left has the virtue of being *universalist*. That is, socialism is concerned with and addressed to *all* human beings (Hobsbawm, 1996:41-4). Regarding the post-modern aversion to universalism and the repetitive appeal to difference, Leninists have pointed out that certain universalities actually protect and encourage individual particularities (Sarup, 1996:63). Further, a concern with difference alone is insufficient as it does not allow us to distinguish the difference of the oppressor from that of the oppressed. That is, it does not allow that there will be differences that we should not accept (Sarup, 1996:63). Finally, these Marxists have offered a number of challenges to the post-modernist replacement of class by the new social movements. Such new movements are not a cohesive substitute for the working class (Scott, 1990:80). Tellingly, only “progressive” social movements - rather than say nationalism - are ever included by post-modernists (McLennan, 1995:86). Lastly, politically implicit in the post-modernist message to “respect differences” is little but a commonplace liberal call for something like a multi-cultural community (Zavarzadeh and Moton, 1994:3) - hardly an answer to the huge and pressing problems of late capitalism.

These obdurate socialist arguments insist that the Marxian answers to questions of class interests and agency remain defensible in the face of post-modernism. Post-modernists often assert that there are no material interests, only discursively-constructed ideas about them. Marxists respond, however, that, if interests are purely discursive, then on what basis do post-modernists retain a commitment to leftist values (sometimes even to a loosely-defined socialism)? Moreover, why do post-modernists try to foist this commitment onto *all* social movements (Geras, 1987:192; Wood, 1986:61)? For Eagleton (1991:206), the denial of

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objective interests amounts to no less than extravagant idealism. After all, no other-worldly postulates are required to show that the position of slave carries with it a set of interests: namely, that if you were to find yourself in this position, you would do well to extract yourself from it. Marxists maintain that the working class' experiences of exploitation and unfreedom, and its numerical and strategic social power, mean that it has the interest in and the ability to establish socialism (Wood, 1986:14). Moreover, the events of 1989-91 have been read by these Marxist thinkers as strengthening socialist claims about the force of class agency in historical change (Callinicos, 1991:7; Halliday, 1990:5; Eagleton, 1991:xiii).

The post-modernist destabilisation of truth, history, and totality have all been repudiated by Leninists. The distinction between truth and falsity, with evidence as the site of judgment, is reasserted (Anderson, 1984:48). The aestheticisation and randomisation of history are rejected as philosophically untenable and ethically dangerous: historical judgements can and must be made (Anderson, 1983; Hobsbawm, 1994). Post-modern antipathy towards the category of totality is also called into question. Both Jameson<sup>13</sup> (1990) and Wood (1995:2), for instance, argue that capitalism's totalising tendency means that the category of totality is a methodological necessity for anyone hoping to understand the contemporary world: "The dynamics of such commitment are derived not from the reading of the 'Marxist classics' but rather from the objective experience of social reality and the way in which one isolated cause or issue, one specific form of injustice, cannot be fulfilled or corrected without eventually drawing the entire web of interrelated social levels together into a totality, which then demands the invention of a politics of social transformation" (Jameson, 1990:251).

Rather than cede ground and try to "learn to love the market" (Pierson, 1995:210), these Leninists have returned to the critique of capitalism, and they have viewed post-modernism as little more than an inscription of capitalism's current phase. Capitalism is exploitative and generates unfreedom, it is wasteful and irrational, and it thwarts the potentialities of human beings. International capitalism's historical track record is hardly impressive, and there is a curious lack of interest in the experiences of "really existing liberal capitalism" (Callinicos, 1991:101,109,120; Miliband, 1994:34-9; Halliday, 1990:22; Wood, 1995). For unrepentant Marxists, post-modernity - an "advanced stage of intellectual malady" - is best read as a signal of the interests bound up with consumer capitalism in its latest "post-industrial" phase (Norris, 1990:44; 1992:16,150; Miliband, 1985:6; Geras, 1987:42). For instance, rejecting the idea that we live in "new times", Alex Callinicos (1989:4,168,170) links the post-modern phenomenon to the rising prospects of a new middle class: "what could be more reassuring for a generation, drawn first towards and then away from Marxism by the

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political ups and downs of the past two decades, than to be told - in a style decked out with the apparent profundity and genuine obscurity of the sub-modernist rhetoric cultivated by '68-thought' - that there is nothing they can do to change the world?"<sup>14</sup> Similarly, Wood (1986) interprets the post-modernist "new true socialism" as issuing from the same causes as the rise of the "new right". The retreat from Marxist fundamentals is interpreted by Wood as an over-reaction to the disappointment that the new militancy in labour-capital disputes seen in the 1980s failed to bring socialism with it.<sup>15</sup>

Rejecting that one can in anyway be complacent about really existing capitalism, Leninists have sought to distance themselves from the historical failures of the socialist project. Instead, they gesture towards a *third way* that can establish "real socialism". Miliband (1994:47), for instance, argues that the lack of democracy and equality in Russia and in other nominally communist societies had no relationship with Marx's thought, and he thus denies that these societies or their dissolution say anything significant about the possibility or desirability of socialism. Similarly, Erik Olin Wright (1993:16,22) argues that Russia does not discredit socialism. Not only was the USSR not based, as Marx argued that socialism should be, on advanced capitalist productive forces, but communist Russia exhibited an "absence of meaningful democracy, [and] socialist economic institutions could not be constructed and sustained". Indeed, Alex Callinicos (1991:1,16) believes that the collapse of the USSR is a boost to socialism, clearing the way for real Marxism to assert itself.

Like the social democratic attempt, in my opinion, the restatement by obdurate Leninists fails to address the tasks faced by socialist thought in a post-modern age. These leftist thinkers have importantly pointed to political and theoretical inadequacies that are to be found in some post-modernism: the extreme relativism and uncritical cultural pluralism; the re-emergence of meta-narrative and totalisation; the rejection of truth and causality in favour of an *a priori* philosophy of utter contingency<sup>16</sup>; the irrationalist rejection of Enlightenment and the Western tradition; the fragmentation of possibilities for alliance and solidarity implied by some forms of identity politics; the withdrawal of interest from macro-structures of domination; the subjectivism, quietism, and aestheticisation of its politics (Best and Kellner, 1991:262,291; 1997:278). In response, these Leninists have importantly emphasised the power and destructiveness of capital, and they have insisted that collective action is still possible and necessary. However, much of the Marxist response has been inadequate, an inadequacy centered primarily on two problems: first, although these thinkers are all philosophically post-Leninist, without an explicit political distancing from the

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Leninist tradition, their own third way remains mired in the barbarism of Stalinism, unable as they are to convincingly distinguish their own strain of socialism from “really existing socialism”; secondly, these Marxists have not recognised the decisiveness and potential of what post-modernism has to tell us. I will deal with each of these issues in turn.

Today, any attempt to argue for a third way separate from really existing socialism and liberal-democratic capitalism is treated with extreme skepticism, as theoretically “threadbare” or as a “pathetic dead-end” (Pierson, 1991:57,65; Giddens, 1994; Dahrendorf, 1991; Stedman Jones, 1990:3). Exasperation with debates about what constitutes “real” socialism is perhaps understandable. The socialist ideal could remain forever immune from critical attack, never more than a supposedly appealing but frustratingly hazy shape. Against those who would, in Foucault’s words, oppose Marx’s real beard to Stalin’s false nose, does not the communist ideal carry in its very “genetic” makeup (Kolakowski) defective material that predisposes its realisation to gulags and show trials?

I find such objections largely justified when they refer to the attempts by obdurate Marxists to differentiate Stalinism from socialism. When critics like Eric Olin Wright and Ralph Miliband reject the equation of Russia with socialism, their insufficiently elaborated criteria are far from an adequate basis for a position that can avoid the weaknesses of social democratic and authoritarian communist accounts. Quite reasonably contending that “Bolshevism is ended, not history”, Lane (1996:199-200), for example, still fails to meaningfully distinguish “really existing socialism” from what might still be valid in the socialist project. Lane asserts that Leninist political voluntarism has proven inappropriate as the praxis of socialist revolution, but is this what marks socialism off from the disaster that was “really existing socialism”? I believe that if socialists are to be convincing they must do significantly more than gesture at criteria such as ill-defined degrees of democracy and the presence or absence of political voluntarism. They will have to talk more closely about the content of socialism, and they will have to address in a much more sophisticated manner that seemingly outmoded issue: the Russian question.

Regarding the second problem I have identified (the failure of socialists to deal adequately with the post-modern), today, sociological debate has apparently moved beyond both of those initial reactions to the advent of the post-modern - uncritical embrace or angry rejection and condemnation. Although obdurate Leninists made telling blows and important correctives to a rampant post-modernism that bent the stick too far in one direction, it makes little sense to read post-modernism as a new “*trahison des clercs*” or to appeal to a gross

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materialism that links post-modernist thought with the income and status of academics. Neither is it convincing to assert that “new times” thought signals the lack of staying power and crushed expectations of naïve academic socialists. In fact, on the whole, socialists have been far too hasty in pronouncing pessimistic and negative judgment on the entirety of post-modernism, even if they have often been right in rejecting the implications of some post-modernist politics.

An example of one such misdirected socialist reading of the post-modern is provided by left communist Cornelius Castoriadis. Castoriadis (1997b) interpreted the advent of post-modernism as a signal of the contemporary retreat from the radical questioning characteristic of what he called the “project of autonomy” into generalised conformism. Post-modernism, asserted Castoriadis (1997b:32), reflects the chronic inability of the current age to come up with anything positive, both as to what it is and as to what it wants. The entanglement since the mid-eighteenth century of those two “imaginary significations” - the project of autonomy and the attempt at the unlimited expansion of rational mastery - has, since the end of World War II, given way to a disappearance of the twin critiques of representative democracy and capitalist rationality, as well as to privatisation, depoliticisation, and submission to the dominant order under the sign of the economic (Castoriadis, 1997b:37-40).

Whilst he rightly dismisses the political agnosticism of some post-modernists, I do not believe that Castoriadis’ relentlessly negative critique can be justified. Castoriadis (1997b:41) and others have pointed out many features of the post-modern condition and of postmodern theory that do not seem to justify such pessimism, which can be read as encouraging and vital for a contemporary revitalisation of socialism. For instance, post-modernism frequently contains a thorough-going skepticism to all claims of authority and foundations (based, for instance, on science, on History, on Doctrine, on Party, or on a universal class), a tacit anarchism and anti-statism (May, 1994; Aronowitz, 1989:49; Pepper, 1993:153), and a continuing interest in democracy.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, post-modernism has paid close attention to questions of gender,<sup>18</sup> it has taken a more modest and self-reflective approach to theoretical and political questions, in contrast to the dream of unity, closure, and total transparency (Beilharz, 1994:9,105-6), and it has jettisoned the notion of history as progress.

I believe that, today, post-modernism is an inescapable intellectual and political formation for the left. Post-modernist politics are, very importantly, inseparable from the failures and

defeat of the social democratic and Leninist projects. Further, post-modernism, attempting as it does to move beyond eclipsed socialist orthodoxy, is still frequently marked by a socialist-leftist political urge. However, post-modernism's socialist direction is most abundantly evident in the post-Marxist venture, which aims to make pragmatic use of the Marxian tools that it finds helpful, while being more skeptical about Marxism's methodological distinctiveness and shelving Marxism's untenable elements - the essentialism, the philosophy of history, the totalising approach (Mouzelis, 1990:1; Wright, 1992:6; Pierson, 1995:55). Because of its embrace of post-modernity as an insurmountable horizon for political and theoretical activity and because it consciously strives towards a socialism after social democracy and Leninism, post-Marxism is far more interesting and important than the attempts at re-stating social democratic or Leninist socialism.

### **“Radical and plural democracy” - The Post-Marxist Alternative**

Perhaps most prominent in the post-Marxist field are social theorists Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe.<sup>19</sup> Hoping to avoid “the twin pitfalls of Marxist socialism and social democracy”, Laclau and Mouffe seek to be both modern and post-modern (Mouffe, 1989:32). The post-modern facet of Laclau and Mouffe's political equation sees them abandoning the abstract universalism and positivist epistemology of the Enlightenment, the essentialist conception of social totality, and the myth of a unitary subject (Mouffe, 1989:42). Laclau and Mouffe (1985:146,152) reject Marxism's reduction of concrete social struggles to one fundamental moment - class - and they trace the slippages in the thought of a number of prominent Marxian theorists who, while committed to class essentialism, were pushed by the exigencies of the struggles that they witnessed to at least partially acknowledge the plurality of the social world. Laclau and Mouffe (1985; Laclau, 1990:xiv,83) argue that the social is open and indeterminate - one can no longer appeal by way of Party, History, or Doctrine to a guaranteed future. Any social identity entails construction rather than a simple recognition, argues Laclau (1994:3), drawing on Lacanian psychoanalysis to posit an originary lack, which is then addressed by identification. Class identity cannot, therefore, be the most fundamental of subject positions: “as every subject position is a discursive position, it partakes of the open character of every discourse; consequently, the various positions cannot be totally fixed in a closed system of differences” (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985:115). Nor, insist Laclau and Mouffe (1985:85), are class positions the necessary location of historical interests. There is no privileged agent of socialist change, and no necessary relation between socialist aspirations and the positions of subjects in the relations of production (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985:6). Instead of Marxism's

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“obsolete positivism”, its notion of one essential moment of rupture, and its assumptions of a projected end of politics and a transparent society, Laclau and Mouffe (1985:85,152; Laclau, 1990:184) argue for a reformulated strategy of hegemony, involving highly contingent political articulations around “nodal points” that partially fix meaning.

Accepting much of the post-structuralist turn to language, the post-industrialist analysis of late capitalism, and the post-modernist emphasis on pluralism and difference, post-Marxism nevertheless remains committed to the project of socialism. This socialist commitment is characteristically articulated in a rather vague language of hesitation and moderation, with “citizenship”, “civil society”, “rights”, “democracy”, and “pluralism” as the recurrent elements of the post-Marxist political lexicon. This “socialism without guarantees” (Blackburn, 1991:239) seeks to pursue a politics very different to that which had revolved around parties, resolutions, and manifestos (New Times Manifesto, 1990:448-9) - in Urry’s (1989:38) words, a “small-p” politics of civil society. Hall and Jacques (1990:173), for example, seek to revive the concept and politics of citizenship as a means of redressing the balance between state and civil society. In a similar vein, Laclau and Mouffe (1985:176) argue that the left’s task is to deepen and expand liberal democracy in the direction of “radical and plural democracy”. In order to accomplish this, asserts Mouffe (1991:1), one should accept as well-founded the ideals of the 200-year-old democratic revolution - freedom and equality - and contrast them with their imperfect realisation in the contemporary period. Thus, for Laclau and Mouffe (1992:2), the historically disastrous attempt to construct a totally new society should be abandoned in favour of the pursuit of socialist goals within a liberal-democratic regime. Radical democracy, says Laclau (1990:232), is anti-utopian - it is open and incomplete. Emancipation is thus always emancipation to come (Torfing, 1999:284). This has meant a reformulation of socialist goals and analyses of state and market in a more “realistic” direction. According to Laclau (1990:25), for instance, the polarities between the market-based system and the system based on social management and planning (abandoned for some type of mixed economy, a “realistic” option for the left, says Laclau) and between reform and revolution are to be reconsidered. Similarly, Laclau and Mouffe reject that the state is a homogeneous unit, divided permanently from civil society (Boggs, 1995:21), and Mouffe (1997:96) accepts the necessity of representative democracy and the state.

While I find post-Marxism’s attempted dialogue between post-modernism and socialism more compelling than social democracy and Leninism, I believe that both its critical and its utopian moments lack a certain robustness. Laclau and Mouffe have contributed a great deal

to any post-modern reinvigoration of the socialist project. By undermining the distinction hitherto drawn between reform and revolution they have moved beyond the eschatological vision of the advent of socialism. They have emphasised the extension of popular sovereignty, seeking the “gradual displacement of the democratic imaginary to all spheres of society” (in Torfing, 1999:257). Laclau and Mouffe also show a keen appreciation of the possibilities that the current conjuncture offers up to socialism, rejecting sectarian and isolationist culture critique. Moreover, they have reintroduced politics into the socialist equation with their emphases on hegemony and articulation and with their rejection of perfectionism. However, Laclau and Mouffe’s commitment to socialism and democratic politics is weakened by a relative coyness regarding the massive structuring effects of capital.<sup>20</sup> Their continuing acceptance of the state seems somewhat akin to the Eurocommunist stance (Torfing, 1999:260).<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, the rejection of universalism surely undermines the projected arrangements and very possibility of radical democracy.<sup>22</sup> This shows itself as a failure to specify the particular *socialist* organisational arrangements of radical democracy, resting content instead with a nebulous appeal to civil society’s or democracy’s replenishment.<sup>23</sup> In short, the problem to be addressed at a utopian and political level is how, in the end, this vision can avoid either replicating the deficits of some post-modernist political thinking (foreclosing on the possibility of anything other than contingency<sup>24</sup>) or solidifying into yet another species of electoral, social democratic politics.

Despite its frequent socialist leanings, then, post-Marxism and post-modernism’s political-utopian voice is often muffled. Fear of the dangers of unrealistic utopianism has made leftist post-modernism reluctant to describe its own utopian tendencies and unwilling to closely specify the concrete possibilities for progressive social change. The constant irony that post-modernism is left having to treat its own aspirations for emancipation with has made for a domination of project-less pragmatics over a much needed utopian dimension. Such realism, I suggest, has much in common with the reluctance of both social democracy and Leninism to extend their arguments in a utopian direction.

### **“To shed light on an existing historical movement” -**

#### **The Left Communist Tradition**

I have argued that the various contemporary efforts at socialist restatement have proved importantly flawed. The most important difficulties in socialist reassertion appear to be the challenge posed by the emergence of post-modernism and the confrontation with the legacy of socialist orthodoxy. I contend that social democrats and Leninists have been unable to

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face these issues adequately, I have said that, although promising, post-Marxism has not yet provided a compelling socialist vision, and, in the remainder of my thesis, I shall contend that the left communist tradition might provide a way forward, being open to important post-modern insights and possessed of a radical and compelling socialist alternative.

In this section, I examine the content of the socialism espoused by the left communist tradition. I aim to define the features that unify this tradition despite its internal divergences. That is, I ask what it is that makes left communism “hold together”. In approaching this problem, I emphasise the necessary corrosion of the divides between social democracy and Leninism and between anarchism and Marxism, and I argue for the importance of the left communist aspiration towards popular sovereignty.

Any attempt to delineate and describe a leftist tradition must take stock of Perry Anderson’s (1976) *Considerations on Western Marxism*, a shining contribution to socialist history of ideas. Today, much of Anderson’s argument regarding Western Marxism appears to be the result of selective blindness and unreasonable hopes. In keeping with his own political prejudices, Anderson attempted to chart Western Marxism’s “retreat” from politics and economics into superstructural concerns, its all-to-intimate links to bourgeois philosophy, and its absence of a healthy Marxist-Leninist practice with organic ties to a proletarian audience. All this he set against the “heroic period” that preceded it. More tenuously still, Anderson contrasted the pessimism and isolation of Western Marxism with the emergence of a vigorous, politically and economically literate Trotskyism, which he saw as practical corrective to the years of defeat and counter-revolution. This context of defeat was decisive. Following Lenin, Anderson (1976:3) argued that “correct revolutionary theory assumes shape only in close connection with the practical activity of a truly mass and truly revolutionary movement”. The limitations of the working class movement, therefore, set limits on Western Marxism’s work, just as it had on that of Marx and Engels, both in terms of the *scope* of the texts and at the level of the theory’s reception.

The contemporary reader of *Considerations* cannot help but be struck by some of the flaws of the work. There are significant gaps in Anderson’s tradition. Equally, his scathing judgements downplay the important additions that “Western Marxism” has lent to Marxian thought. Furthermore, Anderson’s projection of the coming resurgence of Trotskyism fails to convince.

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In view of these potential dangers (selectivity and political bias, for example), how should one approach the identification of a tradition, its adherents, its key texts, its fundamental axioms? One approach might be to engage in a lengthy examination of methodological and epistemological questions. These issues have become ever more problematic, as skeptical post-modernist thinkers have troubled the taken-for-granted assumptions of historical practice, and as realist-Marxist historians have countered with accusations of nihilism and bad faith.<sup>25</sup> I shall not attempt to intervene in these questions, as, accepting much of the post-modernist critique, I do not believe that an exhaustive investigation of my epistemological and methodological commitments would guarantee anything. Agreeing with post-modernists that the past is lost, that historical work cannot be simply objective, that it is, instead, always history-*for*, I emphasise the political character of the history I am engaging in. My aim is not to seek a comprehensive explanation of left communism's achievements in the realm of political thought.<sup>26</sup> Rather, I aim to delineate essential themes and to acknowledge both gains and shortcomings, in an attempt to discern the terms of a dialogue with post-modernism that can rejuvenate socialism in the contemporary period. This is, again, to underscore the *political* (as well as the historiographical) aspect of the project at hand. Thus, to return to *Considerations*, what stands out most about Anderson's intervention - overshadowing its historical faults and doubtful political conclusions - is the immense contribution it has made to thinking about the Marxian tradition and about the future course of socialist theorising and political practice. Such, surely, is achievement enough, and it is in this way that Anderson's work has served as a touchstone for the discussion to follow.

Left communism is marked by often dramatic internal divergences and oppositions. Thus, if "tradition" is taken to mean a single set of founding documents, clearly established theoretical ancestry, and definite modes of practice, then the term is too strong an appellation. As a political-intellectual formation, left communism contains differing positions on different dimensions. It includes both Western Marxism's cultural and theoretical heresy, often combined with political quietism, and, conversely, council communism's political heresy, combined with theoretical orthodoxy and near complete silence on cultural matters. There are also - often dependent on political-historical context - inconsistencies within sub-traditions and within the work of single authors. In this sense, "mood" or "tendency" might be considered by some a more appropriate designation. However, despite the useful connotations of inclination, drift, and factioning contained in these terms, I prefer to remain with "tradition" in order to emphasise the more tangible and less temporary aspects of the shared left communist commitments.

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To date, the expression “left communism” has been used predominantly in three ways. Firstly, it has been a label often applied narrowly to the mostly French and Italian followers of Amadeo Bordiga. The Bordigists refused the compromises of reformism and alliance politics, holding intransigently to what they saw as an invariant communist programme. Secondly, “left communism” is connected to Lenin’s famous work on the “infantile disorder”. In this tract, Lenin (1966) designates as “‘left’ communist” those intellectuals such as Pannekoek, Bordiga, and Pankhurst, who, ignoring party discipline, sought an immediate revolution from below and who refused to participate at the old working class sites of struggle (in parliament and the trade unions). Finally, in the period immediately following the revolution in Russia, the “Left Communists” were a grouping within the Russian Communist Party that were hostile to the bureaucratisation of the party, concerned about the diminishing role of the industrial proletariat in decision-making, and on guard against the threat of a post-revolutionary transformation towards “state capitalism”. Together, these three particular applications of the title “left communism” provide something of a planting of flags, capturing a number of the essential features of the tradition I am exploring. Notably, these features include an opposition to bureaucratisation, a belief that revolution must be the work of the mass of people, an opposition to Bolshevism as an ideology of “state capitalism”, a commitment to a complete rather than piece-meal transformation of social life, and a trenchant opposition to the old workers’ organisations. However, these applications apply only to narrowly defined groups that have these characteristics. I, on the other hand, am using the term to capture a field of such characteristics, a field that runs much wider than such narrow designations imply.

In previous treatments, something close to my “left communist” tradition has been labelled as “non-market socialist” (Rubel and Crump, 1987), as “radical theories” (Schechter, 1994), as “leftism” (Gombin, 1975), as “libertarian Marxism” (Guerin, 1969), as Marxism’s “underground tradition” or “unknown dimension” (Howard and Klare, 1972), and as “anti-Bolshevik communism” (Mattick, 1978). In these accounts, left communists are variously defined as anti-market, activist, opposed to determinism and fatalism, exponents of the imagination and everyday life, anti-representational in political bearing, anti-statist, opponents of Leninism, and as bearers of the utopian dimension against the realism of orthodoxy. Again, these designations provide an important planting of flags. However, these previous investigations are either limited in important ways or they do not address themselves to the questions I seek to answer. For a start, given the content of the socialism that these groupings and individuals are said to aspire to, many of the works make inexplicable exclusions or inclusions.<sup>27</sup> Frequently, one facet only of this libertarian

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communism is considered, which by itself is inadequate for the task of presenting a way forward for libertarian socialist thought.<sup>28</sup> Often, the left communist bridging of the anarchist-Marxist divide is not considered relevant.<sup>29</sup> And, at times, the commitments of the authors in question preclude a critical consideration of the shortcomings, hesitations, and inadequacies within the tradition.<sup>30</sup>

Given the strength of its opposition to both social democracy and Leninism, left communism can be identified in opposition to these two dominating socialist traditions. Left communism could thus be plausibly defined wholly negatively against each of the principal attributes of the socialisms that have dominated the last seventy years of thought on social change. I have suggested that, in some crucial ways, social democracy and Leninism are rather similar. Both of these socialist strands, I will argue, represent *state capitalism*, either in the form of the Western state-managed economy or as the anti-imperialist capitalism of development adopted by a number of economically under-developed nations (Crump, 1987:35). I believe that the over-estimation of the importance of the division between these two socialist strands has contributed to the neglect of left communism's alternative.<sup>31</sup>

The split between social democracy and Leninism, embodied in the March 1918 change of the Bolsheviks' name from "social democrat" to "communist" and in the twenty-one conditions imposed by the Comintern, and summed up in the new contrast between "socialism" and "communism", apparently divided completely "reformist" from "revolutionary" socialist strands and simultaneously exhausted the possible meanings of socialism/communism. However, while social democracy and Leninism have had different historical trajectories,<sup>32</sup> the points of comparison and the parallel decline of the two currents since the 1960s (as "organised capitalism" gave way to a "disorganised capitalism"<sup>33</sup>) are evidence for a vital congruence in the type of social regime that both represented.

For Gilles Dauve (1997:12): "The purpose of the old labour movement [social democracy/Leninism] was to take over the *same* world and manage it in a new way ... Only a tiny minority held that a different society meant the destruction of state, commodity and wage labour." The "tiny minority" that Dauve speaks of, the left communist tendency that I seek to investigate in the present work, has opposed each of those premises that I suggest social democracy and Leninism share: the emphasis on national development through the state, the aspiration to the development of the forces of production and to a socialist accumulation, the comprehension of social change as being achieved through party power, the desire to manage rather than abolish capital, the search to ameliorate the problems of

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capitalism through planning, expertise, and rationalisation, and the hope for more security and greater wealth and status for the people. However, I contend that left communists share *more* than a negative bearing towards these features of socialist orthodoxy.

Caute (1966:12,27) has argued that all traditional modes of designating the left – as optimistic, as enamoured with science and rationality, as committed to liberty and equality, as empathetic with the oppressed, as anti-racist, as pacifist, as hostile to authority, as anti-clerical – cannot be applied to the whole of the left. For Caute, the only facet that can accurately be said to define the broad political left is the *commitment to popular sovereignty*. I believe that it is such a commitment, extended to the greatest degree in political, economic, and social terms, that positively specifies the left communist tradition.<sup>34</sup>

Left communism has translated popular sovereignty into demands for the abolition of the state, private property, and the alienated life characteristic of capitalism. Thus, for left communist thinkers, emancipation must be self-emancipation. “The existence of the state and the existence of slavery are inseparable” (Marx in Rubel and Manale, 1975:47). It is necessary to obtain “the disappearance of wage-earners and employers” (CGT in Jennings, 1990:7). And one must replace the abstract human being of democratic theory and the competitive individualism of bourgeois society with the “all-sided” human being, integrated within a socialist community (Rubel and Manale, 1975:44; Ollman, 1996:116; Jennings, 1990:93). I believe that left communism’s translation of this leftist aspiration to popular sovereignty has, uniquely within the larger socialist tradition, preserved and extended the radical emancipatory and humanist message of the Enlightenment and the democratic revolution.

This general definition allows for a concrete identification of the socialist strands, figures, and works of the left communist tradition. I have designated as “left communist” thinkers and groups from among the following Marxist and anarchist sub-traditions: anarcho-communism, anarcho-syndicalism, impossibilism, council communism, Bordigism, Western Marxism, and primitivism. Following a brief consideration of each of these sub-traditions, I will examine the manner in which left communism surpasses the divide that has separated Marxism and anarchism. It is my belief that a corrosion of this division is needed for a post-modern socialism because the divide is at present a block on socialistic reinvention.

First appearing in the 1870s in the writings of thinkers such as Peter Kropotkin (1842-1921), Errico Malatesta (1853-1932), and Elisee Reclus (1830-1905), *anarcho-communism*<sup>35</sup>

soon replaced collectivism as anarchism's dominant strand. In contrast to collectivism and state socialism, anarcho-communists steadfastly rejected claims that reward might be apportioned according to work. Instead, they championed a society of freely federated peoples' communes to be based on the slogan "from each according to their ability, to each according to their needs". With his *What is Anarchist Communism?*, Alexander Berkman (1870-1936) provided perhaps the clearest statement of this creed, and, more recently, Murray Bookchin (1922- ) has carried the anarchist-communist flag, adding to it an ecologically-conscious moment.

Emerging along-side anarcho-communism in France in the late nineteenth century,<sup>36</sup> *anarcho-syndicalism*<sup>37</sup> was in many ways a reaction to the growth of parliamentary socialism, rejecting the political realm and state-sponsored reforms for the direct action and solidarity of the working class (Ridley, 1970:3; Sonn, 1992:10). At the 1905 Congress of Amiens, syndicalism's high-water mark, French syndicalists declared that: "The free worker will replace the employer. The free workshop will replace the government. The administration of things will replace the governing of men. Mutual aid will replace the market economy. From each according to his ability, to each according to his need. In place of the state, free associations freely federated!" (in Ridely, 1970:169). Anarcho-syndicalism was championed in well-known works such as Georges Sorel's (1847-1922) *Reflections on Violence*, Pouget and Pataud's *How Shall We Bring About the Revolution*, and Rudolph Rocker's (1873-1958) *Anarcho-syndicalism*.

The critique of European "possibilism" - socialism as statist and evolutionary - developed in the English-speaking world primarily through what became known as *impossibilism*. The interventions of poet, artist, and socialist propagandist William Morris (1834-1896) preface many of the later arguments to be made by the Socialist Party of Great Britain (SPGB), established in 1904, and the Socialist Labour Party (SLP), established in 1903 and under the influence of Daniel De Leon (1852-1914). The impossibilists eschewed reformism and compromise, championing a working class-led "battle of democracy" that would bring down the state and capital.

Developing, like impossibilism, from within the Marxian tradition but espousing many of the same themes as syndicalism, *council communism*<sup>38</sup> responded to the appearance, especially around the period 1917-1921, of workers' councils throughout Europe. For these communists, the struggle against capitalism, the transition to communism, and the administration of the new socialist order were all to be the work of the workers' councils.

Premised on many of the “spontaneist” arguments developed by Rosa Luxemburg (1871-1919), council communism’s adherents have included other socialist luminaries, such as Anton Pannekoek (1873-1960) (whose *Workers’ Councils* is council communism’s most famous work), Paul Mattick (1904-1981), Sylvia Pankhurst (1882-1970), Cornelius Castoriadis (1922-1997) (*On the Content of Socialism*), *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, C. L. R. James (1901-1989), Guy Debord (1931-1994), and the Situationist International.

Many *Western Marxists* fall within the council communist sub-tradition. Notable examples include Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937), Georg Lukacs (1885-1971), and Karl Korsch (1886-1961). This is a signal of the fact that, although it has frequently exhibited political withdrawal, as Aronowitz (1981:xiii) has pointed out, Western Marxism has a historical function linked to the anti-Leninist movements of this century. This withdrawal, though, has meant that while Max Horkheimer (1895-1973), for instance, identified with Luxemburg and the workers’ councils, and while Herbert Marcuse (1898-1979) became a father of the *gauchiste* New Left, Western Marxism’s challenge has for the most part functioned at a philosophical and theoretical level.

Also a sub-tradition beneath the larger Marxian umbrella, the followers of Amadeo Bordiga (1889-1970) consistently rejected class compromises such as those of the parliamentary arena. The Bordigists insisted that the modern state had only one function - the protection of capital - and they therefore refused to distinguish fascist from democratic state forms. Later readers of Bordiga, such as the International Communist Current (ICC) and Jean Barrot (in books such as *The Eclipse and Re-emergence of the Communist Movement*), have integrated these elements of *Bordigism* with what they take as the best of council communism, jettisoning both Bordiga’s vanguardism and any fetishisation of the council form.

Finally, after 1968, as ecological problems increasingly came to light, and as liberal capitalism made a forceful return against the raised hopes of radicals, there developed from within the broadly ultra-leftist-anarchist milieu a strand of left communism best described as *primitivist*. The arguments of primitivism have been developed in their most sophisticated form by thinkers like Fredy Perlman (1934-1985) (*Against His-story, Against Leviathan!*), John Zerzan (*Future Primitive*), and former Bordigist, Jacques Camatte (*This World We Must Leave*).<sup>39</sup> Rejecting socialism’s uncritical approaches to progress and the domination of nature, primitivists have instead oriented their communist vision towards anti-industrialism, decentralisation, the re-establishment of organic community, and a more sensitive approach to the natural world.

A glance at these sub-traditions indicates a considerable diversity amidst the unity implied by the label “left communism”. Indeed, these thinkers would hardly have recognised themselves as belonging alongside many of those that I have listed as their companions. Nevertheless, I shall argue that these are not eccentric and marginal figures to be considered in isolation, nor are these discrete socialist sub-traditions. These thinkers and sub-traditions are importantly unified by the libertarian socialist commitments of which I have spoken.

One essential signal of the unity of left communism as an historical-intellectual formation is the fact that it renders inoperative the familiar division between Marxism and anarchism. Just as an over-concentration on the differences between social democracy and Leninism has served to marginalise or disguise the left communist contribution, so too an overdrawn distinction between the socialisms issuing from Marxian postulates and those described as anarchist has tended to overlook what a host of thinkers and groups in both traditions have in common. This practical movement beyond the divide separating Marxism from anarchism contains much that is vital for a radical post-modern socialism. I shall conclude this section of the present chapter with an examination of the historical division between Marxism and anarchism, arguing that the exemplary figures and groups I am investigating have made it impossible to hold to any idea of a sure rupture between these two traditions.

The inherited split between Marxian and anarchist positions has been dated to Marx’s encounters with Proudhon, Stirner, and Bakunin. It was not, however, until the 1890s and finally in 1896 that a series of oppositions and debates was finally polarised into a clearly understood and enacted upon historical cleavage (Fleming, 1979:228).<sup>40</sup> Marx’s objections to Stirner’s idealism and individualism and to Proudhon’s “petty bourgeois” socialism have been handed down to followers, who have taken these two figures as the undisputed fathers of anarchism and who have insisted that any anarchism will for all times be *declassé* and decadent in character (Barker, 1986:198; Plekhanov, 1912:143; Bukharin, 1981:9).<sup>41</sup>

If Stirner and Proudhon *do* often appear to be what Marxists say anarchists are, Bakunin and many who have followed defy such accusations. Marx (1972:48,119) objected to Bakunin’s sectarianism in the First International. Marx saw Bakunin as theoretically weak - “Anarchy reigns in any case in his head” (in Rubel and Manale, 1975:232). He rejected as a secondary issue Bakunin’s obsession with the abolition of inheritance, and he interpreted the anarchists as erroneously claiming that the state had created capital. For Bakunin, on the other hand, Marx, as a Jew and a German, represented all the evils and dangers of *etatisme*. Bakunin thus lumped Marx and Lassalle together, with only casual regard for the former’s work

(Shatz, 1990:xxxii). Since Bakunin, then, anarchists have tended to represent the Marx-Bakunin split as a division between an authoritarian-centralist and a libertarian-federalist conception of communism.<sup>42</sup> Such simplistic judgments are, however, entirely untenable. Contrary to any rigid separation of Marxian centralisers and anarchist decentralisation, Bakunin approved of some centralisation - "Economic centralisation, the essential condition of civilisation, creates liberty" (in Carter, 1971:66). Moreover, there are numerous decentralist aspects to the work of Marx and Engels, as even a rather one-eyed anarchist like Clark (1984) can admit. Similarly, while Marx certainly acted in an authoritarian manner inside the International, Bakunin's *penchant* for hierarchical secret societies, many of his enunciations on socialism and religion, and his vile and obsessive anti-semitism and Germanophobia can hardly be portrayed as libertarian.

According to Carter (1971:60), Marxian and anarchist thought are divided over nationalism, industrialisation, democracy, and the notion of historical progress. For Clark (1984:68), the division is most vitally based on Marxism's commitment to a high development of technology, centralisation, and the notion of humans as primarily producers. These puritanical and ascetic tendencies of Germanic socialism are sharply opposed by anarchism's hedonistic element. In a similar vein, Pepper (1993:206-7) provides a rigid comparison of socialism and anarchism that divides the two tendencies thus: an emphasis on class exploitation versus an emphasis on hierarchy; historical versus a-historical analysis; ambiguity about the state versus total opposition to the state; a desire for capitalism to be abolished first versus a desire to first abolish the state; participation in conventional politics versus the rejection of conventional politics; struggle as the confrontation with capitalism versus the attempt to bypass capitalism and prefigure the new society; collective action versus lifestyle politics; a focus on the working class versus new social movements and community groups; vanguardism versus anti-vanguardism; dictatorship of the proletariat versus rejection of all government; materialism versus idealism; the planned economy versus self-organisation and spontaneity; limited decentralisation versus decentralisation; an elevation of the collective over the individual versus an overriding commitment to individual autonomy. I argue that when one considers those groups and individuals that I have designated as part of the left communist tradition, it becomes clear that *there is not one element of comparison in any of these formulations that can be seriously maintained as dividing Marxism from anarchism.*<sup>43</sup>

Marxians, for example, have criticised anarchists as unable to break with capitalism, while anarchists accuse Marxists as unable to break with authoritarianism and statism. Thus, the

two traditions appear to be divided most simply into, on the one hand, those who would abolish capital without an accompanying abolition of the state (the Marxians), and, on the other, those who would abolish the state without abolishing capital (the anarchists). Setting aside the question of Bakunin, about whom there is some controversy, such claims are clearly incorrect or at best misleading generalisations. Anarchist communism dates to the late 1870s, first being mentioned in 1876 by Dumartheray and promoted in Italy in that same year by Malatesta, Cafiero, and Costa (Fleming, 1979:137). For Elisee Reclus, the products of labour could not be apportioned according to labour expended as they were the result of the combined effort of people - the existing *and* past generations. Thus, in the projections of anarcho-communism, each will possess the right to draw from the common stock, the only guide to action being “that which grows out of the solidarity of interests and the mutual respect of his associates” (Reclus in Fleming, 1979:138). Conversely, the anarchist notion of the inherent statism of Marxian communism<sup>44</sup> is a mistake. The Dutch council communists, for example, inspired by Marx’s anti-state rhetoric in his comments on the Paris Commune, insisted that Marx’s thought was inherently anarchistic.

If on such large issues as the state and capital there has been a vital convergence, perhaps as Dirlik (1991:9) notes, there have nevertheless tended to be different historical emphases and moods between anarchism and Marxism. Any judgement here is far from straightforward. Moreover, as Dirlik suggests, if these tendencies exist they might in fact supplement one another. Thus, anarchism may point Marxian socialists towards the necessity of changing social discourses and it may have a decentering effect on Marxian thought,<sup>45</sup> whilst Marxian theory might compel anarchism not to ignore the indispensability of structural change (Dirlik, 1991). Both the anarchist and Marxian traditions contain authoritarian elements that preserve the domination of state or capital. However, the confluence of concerns and the similar libertarian solutions that have been advanced across these traditions by those I have designated as part of the left communist tradition has bequeathed us a rich legacy. Full of both exciting and lamentable elements, within this legacy one discovers much that is vital to any successful restatement of radical socialist politics.

### Conclusion

This chapter, has examined the profound crisis into which socialist politics and theory have fallen. Both social democracy and Leninism have been eclipsed by events. In particular, the adequacy of socialism and the possibilities of its revival have been challenged by the rise of post-modernism. In such a period, I have maintained that a re-consideration of the left

communist tradition is a worthwhile project. Today, any attempt at socialist restatement must both move beyond socialist orthodoxy and acknowledge post-modernism as an inescapable political and intellectual horizon. The failure of efforts by contemporary social democrats and Leninists to develop a convincing socialistic restatement indicates their inability to get to grips with post-modern realities. This inability speaks of the closing of that period in which their project (as a mode of party-state-led intervention into the economy on behalf of national development) was still on the agenda.

However, I contend that, for leftist intellectuals still concerned with socialism's alternative to the capitalist order of things, breaking into post-modernism without restraint has its dangers. What is needed is a political and theoretical articulation between what is vital in post-modernism and what is still alive within socialism. A first attempt at this articulation - post-Marxism - though successful in some respects, has placed too much emphasis on the "post". Overvaluing contingency and shrinking from those vital focussing points of classical Marxism, state and capital, the post-Marxists have not succeeded in rediscovering the spirit or substance of those most radical alternatives to a now-eclipsed socialist orthodoxy. In view of these conclusions, I believe that left communism is of great interest. Submerged by the concentration on divisions between social democracy and Leninism and between Marxism and anarchism, left communism presents a socialist alternative that demands to be heard today. There are significant gains to be had for post-modernists still committed to broadly socialist values who enter into a dialogue with this left communist tradition.

The following chapters consider the left communist legacy, both in its advances beyond socialist orthodoxy and its possible negotiations with post-modernism. These advances and negotiations comprise a very broad field, encompassing the role of intellectuals, political organisation, theorising, ethics and politics, the economy, state and administration, and the interpretation of culture.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Beilharz (1994:viii,6,105) argues, for instance, that socialism's terms of reference remain with us, even though these are today more of a cultural than a political influence.

<sup>2</sup> With 1989, says Giddens (1998:43), "socialism as the *avant garde* of political theory comes to a close", and "No one any longer has any alternatives to capitalism".

<sup>3</sup> For similar sentiments from the left, see Lane (1996:190), Hall and Jaques (1990:52), and D. Miliband (1994:2).

<sup>4</sup> What Edgell (1993:10) calls "proletarianisation in reverse", and what Hindess (1987:53) refers to as the "embarrassment of the middle class".

<sup>5</sup> Who will support "the right causes" now? asks Jameson (1991:256). See also Blackburn (1991:238).

<sup>6</sup> Marxism is often the particular target of both the broadly socialist and anti-socialist tendency within post-modernism. Docherty (1996:243), for example, asserts that “The current postmodern condition is inimical to Marxism”. Similarly, Nancy Fraser argues that: “Marxism as the meta-narrative or master discourse of oppositional politics in capitalist societies is finished. So is Marxism as a totalising theory of the system dynamics, crisis tendencies, and conflict potentialities in capitalist societies” (in Aronson, 1995:151).

<sup>7</sup> After all, the expression “crisis of Marxism” was coined as early as 1898 by Thomas Masaryk, and Kolakowski dated Marxism’s “breakdown” from the 1920s (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985:18; Pierson, 1995:55).

<sup>8</sup> For some, the working class now finds its real identity in the supermarket and shopping complex (D. Miliband, 1994:127).

<sup>9</sup> For instance, Lyotard, arguing the incommensurability of different paradigms, has asserted that, today, one is forced to judge “without criteria” (Rojek and Turner, 1998:3; Williams, 1998:101-108).

<sup>10</sup> The statism of such an approach is further illustrated by Miliband’s (1994:150,190) lament over the decline of the Eurocommunist parties and his continued support for Cuba.

<sup>11</sup> For a trenchant critique along these lines of Giddens’ *Third Way*, see Callinicos (1999).

<sup>12</sup> Callinicos (1987:8), for example, notes that, in Marx’s time, the largest category of wage labourers was domestic servants.

<sup>13</sup> It is important to mention Fredric Jameson’s more nuanced Marxist approach to post-modernism. Tracing epochal changes in the economic ordering of capitalism, and the accompanying alterations in culture and psyche, Jameson has refused to moralise the post-modern (Anderson, 1998:52-7,65). There are, for Jameson, a number of progressive features of the post-modern: “its populism and pluralising democratisation, its commitment to the ethnic and the plebeian, and to feminism, its anti-authoritarianism and anti-elitism, precisely its anti-bourgeois features” (in Bromwich, 1999:16).

<sup>14</sup> In a similar mode, Sivanandan (1990:19) judges the “new times” thesis a “fraud, a counterfeit, a humbug”, and Cloud (1994:223-247) views post-Marxism as akin to New Age religion - idealist, individualist, consumerist, and quiescent.

<sup>15</sup> Wood (1986) also mentions the lure of intellectual fashion as a possible explanation.

<sup>16</sup> For instance, of the post-modernist *a priori* commitment to contingency, Best and Kellner (1991:202) ask: “are all articulatory practices equally determinant or are some more critical than others?”

<sup>17</sup> McGowan (1991) and Keane, for example, detect a deeply democratic impulse at work in post-modernism (Bertens, 1995:198). Similarly, Burbach, Nunez, and Kagarlitsky (1997:49) maintain that “many postmodernists have put forth devastating critiques of western domination and its culture of power while arguing for a new liberation of humanity”.

<sup>18</sup> That left communism requires a gender-sensitive corrective to its masculinist orientation is evident in its gendered language. I have left this sexist language unamended in my text for reasons of presentation.

<sup>19</sup> Another important moment in the emergence of post-Marxism has been the theoretical and political arguments around the idea of “New Times”. The idea of “New Times” was initiated within the pages of *Marxism Today* from October 1988, where, influenced by post-structuralism and the thought of Gorz, Touraine, and Bahro, a number of socialist theorists attempted to negotiate a progressive-left path beyond social democracy and Leninism (Davey, 1994:197). These “new times”, for Hall and Jacques (1990:173; Jacques, 1990:35-7), mean an epochal shift encompassing post-industrialism, post-modernism, and a recognition of the importance of the new social movements.

<sup>20</sup> Thinkers like Best and Kellner (1991:197-204) and Bertens (1995:187) have charged that, generally, there is too little macro-political analysis in post-modernist theorising. A plurality of short-term, micro-political concerns dominate, meaning that, although post-modernists champion an egalitarian and democratic order, their politics are debilitating (Bertens, 1995:187,198). Bertens (1995:199) argues that post-modernism’s insistence on difference and distance mean that it is “wholly apolitical in the macropolitical sense. The fears of representation, of power, and of a social reality wholly dominated by capitalism, have steered most postmodernist theorists towards tactics of micropolitics while leaving the field of macropolitics to the enemy.”

<sup>21</sup> The issue at stake is illustrated by a conference clash between Mouffe and Cornelius Castoriadis. In response to Mouffe’s call for a de-bureaucratisation of the state, Castoriadis joked that one might as well call for a de-militarisation of the army (Curtis, 1997a).

<sup>22</sup> The post-modern emphasis on difference and the rejection of universalism seems problematic. How, in the absence of such universals, can post-modernity function as a left-progressive venture? One

cannot avoid choosing, evaluating, and excluding: there must be some closure and prioritisation (Boyne and Rattansi, 1990:38). Otherwise, globalising strategies and alliances across particularistic boundaries are impossible (Boyne and Rattansi, 1990:38). And without such universals covertly at work, how could Laclau and Mouffe's meta-narrative of democratic pluralism possibly function (Bertens, 1995:193)? In contrast to post-modernism, post-Marxists Kellner and Best argue that universal rights such as equality, freedom, and democratic participation are essential to any liberatory, democratic project (Bertens, 1995:193).

<sup>23</sup> As Best and Kellner (1991:197,204) point out, Laclau and Mouffe's definition of democracy is not adequately theorised, they do not explicitly separate bourgeois from socialist democracy, and "they do not give specific content to the concept of radical democracy or adequately theorise its imbrication in new social movements or socialism".

<sup>24</sup> As Mouzelis (1990:27-8) has said, one need not be essentialist in identifying institutional or structural configurations that are resilient and that have, at certain points for certain subjects, resounding and long-lasting effects. For Mouzelis (1990:311), Laclau and Mouffe do not do enough to provide tools that might aid in assessing these situations and the articulatory possibilities that derive from them.

<sup>25</sup> For discussion of this debate, see Weinstein (1990:1), White (1978:98), Jenkins (1991:20,56), Munslow (1997:4), and Southgate (1996:48).

<sup>26</sup> This is not at all, of course, to deny the impact of the historical and political context (most importantly, the defeat of the tumultuous class struggles from 1871 to 1905 to 1917-21 to 1968 and the hegemonic position attained by social democracy and Leninism as socialist opposition to capitalism in the twentieth century) on what I call left communism.

<sup>27</sup> For instance, Schecter's (1994) *Radical Theories* excludes Castoriadis and impossibilism.

<sup>28</sup> For instance, in Rubel and Crump (1987), the non-market aspect is raised above all others.

<sup>29</sup> Neither Gombin (1975) nor Schecter (1994), for example, really consider this divide.

<sup>30</sup> Mattick's *Anti-Bolshevik Communism* is a good example of this.

<sup>31</sup> As Beilharz (1994:viii,52) argues, socialism came to be identified with the state, planning, nation building and nationalism, and social security. The choice for those on the left, with the burying of libertarian strands of socialism by state socialism has thus, as Wright (1986:77,88) points out, been limited to that "between an undemocratic communism and an unsocialist social democracy".

<sup>32</sup> As a number of commentators have argued, the essence of pre-war social democracy was towards a reorganisation of capitalism, a state planification of private property, a bettering of the workers' conditions, an addition of social content to political democracy, and an advocacy of security in society, of rights, freedoms, and equality (Lichtheim, 1970:200; Barrot and Authier, n.d.:10; Padgett and Paterson, 1991:13; Murphy, 1993:17). Increasingly distancing itself from the previously vaunted "expropriation of the expropriators" in the post-World War II period, social democracy became tied to the welfare state and Keynesian political control over economic life, to a "managed" or "social" capitalism (Pierson, 1995:31,52; Padgett and Paterson, 1991:1,21). And, not even modestly undermining capitalist power structures, social democratic parties have subsequently been ensnared in the general crisis of the liberal democratic state and the disrepute into which the Keynesian compromise has fallen (Boggs, 1995:76-77; Padgett and Paterson, 1991:1,21).

Breaking with social democracy after the dramatic capitulation of the SPD in August 1914, Lenin and the Bolsheviks continued to share social democracy's socialist content, revolution representing a mere *shift in management* (Boggs, 1995:9,83; Piccone, 1983:186-8). In the Third-World, Leninism subsequently became the mythology of national liberation, an ideology of anti-imperialist national development within underdeveloped nations, through the vehicle of the party-state. In the West, on the other hand, Leninism was either condemned to the marginality of sectarian Trotskyite groupings, or it found a brief period of success in the middle 1970s, in Italy, France, and Spain, in the guise of Eurocommunism.

<sup>33</sup> The emergence of disorganised capitalism embodies a change in the composition of the working class and the nature of work, flexible specialisation, varied consumer markets, the growing independence of monopolies and finance from the control of the nation-state, and the cultural correlate of post-modernism (with a sensibility and aesthetic practice that pivots around play, chance, localism, individualism, eclecticism, spectacle, pluralistic otherness, aesthetics) (Harvey, 1990:152,165-6,340). The effects of such changes have proved a serious blow to the type of social regime that both social democracy and Leninism embodied (Pierson, 1991:63; Callinicos, 1991:57; Lane, 1991:191). For Fotopoulos (1997:ix,74,100,143), these changes were necessitated by statist socialism's inability to combine two incompatible elements: the growth element of the market economy with the social justice

element of socialism. This incompatibility was felt most profoundly since the 1970s with the emergence of economic, social, and political crises.

<sup>34</sup> In a similar mode, Boggs (1995:220) has argued that at the base of the rediscovery and development of the radical-left project is the concern with “collective empowerment”.

<sup>35</sup> Other prominent anarcho-communists include Emma Goldman (1869-1940) and Gustav Landauer (1870-1919).

<sup>36</sup> An 1895 article by Pelloutier (1867-1901) entitled “Anarchism and the Trade Unions” expounded the new tactic, and syndicalism grew out of the Pelloutier’s Federation of the Bourses du Travail (labour exchanges) (Guerin, 1970:78; Ridley, 1970:30). The Bourses and the CGT (the General Confederation of Labour) merged in 1902, and, from this period until 1914, revolutionary syndicalists were in control of the CGT.

<sup>37</sup> Also noteworthy within the anarcho-syndicalist tradition are the German syndicalist union (FAUD), the American Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), the British Guild Socialists, and the contemporary intellectual, Noam Chomsky (1928- ).

<sup>38</sup> Important council communists include the German Communist Workers’ Party (KAPD), Herman Gorter (1863-1927), Sylvia Pankhurst (1882-1970), Otto Ruhle (1874-1943), Jan Appel (1890-1966?), Paul Mattick (1904-1981), Henri Simon, the Johnston-Forest Tendency (JFT), Antonio Negri (1933- ) and the Italian Autonomists.

<sup>39</sup> For examples of contemporary primitivism, see journals such as *Green Anarchist* in Britain, and *Fifth Estate* and *Anarchy* in the United States.

<sup>40</sup> Although the anarchists had been somewhat separate from the Marxians ever since the struggles of the First International, it was within the Second International that the relationship between the two became a pressing question. Important anarchist figures - such as Kropotkin, Malatesta, Peloutier, Berkman, Pouget, Goldman, Reclus, and Landauer - attended Second International congresses. These anarchists protested at the attempts of the social democrats to exclude them. After all, surely, they argued, their socialism was more steadfast than that of the many reformists within the ranks of the Second International?

<sup>41</sup> Similarly, in the Marxian tradition, anarchism has also become closely associated with the despairing individual terrorist acts of the period of “propaganda by deed”. Thus, for Plekhanov (1912), as for Engels (1972:180), through their impotent and incoherent violence, anarchists had served the cause of reaction. Lafargue (1970:61) even went so far as to insist that the potential for manipulation of such tactics was not accidental: the police introduced anarchism into France from scratch in order to destroy socialism.

<sup>42</sup> For instance, see Woodcock (1962:158), Dolgoff (1972:19), and Clark (1984).

<sup>43</sup> Similarly, Hobsbawm’s definition of anarchism as “a critique of authoritarianism and bureaucracy in states, parties, and movements ... [that] suggests a solution in terms of direct democracy and small-governing groups” (in Gouldner, 1985:148) could just as easily include numerous left-Marxians, as I intend to show in the course of this thesis.

<sup>44</sup> Clark (1984:69), for example, sees Marx’s writings on transition and post-revolutionary organisation as logically issuing in *state capitalism*.

<sup>45</sup> Similarly, Guerin (1970:xviii) has asserted that “the constructive ideas of anarchism retain their vitality ... [and may] contribute to enriching Marxism.”

## Chapter Three

### What is to be Done?

#### Intellectual, Party, Theory

*"It is common knowledge that the masses are divided into classes ...[,] that as a rule and in most cases ... classes are led by political parties, as a general rule, are run by more or less stable groups composed of the most authoritative, influential and experienced workers, who are elected to the most responsible positions and are called leaders. All this is elementary. Why replace it with some kind of rigmarole?" (Lenin in Graham, 1986:213).*

*"The concept of a party with a revolutionary character in the proletarian sense is nonsense" (Ruhle, n.d.b:26).*

#### Introduction

Marx, as Lovell (1986:30) notes, was never clear about the relationship between his project and the working class movement, about the link between leaders, intellectuals, parties, and the masses.<sup>1</sup> At a certain moment, communist intellectuals, their theory, and the party are lent no autonomy whatsoever. Marx (1987:228-231) insists that revolutions cannot be made and communism is not an ideal. Socialism is a "real movement" to be achieved by the working class made conscious as a result of "the premises now in existence", of history itself. Thus, "It is not a question of what this or that proletarian, or even the whole proletariat, at the moment *regards* as its aim. It is a question of *what the proletariat is*, and what, in accordance with this *being*, it will historically be compelled to do". Therefore, communism was not a function of the educative investments of intellectuals, the revolutionary exertions of a clique of activists, or the result of a "good theory".

At the next moment, however, Marx asserts that "The head of this emancipation is philosophy". Theory - rather than always arriving too late, rather than being historical and partisan - might have a leading role, a leading role attributable to its *scientificity* above and beyond its historical coordinates<sup>2</sup> or attachments to progressive social movements. Here, the moralistic and messianic motif is replaced by a scientific emphasis on the primacy of material forces and the laws of capitalist development (Femia, 1993; Boggs, 1984:2). This

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second tendency posits Marxism as a hard science in line with the natural sciences - complete, objective, and able to unproblematically guarantee the truth of its theoretical propositions. This science is developed and expounded by the communists, "the most advanced and resolute section of the working-class parties of every country". And, because these communists "have raised themselves to the level of comprehending theoretically the historical movement as a whole", because "they have over the great mass of the proletariat the advantage of clearly understanding the line of march, the conditions, and the ultimate general results of the proletarian movement" (Marx, 1987:229-231), the communists appear to have an independent and superior authority over the class they lead.

Post-modernism is the most radical contemporary expression of the difficulties encountered by the latter side of these socialist formulations on intellectuals, political organisation, and theory. Most crucially, the post-modernist challenge to socialist theory and practice is contained in its sharp critique of representation. In its philosophical form, this challenge is an attack on the metaphor of the mind as a mirror of nature, on the confident separation of science from ideology, and on the aspiration for totalising theories of social order and history (Best and Kellner, 1991:287). The critique of representation also entails a rejection of any sort of vanguardism (May, 1994:12; Best and Kellner, 1991:287). Here, post-modernity as a whole entails a declining faith in party political organisation and a rather modest conception of the role of the contemporary intellectual.

Thus it was that Michel Foucault (1980:126) spoke of the closing of the period in which "To be an intellectual meant something like being the consciousness/conscience of us all." The "universal intellectual", "proclaiming the rights of humanity, unveiling deceit and hypocrisy, attacking despotism and false hierarchies, combating injustices and inequalities" (in Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1982:202), had given way, argued Foucault, to the "specific intellectual": "Intellectuals have got used to working, not in the modality of the 'universal', the 'exemplary', the 'just-and-true-for-all', but within specific sectors, at the precise points where their own conditions of life or work situate them." In opposition to the romantic portrait of the free, almost self-created subject, outside of and in courageous antagonism to power - the intellectual as "somewhat ahead and to the side" (Osbourne, 1996:xvi) - Foucault (1980:131) maintained that "truth isn't the reward of free spirits, the child of protracted solitude, nor the privilege of those who have succeeded in liberating themselves".

Foucault's comments resonate with an apparent truth regarding the post-modern age, hypersensitised to "the indignity" - not to mention the dangers - "of speaking for others"

(Deleuze in May, 1994:97). The notion that a philosopher or a political organisation could effectively represent any social whole, the pretensions of intellectuals to knowledge of people's real interests, and the assumption of universal values pointing towards some future harmonious order are all anathema to the post-modern thinker. For instance, Zygmunt Bauman (1995:230-1,238-40) has argued that the model of the intellectual as uprooted, set against the people, and functioning as ethical and cultural legislator is now gone. With the consumer choices, privatisation, and identity fragmentation that post-modernism encompasses, we have witnessed a dismantling of the roles of the intellectual as spokespeople "for common causes, theorists of 'good society' and designers of alternative social arrangements". Says Bauman, "It may well be that the historical glory of intellectuals was tied closely to other, now largely extinct, factors of the modern age - great utopias of perfect society, projects of global social engineering, the search for universal standards of truth, justice and beauty, and institutional powers with ecumenical ambitions willing and able to act upon them." Having lost the role of cultural legislators, intellectuals, in Bauman's opinion, have a new, apparently more modest function as cultural interpreters: "translators in the ongoing exchange between autonomous, diverse but equivalent styles." This interpreter-intellectual is forced to "advance without authority", though he or she is still endowed with the *duty*<sup>3</sup> of making unheard voices audible and still burdened by the courage and sacrifice such a duty requires (Bauman, 1995:241-3). This may certainly not appear ideal, but in the post-legitimation era it is "the only feasible, sensible and, indeed ... realistic programme that the intellectuals ... have and are likely to have for some time to come."

The painful unease felt by progressive intellectuals regarding "what is to be done?" in the post-modern age, amidst the debris of old emancipatory ideologies and faced with the threat of a variety of calamities, seems set to resolve itself into a number of equally unsatisfactory possibilities. For a start, leftist critics have frequently charged that the theoretical and political claims of post-modernism mean a flight into ludic sophism and frivolous, individualist escapism such as that found in the work of Jean Baudrillard and his followers. Alternatively, in line with Foucault's comments on the "specific intellectual", the political tasks ahead seem destined to involve engagement of "only" a local and partial kind. A further option has been the muscular reassertion of the heritage and true role of the modern progressive intellectual by thinkers such as Christopher Norris<sup>4</sup> and Edward Said (1994:13). Despite their post-structuralist leanings and against the post-modernist "deviation of the intellectuals", Said and Norris have championed the heroic-individualist conception of the intellectual who seeks to advance human freedom and knowledge, who courageously "speaks the truth to power", and who remains defiantly undomesticated.

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Closely connected to thinking about the place of the intellectual is the problem of political organisation, and here the question of the political party has been of particular importance. From the 1830s, socialist theoreticians had increasing contact with the labour movement, and the period saw the formation of self-educational and propaganda groupings of working-people and dissident intellectuals (Landauer, 1976a:78). By the late nineteenth century, organised mass parties and underground “micro-parties”, made up of an ideology, a structure (organisation), and a pattern of action (strategy and tactics), had become an essential - perhaps, says Gross (1974:17), the most significant - social-political force of the modern age.

Today, the same doubt and ironic distancing that is evident in discussion of the figure of the intellectual is to be found directed at the political party. The conception according to which the party represents the people, as if there were an unproblematic identity of interests between the two, is in severe disrepute. And the contemporary anti-political urge manifests itself in the flight from involvement in party-political activity.<sup>5</sup>

In tandem with these developments, post-modernists have jettisoned the old socialist conception of the content and role of theory. Denying that theory might ever escape ideology and history, post-modernists have rejected that one might achieve a final and scientific identification of the good, the true, and the beautiful. In contrast to the closure, totalisation, and scientific certainty sought by socialist theorising, post-modernists have accented theoretical openness, partiality, and play as not only politically and ethically desirable but also, and somewhat paradoxically, as a means of more accurately capturing the nature of contemporary social reality.

Given post-modernism’s cautious approach regarding the tasks of the intellectual, the disrepute it casts upon the political party, and its much more modest conception of theory, the communist seems out of time. Making the apostolic journey to the people to proclaim universal values and to reveal the true shape and workings of the social world, the communists, their political organisation, and their theory represent everything that post-modernists have seemingly cast aside: the idea of the intellectual or party as ruler-legislator, as privileged interpreter of the direction of history and the real needs of the masses, and as bearer of a theory or utopian vision that guides and guarantees the movement’s success.

The current age is thus one of profound uncertainty for the left intellectual. The political bankruptcy of Leninism and social democracy and the emergence of post-modernist thought

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have undermined the verities of socialist thinking and practice. I believe that a consideration of the left communist tradition may be immensely fruitful in addressing the resulting leftist intellectual disarray. Left communism, like post-modernism, has rejected socialist orthodoxy's vanguardism, its privileging of the intellectual or the political party as director and representative of the larger interests of the people. In contrast to the pessimistic premises of elite theory, left communists have argued that revolution is the movement of the mass of people: the oppressed have the potential to change themselves and the world. In this vein, left communists have frequently extended the critique of representation to its most extreme spontaneist and workerist conclusions, elevating masses over leaders and bureaucracy, practice over theory, and the unconscious over the conscious. However, these moves have not issued in political paralysis, nor in more modest political attachments. The left communist remains committed to universal emancipation and avoids the romantic individualism sometimes detected within post-modernism. Optimistic about the revolutionary capacity of the mass of people, left communists have seldom been able to bring themselves to "go back to bed" and simply wait for the new world. The tension between those two moments in Marx's political thinking - between the assertion that working class emancipation must be self-emancipation, and the continuing belief in the independent liberatory possibilities of socialist organisation - has mostly remained unresolved in left communist theory. This tension has been historically productive. It has meant that left communists have been forced to "advance without authority". This practical conclusion, prefigurative of post-modernist strictures, needs today to be unreservedly embraced by socialists.

If left communists have allowed themselves no authority as directors of the people or representatives of the oppressed, they *have* frequently appealed to the authority of theory in their attempts to develop socialist consciousness. The left communist tradition is characterised by various attempts at theoretical reconstruction or philosophical shift in the face of the political bankruptcy of social democracy and Leninism. Confronted by immense historical difficulties, and anxious to differentiate themselves from socialist orthodoxy's attempts to lead the working class, left communists have sought to arm the movement with theory. However, many left communists have also displayed an acute awareness of the potential that a separate theory and its bearers (the intellectuals, the party) have to constitute an authority over those the theory is meant to represent or even to emanate from. These left communists have maintained a libertarian hostility to Leninism and social democracy without relinquishing the goal of understanding and effectively intervening in the world.

This chapter examines the role of the intellectual, the function of the party, and the place and content of socialist theory. I begin by arguing that socialist orthodoxy displaced working class and popular self-emancipation with notions of the intellectual and the party as representatives of the people, as bestowers of true consciousness, and as the bearers of science. As May (1994:20) has argued, socialist orthodoxy held to the belief that there could be only one theory, one struggle, one leadership. Left communism has frequently weakened this conception without, for all that, accepting political withdrawal or anti-intellectualist conclusions. An examination of the left communist tradition indicates various central dilemmas - fear of the party versus fetishisation of the party, mass party versus sect, party versus masses, workerism versus elitism, self-emancipation versus emancipation from without, determinism versus revolutionary will, theory versus movement. Such tensions have not, however, paralysed left communists. Committed to self-emancipation and popular sovereignty, left communists have made an advance on the positions of socialist orthodoxy, coming to practical stances whose modesty resembles the political conclusions reached by many post-modernists. It is my argument that left communism provides the basis for an ironic but engaged and confident politics of the present, a politics that both departs from the entrenched difficulties of socialist orthodoxy and answers some of the problems raised by the post-modern condition.

**“Yes, the dictatorship of one party!” -  
From the Second International to Bolshevism**

The pages in the *Communist Manifesto* that fall under the heading “Proletarians and Communists” begin with a series of propositions on the relations between communists and the proletariat and end with a number of proposals of a state capitalist character. These expressions have been treated with some suspicion by commentators. Libertarian sentiments, such as the insistence that revolutionary ideas are dependent on the revolutionary class, seem out of sorts with some of the other assertions in the *Manifesto*. The communists are, for example, depicted as the most advanced section of working class parties of every country, as having a theoretical advantage over the mass of workers, as “represent[ing] the interests of the movement as a whole”, and as organising the proletariat “into a political party” (Marx and Engels, 1987:228; my emphasis). The deep structure of passages such as these, it is claimed, clearly indicates a bid for power by the intellectuals.

The conclusion of anarchists like Gustav Landauer (1978:48) and John Clark (1984:78) is consonant with Gouldner’s (1985:49) assertion that: “At the deepest reaches of Marxism,

what we unearth is the ancient commitment to govern rationally - the commitment to the 'philosopher king'." For Gouldner (1985:3), Marxism is founded on a paradox - a paradox that will later be resolved by Lenin's vanguard party: Marxist, "proletarian" communism begins in the theoretical work of two advantaged sons of the bourgeoisie, it arises out of their leisure, education, reading - in short, out of their class position. For Gouldner (1979:9), "The Marxist scenario of class struggle was never able to account for itself, for those who produced the scenario, for Marx and Engels themselves. Where did the *theorists* of this class struggle fit into the supposed cleavage between proletariat and capitalist class?" Gouldner (1979:75) concludes that this lacuna is the key to understanding Marxism as the expression of the aspirations of the "New Class", those intellectuals and intelligentsia seeking to counter their own blocked ascendance to power: "Marxism has always lived a double life, vaunting theory, arguing that emancipation from the present cannot be achieved without it, yet suspecting and sneering at theorists ... Marxism wishes to vaunt the function, but to stigmatise the functionary. This serves to conceal the alien elite origins of its own theory, so dissonant in a social movement purporting to be proletarian ... Marxism's stress on the role of theory and of 'scientific' socialism must inevitably invest theorists, intellectuals - in a word, the New Class - with great autonomy. For it is they and they alone who produce socialism's theory ... Marxism's task is to find a way of vaunting theory but concealing the New Class from which it derives, concealing its paradoxical authority in a movement of proletarians and socialists. The invention of the vanguard party was central in that manoeuvre." Here, those measures suggested at the end of the second section of the *Manifesto* serve to propel this New Class to ruling class: "In transferring the means of production to *state* control, thus swelling the bureaucratic apparatus of the state, socialism extends the domain within which the New Class's cultural capital holds sway ... The decisive mark of socialism is elimination of moneyed capital, the old class; its inevitable consequence, however recognised or intended, is to pave the way for cultural capital; i.e., for the New Class" (Gouldner, 1979:61). A consideration of socialist orthodoxy, I argue, supports Gouldner's equation of socialism with rule by the intellectual or party.

In the period of the Second International, a period of optimism regarding the growth of socialist parties, the intellectual had a decisive place: "Even before political socialism appeared on the scene, the labour lawyer who defended the workers' rights was often an important figure. Socialist parties offered an even more fruitful field of work to progressive-minded intellectuals. As parliamentary experts they drafted the bills which the socialist deputies proposed; as editors they wrote articles in the socialist press; as authors they popularised socialist ideas or developed and defended them in discussions with their

opponents; as instructors they gave intellectual training to leaders and subleaders of proletarian origin; as lawyers they advised the party officers how to avoid legal traps or defended them in political trials. Through the mere fact of their participation, the intellectual demonstrated that the socialist appeal was not merely based on the economic interest of the individual, but also on the significance which were the concern of all mankind” (Landauer, 1976a:486). However, the alleged primacy of material conditions and the proletarian nature of Marxism’s socialism (Pierson, 1993:1), together with the crises provoked by ministerialism in France and revisionism in Germany, meant that the vexed questions of intellectuals and party organisation became live issues, especially with the strength of a syndicalist mood amongst both workers and theoreticians. In this period, for example, the SPD was troubled by the so-called “*akademikerproblem*”. This dispute centred on the role of the intellectuals who had entered the party in large numbers in the 1890s and who were viewed by some as responsible for a veritable de-proletarianisation, and even of an accompanying de-radicalisation, of socialism (Pierson, 1993:9,79).

The response by thinkers like Engels and Lafargue to such problems around the role of theorists in the socialist movement was a common and paradoxical anti-intellectualism, which relegated intellectuals to a mere function of economic development (Pierson, 1993:32).<sup>6</sup> However, within the Second International, the party and the theorist had a special place. Karl Kautsky, for instance, understood the party as representative of and legislator for the working class. For Kautsky, it was *the party* that would take power after the revolution, as a class, though it might rule, *could not directly govern* (Salvadori, 1979:21). In Kautsky’s opinion, it was the very character of those in the party, as professional and skilled politicians and as technically-trained intelligentsia, that allowed for, or, more strongly, *necessitated* this role for the intellectual and the party.<sup>7</sup>

Capable of freeing themselves from the determinants of their backgrounds and taking a special place in the movement, intellectuals could, Kautsky argued, lend to workers a “clear conception of their historical function” and “clarity and consciousness of goals” (in Pierson, 1993:40,65,86). In fact, Kautsky famously asserted that “Modern socialist consciousness can arise only on the basis of profound scientific knowledge ... The vehicle of science is not the proletariat, but the bourgeois intelligentsia.” Thus, “socialist consciousness is something introduced into the proletarian class struggle from without” and is “not something that grew naturally from within it” (Kautsky in Lenin, 1970:151). It is, though, important to clarify Kautsky’s point.<sup>8</sup> Kautsky, the arch fatalist and optimist,<sup>9</sup> would have been in a gravely contradictory space, as John Kautsky (1994:80) has pointed out, had he argued that the

proletariat was spontaneously imbued with bourgeois ideology (Kautsky, 1994:80). In fact, for Kautsky, what was brought from without by the intellectuals to the workers was “modern socialism,” that is, Marxism. It was, in Kautsky’s reckoning, the intellectual’s function to provide “knowledge of the goal” and a scientific basis for workers’ ideals and instincts, but revolutions *could not be made* (Kautsky, 1994:72,80).<sup>10</sup>

What was the precise content and function of this “modern socialism” expounded by Second International orthodoxy? The scientific facet of Marx’s work was given an even more deterministic and confidently positivistic reading by Engels. It is hard not to agree with Walicki (1995:115) that Engels’ “ostentatious modesty” regarding his own contribution to “scientific socialism” has concealed his additions and alterations to what has come to be commonsensically referred to as “Marxism”. As McLellan (1977:39) notes, the growing popularity of Marx’s work demanded a clearer formulation, and Engels proved an excellent populariser and simplifier. In the process, “historical materialism” (Engels’s phrase) became a more universal theory than Marx might have wanted (Thomas, 1992:40). Certainly, it was attached to natural science in a way that has proven uncomfortable for most contemporary Marxian theorists.

In *Anti-Duhring, Ludwig Feuerbach and the Outcome of Classical German Philosophy*, and the posthumously published *Dialectics of Nature*, Engels transformed Marx’s work into a complete and scientific philosophical system (McLellan, 1977:64,72). In particular, Engels’ serialised attack on Duhring, part of which was reproduced as *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*, proved the “single most important source of the spread of Marxian thought in Europe” (Stenson, 1981:193). Here, the idealistic and historical connotations of historical materialism are diminished and dialectics becomes systematised and categorised into the transformation of quantity into quality and vice versa, the interpenetration of opposites, and the negation of the negation (McLellan, 1977:64). Attaching science to the Marxian socialism he sought to promote, Engels (1958:76) declared: “Nature is the proof of dialectics ... Nature works dialectically and not metaphysically.” Relatedly, science could unproblematically separate fact and value: “When one is a man of science, one does not have an ideal; one works out scientific results and when one is a party man to boot one fights to put them into practice. But when one has an ideal, one cannot be a man of science” (in McLellan, 1979:16).

The rise of the powerful social democratic movement took place beneath the “long shadow” cast by Darwin (Jacoby, 1981)<sup>11</sup> and the achievements of science. This intellectual backdrop

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gave good cause for optimism, for the faith that socialism was an inevitable part of the obvious progress of society. Such a confident appeal to science proved an important myth for devotees and a baton with which to bludgeon rather than convince opponents (Kitching, 1994). Each of the prominent Second International figures (Labriola, Mehring, Kautsky, and Plekhanov) corresponded with Engels, and each sought to continue the development of historical materialism into a “complete theoretical system” (Kautsky in McLellan, 1979:67).<sup>12</sup> Such development emphasised necessity<sup>13</sup> against Marxism’s ideological rivals and seemed to answer all questions, providing an attractively simple and comprehensive set of axioms that could be wielded by its militants (Walicki, 1995:208; Anderson, 1976:6; Sassoon, 1996; Wright, 1986:6).

Lenin’s voluntarism and the context in which Bolshevism developed produced important differences between Leninism and classical social democracy; and yet, in essentials, the consonance is obvious. Following Kautsky, Lenin argued that the party should guide the masses, orienting their action in the correct direction. And, as in the social democratic case, Lenin’s and the Bolsheviks’ conception of the seizure of power displaced the working class for the party. Moreover, Leninism is philosophically indebted, in the main, to the evolutionist and determinist formulations of social democracy (Salvadori, 1979:21).

Lenin’s infamous treatise of 1902, *What is to be Done?*, was addressed first and foremost to what the Bolshevik leader interpreted as the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party’s crippling disorganisation. However, Service (1985:88) claims that Lenin believed himself to be articulating generally applicable theoretical propositions. Bearing the imprints of absolutism, feudalism, and illegality, Lenin’s intervention champions the organisational principles of absolute secrecy, the strictest selection of professional revolutionaries, centralism, and the disciplinary subordination of members to the central committee (Jacoby, 1981:67; Mattick 1978:45). Lenin insisted on the importance of such an organisation: “Give us an organisation of revolutionaries,” promised Lenin (1970:219), “and we will overturn Russia.” Given the division and degradation of the working class, socialist consciousness must be introduced from without. The party thus must train and enlighten the masses, express their interests and direct all their activities along the path of conscious class politics (Lenin, 1972:253,319): “only the political party of the working class, i.e., the Communist Party, is capable of uniting, training and organising a vanguard of the proletariat and of the whole mass of the working people that alone will be capable of withstanding the inevitable petty-bourgeois vacillations of this mass and the inevitable traditions and relapses of narrow craft unionism or craft prejudices among the proletariat, and of guiding all the united

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activities of the whole of the proletariat, i.e., of leading it politically, and through it, the whole mass of the working people. Without this the dictatorship of the proletariat is impossible” (Lenin, 1972:327). Thus, for Lenin, to weaken the party was to weaken the working class (Daniels, 1965:113).

Following Kautsky, the master of Marxian orthodoxy, Lenin believed it was a “profound mistake” to “imagine that the labour movement pure and simple can elaborate, and will elaborate, an independent ideology for itself” (in Eyerman and Jamison, 1991:97). In Lenin’s (1970:143) famous words: “The history of all countries shows that the working class, exclusively by its own effort, is able to develop only trade union consciousness.” This “trade union consciousness” is the “spontaneous” thought of the working class due to its “low cultural level” and given the weight of bourgeois over proletarian ideology (Howard, 1972:54). For Lenin (1970:182), therefore, “Class political consciousness can be brought to the workers only from without, that is, only from outside the economic struggle.”

In the months leading up to the October Revolution, Lenin came to terms with the shock of the collapse of the Second International and was excited into libertarian mode by the unrest and radicality of the Russian working class. In this period, Lenin expressed sentiments counter to the elitist and substitutionist propositions of *What is to be Done?*<sup>14</sup> This “anarchist” mode saw Lenin arguing that the masses were to wield power directly through their soviets. However, even in *The State and Revolution* the role of the vanguard (references to the party, notes Sirianni (1982), being suspiciously absent) was still essential. According to Lenin (1969:25): “By educating the workers’ party, Marxism educates the vanguard of the proletariat, capable of assuming power and *leading the whole people* to socialism, of directing and organising the new system, of being the teacher, the guide the leader of all the working and exploited people in organising their social life without the bourgeoisie and against the bourgeoisie.” In the period after the 1917 revolution, vanguardist principles again assumed a central place in Lenin’s thought. “Yes,” declared Lenin (1965:535), “the dictatorship of one party! We stand upon it and cannot depart from this ground, since this is the party which is the whole factory and industrial proletariat. This party had won that position even before the revolution of 1905.” Here, Lenin (1965:242) admitted that it was the Bolsheviks that had won power in Russia,<sup>15</sup> not through the will of the people but through a displacement by virtue of which the party was equated with the class.<sup>16</sup>

Bolshevism's accentuation of the party and the intellectual was tied closely to their presumed capacity for developing a correct and guiding theory. Revolutionary theory, for Lenin, was vital: "The role of vanguard fighter can be fulfilled only by a party that is guided by the most advanced theory" (in Stalin, 1970:22). For the most part, Lenin shared the Second International conception of the nature and role of theory. Thus, in his *Three Sources of Marxism*, Lenin (1976:7,21) followed Engels and Kautsky closely, contending that "Nature's process is dialectical and not metaphysical", and confidently insisting that "The Marxist doctrine is omnipotent because it is true". When Bogdanov asserted that the interfusion of subject and object meant that absolute truth became an unattainable goal, Lenin disagreed vehemently (Service, 1985). Directing his venom at Bogdanov's heresy, Lenin's *Materialism and Empiriocriticism* posited the independent objectivity of the external world, the primacy of matter over mind, the possibility of incontrovertible truth, humanity's capacity to gain exact truths about the world, and the mind as a camera which could copy and produce accurate pictures of reality (Service, 1985:8,144,178).

Lenin was startled into a Hegelian philosophical revision of his conception of Marxism by the collapse of his illusions concerning the Second International (Harding, 1996:77,233; Dunayevskaya, 1973).<sup>17</sup> However, it was his earlier, raw theoretical conceptions that furnished the "Diamat" of Soviet Marxism, as official state ideology. For instance, in its attempt to prove that the party's activity was to be derived from the irrevocable laws of history, Stalin's *Dialectical and Historical Materialism* drew on Lenin's *Materialism and Empiriocriticism*, Plekhanov, and the later Engels' (Walicki, 1995:432). Nature, declared Stalin (1972:301), is dialectical, and the world and its laws are *fully knowable*. Social life and history develop according to regular laws, and our knowledge - when properly guided - can have the validity of objective truth. Marxist science can thus become as precise as biology: "Hence socialism is converted from a dream of a better future for humanity into a science" (Stalin, 1972:310-312). Here, the working class, seen by Marx as the presupposition of any revolutionary theory, is displaced and marginalised by the bearers of science.

Within both social democratic and Leninist thought, the socialist intellectual and the party were able to gain objective comprehension of the laws and direction of history. Further, discerning the needs and interests of the masses, and the best modes of action and post-revolutionary organisational exigencies, they were posited as able to represent the masses. The intellectual and the party are to lead, to train, and to seize and exercise power on behalf

of and thus over the working class. In the sections that follow, I shall explore the left communist rejection of and alternatives to the positions of socialist orthodoxy.

**“Revolutions do not allow anyone to play schoolmaster with them” -**

**Left Communism on Parties and Intellectuals**

The substitutionism of socialist orthodoxy *does* have doctrinal support in the classics of both the Marxian and anarchist traditions. Gouldner (1985:7,14), I believe, has argued very persuasively that Marx and Engels spoke so little of intellectuals because of the crucial logical gap in their theory, a gap which was filled by Lenin’s vanguard party. The contradiction between the demand for theory and the critique of theorists, and the disjunction that the existence of revolutionary intellectuals introduces between being and consciousness,<sup>18</sup> is overcome by the vanguard party, which disciplines intellectuals while maintaining them in positions of authority. For Gouldner (1985:27-8), of course, this is a signal of the secret fact that Marxism arose in no real connection to the proletariat. Rather, the proletariat were simply a convenient social agent hitched to the true and deep goals of Marxism: the rise to power of a “new class”. While one may certainly accept the existence of the contradiction Gouldner identifies, I think that there is nothing that allows one to discern such intentions or to identify such a function throughout the entire Marxian tradition. There are other readings of the communist classics to be had, readings that accent self-emancipation and no more than an auxiliary role for intellectuals and parties. In particular, left communists have rejected claims that intellectuals or parties are to represent, lead, or to take power on behalf of the working class.

The left communist advance beyond substitutionism and elitism has not been achieved all at once or in a straightforward and linear manner. Left communism was faced with and marked by a troubled social-historical context. Social democracy and Leninism had achieved dominance, and libertarian socialist possibilities had been defeated. The working class were quiescent, and capital seemed to be marching forward relentlessly. In such a context, one discovers tendencies that move towards both substitutionism and party fetishism and, on the other hand, the paralysis of pure spontaneism and anti-political catastrophism (Boggs, 1995). Both modes, signals of political failure, appear as a negation of politics, issuing variously in sectarian aloofness, a blind faith in history’s telos, and inadequate attention to questions of consciousness and strategy (Boggs, 1995). Left communists have often attempted to surpass the contradictions between the goal of proletarian self-emancipation and the continued intervention of socialist intellectuals and parties by choosing one side or

the other of the dilemma. And yet, when this tension is enabled to continue unresolved, a space is opened for a libertarian socialist intellectual-political practice. Left communists have diminished the authority of the intellectual and the party. At the same time, they have avoided the passivity of anti-intellectualist spontaneism before the guarantees of History or revolutionary instinct, actively attempting to organise and theorise towards the generalisation of a new socialist commonsense.

Anarchism posed an early challenge to the vanguardism and statism it detected in the Marxian conception of communism. Many anarchists have argued that the Marxist, as a thoroughly political creature, seeks in every instance the establishment of a disciplined, theoretically-coherent party that aims at the conquest of the state apparatus. The anarchist, on the other hand - aiming at the thoroughly un-Marxist goal of dissolving hierarchy - participates in loose political-cultural groupings or, as a committed individualist, refuses all associations that might limit his or her autonomy. Thus, for Proudhon, "All parties without exception, insofar as they seek for power, are varieties of absolutism" (in Woodcock, 1962:1). And Bakunin (1953:247; 1990:135,204) insisted that revolutions were the product not of parties or individuals, but of the force of circumstances (economic collapse in particular) and the inherently rebellious instincts of the masses. Given this, and his fear of the statist communists' desire to impose science and their own rule on the people, Bakunin (1990:204) maintained that: "All that individuals can do is to clarify, propagate, and work out ideas corresponding to the popular instinct". In Bakunin, one detects all the essential libertarian premises around the questions of party, consciousness, and socialism. Emancipation must be self-emancipation. Further, this emancipatory urge must emerge from the people themselves through the struggles the present order forces them to engage in. Thirdly, working class organisations will be the primary means by which to transcend the current order.

More generally, most anarchists have rejected *in toto* any conception of a socialist power seizure by a political party. Instead they have championed the revolution from below. Implicated in this propensity is the anarchist tradition's strong streak of suspicion regarding intellectuals *vis a vis* the virtuous masses (Beetham, 1987:130). For instance, the French syndicalist Lagardelle linked intellectuals to state socialism and bourgeois values: "In conquering the state, in exalting the role of parties, they [intellectuals] reinforce the hierarchical principle embodied in political and administrative institutions"; "They enter the labour movement as the bearers of traditional values, from whose influence it is precisely the mission of the proletariat to tear itself free" (in Beetham, 1987:111-2). In like manner,

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Malatesta (1965:90) and Sorel championed self-emancipation - the latter, for example, insisting that middle class intellectuals could only do harm in a working class organisation, poisoning the workers with foreign modes of thought and replacing "the idea of class" by the notion of party (Kolakowski, 1978:163; Jennings, 1985:123). These conceptions have taken material form in the frequent anarchist refusal to constitute themselves as a separate leadership group. Often the emphasis has been on an informal *affinity group* (Bookchin). Alternatively, organisation has been seen as best achieved by a single, simultaneously economic and political, administrative unit (Ruhle, Syndicalism). In this, anarchists have often tended towards a profoundly optimistic view of the working masses as naturally decent, as pushed by historical circumstances themselves and not intellectuals towards revolution, or as possessed of (or progressively becoming gripped by) an "instinct for freedom" (Bakunin, Chomsky).

These emphases on anti-intellectualism, the rejection of representation, and the prefigurative, culturalist insistence that one cannot "combat alienation by means of alienated forms of struggle" (Debord, 1995:122) resurfaced in the existentialist-influenced and *gauchiste* 1960s. For instance, around the events of May 1968, the former Bordigist Jacques Camatte came to question the political perspectives that he had hitherto held, arriving at a rejection of the party concept as it had been articulated in the communist tradition. As far as representation is concerned, Camatte (1995:20) argues that: "Since the essence of politics is fundamentally representation, each group is forever trying to project an impressive image on the social screen. The groups are always explaining how they represent themselves in order to be recognised by certain people as the vanguard for representing others, the class. This is revealed in the famous 'what distinguishes us' of various small groups in search of recognition. All delimitation is limitation and often leads rather rapidly to reducing the delimitation to some representative slogans for racketeerist marketing. All political representation is a screen and therefore an obstacle to a fusion of forces." The party today, says Camatte (1995:9), is a "gang" or a "racket". The formation of any such gang is not at all counter to the dictates of capital. On the contrary, "capitalism is the triumph of the organisation, and the form the organisation takes is the gang" (Camatte, 1995:30). The formation of the gang is based on the deindividualising illusion of party as community (Camatte, 1995:31; Trotter, 1995:9). In contrast to the dictates of gang politics, for Camatte (1995:33), "The revolutionary must not identify himself with a group but recognise himself in a theory that does not depend on a group or on a review, because it is the expression of an existing class struggle." According to Camatte, the desire for theoretical development must

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be realised in an autonomous and personal fashion, which he views as a return to Marx's post-1850 attitude to all groups.

Sentiments like Camatte's have much merit, both in terms of their anti-representational stance and in light of the descent of small left groups into super-bureaucratic modes of operating and self-referencing sectarian polemics. However, Camatte's anti-authoritarian positions seem too individualistic and pessimistic, the apparently de-politicised gestures of withdrawal made by *l'homme revolte* faced with an unpromising situation. Thinking past socialist orthodoxy requires something altogether more political and less anti-intellectual.

If the anarchists made a rather early and clear break from the notion of liberation as the rule of intellectuals and parties, such a turn was slower emerging within the Marxian tradition. One does find early expressions of such perspectives in Morris and the SPGB, then again around the events of 1905,<sup>19</sup> with the growing concern at the bureaucratisation and de-radicalisation of international socialism. However, the most important ruptures are to be traced to the insurgency in and around the First World War. Disillusioned with the capitulation of the social democrats, excited by the emergence of workers' councils, and slowly distanced from Leninism, many communists came to reject the claims of socialist parties and put their faith instead in the masses. For these socialists, "The intuition of the masses in action can have more genius in it than the work of the greatest individual genius" (Mehring in Appel, 1990:342).

Luxemburg's workerism and spontaneism are exemplary: "revolutions do not allow anyone to play the schoolmaster with them" (Luxemburg, 1970:188). Luxemburg (1970:393) was convinced of the democratic and mass character of the revolution to come. In contrast to both Lenin's substitutionist tendencies and social democracy's staid leadership, her conception of the dictatorship of the proletariat was equivalent to the dictatorship of a class, "not of a party or of a clique". Socialism was to be the work of the masses, not of any government or central committee, no matter how theoretically sophisticated and socialist-minded they declared themselves (Luxemburg, 1970:130,419). In numerous spontaneist formulations, Luxemburg interpreted socialism as *solely* the product of working class struggle: "To educate the proletarian masses socialistically [in the past] meant to deliver lectures to them, to circulate leaflets and pamphlets among them. No, the socialist proletariat doesn't need all this. The workers will learn in the school of action" (in Howard, 1971:406).

However, as Gombin (1978:80) has argued, Luxemburg's whole career was concerned with an attempt to reconcile the apparently irreconcilable: an autonomous proletarian dynamic with the need for a vanguard. Sometimes this vanguard is but the "speaking part" to the active chorus that is the masses; sometimes the party is to forge ahead and to accelerate the revolutionary process; sometimes the party itself is to take power (Dunayevskaya, 1991:20; Frolich, 1940:168). As an example of the latter accent, although Luxemburg called for all power to the soviets, shortly before her assassination she declared: "The Spartacus Union will never take over the power of Government otherwise than by a clear manifestation of the unquestionable will of the great majority of the proletarian mass of Germany" (in Gruber, 1967:132). Of course, for Luxemburg, this take-over was to be the work of a *mass party* - perhaps more akin to Marx's occasional usage of "party" as coincident with the entire proletariat.<sup>20</sup> And yet, Luxemburg was reluctant to stray from the old social democratic vision of the party.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, the Spartacus union could hardly have been taken to resemble anything like a mass organisation and, therefore, the vanguardist conflation of party and working class power appears tortuously out of sorts with Luxemburg's libertarian strictures.

In various thinkers of the time (Appel, Pannekoek, Gorter, Pankhurst, Ruhle, Gramsci, Lukacs), the tension found in the work of Luxemburg is repeated. On the one hand, communism is "the independent revolutionary movement of the international working class", rather than the "artificially devised" product of a party (Korsch in Kellner, 1977:193,211). On the other hand, left communists have been reluctant to give up the idea that there is still a vital role for communist thinkers and communist organisation in the achievement of socialism. For example, as early as 1910 Pannekoek had declared that "An acceleration of our struggle is possible only when the masses themselves seize the initiative, leading and pushing their organisations forward" (in Bricanier, 1978:22). However, in 1920, Pannekoek spoke of the Communist Party putting itself at the head of the movement as a whole, organising the working class into a disciplined army, and trying to connect spontaneous actions together: "leadership in the revolution then falls to the Communist Party by virtue of the world-transforming power of its unambiguous principles" (in Bricanier, 1978:101; Smart, 1978:118-9). In the same year, Pannekoek even talked of the Communist Party *taking power*, after which it would work to eradicate the proletariat's weaknesses and strengthen it for the struggles ahead (Smart, 1978:108). Similarly, at this time, Herman Gorter, Sylvia Pankhurst, Otto Ruhle, and Jan Appel<sup>22</sup> all insisted on the central role of a strong, coherent communist party to work in dialectical relation with the working class, to correct its mistakes,<sup>23</sup> to show the working class by word and deed what to

do, to act as “eye” and “steersman” of the working class (Gorter in Smart, 1978:162; Rachleff, 1976:182; Shipway, 1987:121).

The tension between spontaneism and vanguardism resolved itself in two diametrically opposed ways: the first involved a drift towards the party; the second saw a move towards complete proletarian spontaneity. The first course is exemplified most usefully in Gramsci, Lukacs, and Bordiga; the second, in Pannekoek, Ruhle, and later councilist groupings such as ICO and *Echanges et Mouvement*. Both such resolutions are an inadequate basis for socialist politics. In fact, I believe that the unresolved struggle with this problem proved productive for the possibility of an engaged and critical but still libertarian socialist politics.

Korsch moved from orthodoxy to a critique of the Leninist and social democratic equation of the dictatorship of the proletariat with the dictatorship of the party.<sup>24</sup> However, those other two fathers of Western Marxism, Lukacs and Gramsci, migrated in the opposite direction. Radicalised by the syndicalist mood and by the appearance of councils in Italy, Hungary, and elsewhere, Gramsci and Lukacs initially emphasised the proletariat over the party. Thus, for Lukacs (1973:34; my emphasis), “*Nothing* but the unity and will of the proletariat can destroy the old society and build the new.” In a similar vein (though without Lukacs’ impractical romanticism), excited by Italy’s “two red years” (1919-1920), Gramsci (1977:93,100) spoke of the Italian Socialist Party as little more than a “wretched clerk”, and he insisted that “The factory council is the model of the proletarian state” (in Sassoon, 1980:45). However, both Lukacs and Gramsci had retained a conception of the party as able to help make “people conscious of their objective and to point the way forward for the struggle” (Lukacs, 1973:58) or as acting as a “furnace of faith” (Gramsci, 1977). With the defeat of the post-war proletarian unrest, both thinkers came to elevate the party over the proletariat. For Lukacs (1973:35,88), “the working class without an independent political party is a rump without a head”, and it became *the party* that was prefigurative of socialism, embodying all that was potentially admirable in the proletariat as a class for itself.<sup>25</sup> And Gramsci too moved from a syndicalist to a vanguardist vision of the revolutionary process, a move which culminated, as Femia (1981:149-50) puts it, in a “ferocious Jacobinism”.<sup>26</sup>

Like Gramsci, Amadeo Bordiga’s thinking was greatly shaped by the reformist and compromising Italian Socialist Party, the war, and the rise of proletarian militancy in Europe. In contrast to Gramsci’s emphasis on factory councils, Bordiga’s “intransigent” tendency in the socialist party called for a pure communist doctrine and a compact, non-compromising organisation (Joll, 1977:41). Bordiga did not, though, reject the workers’

councils.<sup>27</sup> The councils might well play a role in revolutionary struggle but their main function, argued Bordiga (1977:230-1), was as a means for the working class to exercise power *after* smashing the capitalist state. What is important *now* is the political struggle against the bourgeois state, and for this struggle the important organ is the Communist Party (Bordiga, 1977:205,214): “Those who can represent the proletariat *today*, before it takes power *tomorrow*, are workers who are conscious of this historical eventuality; in other words, the workers who are *members of the Communist Party*.” To over-emphasise, as did Gramsci, the councils was to incorrectly weight a *form* over a *force*: “there are no organs which are revolutionary by virtue of their form; there are only social forces that are revolutionary on account of their orientation” (Bordiga, 1977:219-220).

Bordiga’s anti-formalism appears to have been sound, especially in view of the councilist tendency to raise organisational modes in themselves to the very stuff of socialism. However, despite his talk of the workers’ assumption of power, and despite his thoroughgoing opposition to political voluntarism, Bordiga’s notion of revolution was thoroughly Blanquist (Buick, 1987). The party was viewed as the “social brain” of the class, and this party - unified, centralised, and disciplined - was to seize and exercise power on its behalf (Buick, 1987:128): “Only the party can embody the dynamic revolutionary energies of the class” (Bordiga, 1977:219). This conception of socialist revolution tended, then, to converge with the authoritarian and substitutionist position that the Bordigists had come into conflict with.

On the other side of the party/anti-party divide is the tendency, developing from the Dutch and German far-lefts, that inclined towards the complete eradication of the party form. In its very existence, the KAPD, for instance, signalled the felt need for a strong, coherent organisation (Raden, 1968:16). However, the pivotal role of Pannekoek’s thought in the KAPD programme pointed to a rather minimal conception of the tasks before a socialist party: “Revolution is the work of the masses; it begins spontaneously. Certain actions decided upon by the party can sometimes (rarely, however) be the point of departure, but the determining forces lie elsewhere” (in Bricanier, 1978:180). Such caveats and the developing conception of the revolution as above all a working class affair are indicated in the KAPD’s conception of itself as “not a party in the traditional sense”, as it distanced itself both from the non-revolutionary SPD and the vanguardism of the German Communist Party. For the KAPD, “The question we must answer in a decisive manner is the following: how can we overthrow capitalism, how can we act towards this end in such a way that throughout the whole process, the proletariat keeps things under its control?” (in ICC, n.d.a:1). But who

was this “we”, and in what relation did they stand to the proletariat? For some within the KAPD, functioning in a party framework all too reminiscent of the old organisational forms became impossible.

Soon after forming, the KAPD entered into a close relationship with the AAUD (General Workers’ Union of Germany). Very quickly, however, differences arose over the question of whether there should exist a political party outside of the industrial AAUD (Raden, 1968:11). In 1920, Otto Ruhle and his East Saxony organisation (of over 100,000 members) criticised the KAPD as a “leadership clique” and left the party to merge with the AAUD. In 1921, Ruhle left the AAUD to form the AAUD-E (General Workers’ Union - Unitary Organisation), rejecting *in toto* centralism and “outside leadership”. Against the interference of intellectuals in working class institutions, Ruhle insisted on the primacy of factory organisations (Gerber, 1989:158; Ruhle, n.d.a:xvii). As it was *only in the factory* that the worker was not petty bourgeois, and as all political parties were “bourgeois”, Ruhle (n.d.b:2,26,28) concluded that the revolution was an economic affair, that it was certainly “not a party affair”, and that “The concept of a party with a revolutionary character in the proletarian sense is nonsense.”

Pannekoek (n.d.b:2) soon came to the similar conclusion that there was an internal contradiction to the phrase “revolutionary party”: “The workers should not blindly accept the slogans of others, nor of our own groups but must think, act, and decide for themselves” (Pannekoek, n.d.b:1). In fact, Pannekoek (n.d.b) went so far as to suggest that: “The belief in parties is the main reason for the impotence of the working class.” In 1927, when the Dutch councilist group, KAPN (Communist Workers’ Party of Netherlands) asked him to clarify whether he was or was not a member, Pannekoek replied: “I consider the party-system and the conception of party membership to be in large part a remnant of the earlier socialist era of the workers’ movement, which, however inevitable it may be in certain respects, is in general harmful. For this reason, I remain outside it” (in Gerber, 1989:182). By 1936, Pannekoek - already a long-time outcast from active political life - contended that: “in this transitional period, the natural organs of education and enlightenment are, in our view, work groups, study and discussion circles, which have formed on their own accord and are seeking their own way” (in Bricanier, 1978:282). For Henck Canne Meijer, a prominent participant in the GIC (International Communist Group) and friend of Pannekoek, the “work group” was quite unlike a party. And yet, Meijer looked forward to the generalisation of such groups in “which ... [the working class] masters the science of the social forces.” Thus, it appears that such a “work group”, like the anarchist “affinity group”, functions as a “party

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in disguise” for those who are hoping to theorise away their own continued participation in “separate” political organisations and to erase the ever-present problem of their role as intellectuals in the projected revolution.

For all of his tilting towards spontaneism, Pannekoek still felt that parties and intellectuals could (perhaps even, *should*) play an important role. This is indicated in his later assertion (shared, at some points, by Pankhurst, Bordiga, and Barrot) that, in a period “of decline, of confusion, of deceit”, the intellectual or work group was to preserve “the principles of class struggle” for a future revival (in Bricanier, 1978:243). This position, and Pannekoek’s admission that vanguards could spark larger radicalisations, was rejected by elements of the next generation of council communism. For the workerist outgrowths from *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, for example, the anti-representational perspectives of the German and Dutch lefts were developed to an outer extreme that dispensed with Pannekoek’s covert educationism.

For some in *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, Castoriadis’ (1952:200) insistence on the indispensability of a revolutionary leadership as a distinct fraction of the class tasted too strongly of Leninist substitutionism. According to an opposition within SoB headed by Claude Lefort, the organisation’s role was merely that of a study group (rather than a party), and the group was *a priori* subordinate (“a provisional detachment purely conjunctural to the proletariat”) to any autonomous workers’ organisation (in Binstock, 1971:188,194). The irresolvable dispute within SoB over the question of organisation finally saw Lefort and Henri Simon leaving the group in 1958 to form *Informations et Liasons Ouvrieres* (ILO), which in 1960 became *Informations Correspondance Ouvrieres* (ICO) (Curtis, 1988:301). Within these groupings, liaison, and information were taken as more important than theorising, and workers’ everyday struggles were raised to the very stuff of socialism (Gombin, 1975:112). To prevent outside leadership and bureaucratic manipulation, the ICO militant could participate in struggles only as a worker and not as the member of an organisation (Gombin, 1975:115). ICO was thus based on a literal interpretation of Marx’s famous stricture that “the emancipation of the working class must be the work of the working class itself” (Gombin, 1975:112).

Henri Simon (1974:1-6) saw the struggles arising spontaneously from the capitalist system itself as assuming a new propensity towards autonomy, and towards the destruction of hierarchies and all forms of elitism: “The new tendency is towards people doing what they want by themselves and for themselves, towards taking and doing instead of asking and waiting.” Simon’s successor group to ICO, *Echanges et Mouvements*, developed these anti-

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vanguardist contentions, insisting that all “revolutionary groups” were in decline. As workers were moving more and more by themselves, offering them advice and lessons was impossible as well as noxious. According to Simon, “The Level and size of the so called ‘intervention of revolutionary groups in the struggles never determine or fundamentally influence the level and size of working class struggle”. *Echanges* (n.d:4) thus modestly restricts its role to the exchange of information and theoretical discussion.<sup>28</sup>

For these thinkers, it was the very logic of the historical process itself that educated the working class and generated the movement towards socialism. For Pannekoek and Luxemburg, socialism is a *process*, a dialectic of struggle and consciousness (Pannekoek, 1970:19; Shipway, 1987:111; Luxemburg, 1970:118). Communism is not at all a poetic ideal, the product of will, coercion, or morality. Instead, it is the product of historical conditions, of the material being of the working class within capitalist society. For Luxemburg (1970:121,426), the communist scripture should read: “In the beginning was the deed”. In this vein, Luxemburg insisted that “The unconscious comes before the conscious. The logic of the historic process comes before the subjective logic of human beings who participate in the historic process”. What was it in history that urged the working class in a socialist direction, that favoured such optimism? In her *Accumulation of Capital*, Luxemburg argued that the *complete* expansion of capitalism and the consequent exhaustion of the possibilities for further development meant the onset of capitalist decline and decadence (Dunayevskaya, 1991:44).<sup>29</sup> Not only did Luxemburg argue here the un-Marxist thesis that the market determined production, but she also implied that capitalism’s downfall would come from an outside force rather than from the working class (Dunayevskaya, 1991:33,45). However, Luxemburg maintained that the recurrent crises caused by the process she described would “make the rebellion of the international working class against capitalist dominance necessary even before capitalism has reached the natural self-created limits of its economic possibilities” (in Frolich, 1940:185).

As was often the case with Marx, then, the answer to questions of consciousness and historical process appear to lie in the direction of *catastrophe*. For instance, although Pannekoek specifically opposed Luxemburg’s catastrophism, he tended, as Gerber (1989:2,102) notes, to retreat to a highly fatalistic account of consciousness as an outgrowth of social development. Pannekoek and the Dutch leftists had seemingly provided a route away from determinism and towards some sort of conception of hegemony with their emphasis on the importance for victorious communism of spirit and consciousness. However, an ultra-determinism saw them abandoning such possibilities for an optimistic but

unrealistic catastrophism. Such optimism is evident in Pannekoek's (1970:34) characterisation of the revolutionary process as revealing "unceasing progress". Even when the working class seems at its most passive and integrated, argued Pannekoek (1970:98), "the forces of capitalism are working in the depths of society, stirring old conditions and pushing people forward even when unwilling". Capitalism's effects are "stored in the subconscious" where they "intensify the inner strains".

At times, however, Pannekoek recognised that these economic conditions would not be enough. He supplemented such catastrophism with the proviso that revolution would only follow collapse if: firstly, the sense of intolerability exercised more and more pressure<sup>30</sup>; and secondly, there existed a general awareness of what should be done (Bricanier, 1978:288). Such provisos, though, imply an autonomy for consciousness and thus deny the utility of the catastrophe theory to which the councilists remained stubbornly wedded. Instead of developing these embryonic sophistications, council communism persisted in its deterministic vein long after history had refuted its predictions. Thus it was that the theorist most connected with council communism from the 1940s, Paul Mattick, came to argue, against Pannekoek's rejection of the theory of collapse, that, in fact, the theory of catastrophe was a major point of demarcation between reformists and revolutionaries (Gerber, 1989:172). Mattick qualified this accent by noting that the working class need not be reduced to starvation but may be stirred by in-roads into their customary living standards or the denial of better living standards. However, Mattick's (1969:357) life work points again and again to the conclusion that, despite the apparent successes of the Keynesian compromise, crisis and thus revolution could not fail to reemerge. The *attentiste* and workerist implications of such determinism and catastrophism, even if they are not fulfilled in a cessation of activity, are gestured towards by a council communist writing in Mattick's journal *Living Marxism*: "[It is] unnecessary to fight against the propaganda agencies of the totalitarian rulers with their own weapons ... [These ideologies'] inconsistency with reality will become openly apparent at the moment the masses are forced to face the material overthrow of society" (in Rachleff, 1976:240).

In the left communist commitments to spontaneism, one detects a profound optimism concerning the historical process and the priority of action and the unconscious over words and thoughts. It does not, then, matter what proletarians think; it is a question of what they will be forced to do. As Cajo Brendel (1953:2) says: "it's not what workers think about their own action that is important in the class struggle, but what these actions mean, and how the momentum of events shapes the way workers behave." Similarly, Bordiga rejected

Gramsci's emphasis on culture and education, insisting instead that revolution would arrive by way of the inner crises of the capitalist mode of production (Ransome, 1992:203,223). As Barrot (1974:31) puts it, revolution is "the result of real needs; it originates in material living conditions which have become unbearable."<sup>31</sup>

Perhaps such catastrophism and the prioritising of historical process over ideas have some virtues. Not only do such claims *a priori* deny the intellectual and party any unchallenged authority over the socialist movement, but history, after all, does indicate the confluence of revolution with war, famine, and natural disaster. Apparently vindicating Marx's (1978:74) contention that being determines consciousness and that history cannot be reduced to ideas and ideals, the successes of socialists have been almost entirely reliant on particular economic-political conjunctures rather than on the implantation of radical ideologies (Geary, 1981:52). Thus, for example, Spartacus, the best known of the left radical groups, had little support during the German revolution, and most Germans were not even aware of its existence. There is, in fact, no proven link from Spartacus to the January 1919 "Spartacus" uprising - though Liebknecht was, to some extent, to become a symbol of anti-war sentiment in Germany (Nettl, 1969). In general, as Stearns (1971:214) has argued, "the [socialist] ideologies did not determine most workers' goals". Although these ideologies motivated working class representatives, these representatives were unable to push workers beyond that which the general social conditions of the time allowed. It would, then, be wise to conclude with Held (1996:9) that "it is only when ideas are connected to propitious historical circumstances and structural forces that they develop sufficient influence to alter the nature and workings of institutional forms."

While it may capture the weight of historical factors, the premises of catastrophe theory are plagued with difficulties. For instance, for all the council communists' concerns with working class consciousness, it is not certain that this consciousness is ever a real factor in their theories of revolution. Lukacs is exemplary here. In *History and Class Consciousness*, Lukacs argued that consciousness was not simply reflection but was, in fact, a *transformative force* (Eagleton, 1994:12). Lukacs insisted that intellectual leadership was not a task for intellectuals. Rather, "only through the class consciousness of the proletarians is it possible to achieve the knowledge to intellectual leadership" (in Eyerman, 1994:78). Nonetheless, not only did Lukacs end up attributing to intellectuals a great role in the advent of socialism, but consciousness does not appear to be quite the factor we were promised: "Only the consciousness of the proletariat can point the way that leads out of the impasse of capitalism ... But the proletariat is not given any choice ... But the proletariat cannot

abdicate its mission. The only question at issue is how much it has to suffer before it achieves ideological maturity, before it acquires a true understanding of its class situation and a true class consciousness” (Lukacs, 1973:76). Consciousness, then, seems more akin to the responses of a rat forced through a maze by a series of electric shocks than anything implying human agency, critical thought, moral evaluation, or utopian hope.

In some ways, councilism thus makes no advance on the ultra-determinism and unshakable optimism of the Second International. As Gorter, writing in a period of downturn and uncertainty, recognised: “The most terrible economic crisis is here and yet the revolution has not come. There must be still another factor which brings to existence the revolution and which, if it is absent, aborts or lets it fall. This factor is the spirit of the masses” (in Howard, 1972:51). Gorter is obviously correct, given that crisis and upheaval have often elicited reaction rather than communist radicalisation. And yet, Gorter makes little progress, only adding to the equation another factor (“the spirit of the masses”) which cannot be accounted for or, therefore, in any way controlled by the revolutionary. In a similar fashion, Murray Bookchin (1987:177) contends that the “worsening of economic conditions does not inspire a revolutionary consciousness, much less a socialist one, but fosters demands for reform within the capitalist system and, perhaps more poignantly, resignation and slavish attempts to accommodate to the vocational demands of society.” Bookchin’s answer - a counter-culture of sorts - is an example of the “cultural” direction in which communists have been pushed by the inadequacies of catastrophism. While this cultural turn is important, Bookchin’s answer is inadequate, illegitimately seeking to by-pass the questions of socialist organisation and the place of intellectuals.

*Echanges et Mouvement’s* conception of revolution, as a long, complex, and ongoing process, is, in essence, identical to Luxemburg’s argument that “revolution is the only form of ‘war’ ... in which the final victory can only be prepared by a series of ‘defeats’” (in Howard, 1971:44). Thus, on the eve of her death, Luxemburg was able to look confidently towards the future, seeing the communists’ failure as a necessary step towards ultimate victory. In this interpretation, as Mattick (1978) recognised, things seem to “roll uphill” inexorably. The working class of the 1990s must of necessity be closer to socialism than the proletariat of the 1920s, and the working class can never be judged wrong. Faith in an unstoppable revolutionary process or, in some anarchist formulations, in a revolutionary instinct<sup>32</sup> means that one actually evades the problem of really-existing consciousness and emphasises instead actions that have in large part no more than a potential existence.

It is worth re-emphasising the drubbing that the ideas of catastrophe and immiseration have taken. Left communists, like socialists in general, have a long tradition of predicting collapse: from De Leon's declaration that capitalism was on its last legs at the turn of the century to the recent claim by Claude Bitot that capitalism, having at last reached its true historical limits, will drive the working class towards socialism (Coleman, 1990; Buick, 1987). Bernstein's challenge to this sort of notion and Luxemburg's response are highly revealing. Bernstein rejected the law of value and the idea of collapse, arguing that trusts would allow capitalism to survive almost indefinitely (McLellan, 1979:25). Luxemburg (1986:55) replied: "Bernstein began his revision of the social democracy by abandoning the theory of capitalist collapse. The latter, however, is the cornerstone of scientific socialism." This response is little but a declaration of stubborn faith. Even left communist, Paul Mattick (n.d:1), himself a firm partisan of the theory of collapse, admitted that failure and utopianism had engendered a reliance on pure spontaneity and the "politics of catastrophe". As Guttsman (1981:297) and Kitching (1994:8) argue, inevitability doctrines seem to function as a psychological placebo for the unsuccessful intellectual. To feel, as G. D. H. Cole (1980:11) or C. L. R. James asserted, that modern society itself is undertaking the socialist task seems a rather comfortable and comforting prospect. Here, Marx's "old mole" of revolution defies the confidence of society's rulers and the plans of would-be radical leaders, popping up where least expected after ages of unseen work. As Luxemburg maintained in a letter of 1917: "Today, they [the masses] may appear indifferent and apathetic, tomorrow they might rise up with the greatest show of audacity. So we shouldn't make judgements based on their mood of the moment, but must take the basis of social development into consideration" (in Brendel, 1953:5). Boggs (1982:12) has pointed out that Luxemburg's faith acted like a Sorelian myth, and while this mythic quality is perhaps to an extent inevitable in any utopian project, it has tended to promote a blithe neglect of the intricate questions of consciousness and organisation.

*Attentisme* and spontaneism are clearly inadequate, and left communists have been unwilling to accept the political consequences of such extreme anti-vanguardism. Even the allegedly hyper-spontaneist anarchists have shown themselves unhappy with uncritical faith in the masses and anti-elitism alone. For instance, Bakunin's anti-intellectual and anti-political credentials are much tarnished by contrary sentiments in his work and life. In fact, with his notions of a "collective, invisible dictatorship," and because of his penchant for secret societies and ill-conceived plots (Masters, 1974:142,161),<sup>33</sup> Bakunin has been viewed by a number of thinkers<sup>34</sup> as the hitherto unacknowledged father of Lenin's authoritarian vanguard party.

Bakunin and other anarchists were frequently less than convinced of the much vaunted liberatory instincts of the masses.<sup>35</sup> Here, then, if we do not discover a tendency to withdraw from the realm of socialist agitation into artistic concerns or private life, we find a potential opening for the intellectual or the militant to lead the way and educate the masses or, at the very least, to throw their own revolutionary elan in the faces of the complacent majority by way of romantic bohemianism or insurrectionary martyrdom. Syndicalism held to the notion of the moral superiority of the heroic, self-sacrificing working class - "*le travail est grand et noble, c'est la source de toute richesse et de toute moralite*" (in Thomas 1980:169). This did not, however, exclude the idea of a "*minorite conscient*" that would activate the indifferent masses (Woodcock, 1962:301): "What else is syndicalist action but the action of courageous minorities, leading the masses, whose wants they express? These are the far-sighted men who march in front of the others, those on whom the pressure from the employers falls most cruelly, those who are oppressed through corruption, favoritism ... In this atmosphere of slavery and cowardice, who can awaken the latent energies, the dormant courage, the oppressed desire to revolt? Only the active element, through its enthusiasm, through the moral force which it acquires. These men alone count for syndicalism" (in Landauer, 1976a:344).<sup>36</sup> Thus, Griffuelhes denounced the "mutton-headed stupidity" of the majority, and Pouget saw the masses - "*zeros humains*" - as "inert" and universal suffrage as suffocating "the minority who carry the future within themselves" (Cole, 1970:348; Jennings, 1990:32). Similarly "aristocratic" (Landauer, 1976a:345) tendencies are to be found in Goldman (1983:86) and Malatesta.<sup>37</sup> And contemporary anarchist, Noam Chomsky, and even the fervent anti-intellectualist, Georges Sorel, posited a continuing role for the intellectual.<sup>38</sup>

As he explicitly both rejected Leninist vanguardism *and* criticised spontaneism, Cornelius Castoriadis is a particularly important figure within the left communist tradition. Castoriadis spelt out what had remained only implicit as an unacknowledged tension within much left communism: that the emancipation of the mass of people is the task of those people, but that the socialist thinker could not simply fold his or her arms. What was Castoriadis' alternative conception for the socialist intellectual and political organisation? In 1953, Castoriadis established contact with the aged Pannekoek, sending the latter twelve issues of *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, and an interesting exchange took place between the old and the new representatives of council communism (Binstock, 1971:200). Pannekoek applauded SoB's efforts but criticised Castoriadis' programme as attempting to reconcile the irreconcilable - self-government with leadership by a small external group - and consequently as tending towards Leninism (Gerber, 1989:195; Binstock, 1971:200). Castoriadis replied that

organisations need not be Leninist-Stalinist and that, in reality, a small nucleus of *avant-garde* workers could spark larger battles that would involve wider sections of the working class (Gerber, 1971:195).

Attempting to avoid a spontaneism that would dispense completely with any grouping outside of the working class itself, and arguing that such a grouping for ideological struggle and exemplary action did not require that they would constitute the post-revolutionary power, Castoriadis (1988a:198) argued that: “To renounce rational, organised, and planned collective activity because the masses will resolve all problems in the process of their struggle is in fact to repudiate the ‘scientific’ aspect, and more precisely the rational and conscious aspect of revolutionary activity; it is to sink voluntarily into a messianic mysticism”. Such an understanding of the tasks ahead set Castoriadis (1997a:11) in opposition to the ILO/ICO: “People’s evolution is not ‘autonomous’ in the absolute; it occurs in the midst of a struggle and of a social dialectic in which capitalists, Stalinists, and so on are constantly present ... It is one thing to condemn the conception of party as ‘director’, it is another to reject one’s own responsibilities and say [like ILO/ICO], ‘Our sole point of view consists in putting our newspaper at the disposal of those who want to speak’.”<sup>39</sup>

A revolutionary organisation is an important instrument, *one* instrument, in the struggle for socialism (Castoriadis, 1997a:7). Still, the most important factor in socialism is the mass of people: “they alone can invent, create a solution to a problem of which today no one can have even a suspicion” (Castoriadis, 1988a:232). Socialism is an answer to real problems and real issues that arise in the being of ordinary people. Socialism’s “seeds must already be present in the proletariat ... this can only be the result of its experience of work and of life under capitalism” (Castoriadis, 1988a:10). However, for Castoriadis, there is still something to be done. In essence, for Castoriadis (1988a:298): “To be revolutionary signifies both to think that only the masses in struggle can resolve the problems of socialism and not to fold one’s arms for all that; it means to think that the essential content of the revolution will be given by the masses’ creative, original and unforeseeable activity, and to act oneself, beginning with a rational analysis of the present and with a perspective that anticipates the future.”<sup>40</sup>

In rejecting Bordiga’s Blanquist conception of revolution, Gramsci too, though often drifting towards Jacobinism, provides some way forward from the dilemma of pure spontaneity versus the party as ruler. Arguing that the workers’ acquisition of socialist truths

was not spontaneous (“‘Pure’ spontaneity does not exist in history”), Gramsci consistently stressed the force of ideas in historical change. In line with these assertions, he emphasised the importance of education (Gramsci, 1977:196; Femia, 1981:135; Joll, 1977:31,85). Thus, while believing that the working class “has its own conception of the world, even if only embryonic; a conception which manifests itself in action”, Gramsci argued that the working class’ intellectual and moral subordination necessitated a patient “war of position”, the important agents of which would be parties and “organic intellectuals” in a dialectical interchange with the masses (Femia, 1981:43,137,163). Combining the emphases on leadership and spontaneity, Gramsci argued that the revolutionary intellectual works to corrode the hegemony of the ruling class and link together groups in struggle. By articulating a new conception of the world, such intellectuals help form a new revolutionary subjectivity (Boggs, 1984:212,223-6; Ransome, 1992:196).

Against Bordiga’s ultra-sectarian determination to keep the communists separated from any other social forces, Gramsci refused the idea of a party that was but “a collection of dogmatists or little Machiavellis ... which makes use of the masses for its own heroic attempts to imitate the French Jacobins” (in Adamson, 1980:54,58). The Communists must extend their appeal, must remain a part of the working class, and must, to an extent, be prepared to follow the shifts of the latter (Adamson, 1980:60). Arguing for revolutionary change as a *process* rather than as a single event, Gramsci asserted: “Bordiga has said that he is favourable to the winning over of the masses in the period immediately preceding the revolution. But how do we know when we are in this period? It depends precisely on the work which we know how to develop among the masses whether this period begins or not. Only if we work and achieve some success in the winning over of the masses will we arrive at a pre-revolutionary period” (in Sassoon, 1980:102). Gramsci thus criticised Bordiga’s political fetishism, which was, strangely enough, largely devoid of political content; that is, in Bordiga, the party was appointed to a leading position that it could not work towards taking up.<sup>41</sup>

I have argued that in its best moments left communism recognised that both the return to Jacobinism and the anti-vanguardist, spontaneist position were insufficient. Notably, Castoriadis and Gramsci were able to explicitly accept the necessity of proletarian self-emancipation *and* to emphasise the importance of socialist organisation and agitation. I will now consider left communism’s “educationist” tendency. This tendency, among socialists for whom the emancipation of the working class was to be a matter for the working class itself, is quite at odds with the Leninist conception of the role for socialist thinkers.

Nevertheless, here socialist intellectuals and socialist organisations have a potentially important role to play in the revolutionary process.

Communists like William Morris, Daniel De Leon, the SLP, and the SPGB prioritised education. For Morris, “the only rational means of attaining to the New Order of Things” was by “making socialists by educating them” (in ALB, 1984:23). Thus, in an article in which he farewelled political activity, Morris maintained: “I say make Socialists. We socialists can do nothing else that is useful, and preaching and teaching is not out of date for that purpose” (in Salmon, 1994:xli). Similarly, according to Daniel De Leon, the SLP had an important role as an “educational-propaganda organisation”. The SLP sought to refine “the character and moral fibre of the mass” and to alter enslaving habits of thought (Shipway, 1988:186; Herreshoff, 1967:152; De Leon, 1970:34). In like manner, Cole (in Carpenter, 1973:100) and Pankhurst (1993:83) insisted that the problem ahead was an educational one. In like manner, according to the SPGB, given that “Unless people understand socialism and want it, they will never establish it”, “There is no easier road to Socialism than the education of the workers in Socialism and their organisation to establish it by democratic methods” (Socialist Standard, 1920; Coleman, 1987:92-3). Thus, for the SPGB, the party’s job was to “make socialists”, and thus to “shorten the time, to speed up the process.”

In many respects, this educationism is close to some elements of anarchism, which, (following William Godwin) place tremendous faith in human rationality, and view the human being as profoundly the effect of circumstances and thus of the opportunities for enlightenment that he or she encounters (Woodcock, 1962:53). While many anarchists have followed Bakunin and Kropotkin in seeing revolution as spontaneous, as given by force of circumstances, many have rejected the Marxian super-determination that reduces the proletariat to an object and emphasises only economic conditions. Instead, they have maintained that people can be swayed by the moral and rational arguments a libertarian education would provide (Guerin, 1970:34; Bakunin, 1953:315,323; Clark, 1984:65). Thus Rocker, Sorel (Jennings, 1985:134), Berkman<sup>42</sup> (1972:132), Malatesta (1965:206), and Goldman (Wexler, 1984:95-7) rejected the “inevitable fatalism of rigid natural laws” (Rocker in Thorpe, 1990:245) and emphasised the place of will, education, and the intellectual. For Emma Goldman, “our ends are reached more quickly by educating the individual” (in Wexler, 1984:95,97). Berkman and many other anarchists similarly enthused over the liberatory possibilities of education, and Berkman was one of the founders of the Modern School in New York (Walter, 1989:viii). Pelloutier saw the task ahead as “*instruire pour revolter*” (in Jennings, 1990:18). In similar fashion, insisting that the primary factor in

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human history was “the idea” and that “when an idea grows revolution must come,” Reclus believed that “education is everything” (in Fleming, 1979:153,226). For these anarchists, then, as for the Marxian educationists, as for Castoriadis and Gramsci, although the revolution was to be a matter of the mass of people, intellectuals and political organisation were of great importance.

For left communists, the outcomes of Bolshevism and social democracy indicated the dangers of privileging the party and its intellectuals, a privileging that issued in the seizure and exercise of power on behalf of the people. Repelled by the de-radicalisation, bureaucratisation, and capitulation of social democracy in the imperialist war, libertarian socialists emphasised masses over elite, workers over intellectuals, action over theory, and movement over leadership. Conversely, the failures of the spontaneous movements of proletarian insurgency in the 1917-1923 period led some thinkers back to the problem of politics and culture. The collapse of the immense hopes raised by insurgency around the First World War was, in a sense, the failure *both* of the unrealistic hopes for parties and of those for the proletariat. The SPD showed itself a bureaucratic and nationalist force that rejected social revolution. The Bolsheviks seized power on their own behalf and worked to undermine the organs of workers’ power. On the other hand, the proletariat in Europe refused to grasp power when it seemed there for the taking, settling instead for the meagre gains of republican democracy or, worse, supinely allowing all working class organisations to be crushed by the reaction. It was amidst such failures and the dilemmas of isolation versus compromise and sectarianism versus incorporation (Boggs, 1984:226) that the possibility emerged of a properly political and engaged but non-vanguardist conception of socialist struggle. Insisting that the party was not to take or exercise power, that the predominant force of societal transformation was the mass of people, even the extreme spontaneist conclusions of left communists like Luxemburg and Mattick did not mean a cessation of intellectual and political work. And left communists such as Castoriadis, Gramsci, and those attuned to the possibilities of education have *explicitly* sought to combine anti-vanguardism with the attempt to make socialism the prevailing commonsense of the age, to emphasise the role and place of organisation and intellectuals. The political conclusions of these thinkers is a clear advance on the anti-politics of both substitutionism and pure spontaneity. These left communists have, then, diminished the authority of the intellectual and the party. Nevertheless, it remained, for these socialists, unavoidable that they should battle over the “social question”. A post-modern socialism would do well to pay close attention to the manner in which numerous left communists have sought to combine intellectual and organisational work towards a new society and commonsense with an

implacable opposition to vanguardism. A certain tension is ineradicable here, as a strong political attachment is combined with a libertarian and post-modern modesty.

**“Social truth is not a fixed quality” -  
The Function and Content of Theory**

In sum, then, a number of left communists managed to negotiate a path between vanguardism and spontaneism. These thinkers sought to eliminate the problem of vanguardism by rejecting the notion that the party is to take power, and they moved beyond immobilising spontaneism by refusing the quiescence that appears to follow from catastrophist and determinist positions. In the most lucid of left communist thinking, the tensions at work are accepted as vexing but inescapable and productive. Having dealt with the question of socialist intellectuals, political organisation, and power, I shall in this section examine the closely related issue of theory’s content and function.

Theory is perhaps best understood as a lens that helps us focus in particular ways, yielding systematised, detailed, and coherent generalisations about the world (Thiele, 1997:1-2). In opposition to the romantic portrait in which the theorist, voluntarily or by force of circumstance, develops an account from outside public life, heroically delivering truth from on high (Gunnell, 1987:138-141), Flacks (1991:3) has pointed out that “To make social theory is frequently to attempt to make history ... Social theories are levers intellectuals use to influence power structures, to facilitate political outcomes, to enable groups interested in exercising control to improve their practice, to justify their ascendancy, to achieve their goals, or to advance their interests.” This is important. Socialist orthodoxy has denied this political dimension of theory. And, in presenting theory as no more than a scientific investigation that relays what lies before us, in its secret privileging of theory and theorist, socialist orthodoxy has devalued popular self-activity (Boggs, 1995:55). Further, socialist orthodoxy has avoided addressing the crucial questions: “what ... of the relationship of the intellectual to those whose interests are represented? What of the cultural power and authority of intellectuals themselves?” (Osbourne, 1996:xv).

In response to the political bankruptcy of socialist orthodoxy, left communism sought a theoretical break. This break took a number of forms. The Bordigists and the SPGB championed a super-Marxian intransigence in theoretical matters. Some anarchists appealed to instinct, will, movement, or morality. And other socialists made a return “behind Marx” to the anti-positivist programme of German idealism. Left communism has linked its

libertarian political aspirations with this theoretical differentiation from orthodoxy. While contending that there can be no purely theoretical solution to the problems that socialism addresses, many left communists have importantly both attempted to make a break from the determinist and authoritarian implications of theoretical orthodoxy *and* they have continued to view a rational comprehension of society as a whole and of the possibilities for change as an important goal for socialist intellectuals. Such a stance has again entailed a troublesome negotiation. On the one side, left communists have battled against the possibilities of theory and theorists dominating the socialist movement. On the other side, left communists have continued to intervene as theorists and to act as if theory mattered. The tension between these two aspirations has proved fruitful in terms of a libertarian socialist practice.

As Wexler (1984:46) notes, “Against the Marxist’s insistence on the determining role of objective conditions in shaping consciousness, anarchists emphasised the power of consciousness - of ideas and will - in changing material conditions.” Anarchism, as Carter (1971:1) contends, has lacked a theoretical analogue to Marx,<sup>43</sup> a source of pride for many anarchists, who have emphasised a movement rather than a theory (Ridley, 1970:1). In this vein, anarchist thinkers have distrusted final answers, appealed to justice over science, and have tended to be not only anti-Marxist but also anti-intellectual in outlook: “*Pas de mains blanches, seulement les mains calleuses*” (in Joll, 1979:63; Woodcock, 1962:101; Stirner, 1995:324; Bakunin, 1953:254).

Bakunin’s (1953:250,254) early suspicion regarding the Marxist “representatives of science”<sup>44</sup> has been followed by numerous anarchistically-inclined left communists. For example, although viewing himself as a Marxist, Georges Sorel nonetheless rejected Marxist positivism, rationalism, and determinism. Instead, he emphasised the revolutionary, mythic quality shared by both syndicalism’s general strike and Marxism’s apocalyptic vision of the coming capitalist collapse (Kolakowski, 1978:188). The “life-giving” quality of these doctrines was the important thing, as the future hinged crucially upon revolutionary will, and Marxism was true *only in the pragmatic sense*, that is, as a useful instrument with which to institute the supreme values of humanity (Kolakowski, 1978:150; Laclau and Mouffe, 1985:38). On the other hand, Landauer’s (1978:54) own Nietzschean turn meant a thoroughgoing rejection of Marxism: “We are poets; and we want to eliminate the scientific swindlers, the Marxists, cold, hollow, spiritless, so that poetic vision, artistically concentrated creativity, enthusiasm and prophecy will find their place to act, work and build from now on; in life, with human bodies, for the harmonious life, work and solidarity of groups, communities and nations. We provide no science and no party.” According to

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Landauer, all history was becoming and flux: “All our conceptions, religious, and science are mere poetry and play”, and “our world view is not science, not theory, not merely a matter of the head ... it is life, love arising from the soul” (in Link-Salinger, 1977:54,84). In a like manner, though free of the irrationalist tendencies of the above formulations, Errico Malatesta (1965:19,21), Emma Goldman (1984:49,63; Wexler, 1984:46,97), and Rudolph Rocker (1937:26,234) all rejected Marxism’s pretentious and authoritarian appeal to science. Rather than economic fatalism and law, they emphasised creativity, morality, and will. And these thinkers rejected the implication that science was infallible: “We do not boast that we possess absolute truth; on the contrary, we believe that *social truth* is not a fixed quality, good for all times, universally applicable, or determinable in advance ... Thus our solutions always leave the door open to different and, one hopes, better solutions” (Malatesta, 1965:21).

For all their suspicion of final answers and the claims of science, and despite Landauer’s aestheticist predilections, most anarchists have not rejected the aspirations of classical social theory. A rational, even scientific, social theory has therefore remained an important goal for numerous anarchists. Thus, for instance, Noam Chomsky (1988:140) has argued that “Without a revolutionary theory or a revolutionary consciousness there is not going to be a revolutionary movement. There is not going to be a serious movement without a clear analysis and a theoretical point of view.” Chomsky and Kropotkin have both displayed an immense faith in rational thought, Enlightenment values, and science: “Anarchism is a world concept based upon a mechanical explanation of all phenomena, embracing the whole of nature - that is, including in it the life of human societies and their economic, political, and moral problems. Its method of investigation is that of the exact natural sciences, and, if it pretends to be scientific, every conclusion it comes to must be verified by the method by which every scientific conclusion must be verified. Its aim is to construct a synthetic philosophy comprehending in one generalisation all the phenomena of nature - and therefore also the life of societies” (Kropotkin, 1975:60).<sup>45</sup> However, in a manner reminiscent of Hegelian Marxism, Kropotkin also asserted the non-autonomy of theoretical practice and the historicity of science: “our ideas have been more or less the expressions of the ideas that are germinating in the very depths of the masses of the people ... [N]o truthful social action is possible but the science which bases its conclusions, and the action which bases its acts, upon the thoughts and the aspirations of the masses” (in Wexler, 1984:96). And, at other times, Kropotkin argued for a mutual interaction between theory and practice that treats both as equally important: “The revolutionary action coming from the people must coincide with

a movement of revolutionary thought coming from the educated classes. There must be a union of the two” (in Osofsky, 1979:95).

Just as Lenin had tried to escape the political consequences of social democracy by way of a theoretical break (Piccone, 1983:50), so too left-Marxians sought a philosophical escape route from the unpalatable state capitalism that orthodox socialism enshrined. This attempted break was not always entirely successful, but it pointed the way beyond Marxism and beyond what might be considered an opposing tendency - the flight into absolute contingency and the end of what is essential in social theorising.

A prominent astronomer, Anton Pannekoek was, in his time, the most competent Marxian thinker on any question in the sciences. Pannekoek insisted that his interest in Marxism followed naturally enough from his scientific training (Mattick, 1970). Nevertheless, rather early on, he found himself dissatisfied with aspects of Marxist orthodoxy. In particular, Pannekoek was concerned with Marxism’s inability to deal with spiritual and intellectual questions, and with the Marxian prioritisation of natural over social sciences (with historical materialism posited as part of the category of the latter) (Gerber, 1989:12,23; Bricanier, 1978:29).<sup>46</sup>

Whereas other “nonconformist” Marxists looked to Hegel to escape the weight of socialist theoretical orthodoxy, the Dutch looked to Joseph Dietzgen (Jacoby, 1981:37,75). Pannekoek placed Dietzgen third after Marx and Engels in the socialist canon; Gorter translated his writings; Roland Holst wrote a book about him (Bricanier, 1978:4-6). For Dietzgen, no form of knowledge was ever absolute, and Pannekoek followed this thrust, accepting the relativistic view of human knowledge that followed the collapse of faith in naïve positivism (Gerber, 1989:15; Pierson, 1993:236). In this vein, Pannekoek claimed that Marxism, though a science, was not outside of evolution and regression. Marxism’s importance lay in its partisan nature, as the *ideology of the revolutionary working class movement* (Gerber, 1989:24,27). In another anti-determinist and anti-positivist formulation, reminiscent of Lukacs’ argument in *History and Class Consciousness*, Pannekoek (1948:24) maintained that Marxism’s scientificity was constituted “not so much [by] the truth of the rules and expectations it formulated, but rather [by] what is called its method: the fundamental conviction that everything in the world of mankind is directly connected with the rest.”<sup>47</sup> Pannekoek (1978:17; 1970:29) was prepared to lend theory autonomy and importance: “Capitalism must be beaten theoretically before it can be beaten materially”. At other times, however, perhaps fearful of the authority that independent theory might exercise

over the working class movement, Pannekoek (1978:36,72) was apt to deny theory's autonomy: "[theory] can do no more than afterwards explain its [capitalism's social struggles] causes and consequences." Thus, in Pannekoek we discover a number of important left communist theoretical emphases: an anti-positivist and anti-determinist caution regarding the authority of theory and theorists, and an accent on the importance of history, political commitment, and popular movements.

"Western Marxism", if it means anything, has come to signify the philosophical movement within the Marxian tradition away from the deterministic theorising of socialist orthodoxy. Thus, Western Marxism has offered a philosophical correlate to the political challenges made by the "left" wing communism attacked by Lenin and the Comintern (Jacoby, 1981; Aronowitz, 1981). Implicitly rejecting the notion that theory reaches its zenith with Marx, Western Marxism frequently returns "behind Marx" to Hegel and other "bourgeois" philosophers, accenting history, totality, dialectics, and questions about culture and human autonomy. Contrary to the socialist orthodox emphasis on the purely scientific study of economic structuring, it stresses the *critical* aspect of theorising (Anderson, 1976).<sup>48</sup> For a short period, the three fathers of Western Marxism - Lukacs, Gramsci, and Korsch - brought together these philosophical challenges with political apostasy against both social democratic and the emerging Bolshevik orthodoxy.

Within Italy in the period of Western Marxism's genesis, one discovers two very different responses to theoretical orthodoxy. Amadeo Bordiga saw Marxism as a completed system, insisting on "no revision whatsoever of the primary principle of proletarian revolution". Bordiga boasted of never having read a page of Croce or Gentile, and forthrightly promoted vulgar materialism (Sassoon, 1996:83; Piccone, 1983:134; Communist Left, 1951:15).<sup>49</sup> On the other hand, Gramsci, influenced as a young man by Croce's anti-positivism and by Sorel's emphasis on the advent of a new culture, turned away from the prevalent economic determinism of international socialism.<sup>50</sup> Gramsci emphasised the autonomy of ideas and critiqued Bukharin's crudely materialist exposition of historical materialism as a system of eternal truths, viewing Marxism as, most importantly, *a set of tools* (Joll, 1977:21,25,162; Femia, 1981:61,66). Giving consciousness an active role and positing theory as an autonomous force, Gramsci held that reality was sifted through a set of categories and a hierarchy of pre-existing values (Femia, 1981:73).

Influenced, like Gramsci, by Sorel and idealism, Georg Lukacs admitted to trying to "out-Hegel Hegel" in his *History and Class Consciousness*. Like Pannekoek (whom he had read),

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Lukacs attacked Engels' application of dialectics to nature.<sup>51</sup> Insisting, in Hegelian mode, on the primacy of the category of totality and the historicity of theory, Lukacs (1973:15,19,228; Bottomore, 1979:18) admitted that even historical materialism was "just as much a function of the growth and disintegration of capitalist society as are other ideologies". Of course, this historicisation sat rather uneasily with Lukacs' proposition that historical materialism was a science that could penetrate below the surface to reveal the profounder historical forces. And, as noted, Lukacs (1973:68,77,327) came to attribute this science not to the proletarian movement itself but to the communist party.

Karl Korsch is perhaps more interesting than Lukacs because he remained a left communist for the rest of his life and because of the persistent urge towards theoretical openness in his work. Vehemently condemned in the Comintern for the "petty bourgeois" and "old Hegelian" character of their thought, the concerns of Korsch and Lukacs momentarily converged with *Marxism and Philosophy* and *History and Class Consciousness*. After these publications, they parted company again - Lukacs towards peace with the politics of the Comintern, Korsch into lonely utopian opposition (Halliday, 1971). Korsch rejected the eternal and static, and he was obsessed by the essential role of *practice* in a theory's truth: "It is useless to discuss the controversial aspects of a theory of society ... when such a discussion does not form part of a real social struggle. There must be various possibilities of action for the party, group or class, which the theory in question can relate to" (in Goode, 1979:185).

In *Marxism and Philosophy*, Korsch cited approvingly Hegel's dictum that "Philosophy can be nothing but its own epoch comprehended in thought." No theory could escape history, not even Marxism. In this vein, Korsch even credited the stimulus for Marx's *Capital* to the movement of the oppressed classes. According to Korsch (1970:42), the Marxist system was the theoretical expression of the revolutionary movement of the proletariat in the same way that German idealist philosophy was the theoretical expression of the revolutionary movement of the bourgeoisie. Marx, then, did not create the working class movement or class consciousness: rather, he "created the theoretical-scientific expression adequate to the new content of consciousness of the proletarian class, and thereby at the same time elevated this proletarian class consciousness to a higher level of its being" (in Kellner, 1977:136). Revolutionary thought would not, therefore, be static but would exist in a dialectical relation with the real class movement, changing with that movement (Gombin, 1978:52). Thus: "Today's truth depends upon the existing mode of material production and the class struggle arising therefrom" (Korsch in Kellner, 1977:278).

For Korsch (1971:61), Marxist theory was not a positive but primarily a *critical* theory, being concerned not with detached contemplation but with active transformation. While the content of Marxist theory is to be derived from working class struggles, Korsch believed that its form was given (independently!) by the Hegelian dialectic (Kellner, 1977:33). And, for Korsch, the dialectical method was revolutionary in its form. Turning away from the immediately given and thriving on the principle of contradiction and negation, the dialectic contains the principle of qualitative change and development (Kellner, 1977:277). Given this, Marxian concepts, explained Korsch (1963:229), “are not dogmatic fetters” or pre-established truths: they “are an undogmatic guide for scientific research and revolutionary action. ‘The proof of the pudding is in the eating’.”

Like many left communists, Korsch’s work is haunted by the tension between an authoritarian autonomisation of theory as science and the anti-intellectual conclusion that theory is completely without autonomy. Relatedly, in Korsch, a positivist and scientific thrust confronts a Hegelian and dialectical thrust (Kellner, 1977:100,96).<sup>52</sup> Korsch wanted to save Marx from his scientific Kautskyite and Leninist interpreters, denying that these interpreters had described the real Marx. Simultaneously, however, at times Korsch found Marx too positivist and too uncritical of bourgeois science (Kellner, 1977:99).<sup>53</sup>

Korsch struggled but did not finally succeed in freeing himself from the confines of Marxist metaphysics. Castoriadis, however, was eventually able to explicitly make the break into a post-Marxism, insistent, though, on retaining the essentials of critical social theory. For Castoriadis (1988b:214; 1993:29; 1997a:36-7), given that the working class movement seeks to be unique in its consciousness of means and objectives, revolutionary theory is an essential moment in the struggle for socialism. Without the development of theory no development of revolutionary action is possible. Theoretical activity is to be governed by the thus-far repressed answer to the prior question of “what really matters?” For Castoriadis (1997a:9-10), the answer to this question is to be found in the profound significance of everyday struggles by ordinary people and the connection of these concerns to the problem of society and of socialism. Theory’s function, argued Castoriadis (1988b:214), “is to state explicitly, and on every occasion, the meaning of the revolutionary venture and of the workers’ struggle; to shed light on the context in which this action is set; to situate the various elements in it and to provide an overall explanatory schema for understanding these elements and for relating them to each other; and to maintain the vital link between the past and the future of the movement. But above all, it is to elaborate the prospects for socialism.” Castoriadis does not, however, thereby disregard the practical and historical presuppositions

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of theoretical development. After all, he asserts, “Marx could not have anticipated the Commune ... nor Lenin the soviets” (Castoriadis, 1988b:213).

Castoriadis (1997a:17,25) rejected the major premises of Marxian economics, Marxism’s external and teleological laws of history, its consequent elimination of class struggle, and its theoretical pretensions. Marxism is rejected as tautological: it is true as it is the theory of the proletariat; the proletariat is the truth of history because Marxism has shown this to be the case (Howard, 1988:246). Neither, argued Castoriadis (1997a:143), can one save Marxism by separating method and content *a la* Lukacs: “How are we to know which category corresponds to which material?” Today, Marxism functions as ideology, an eternal and closed doctrine that veils reality in the so-called communist nation-states (Castoriadis, 1997a:113,141). For Castoriadis (1997a:114; 1997b:64): “Revolutionary politics cannot be the last refuge for neurotic rigidity and the neurotic need for security”. It cannot be a static and complete, “Talmudic commentary on sacred texts”. Though one can and indeed must discern the difference in any period between truth and error and arrive at a “provisional totalisation of truth”, the ideology of a complete and definitive theory safe from history is a bureaucratic and manipulative fantasy. With the passing of what Castoriadis (1997a:113) called the “theological phase of history”, this fantasy cannot be revived.

Castoriadis’ thinking beyond Marxism, while retaining a commitment to rational and critical social theory, is, I believe, the zenith of left communist theoretical practice. Today, a post-Marxism (that is not, for all that, anti-Marxian) such as that represented by Castoriadis is vital for socialism. Such a theoretical commitment advances on anti-intellectualist anarchism and the scientism and closure of the left-Marxian return to Marx. Hoping to escape from the undesirable consequences of social democracy and Leninism, left communism departed from authoritarian orthodox theoretical postulates. Left communist thinkers have emphasised theory’s lack of autonomy, implying that in itself theory can achieve nothing. Theory does, though, remain important for comprehending and changing the world. As Best and Kellner (1991:260) put it, “social theories provide mappings of contemporary society: its organisation; its constitutive social relations, practices, discourses, and institutions; its integrated and interdependent features; its conflictual and fragmentary features; and its structures of power and modes of oppression and domination”.

A number of left communists have accented theory’s organic connection to the concern for a better life. They have emphasised the social and historical nature of truth and have been suspicious of claims to theoretical finality. For these socialists, theory provides tools and

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undogmatic guides for investigation. And theory has been understood as unable to stand alone (it depends crucially on a movement). As in the case of the role of the intellectual, there exists within left communism a productive tension, a tension that today must be lucidly acknowledged as inescapable. This tension holds between the scientific ambition of classical theoretical practice and the possibilities for this ambition to dominate the movement, to become an impediment to the realisation of socialist relations and consciousness. Many left communists have been fearful of the vanguardist displacement of the mass of people in favour of the bearers of science. However, they have often avoided the extreme anti-intellectualist conclusion that theory or theorists have no role or independence, and they have refused to be demobilised. In this way, left communism has weakened the Leninist idea that there can only be one theory, while retaining a commitment to a theoretical practice that will separate truth from falsity, expose error, and make “provisional totalisations”, with the goal of more effectively comprehending and intervening in the social world.

### Conclusion

Left communists have been forced to tread an uncertain and difficult path. Consistent critics of representation (viewing it, like Marx, as “something passive”), left communists have eschewed directorial pretensions, while nevertheless finding themselves propelled into political contestation by their own commitments. Thus, while anti-vanguardism has often issued in theoretical spontaneism and potentially immobilising *attentisme*, such conclusions have generally not eliminated activism. Feeling passionately about the iniquities and unnecessary sadnesses of the present and convinced of the possibilities of the socialist utopia, left communist intellectuals have quite naturally intervened whenever they have felt able. At numerous instances, then, left communists have tended to go beyond the bind of the fetishism of party and intellectuals versus the fear of party and intellectuals. The political path for left communists could, then, be described as an advance without authority. I believe that a successful contemporary left communism will need to acknowledge this post-modern path (as a thinker like Castoriadis has already done), in the process freeing itself from the illusions of catastrophism and the too easy socialist equation of being, consciousness, and action. However, left communism also has something to offer leftist post-modernists. Fleeing the authoritarian consequences of socialist orthodoxy, left communism has avoided the anti-political, particularistic, and romantic-individualist tendencies of some post-modernism.<sup>54</sup> Compared to socialist orthodoxy, left communism is much more open to the post-modern insistence on a modest role for intellectuals, theory, and party. However, most

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importantly, left communism also points to the necessity of political organisation and engagement, continuing to insist on the highly immodest goal of universal emancipation.

Post-modernism has posed a momentous challenge to the socialist intellectual and the socialist movement at large. Post-modernists have engaged in an anti-postivist re-thinking of theory as partial and situated. Post-modernism is also relentlessly skeptical with respect to theory's authority (though its own frequent theoretical difficulty and inaccessibility sits uneasily with its anti-authoritarianism). For post-modernists, the idea that theory might ever escape ideology and politics is jettisoned, as is the aim of theoretical closure. And post-modernists tend to deconstruct supra-historical essentialisms, hesitating before confident universalisms and insensitive totalisation. Such post-modern strictures are inescapable for contemporary socialist thinkers. Indeed, I feel that left communism lends itself to a certain post-modernisation. However, a post-modernism that limits itself to the particularism of identity politics, withdraws in fear before politics, or returns to romantic individualism cannot adequately address the political challenges of the age. A post-modern left communist alternative would be post-Marxist but not anti-Marxian. Its theoretical practice would insist on the irony that a historically-informed approach brings, but it would contend that an at least provisional totalisation is necessary and that truth and error can and must always be discerned, against the absolute theoretical contingency of some post-modernism. And opposed to both anti-intellectualism and to the notion that by itself theory can solve practical dilemmas in social life, left communists would take their role as socialist intellectuals seriously, looking to be ever more encompassing (socialism as universal liberation) and to create a socialist commonsense.

We live in an age sceptical of foundations and of representation. Left communism's example, however, suggests that increased modesty about political organisation, intellectual tasks, and theorising, need not see an end to socialist intervention, nor must it mean a withdrawal from the goals of classical social theory. Left communism indicates that both of those emphases that have plagued the socialist tradition - vanguardism and workerist withdrawal - may be surpassed. Forced to negotiate a way past both authoritarian vanguardism and anti-vanguardist withdrawal and isolation, left communists have found that they are unable to theoretically extract themselves from the tensions involved. Castoriadis' (1997a:32-33) modest response serves as a fine summary of the best that left communism has to offer here: "I think that immense tasks are to be accomplished on the level of elucidating the problematic of revolution, of denouncing falsehoods and mystifications, of spreading just and justifiable ideas, as well as relevant, significant, and precise

information”; “As for the rest, we can do nothing: the workers will struggle or they won’t, the women’s movement will spread or it won’t ... But what one should feel responsible for is that in France [for example] there are at least hundreds of people who are thinking by the problematic that matters to us ... The only way to find out if you can swim is to get into the water.”

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> See Marx (1987:229-231,575; 1956:57,61), Brenkert (1983:165), Draper (1978:219,519,524), Maguire (1978:233), and Gouldner (1985:119).

<sup>2</sup> As Aronowitz (1981:7) argues, “Denying its own historicity, Marxism has always to show how its fundamental concepts remain adequate to both past and present.”

<sup>3</sup> As Bauman (1995:242) puts it, this is “a duty without authority, and without even the hope that sometime, somewhere, the unshakeable foundation of that duty will be found, or built, to retrospectively release the doers from the responsibility (or is it guilt?) for what they have done”.

<sup>4</sup> Norris (1995:177) identifies in Foucault a near schizophrenic split between: “(a) ... the ‘public’ intellectual, thinking and writing on behalf of those subjects oppressed by the discourses of instituted power/knowledge, and (b) ... the avowed aesthete, avatar of Nietzsche and Baudelaire, who espouses an ethos of private self-fashioning and an attitude of sovereign disdain toward the principles and values of enlightened critique.” Norris (1992:150,191) finds only the former role adequate, charging that the adoption of the latter position by post-modernist intellectuals can lead to nihilistic indifference and is a signal of their bad faith. For a similar argument, see Russell Jacoby (1987:168,237).

<sup>5</sup> For instance, in 1992, Bryan Gould admitted that he suspected the era of the mass party had now passed (Davey, 1994:214).

<sup>6</sup> “We should have to put off the triumph of socialism not to the year two thousand but to the end of the world if we had to wait upon the delicate, shrinking and impressionable hesitancy of the intellectuals” (Lafargue, 1960:323)

<sup>7</sup> Kautsky’s argument for the intellectuals was also, in part, a response to the surge of anti-intellectualism in the party (Beetham, 1987:118).

<sup>8</sup> Against, for instance, the assertions of many left communists (Barrot, Korsch, and Debord, for example) who have equated Kautsky and Lenin. In reality, Lenin owes far more here to Plekhanov and Russian populism than to the “pope of Marxism” (Baron, 1963:102,204,221).

<sup>9</sup> “Today there is no longer any question as to whether the systems of private ownership in the means of production shall be maintained. Its downfall is certain” (Kautsky, 1971:87)

<sup>10</sup> Thus, while Kautsky (1971:199; Hook, 1955:51) argued that the function of the party was “To give to the class struggle of the proletariat the most effective form”, he accepted that “it is just as little in our power to create this revolution as it is in the power of our opponents to prevent it”.

<sup>11</sup> Thus, at the 1899 Hannover Congress of the SPD, a delegate suggested that the word “dialectic” be replaced by the word “development”, as socialists were closer now to Darwin than to Hegel (Howard, 1972:40).

<sup>12</sup> Socialists, Kautsky hoped, could now “extend the scope of historical materialism till it merges with biology” (in Mattick, 1978:12).

<sup>13</sup> For Bernstein (1970:7), for example, “The application of materialism to the interpretation of history means then, first of all, belief in the inevitableness of all historical events and developments.” Similarly, for Plekhanov, the science of Marxism contained “the general laws of social development deduced from study of history of society, the projection of which proves the inevitability of socialism” (in Baron, 1963:204).

<sup>14</sup> Prior to the October Revolution, for example, Lenin (1970:315) maintained that “Socialism cannot be decreed from above. Its spirit rejects the mechanical bureaucratic approach; living, creative socialism is the product of the masses”.

<sup>15</sup> In fact, Lenin (1964:90) insisted that a party that did not accept power when it was on offer would have no right to exist.

<sup>16</sup> In the Trotskyist tendency, Leninism’s Jacobinism and substitutionism are even more clearly evident. Trotsky’s break in 1917 from his former libertarian positions (see Trotsky, 1979) was thorough and his conversion total (Knei Paz, 1978). For Trotsky (1963:20,108,169), dictatorship

presupposed unity of will and direction, which could only be encapsulated within the “clear programme of action and faultless internal discipline” of a party that would have the final word on all fundamental questions. Responding to allegations of substitutionism, Trotsky (1963:109) insisted that: “In this ‘substitution’ of the power of the party for the power of the working class there is nothing accidental, and in reality there is no substitution at all. The Communists express the fundamental interests of the working class. It is quite natural that, in the period in which history brings up those interests, in all their magnitude, on to the order of the day, the Communists have become the recognised representatives of the working class as a whole.” This substitution being complete, Trotsky elevated the party to the status of a sacred entity, going so far as to deny Max Eastman’s *expose* of the power struggle in Russia and the existence of Lenin’s “testament”, declaring in 1924 that “The party in the last analysis is always right”, and interpreting world events - from the rise of fascism to the failure of revolution in Germany - in terms of leadership (Walicki, 1995:455; Trotsky, 1996:7; 1972:23; Beilharz, 1987:50,72; Knei Paz, 1978:225).

<sup>17</sup> Lenin concluded that the errors of the Second International leaders were attributable to their ignorance of Marx’s method (Harding, 1996:77,233).

<sup>18</sup> As Gouldner (1985:6) argued, if indeed Marxists are correct and consciousness derives from class being, then the existence of Marxist intellectuals is nothing short of a “sociological miracle”.

<sup>19</sup> Excited, like Pannekoek and Kropotkin, by the events in Russia in 1905, Luxemburg (1970:170) contended enthusiastically: “the appeals of the parties could scarcely keep pace with the spontaneous risings of the masses; the leaders had scarcely time to formulate the watchwords of the onrushing crowd of the proletariat.”

<sup>20</sup> In an exchange of letters with Freiligrath in 1860, Marx played down the importance of the Communist League, arguing that it was but one episode in the history of the party. The word “party” was used by Marx and Engels either to refer to the renegade intellectuals around Marx in the 1848 period or to the party “in that great historical sense” as potentially encompassing the whole working class (Hunt, 1974:164,281-3).

<sup>21</sup> Luxemburg clung to the social democratic vision of the mass party, refusing until late in the piece to leave the SPD, and then only in order to collaborate with the USPD (a party built up on a similar model to the SPD). It was better, argued Luxemburg, to be part of a reformist party in which the masses participated than in a doctrinally-pure sect without the masses, a head without a body. Thus, in an August 1908 letter to Henriette Roland-Holst (who had just left the Dutch Social Democratic Party), Luxemburg insisted that: “A splintering of Marxists ... is fatal ... We cannot stand outside the organisation, outside contact with the masses. The worst working-class party is better than none” (in Dunayevskaya, 1991:61).

<sup>22</sup> In 1920, Sylvia Pankhurst (1993:97) still spoke of the party “bringing” the communist revolution. In like manner, Appel (1990:397), in a speech in the Comintern, argued that: “to maintain these organisations [workers’ councils, factory councils, etc.], to lead them, in order to be able continuously to educate this entire class formation, the proletariat needs a Communist Party.” And in this period, even Otto Ruhle (1920:2), who was later to distinguish himself as the arch-enemy of the party idea, asserted: “What counts is to trigger the initiative of the masses, to free them from authority, to develop their self-confidence, to train them in self-activity and thereby to raise their interest in the revolution.” According to Gorter, the construction of a *strong, solid and pure communist party* was the essential task of the period (Shipway, 1987:112). A party’s size was less important, insisted Gorter, than the fact that it based itself on *the future course of social development* (Gerber, 1989:92). Similarly, Pankhurst declared that “The Communist Party must keep its doctrine pure, and its independence from reformism inviolate; its mission is to lead the way without stopping or turning by the direct road of Communist Revolution. Do not worry about a big Communist Party yet; it is better to build a sound one. Never let us hesitate, lest we should make it too extreme” (in Winslow, 1996:144). And, in like fashion, the SPGB maintained: “Better for to have a party, however small, with common principles and a common end, than a party, however large, which is bound by no tie save party interest” (in Coleman, 1984:70).

<sup>23</sup> Gorter (1989:36) did not in *ouvrierist* fashion always admire the spontaneously-correct instincts of the workers: “Most proletarians are ignoramuses. They have little notion of economics and politics, do not know much of national and international events, of the relations which exist between these latter and of the influence which they exert on the revolution. By reason of their position in society they cannot get to know all this. This is why they can never act at the right moment. They act when they should not, do not act when they should. They repeatedly make mistakes”.

<sup>24</sup> For Korsch, the party was still important but, in his analysis, it was the *proletariat itself* that was the party (Aronowitz, 1981:184).

<sup>25</sup> In sad contrast to his own bitter experience in the Hungarian Communist Party, Lukacs (1973:70) praised the immense comradeship and depth of selfless solidarity to be found in such a revolutionary grouping.

<sup>26</sup> By late April 1920, Gramsci viewed a strong and disciplined communist party as “the *fundamental and indispensable condition* for attempting any soviet experience” (in Femia 1981:146). By 1924, the party was “the sole instrument through which ... the idea of the complete redemption of the workers is able to be actualised and realised”. In his Prison Notebooks, where the factory councils are not mentioned and where the Communist Party is viewed as the “modern Prince”, Gramsci contended that “any given act is seen as useful or harmful, as virtuous or as wicked, only in so far as it has as its point of reference the modern Prince itself, and helps to strengthen or to oppose it. In men’s consciences, the Prince takes the place of the divinity or the categorical imperative, and becomes the basis for a modern laicism and for a complete laicization of all aspects of life and all customary relationships” (in Joll, 1977:96).

<sup>27</sup> In fact, for Bordiga (1977:216) at this time, a system of soviets should gradually replace all other embodiments of the state.

<sup>28</sup> Such tendencies are also to be found in the work of C. L. R. James and the Italian Autonomy movement (Cleaver, 1979:45; Callinicos, 1990:65; Negri, 1988:246).

<sup>29</sup> “From the historic point of view, accumulation of capital is a process of exchange of things between capitalist and pre-capitalist methods of production. Without pre-capitalist methods of production, accumulation cannot take place ... The impossibility of accumulation signifies from the capitalist point of view the impossibility of the further development of the productive forces and consequently the objective historic necessity for the breakdown of capitalism” (in Dunayevskaya, 1991:44).

<sup>30</sup> Earlier, Roland-Holst had argued along similar lines: “The Revolutionary Spirit can carry individuals away only at the moment when logical judgment of the consequences of their acts has more or less disappeared from their consciousness”(in Brendel, n.d:4).

<sup>31</sup> Nevertheless, as I have noted, Bordiga insisted that, as the working class was corrupted by the “sewer” that was capitalism, power seizure and the administration of socialism were to be the work of an elite (Buick, 1982:33). Consciousness of the tasks and goals of revolution, maintained Bordiga (PCI, 1921:3), was only to be found in limited groups: “It is sufficient to recall that, if the consciousness of human beings is the result, not the cause of the characteristics of the surroundings in which they are compelled to live and act, then never as a rule will the exploited, the starved and the underfed be able to convince themselves of the necessity of overthrowing the well-fed satiated exploiter laden with every resource and capacity. This can only be the exception. Bourgeois electoral democracy seeks the consultation of the masses, for it knows that the response of the majority will always be favorable to the privileged class and will readily delegate to that class the right to govern and to perpetuate exploitation.” The task of the Communist party, according to Bordiga, was to prepare for the moment of revolutionary crisis, a crisis the party itself could not create (Sassoon, 1980:65).

<sup>32</sup> Bakunin (1953:315) contended that the masses were unconsciously socialistic; and Chomsky (1988) similarly asserts: “I do not doubt that it is a fundamental human need to take an active part in the democratic control of social institutions.”

<sup>33</sup> In this vein, in a widely cited letter to Albert Richard in 1870, Bakunin (1973) asserted that: “we ... must foment, awaken and unleash all the passions, we must produce anarchy and, like invisible pilots in the thick of the popular tempest, we must steer it not by any open power but by the collective dictatorship of all the allies - a dictatorship without insignia, titles or official rights, and all the stronger for having none of the paraphernalia of power.”

<sup>34</sup> For example, Camus (1969), Gouldner (1985:186), and Nomad (Carter, 1971:76).

<sup>35</sup> For example, for Bakunin: “Among a thousand people one can hardly find a single person of whom it can be said ... that he wills and thinks independently” (in Gouldner, 1985:161). Similarly, Herbert Read remarked of the masses: “Such a majority, as any intelligence test will immediately reveal, is inevitably an ignorant majority” (in Carter, 1971:72)

<sup>36</sup> Similarly, in America, the IWW (as self-proclaimed conscious minority) saw itself as the active articulation of the thwarted desires of the masses who all-too-often were “hopelessly stupid and stupidly hopeless” (in Dubofsky, 1969:169).

<sup>37</sup> “Every new idea and institution, all progress and every revolution have always been the work of minorities” (Malatesta, 1965:164).

<sup>38</sup> Sorel viewed the intellectual as potentially working “to ruin the prestige of the bourgeois culture, the prestige which up until the present has opposed the principle of class struggle from fully developing

within proletarian consciousness” (in Portis, 1980:58). And Chomsky (1990:97), self-proclaimed child of the Enlightenment and champion of science, asserts that “It is the responsibility of the intellectual to speak the truth and to expose lies.”

<sup>39</sup> Relatedly, the SI (1989:279) ridiculed the ICO conception that “would observe the appearance of a proletarian revolution almost as though it were a solar eruption”.

<sup>40</sup> Given these aims and these necessities, *Socialisme ou Barbarie* saw its task as spreading ideas and extracting from spontaneous struggles the essential socialist content, articulating it, distributing it, and indicating its “universal import” (Castoriadis, 1988b:213).

<sup>41</sup> Followers of Bordiga, even critical ones like the ICC, have tended to reproduce his party fetishism. However, Barrot is more interesting. Barrot attempts to go beyond Bordigist vanguardism and councilist spontaneity, emphasising that communists cannot create revolution from nothing (in periods of social peace they will be reduced to affirming the integrity of the doctrine), but contending that neither should communists be immobilised by fear of leadership when social peace gives way to struggle. This historic task falls to a party, which, for Barrot, signifies *all those who objectively struggle for socialism*.

<sup>42</sup> Berkman (1972:xxi,132,268) did, though, maintain that a condition for anarchism was the development of physically and spiritually unbearable conditions for the major part of humankind.

<sup>43</sup> Nevertheless, anarchist thinkers from Bakunin onwards have often looked to Marx’s theoretical conclusions for their own contributions. Alexander Berkman’s *What is Communist Anarchism?* is a fine example of this.

<sup>44</sup> For Bakunin (1953:254): “We recognise the absolute authority of science, but we reject the infallibility and universality of the representatives of science.” Similarly, in a famous letter to Marx, Proudhon declared: “after having demolished all a priori dogmatism, do not let us in our turn dream of indoctrinating the people ... let us not ... make ourselves the leader of a new intolerance, let us not pose as the apostles of a new religion” (in Wright, 1986:1).

<sup>45</sup> Reclus, too, saw himself as a scientist, uncovering the laws of social and economic development (Fleming, 1979:185)

<sup>46</sup> In fact, championing social science as a theoretical weapon of the working class, Pannekoek (1912:,1,5,12; 1948:67) argued that natural science was the tool of the proletariat’s class enemy.

<sup>47</sup> On the other hand, as Gerber (1988:7) notes, Pannekoek was frequently unable to move beyond the predominant mode of nineteenth century Marxism - its raw materialism, reductionism, dogmatism, and uncritical belief in historical progress.

<sup>48</sup> For Max Horkheimer (1995:199), Critical Theory was dominated by the concern for reasonable conditions of life: “Thought is not something independent, to be separated from this struggle [for a new life]” (in Kellner, 1989:204).

<sup>49</sup> Bordiga’s theoretical interventions must be seen as every bit as much a reaction to “conformist communism” as the turn away from the doctrinal understanding of Marxism. With his notion of the “invariant” communist programme, Bordiga sought to differentiate his politics from those of orthodoxy with a theoretical commitment of astounding rigidity and consistency, lamenting the compromises, political and theoretical, of the socialist parties. This programme, Bordiga (in common with other left communists - Gorter, Pannekoek, Barrot, Pankhurst - at various points) contended, must be protected in non-revolutionary periods. Such principled rigidity is also characteristic of the World Socialist Movement (“The SPGB’s materialism was the product of nineteenth-century positivism” (Coleman, 1984:65)) and of De Leon and the SLP. These groups have differentiated their politics from orthodoxy, not by “modernisation”, but by exegetical return to founding texts and intra-party scrutiny aimed at rooting out reformism of any kind.

<sup>50</sup> Crude Marxism, complained Gramsci, was “rather like a religion or a stupefying drug” (in Femia, 1981:79).

<sup>51</sup> “However, the crucial determinants of dialectics - the interaction of subject and object, the unity of theory and practice, the historical changes in the reality underlying the categories as the root cause of changes in thought, etc. - are absent from our knowledge of nature” (Lukacs in Goode, 1979:80).

<sup>52</sup> At one point, for example, Korsch insisted that historical materialism was not a philosophy but was an empirical and scientific method (Kellner, 1977).

<sup>53</sup> Korsch’s radical denial of autonomy to theory has been followed by more recent left communists such as Debord and Sanguinetti (1972). In similar fashion, Barrot (1974:82) argues that “the revolutionaries and their ideas and theories originate in the workers’ struggles.” In revolutionary times, says Barrot (n.d.), “theoretical critique then fuses with practical critique, not because it has been brought in from outside but because they are one and the same thing.” However, Barrot does admit a

distinctive autonomy to theory as a possible prerequisite to revolutionary action. A theoretical basis for action must be discovered, says Barrot (1974:82): "Theoretical clarification is an element of; and a necessary condition for, practical unification."

<sup>54</sup> An example of such romantic individualism is Rorty's vision of the ironist artist-intellectual. Embracing perspectivism with what Haber (1994:48) describes as a Nietzschean "Yes!", Rorty views the intellectual as avoiding power, as ironic about his or her vision and influence, and as "the shaper of new languages". Similarly, in Bauman's version, the intellectual is still valiantly and selflessly (spurred to this effort by a duty that comes from who knows where) trying to rescue the silenced from obscurity, as all around "things fall apart".

## Chapter Four

### Left Communism and the Crisis of Socialist Values

*“Socialism, in both its ends and means is a struggle to realise freedom” (Korsch, 1970:126).*

*“[V]alue ..., equality and justice are not ‘concepts’ which can be founded or constructed ... in and through theory. They are political ideas/significations having to do with the institution of society as it might be and as we would will it to be; and this institution is anchored in no natural, logical or transcendental order” (Castoriadis, 1984:329).*

#### Introduction

Just as some critics have read post-modernism as the end of politics, so “post-modernist ethics” has been seen in some quarters as a contradiction in terms (Rengger, 1995:180). Influential commentators have viewed post-modernism as involving the “demise of the ethical” or a “life without principles” (Bauman, 1993:2; Good and Velody, 1998:6). The attack on the universalist aspirations of the Enlightenment, the incredulity towards teleological meta-narratives, the often radical anti-humanism (Benhabib, 1992:3-2), and the apparent advocacy of indeterminacy displayed by post-modernists all seem to undermine any straightforward conception of the good and just society and perhaps, as a number of leftist critics have insisted, even drags us towards nihilism. For instance, Haber (1994:17) has questioned post-modernism’s ability to make moral judgements in the absence of stable social standards, and Harvey (1989:116) has contended that the post-modern involves a triumph of aesthetics over ethics. Such concerns have been lent weight by Derrida’s admission that deconstruction may be “opposed to politics, or ... at best apolitical” and by the post-modernist fascination with Nietzsche (in McGowan, 1991:110).

Nietzsche was, of course, no nihilist,<sup>1</sup> but, for some critics, the post-modernist adoption of Nietzschean individualism effectively excludes the possibility of community and even spells the “death of politics” (Haber, 1994:3; McGowan, 1991:144). This charge has been levelled against Foucault, a self-consciously Nietzschean thinker who jettisons universal ethics,

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questions rationality and humanism, problematises the evaluation of different modes of life, and who champions a politics of subjectivity that looks to otherness and localised transgression against modern power-knowledge relations (Bernauer and Mahon, 1995:141-7,152-5; Haber, 1994:114).

Post-modernism has apparently eliminated any belief in the possibility of a non-ambivalent ethical code (Rengger, 1995:181). As Bauman (1993:245) says, "The postmodern mind does not expect anymore to find the all-embracing, total and ultimate formula of life without ambiguity, risk, danger and error, and is deeply suspicious of any voice that promises otherwise." Post-modernism has questioned all naturalism, foundations, universals, authority, the idea of an autonomous subject of ethics and politics, and the notion of a future transparent political order<sup>2</sup> (Collins and Mayblin, 1996:149; Benhabib, 1992:3; Mouffe, 1992:1). This and post-modernism's reluctance to specify an "ought" and to rank modes of existence has meant an emphasis (like that found in Lyotard) on multiplicity, plurality, and on the incommensurability of discourses (Haber, 1994:48; Smart, 1998:52). For critics, the "strongly felt moral ambiguity" (Bauman, 1993:245) of post-modernism threatens the "death of justice" (Smart, 1998:57-8). For instance, if one is whole-heartedly committed to multiplicity without discrimination, then plurality itself, unprotected by any principle of evaluation and constraint, will surely be submerged by totalitarian discourses.

Despite these concerns, however, there has been a definite revival within the post-modern era of interest in both politics and ethics (Rasmussen, 1990:1). Against the charges of nihilism, most post-modernists hold to a minimum ethico-political "programme" that demands: firstly, that one avoid telling people what they want or what they ought to want; and, secondly, that alternative practices be allowed to flourish (May, 1994:130). Moreover, against the fear that "anything goes" means "anything stays", post-modernists like Lyotard modify their pluralism (his "multiplicity of justices") with something like a "justice of multiplicity" (Smart, 1998:59; Haber, 1994:29). It would appear, then, that post-modernists are not at all wild-eyed nihilists looking to a philosophy of the super-person to legitimate their thirst for power and destruction in a war of all against all. These are frequently solidly progressive thinkers who are, like Derrida, predictably in favour of such unimpeachable campaigns as nuclear disarmament or racial emancipation in South Africa (Collins and Mayblin, 1996:151).<sup>3</sup> They share a commitment to democracy, pluralism, and often an implicit or sometimes overt adherence to the open political forms of liberal democracy (McGowan, 1991:28).<sup>4</sup>

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Not only has post-modernism's anti-foundationalism not issued in nihilism, but, as Keenan (1997:1-2) has argued, perhaps it is only in the absence of the old illusory ethical grounds that we can find real responsibility: "It is when we do not know exactly what we should do, when the effects and conditions of our actions can no longer be calculated, and when we have nowhere else to turn, not even back onto our 'self', that we encounter something like responsibility." Here, post-modernity is first and foremost "modernity without illusions" (Bauman, 1993:3). Derrida, Laclau, and Bauman have assessed the situation in a rather similar way to Keenan.<sup>5</sup> Bauman (1995:6,8,17), for example, argues that "the demise of the power-assisted universals and absolutes has made the responsibilities of the actor more profound, and, indeed, more consequential than before". Post-modernity is, therefore, "the moral person's bane and chance at the same time", where in a world with no god one must "stand up straight and confront Chaos".

Post-modernist thought, I believe, represents a tremendous advance for left-progressive intellectuals thinking about ethics in the contemporary period. In particular, post-modernism addresses the theoretical and practical inadequacies of socialist orthodoxy. Socialist orthodoxy had seen the demise of any significant political and moral thought. Questions about the general ordering of society and the evaluation of competing claims disappeared beneath scientific pretensions and bureaucratic administrative goals. Social democracy and Leninism thus retreated from Marx's insight as to the historicity and sociality of human ideas and values. Instead, they invested the party, through its scientific comprehension of necessity, with the authority to judge what might and what might not serve the emancipation of humanity from nature and from exploitation. The character of the regimes established on the basis of these conceptions has meant that communism today connotes not human liberation but rather the erasure of humanity's diverse desires, needs, and abilities in the name of some illusory natural equality and/or a dream of spontaneous and frictionless solidarity. Freedom in the communist lexicon, it appears, is a property of community and means conformity with one's "higher self", as against the "bourgeois" liberties of the individual (Femia, 1993:38; Bauman, 1976:54). Post-modernism rallies against socialist orthodoxy's authoritarian claims to knowledge of the goals of history and of people's true interests. It rejects final closure and is forthrightly suspicious of the utopian ideas of organic community and perfect harmony.

And yet, in spite of its advance on socialist orthodoxy, there are genuinely troublesome propensities within post-modernist political and ethical thought. The emphasis on contingency and difference threatens to issue in a particularism that is just as morally

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problematic as the abstract and context-independent universalism that post-modernists oppose. Rejecting that one might transcend the limits of ideology and power, does not post-modernism corrode the possibilities of solidarity outside of a particular tradition and the hope for wider emancipatory struggle and transformation? Furthermore, avoiding clearly specifying its political commitments outside of what Benhabib (1992:16) calls a “superliberalism”, post-modernism simply relies on the good sense of its audience. It also implies an individualism somewhat out of sorts in a post-humanist discourse. Most vitally, post-modernists appeal to the aspirations of pluralism, tolerance, and openness without being explicit about a necessary solidaristic project of structural transformation. This seems rather naively to by-pass the structural impediments to justice, to the construction of a political space in which ethical debate and evaluation might be facilitated (McGowan, 1991:120; Benhabib, 1992:16; Sarup, 1996:62).

Thus, although the strictures against foundationalism and the dream of societal closure must be embraced by contemporary socialists, I reject any claims that post-modernism unproblematically replaces socialism as a superior ethical horizon for progressive thought. This chapter considers the possibilities that the left communist tradition offers for a defensible libertarian socialist conception of ethics. I begin with the apparent victory of liberalism over communism, a victory signalled both by the “death of socialism” and by the post-modernist re-invention of liberalism. To a degree, as Fukuyama (1992) asserts, a “remarkable consensus” has indeed emerged around the validity of liberal ideals. And yet, all is not well with liberalism. The hesitation before a whole-hearted commitment to all aspects of liberal commonsense is expressed in the emergence of communitarianism. Arguing that both liberalism and communitarianism are seriously flawed, I suggest that left communism still provides much of contemporary relevance for those committed to the ideal of a just social order. For a number of left communists, a valuable life can only be attained within a society in which people are active members of a political community. Such a social order, they argue, can only be established through a collective project aimed at transforming the structures that at present render those admirable liberal goals - liberty, equality, and fraternity - impossible. This *ethics of emancipation* represents an advance on socialist orthodoxy, liberalism, and communitarianism. The content of such an ethics amounts roughly to equal freedom for all, achieved through solidaristic revolutionising of macro social structures. Left communism would reject both the liberal idea of the unencumbered self and be unsympathetic to communitarian particularism. At the same time, left communism is open to the post-modernist rejection of political and ethical foundations in naturalism or History, and the rejection of the idea of societal perfection and closure. When

this is combined with an acknowledgement of the inescapable tensions between equality and freedom, community and individual, democratic-socialist and liberal goals, left communism provides for the possibility of fruitfully reasserting socialist values.

**“A remarkable consensus”? -**

**Victorious Liberalism and its Discontents**

Docherty (1996:243) has asserted that “all revolutionary and leftist movements live haunted by the shadow of the camps”. And indeed, communist values and the communist conception of the good life are in severe disrepute in light of the career of “really existing socialism”. The tragic consequences of communist rule have often been explained by the fact that communism is wholly without an ethical vision. Thus, Lenin could declare that Marxism contained “not a grain of ethics from beginning to end” (in Femia, 1993:125). The Marxian rejection of political guidance by ethical values is based on arguments about morality’s apparent epiphenomenality and the alleged scientificity of historical materialism.<sup>6</sup> Normative discourse is viewed as ideological and thus as transitory. Communism is not an ideal to which reality will have to adjust but rather a growing reality that will eventually alter the society’s self-understanding (Levine, 1993:147; Marx, 1987:236; Buchannan, 1982:52). Unburdened by ethical considerations, communists appear to subordinate means to ends. Prior to the truly human ethic of a post-revolutionary society, one must operate according to the “point of view of expediency”, and one should subordinate morality to the “consolidation and completion of communism” (Lenin in Meyer, 1963:87; Lenin, 1947:465). Thus, for Trotsky, because the communists sought to increase the power of humans over nature and to abolish the power of humans over humans, the measures towards this could be deemed “permissible and obligatory” (in Knei Paz, 1979:559-60): “That is permissible, we answer, which really leads to the liberation of mankind” (in Lukes, 1985:119).<sup>7</sup> Such moral relativism and the numerous Jesuitical and amoralist moments within the socialist tradition<sup>8</sup> have prompted the equation of socialism with nihilism or pragmatic expediency, as the party, privileged interpreter of the direction of history, subordinates all ideals and principles to the necessities of progress.

The communist emphases on expediency, on the laws of history, and on the all-knowing party, have been tied to an often strident anti-individualism. Expecting spontaneous harmony, “utopia in power” proved a nightmare for the individual. In this light, the idea of “socialist emancipation” is likely to elicit only scornful irony today (Femia, 1993:174-6). In response to communist barbarism, that other half of socialist orthodoxy, social democracy,

distanced itself both from Bolshevism's Jesuitical pragmatism and from Marxian anti-individualism.<sup>9</sup> Thus, while Kautsky (1983:43,109-112) accepted the Marxian historicisation of morality, he refused to reject moral ideals and he defended equality, rights, and liberal-democracy as necessary means towards socialism.<sup>10</sup> Eventually, Kautsky's ethical stance became indistinguishable from bourgeois liberalism, and, on the whole, social democracy merged more and more with the liberal order.<sup>11</sup>

With the collapse of communism, and with social democracy's passage towards bourgeois democracy, one might conclude with Gray (1995:78,86) that liberalism is *the* political theory of modernity, that, as Bellamy (1992:1) argues, "we are all liberals now". One powerful expression of such commonsense is the extent to which post-modernism's ethical and political commitments are congruent with those of liberalism.<sup>12</sup> As Beilharz (1994:39) has asserted, post-modernism "seems to signify among other things a rediscovery of liberalism and the sense of limits to what we can both know and do." At the centre of contemporary commonsense are such liberal tenets as the concern for the liberty and privacy of the autonomous individual, the faith in the general improvability of human life, the assumption of the moral unity of the species, and a certain egalitarianism (at least insofar as opportunity is concerned). Liberalism, as Eccleshall (1984:38) argues, has come to mean a general frame of mind as much as a specific political ideology. Accordingly, the liberal, the man or woman who displays open-mindedness, tolerance, and generosity, is "anyone who is perfectly sensible" (Keynes in Eccleshall, 1984:39). The contemporary ubiquity of such liberal commonsense seems a sure signal of the eclipse of socialist possibilities.

It is, though, necessary to separate, in at least a preliminary manner, the different moments so often conflated with one another under the rubric of liberalism. Almond (1998:182), for example, divides liberalism into: (1) ethical ideals of freedom, toleration, and justice; (2) intellectual ideals of rationalism and universalism; (3) political ideals of individualism and thus advocacy of limitation on government; (4) social ideals of pluralism and toleration of difference; and (5) economic ideals of *laissez faire*. Obviously, there is significant scope for argument and division within the category "liberalism", a category that is able to encompass, for instance, both egalitarians like Rawls and libertarians like Nozick (Etzioni, 1995:2). One might, therefore, accept certain aspects without taking on board the full range of liberal tenets. For instance, Chantal Mouffe (1992:5; 1990:217-8) rejects liberal individualism and insists that economic liberalism can be separated from political liberalism.<sup>13</sup> At various times, left communists have criticised each of the facets of liberalism - the notions of equality and rights, *laissez faire* economic ideals, the facade that liberal political pluralism

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provides for what is, in reality, the dictatorship of capital, and the imprecise and morally unacceptable individualism of liberal philosophical and moral premises. Some of these critiques are apposite, some unjustified, and some in need of revision. Accordingly, any proper assessment requires first an attempt to survey and separate out the most important elements of liberalism.

Liberalism is frequently viewed as somehow synonymous with individualism. Liberalism appears to be guided by concern for the unique person and his or her right to choose options and ends (Murphy, 1993:15; Eccleshall, 1984:63). Mill, for instance, insisted that “Over himself, over his own body and mind, the individual is sovereign”; that “The only part of the conduct of anyone for which he is amenable to society, is that which concerns others” (Jacobs, 1997:70; Almond, 1998:69). The liberal emphasis on individuality and “true character” is tied to a conception of the person as autonomous chooser, and this inclines the liberal away from the specification by anyone else but the person him/herself as to what a good life may mean (Beauchamp, 1991:392; Beiner, 1992:16; Jacobs, 1997:83): a valuable life must be led “from the inside” (Kymlicka, 1990:204). Thus, liberals are often said to *prioritise the right over the good*. Giving up on the task of providing the one true conception of the good life, liberalism, argues Poole (1991:85), has restricted itself to clarifying the principles of justice on which such individualism and pluralism may rest. Liberals have frequently insisted on a theory of justice that is non-teleological and non-consequentialist, that is *deontological*. Such theories of justice are most famously articulated in Kant’s “categorical imperative” and, more recently, by John Rawls with his idea of the “veil of ignorance” as a justification for an originating social contract.

The reluctance to specify the good and the insistence on the character and choice of the individual mean that liberals have frequently emphasised liberty above all else (Murphy, 1993:14). This liberty is commonly of a negative kind. Negative liberty is conceived of as free action, independent of compulsion insofar as it does not harm others (Brenkert, 1983:87). For example, according to Hayek, freedom is a “state in which a man is not subject to coercion by the arbitrary will of another or others” (in Hindess, 1987). Historically, however, liberalism has also been much concerned with equality.<sup>14</sup> Within liberalism, such equality has never been of an absolute order, such as that proposed by ascetic socialism. Instead, it has varied from a commitment to basic political equality (embodied in the phrase “one person, one vote”), to legal equality of persons before the law, to a potentially stronger egalitarian commitment in terms of outcome rather than simply procedure (Almond, 1998:169).

Liberals have often sought to enshrine such equality and such freedoms by recourse to the notion of *rights*, and, as Jacobs (1997:51) notes, today the requirements of justice are most commonly expressed in terms of these rights. Emerging in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the appeal to “natural rights” gained ground swiftly. The late eighteenth century saw American and French revolutionaries appealing to such rights to justify rebellion and then enshrining them in the Bill of Rights and the Declaration of the Rights of Man respectively (Jacobs, 1997:52; Beauchamp, 1991:305). Liberals have often touted such rights as important *trumps* against the arbitrary imposition of power and as guarantees of political and legal equality (Beauchamp, 1991:331; Jacobs, 1997:58).

Economic liberalism (*laissez faire*) also seeks to defend its preferred societal arrangement on the basis of the freedom and right to exercise choice and pursue individual gain.<sup>15</sup> These conceptions, however, are inextricably linked to claims advanced on behalf of the ideal of a free market. Whereas the communist traditions have looked suspiciously at the market - “Freedom is but an empty phantom if one class of men can starve another with impunity” (Jacques Roux in Marshall, 1992:433) - liberals have frequently linked capitalist buying and selling with both individual freedom and societal progress (Hindess, 1987:123; Walicki, 1995:397,504). Seeing market exchange as the only way to freely and equally coordinate a complex industrial society, such liberals interpret communism’s anti-capitalism as indicative of a hostility to individuation itself, as illegitimately assuming the possibility of complete knowledge, and as coercive (Walicki, 1995:397,504; Hindess, 1987:123,127; Gray, 1995:61,68). After all, says Nozick, “The socialist society would have to forbid capitalist acts between consenting adults” (in Wolff, 1996:162). Some liberals, like Hayek, will not accept that the market can be coercive - coercion results only from intentional acts (Plant, 1984:3). Other liberals, like Gray, acknowledge shortcomings,<sup>16</sup> though only so far. Yes, says Gray (1995:66), private property enhances the autonomy of its possessors first and foremost, but it also generates a freedom that extends further than its immediate holders. In terms of autonomy (the most important of values), the worst-off in a system of private property, insists Gray, are still better off than the bulk of those subject to collectivist rule: “the vagabond is freer than the conscript soldier.”

For liberals, the communist utopia is more than just economically unviable. In terms of individual rights and freedoms, its consequences are extremely deleterious. Plato’s utopia in which “Nothing remains personal” and “All are cast in the same mold”, and Rousseau’s notions of a “general will” and the “reign of virtue”, are viewed by liberals as prefiguring communist utopianism (Wolff, 1996:86,92-6; Camus, 1969; Nisbet, 1953:140,181). Walicki

(1995:16,42,539), for instance, charges that Marx treats individuals as the mere instruments of history. Marx applied freedom to the whole species and opposed it to the irrationality of chance - an opposition embodied, above all, in his hostility to the market. Similarly, Femia (1993:10,44,117) views Marxism as led in the direction of totalitarianism through its rejection of the ontological and moral primacy of the individual, its delineation of a human essence, its attempt to extrapolate rational choices from this essence, and its resistance to the "cacophony of pluralism". Opposing the "tyranny of the majority" with which socialism threatens to efface dissent and eccentricity, George Woodcock has maintained that the dull weight of public opinion might prove far less tolerant than a consistent system of law: "Few of them have given sufficient thought to the danger of a moral tyranny replacing a physical one, and the frown of the man next door becoming a thing to fear as the sentence of the judge" (in Osofsky, 1979:69). In similar mode, in opposition to socialism, Ralph Dahrendorf asserts that "The consistent liberal starts off with the badness or at least the incompatible self interests of men which makes it necessary to invent institutions capable of making these divergent interests useful to all ... He gets impatient with the illusion of a community that robs the individual of this opportunity for decision and reduces him from a free person to a bee tied to a hive" (in Plant, 1974:33).

Today, as I have said, liberal values and the liberal critique of socialism appear inescapable. Nevertheless, for all of liberalism's sensibly enlightened stance and its current philosophical and political hegemony, there are numerous signs of dissatisfaction. There is significant discontent with liberal individualism, a great deal of scepticism regarding the liberal-democratic political system, a growing suspicion towards the near hysterical claims once made for free markets, and pessimism and melancholia in response to the conflict and meaninglessness of life in (post) modern societies. In more recent years, many of these concerns have been voiced and solutions sought by "communitarian" theorists.

Communitarianism has frequently and justifiably been seen as backward-looking. Its philosophical fathers are thinkers such as Aristotle, Hume,<sup>17</sup> Hegel<sup>18</sup>. And communitarians look back to the Greek polis or early American town meetings as rich in those essential societal goods long since absent from modern societies (Etzioni, 1995:27; Phillips, 1993:5). This has frequently been combined with complaints about the decay of contemporary society and the decline of community feeling into isolation, individualism, and normlessness (Walzer, 1995:56; Wolfe, 1995:126; Tam, 1998:6). As Phillips (1993:3) notes, "The longing for community is today widespread, and a return to community is often seen as a solution for the ills of modern society: relationships that are transitory, impersonal, and segmented; the

loss of feelings of attachment and belonging; the absence of meaning and unity in our lives; the sharp dichotomy between public and private life; the isolation and alienation of the individual." For instance, Taylor speaks of a "loss of meaning, fragmentation, [and] the loss of substance in our human environment and our affiliations", and MacIntyre contends that the modern human being "is a citizen of nowhere, an internal exile where he lives" (in Phillips, 1993:4).

Insisting, like post-modernism, on the contextuality of knowledge and normativity, communitarianism has, again like post-modernism, asserted the inescapability of "difference", though this difference is unambiguously portrayed as a property of the *community* (Ferrara, 1990:11; Bauman, 1997:188). One therefore finds within the communitarian tradition a sharp critique of universalist ethics, a rejection of the view of the individual as "abstractable" from his or her context, and a prioritising of the community's good over any "purely rational" commitment to individual rights. Both a society's conception of the good and personal identity are to be derived from community (Plant, 1998:82). For Taylor and Etzioni, the values that liberals hold dear - autonomy, integrity, rationality, civility - have *social* preconditions: there is no such entity as the "unencumbered self" (Doppelt, 1990:40-1; Beiner, 1992:17,27; Etzioni, 1995:16). Given this, there *cannot* be a priority of the right over the good (Mouffe, 1992:230; Baynes, 1990:63). As Mouffe (1990:222) says, "it is only through our participation in a community which defines the good in a certain way that we can acquire a sense of the right and a conception of justice." In fact, communitarians have very appositely pointed out that the liberal order is not at all neutral to conceptions of the good: in liberalism, *choice itself* is the highest good (Beiner, 1992:25). Thus, for communitarians, the real problem with the liberal good is that *it is not good enough* (Beiner, 1992:36).

Rejecting both universalist claims and pretensions to neutrality, communitarians seek to promote the "politics of the common good". Communitarians treat communal values as "authoritative horizons" which "set goals for us" (Taylor in Kymlicka, 1990:206,210). Given that societies are to be just "in their own way", the important question thus becomes, "Which social arrangements are just given who we are?" (Walzer in Ferrara, 1990:20,32). For MacIntyre, for example, this has meant an attempt to develop a moral theory centred on virtue, involving an attachment to three crucial concepts: (1) a social "practice"; (2) a tradition of norms, conventions, and standards of excellence; and (3) a recognition of narrative as the way one makes sense of one's life (Ferrara, 1990:25; Poole, 1991:147).

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What is vital here is a community's way of life and those goods that derive from this way of life (Kymlicka, 1990:207).

Having exploded the ideas of liberal neutrality, the abstract individual, and the elevation of the right over the good, communitarianism remains, in my opinion, deeply flawed as a framework of values. Firstly, as mentioned, communitarians are basically conservative.<sup>19</sup> Their romantic lament for past ways of life<sup>20</sup> and their contempt for current arrangements are combined with an inward-looking particularism and localism that would predispose any communitarian society to any number of exclusions (Phillips, 1993:176). Relatedly, communitarians undervalue individual autonomy in favour of the roles allotted by the society in question, the "goods internal to a practice" (Phillips, 1993:183). Such a tendency threatens to issue in a static, conformist society. The relativism of communitarianism apparently disarms evaluations of communities and their practices as wicked, unjust, or ideological (Ferrara, 1990:28).<sup>21</sup> Communitarianism, then, may negate those very important gains of liberal democracy, such as concern for individual distinctiveness and the aspiration towards ever more embracing visions of the good life, where *justice would have a critical as well as a mirroring function* (Jacobs, 1997:69; Plant, 1998:99; Etzioni, 1995:22; Mouffe, 1990:232; 1992:12).

On the other hand, even if the strong communitarian position<sup>22</sup> is indefensible and even if it has somewhat misrepresented liberalism,<sup>23</sup> liberalism has not won the day. That is, the communitarian evaluation of liberalism remains telling. The relentlessly individualist thrust of late-capitalist consumerism has elicited a community-oriented reaction that appears ever more politically inescapable. Liberalism remains overly focussed on the individual as chooser, with little attention to the content and limits of such choosing. In this vein, Beiner (1992:23) rightly notes that the endless praise of pluralism and difference are all very well, but that liberal-democratic reality hardly matches such pious hopes. Beiner (1992:23) maintains that beneath the rhetoric of robust individualism and choice one discovers an increasing sameness "of tastes, of cliched perceptions of the world, of the glum ennui with which one reconciles oneself to the monolithic routines of our world." Furthermore, communitarians are undoubtedly correct to attack the notion that political goods cannot be determined and assessed by abstract reasoning: they are right to emphasise deliberation within a specific context (Plant, 1998:82,89).<sup>24</sup> Finally, liberal-democratic regimes, conflating principles with outcomes, have hardly lived up to liberal promises and have shown themselves as far from neutral.<sup>25</sup>

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Where does this leave us insofar as questions of value go, with respect to problems of justice, ethical deliberation, and human flourishing? It seems beyond doubt to me that communitarianism, like Leninism, threatens to eliminate politics. The equation of value exclusively with collective life (embodied either in the organic community or in the party-state) means an end not only to politics but also to the ethical deliberation that a democratic community might foster. No better answer is provided by liberalism, which, by attaching value to the freedom of an abstracted choice, also negates the political and ethical dimensions of social life. At its worst, in economic liberalism, there is no politics and no ethics whatsoever; there are only the economic collisions of monads in the market, watched over by the neutral presence of the minimal state.

However, having made such assertions, liberalism remains, of course, a complex intellectual formation. This complexity and its post-modern nuances, can be clearly seen in terms of one interesting liberal figure in particular. Rejecting what he saw as liberalism's secret rationalism, Isaiah Berlin expounded an "agonistic" variant that emphasised conflict, irresolvable dilemmas, and radical choices (Gray, 1996). Insisting on cultural pluralism, rejecting perfectionist illusions, maintaining that many of our ethical and political values are tragically incommensurable with one another, and arguing for the inescapably relative validity of our beliefs (Gray, 1996), Berlin sounds engagingly sensible and post-modern. While I would reject some of Berlin's ultimate values,<sup>26</sup> notably his individualism and exaltation of personal choice, I believe that many of Berlin's unpretentious conclusions can and must be embraced by socialists today.

I have argued that the orthodox socialist dream of a scientific-only approach to the valuable has withered. Moreover, both liberalism and communitarianism have run into difficulties. And despite its critique of socialist authoritarianism and of liberalism, post-modernism has found itself unable to finally surpass these paradigms. With these failures in mind, it is now important to look at left communism. I argue that left communism's theorised political community might embody the aspirations opened up with the Democratic Revolution in transforming the freedom-limiting structures of contemporary life.

The following section explores the charges of socialist immoralism, arguing that left communism is not a nihilism nor a politics of pragmatic expediency. Left communism is concerned with justice, with replacing bourgeois with socialist values, with developing an *ethics of emancipation*. The remainder of the chapter considers this ethics of emancipation in some detail. In particular, I contend that left communist values show a tension between

individuation and community needs. I argue that this tension should be accepted as a positive way beyond socialist perfectionism and towards a reinvigorated political and ethical practice.

**“A superior level of moral culture” -  
Left Communism and Socialist Morality**

Socialist orthodoxy equated historical materialism with hard science and on these terms merged morality with necessity (Wright, 1986:5). The apparent culmination of such moves in Bolshevism’s nihilistic pragmatism means that socialism as a whole has often been viewed as bereft of an ethical dimension. Marx’s own comments on ethical issues seem to support these conclusions. For instance, Marx (1994:45-6) rejected rights as simply “the right of selfishness”, culminating in the right of private property, which “allows each man to find in the others not the actualisation, but more the limit, of his freedom”. For Marx (1994:45-6; McLellan, 1995b:74), the liberties of bourgeois society were based on the separation of people, on a conception of the human being as an *isolated monad*. The bourgeois appeal to justice was, for Marx, “ideological nonsense” and “obsolete verbal rubbish” (Buchanan, 1982:57-9).<sup>27</sup> Buchanan (1982:50-1) has usefully summarised Marx’s critique thus: “(1) One of the most serious indictments of capitalism - and of all class-divided societies - is not that they are unjust or that they violate persons’ rights, but that they are based on defective modes of production which make reliance upon conceptions of justice and right necessary. (2) The demands of justice cannot be satisfied in circumstances which make conceptions of justice necessary; thus efforts to achieve justice inevitably fail. (3) Conceptions of rights or justice will not play a major motivational role in the revolutionary struggle to replace capitalism with communism. (4) Communism will be a society in which juridical concepts ... have no significant role in structuring social relations. (5) The concept of a person as essentially a being with a sense of justice and who is a bearer of rights is a radically defective concept that could only arise in a radically defective form of human society.” The new socialist mode of production is superior to bourgeois society for the reason that it will not need to press such distributional claims nor rely on an institutional apparatus to enforce them (Buchanan, 1982:60).

Left communists from the Marxian tradition have often followed Marx’s rejection of justice and rights. For example, writing in the 1980s, the French communists around the journal *La Banquise* (1993:7) contended that the demand “my body belongs to me” was simply a re-statement of the bourgeois demand for property rights.<sup>28</sup> However, many anarchists have

been far from averse to speaking in terms of rights and justice. Justice drove Proudhon's critique of the existing society and enlivened his vision of utopian mutualism. It was by an appeal to the masses' sense of justice that Proudhon hoped to bring revolution (Buchanan, 1982:74): "Justice is the central star which governs society, the pole around which the political world revolves, the principle and regulator of all transactions. Nothing takes place between men save in the name of right, nothing without the invocation of justice" (in Woodcock, 1962:101). Bakunin (1972:80) was also apt to speak in terms of rights, arguing, for instance, that "Work must be the basis of all political rights." Seeking the "triumph of justice", which he defined as "the complete liberty of everyone in the most perfect equality for all", Bakunin (1953:121,155) contended that the ideal of justice had its roots in the animality of the human being. It is, however, with Peter Kropotkin that one finds a sustained attempt to develop an anarchist ethics.

Kropotkin criticised utilitarianism for neglecting human beings' sense of solidarity, and he rejected the notion that morality came to human beings from above. Arguing that bourgeois law served only to hide and protect capitalist exploitation and violence,<sup>29</sup> Kropotkin (n.d.; 1975:34; 1924) attempted to derive the fundamental principles of a new moral science from a scientific examination of the animal world. According to Kropotkin (n.d.), in seeking out what is good for them, human beings - like other animals - act according to their nature. What is good is that which is useful for the *preservation of the species*, or, in more distinctly human terms: "Is this useful to society? Then it is good. Is this hurtful? Then it is bad" (Kropotkin, n.d.). Arguing that "Mutual aid is the predominant fact of nature", Kropotkin (1924) maintained that "the very ideas of bad and good, and man's abstractions concerning 'the supreme good' have been borrowed from Nature. They are reflections in the mind of man of what he saw in animal life and in the course of his social life, and due to it these impressions were developed into general conceptions of right and wrong." The fundamental principles of ethics are therefore *natural* attributes. These attributes have been perverted into crime by exploitation and servitude, religion and authority. Kropotkin (1924; 1975:37,56) declared that criminality was largely elicited by the institution of private property and would therefore be eradicated by the solidarity of the community within anarchism.

Though seldom willing to move as far down this path as Kropotkin, such naturalistic appeals to rights and justice are a common feature of the anarchist tradition. Chomsky (1996), for example, argues for the new society by reference to justice and he views anarchism as "based on the hope ... that core elements of human nature include sentiments of solidarity,

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mutual support, sympathy, concern for others, and so on.” For Alexander Berkman (1972:191), a sense of justice was natural in human beings: “there is a deep-seated sense of justice in mankind”. This justice is, once again, contrary to the one-sided morality of the capitalist world: “there is only class justice in the war of capital against labour.” For Bakunin, Kropotkin, Berkman, and Goldman, the class justice of capitalist society hardly warranted the label “justice” at all: prisons were a failure and a social crime, crime stemmed from the environment (our “cruel social and economic arrangement”),<sup>30</sup> and criminal activity would therefore be dispensed with along with the dispatching of the old world.

The naturalism of these anarchist conceptions is perhaps understandable. It neatly reverses the naturalistic thrust that posited the hierarchical order of the *ancien regime* as given by laws outside and above human beings. While both anarchists and Marxists have committed themselves explicitly to the view that humans are radically a product of social and historical circumstances (rather than of Reason, Nature, or God), the appeal to naturalism has been irresistible as a rhetorical device and as a point at which argument about human good can be anchored. In this way, left communists have often attempted to guarantee harmony beyond the social relations that human beings are able to establish.

A number of left communists, however, have gone some way towards eliminating such naturalism from their repertoire, an important task in my opinion. Murray Bookchin (1992:48), for instance, has sought to distance anarchism from what he sees as the “ethological and ecological nonsense” of the classical anarchists’ discussions of instinctual morality. For Bookchin (1992:56), such argument comes all too close to sociobiological positions, completely overlooking the “distinctly *human* ability to form, develop, subvert, and overthrow ...[institutions] according to their interests and will”. Similarly, maintaining that “There is no human nature”, Castoriadis (1988b:286) rejected all claims that rules and institutions could have an extra-social and supra-historical foundation. For Castoriadis (1984:282), naturalistic and scientific arguments that answer in advance all questions of value are features of the “heteronomous” or alienated society. Instead, Castoriadis (1984:282,328-9) argued that Being is “chaos” and “abyss”, and he emphasised the importance of the arbitrary, the conventional, and the instituted: “value ..., equality and justice are not ‘concepts’ which can be founded and constructed ... in and through theory. They are political ideas/significations having to do with the institution of society as it might be and as we would will it to be; and this institution is anchored in no natural, logical or transcendental order”. Castoriadis (1984:298) believed that each society posited an *axia* or Proto-value from which ideas of justice arose. This being the case, and with the assertion of

judgement's ultimate groundlessness, Castoriadis argued for a justice that was equivalent to the idea of an "autonomous" society. Such a society would be self-instituting in the sense of explicitly giving itself its own laws and institutions, aware that these were subject to transformation or replacement by the collectivity itself: "A just society is not a society that has adopted once and for all, just laws. A just society is a society in which the question of justice remains constantly open" (Castoriadis, 1993:329). It was, contended Castoriadis (1997c:112), only in such a space that one could properly speak of ethics: for instance, because all problems are solved in advance of their advent, he argued that there could be no such thing as a Christian ethics.

There is within anarchism a tendency to forget the social and historical grounds of human good in the face of the appeal of naturalism, a forgetting which, in effect, tends to evacuate the implied political and ethical content of the post-capitalist society. Similar consequences flow from the Marxian tendency to dismiss politics and morality as epiphenomenal, allowing them to slide beneath the inexorable laws of history and claims to scientific knowledge of the direction of progress. For instance, Marxists following Marx have frequently been loath to describe capitalism as unjust, given the relativity of the category "just", but also because socialism is to be conceived as a *real movement* and not as an ideal. Wood (1981), for example, insists that standards of justice can only be applied meaningfully to the modes of production in which they arise. Thus, wage slavery may very well be an evil but it can hardly be said to be unjust (Buchanan, 1982:53). Against this interpretation, Buchanan (1982:71) argues that capitalism violates its own principle that market transactions are to be free exchanges between equals, although he acknowledges that this condition *cannot* be satisfied under capitalism. In like manner, Kymlicka (1990:63) argues that Marx's central objection is a distributional one and that it thus falls within the scope of theories of justice. Kymlicka (1989:100-7,113) rejects Marx's assumption that justice is a remedial virtue, and he finds that Marx, minus the burden of "species-being", comes close to a liberal conception of freedom. Like liberals, Marx emphasised the all-round development of the individual, believed in treating people as equals and as ends not means, and did not premise the overcoming of justice on any coercive identity of interests but on material abundance.<sup>31</sup> These latter emphases seem, to me, persuasive. The question of social ordering is always a social and historical matter; the answers to such questions cannot be given in absolute terms. On the side of the liberals and against the scientific strand in Marxism, such questions of value and justice are inescapable for human society and can certainly not be eliminated by a determinism based on human nature or assumptions about the direction of History.

An exemplar of the difficulties confronting the Marxian tradition in this sphere is the question of rights. While Leninism has tended to dismiss such rights as bourgeois, empty, and individualistic, social democrats have drifted to positions less and less distinguishable from an often context-insensitive, rationalist, liberal universalism.<sup>32</sup> Clearly, something more is required. For instance, in a re-consideration of Marx's *On the Jewish Question*, Bernstein (1991:92) attempts to re-link the idea of rights to the revolutionary tradition. Contextualising Marx's assertions about rights and justice in his famous critique of the *Gotha Programme*, Bernstein (1991:93) notes that Marx's remarks were aimed at Lassalle's insistence on people's right to that which they produce. Bernstein contends that it be remembered that Marx defended workers' rights in the factory, the right to vote, and the idea of a free press (Lukes, 1985:61). Bernstein (1991:96,102) thus argues that we may choose to read Marx's position in a different way from orthodoxy. While acknowledging that rights can function as a mode of domination, we should also understand that rights can be a source of progressive social change, and most importantly, that rights presuppose - whether this is acknowledged or not - *community*. The right to have rights, that is, flows from recognition of the person or group as part of and as participant in a social collectivity. Thus, Bernstein (1991:108,117) maintains that one need not see rights as natural or abstract but precisely as bestowed by community, and, furthermore, that "Rights are the intersection of conflict and community that is democratic politics." The implications are that "Rights politics now cannot be only the struggle to have existing rights recognised, but fundamentally to transform the meaning of rights discourse by revealing the contradictions and miscognitions present in it" (Bernstein, 1991:117).

Analogous arguments have been presented by Kymlicka, Lukes, and Lefort. For Kymlicka (1989:124-6), rights express an important respect for people as ends in themselves, and, overall, justice deals with problems in social coordination that are ineradicable in life. That is, as Lukes (1985:33,65) points out, even if one assumes altruism and a world of plenty, it will be impossible not to allocate benefits and burdens, especially as versions of the good are bound to vary. Minorities may still need to be protected, coercion may be needed to provide the common good, it will be necessary to consider future generations, and people may, after all, get it wrong and not spontaneously act properly towards others (Lukes, 1985:65). In all these cases, rights provide a necessary safeguard. In similar fashion, Claude Lefort insists that just as it is wrong to conflate bourgeois democracy with democracy, so it is ill-advised to think of rights as solely a property of the individual (Thompson, 1986:22). Rejecting the vehement, ironic, or scientific Marxian condemnation, Lefort (1986:240,255,258; Thompson, 1986:22) says that the actualisation of these rights always

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implies an ineradicable *social context*. For Lefort, rights mean that civil society may not legitimately be absorbed by the state (the separation of power is vital), these rights provide a resource for those opposed to the established order (rights cannot be separated from the awareness of rights), and the denial of rights means considerable damage to the social fabric.

The weight of argument, I believe, points to the inadequacy of the standard left-Marxian critique of rights and justice. Both the Marxian and anarchist traditions correctly object to the positing of ethical universals outside history and society. They are also well founded in rejecting the frequent liberal conflation of abstract principles and historical application. As Soper (1990:134,140) points out, it is not only Marxism that has been unable to get a handle on the problem of “dirty hands”. However, despite such critiques, the impossibility of value outside society and history has been forgotten by thinkers from both traditions in their attempts to provide guarantees for their political orientation. Thus, socialist values come to be posited no longer as matters of politics, but rather as neutral, extra-social facts to be discovered in History or in humanity’s natural being. Against such illusions, it must be recognised that left communists *do* have a moral theory. Despite their “moral constipation” or “disguised moralism”, despite their frequent desire to appear fearsome a-moralists before their political opponents, and despite their hope to scientifically separate fact and value, as E.P. Thompson has said of Marx, these left communist thinkers are moralists with every stroke of their pens (Hunt, 1984:179; Lukes, 1985:25; Kolakowski, 1990:210). For instance, rebelling against the twin evils of money and the state, Marx championed values of freedom, community, and solidarity, and he criticised bourgeois egoism and utilitarianism (Brenkert, 1983:5,9). Analogously, the left communist objection to capitalist social ordering is not, first and foremost, the blandly scientific assertion that capitalism is an inefficient or ineffective mode of production and that socialism is a matter of historical necessity. Such a reading dispenses with the vital Marxian insight as to the social and historical constitution of moral truth and replaces it with potentially coercive claims regarding the laws of history and the party as scientific interpreter of these laws and as the bearers of progress. The morality that is rejected by left communists is, as in Bakunin (1953:145,157; 1972:149) and Kropotkin (n.d.; 1977:184), the morality of the state and of the bourgeoisie, in contrast to a “true morality”, the “humanisation of society”, the “superior level of moral culture” that a libertarian socialism would bring (Sorel, 1976:96).

That left communism is not an amoralism is indicated by its persistent concern with the *means* of revolutionary transformation and by the ways in which it has addressed the

question of post-revolutionary conflict. Left communists have, for instance, de-emphasised the violence of the revolutionary process - "a communist movement's weapons are above all the transformation of social relationships and the production of social conditions of existence" (*La Banquise*, 1993:11) - and they have argued that the character of the road to communism is inseparable from the goal: "no revolution can ever succeed as a factor of liberation unless the MEANS used to further it be identical in spirit and tendency with the PURPOSES to be achieved" (Goldman in Lukes, 1985:105). Though far too frequently complacent about the harmony that will issue immediately upon revolutionary transformation, many left communists have also sought to deal in a libertarian and realistic manner with the question of those who do not accept the new social arrangements: "What to do with the dish smashers?" (*La Banquise*, 1993:10).

While baulking at the totalitarian implications of Bakunin's claim that crime in the socialist society should be treated as a sickness, *La Banquise* (1993) endorse his sentiments regarding the expulsion of those who refuse the justice of the new social order: "Any individual who is condemned by the laws of any society, commune, province or nation will retain the right to refuse to accept the sentence which has been imposed by declaring that he or she no longer wishes to be a member of the society in question. But in this case the society, in turn, will have the right to eject the person from its midst and to declare that society's protection is not guaranteed to the individual."<sup>33</sup> In common with a number of other left communists, *La Banquise* (1993:10) gesture towards the civilised way in which "primitive" societies deal with transgression. For *La Banquise* (1993:12): "Religious law, and, later, the law of the state, have presupposed a separation. This is the difference compared to communism, where there will be no need for intangible laws that everyone knows will not be respected. There will be no absolutes, except, perhaps, the primacy of the species ... There will be no falsely universal rules. Like the law, every morality rationalises ideology after the fact; they always wish and claim to be the basis of social life while at the same time wishing to be without a basis themselves since they are based only on God, nature, logic, or the good of society ... That is, a basis which cannot be questioned because it does not exist. In a communist world, the rules which human beings will adopt, in ways we cannot predict, will flow from communist social bonds. They will not constitute a morality in the sense that they will claim no illusory universality in time and space. The rules of the game will include the possibility of playing with the rules." Communism, then, will be a society without monsters, "because everyone will finally recognise, in the desires and acts of others, the different possible shapes of their own desires and being" (*La Banquise*, 1993:13).

This highly political conception of social ordering in the post-capitalist society is shared by contemporary British anarcho-communists *Class War* (1992:121), who assert that “solidarity will need to be argued for before, during and after the revolution”. It is also in line with Castoriadis’ hopes for the autonomous society. Such autonomy is political in that the overall question of society is everybody’s concern and responsibility: “we make the laws, we know it, and thus we are responsible for our laws and have to ask ourselves every time, ‘Why this law rather than another one?’” (Castoriadis, 1997b:18). Castoriadis (1997c:112) thus highlights “the collective, reflective and lucid activity that arises starting from the moment the question of the de jure validity of institutions is raised. Are our laws just? Is our constitution just? Is it good? But good in relation to what? Just in relation to what?” These are real questions that cannot be foreclosed by appeals to guarantees outside of history and society. In the struggle for socialist institutions “We have to create the good, under imperfectly known and uncertain conditions. The project of autonomy is end and guide, it does not resolve for us effectively actual situations” (Castoriadis, 1997a:400).

There are no simple answers to the conflicts necessarily entailed in attempting to create a more free and equal society. Left communists who have sought to set these problems aside as unimportant by appealing to human nature or the reason of History, simply brushing aside skeptical liberalism, are quite mistaken. Such skepticism, reappearing in post-modernism’s rejection of “extra-social guarantees”, is vital for a credible emancipatory discourse. A number of the more sophisticated left communist thinkers have been able to avoid Leninism’s pragmatic expediency *and* context-insensitive liberalism. They have accepted a certain skepticism regarding the origins of their values, while insisting that the good they seek to create can only be created in the context of a properly political society. In the section to follow, I look at this political conception in more detail, exploring the way in which the abiding tension between left communism’s commitments to liberal and to socialist values ensures the possibility of ethical deliberation, avoiding solutions of both an individualistic and of a coercive, community-focused variety.

### **“A struggle to realise freedom” -**

#### **Individuality and Community in Communist Liberty**

Left communists have denied that the bourgeois order is able to deliver the goals of the democratic revolution - liberty, equality, fraternity. Presented as the very zenith of historical progress, left communists - following Marx - have pointed to the iniquities on which capitalism has arisen (plunder, slavery, and murder) and the real unfreedoms and

inequalities upon which its continued existence crucially depends. Thus, Cole concluded that the wage system itself “makes active citizenship impossible for the majority” (in Cauter, 1966:80), and Bookchin (1994) complains of the reduction within capitalism of the social to the economic. Only a libertarian socialist order, argue left communists, can realise these liberal-democratic goals. The values that left communists have promoted as the basis upon which a good society might be established can be summarised as an ethics of emancipation. Above all, this ethics valorises the equal freedom entailed by a truly political order, one that embodies popular sovereignty. Within this broad ethics of emancipation, though, one discovers two diametrically-opposed thrusts: one in the direction of individual self-realisation and individuation; the other oriented towards the freedoms of democratic community and the reliance of the individual on the social. These opposing conceptions of the socialist good do not form an unproductive contradiction or a confused oscillation; rather, I believe that they entail a *productive tension* that promises to take us beyond socialist orthodoxy, liberalism, and communitarianism. I will first examine Marx’s critique of bourgeois freedom, equality, and community (a critique that is still unavoidable and upon which, in large part, left communism’s antipathy to capitalism rests). I then outline the contours of this productive tension more fully.

For Marx, *the institution of private property was itself a distribution of freedoms and unfreedoms*: that is, the liberty of the private owner entailed no less the withdrawal of liberty from non-owners (Cohen, 1981:224,227; McLellan, 1995:45). On the surface, capitalism appears to be the very embodiment of freedom and equality: those meeting in the market engage in free and equal exchanges (Marx, 1993:241). However, against this surface appearance and against the seemingly accidental outcomes of market transactions, Marx noted “the violence of things”. Workers are inserted into a pre-existing division of labour, and market exchange rests on their property-less status. On these terms, human freedom had been mistaken for free development on the basis of the rule of capital (Ollman, 1996:210; Marx, 1993:247-8,515,604,652). Thus, for Marx (1993:652), “This kind of individual freedom is therefore at the same time the most complete suspension of all individual freedom, and the most complete subjugation of individuality”.

If, for Marx, capitalism was not the successful embodiment of democratic aspirations for freedom and equality, neither was it the fulfillment of the desire for fraternity. Marx was a theorist of community. He insisted that freedom could not be thought of apart from the notion of community; the individual was precisely the social being, and therefore genuine freedom could not be abstracted from a harmonious social world. For Marx, the bourgeois

recognition of community in the state was inadequate. The state and the principle of patriotism represented only an *illusory general interest* (Ollman, 1996:214-7).<sup>34</sup> And money had come to mediate relationships between people, to appear as a “social power”, which, in reality, disguised the real relations that produce and reproduce society (Marx, 1993:223-4,157; Brenkert, 1983:113; Ollman, 1996:195).<sup>35</sup>

As Brenkert (1983:86) has asserted, Marx’s - and, I argue, left communism’s - condemnation of capitalism and his utopian vision are based on an *ethics of freedom*.<sup>36</sup> What, for Marx, did such freedom consist of? The answers to this question have been sharply divided. On the one side, thinkers like Tucker (1969:13) have contended that Marxian freedom means the liberation of human creativity. Thus, in the *Grundrisse*, for example, Marx promotes the notion of the universally-developed socialist individual, displaying a distinctive romanticism and an aesthetic conception of the society to come (Lukes, 1985:96). On the other hand, Brenkert (1983:87-8) interprets freedom in Marx as self-development within rational and harmonious relations to others. Here, freedom is social, collective, and positive. Freedom, in this reading, must be more than the simple absence of compulsion, given that constraints can be internal and negative. For instance, a person who willingly spent his or her days chained to a seat, facing a wall, could only implausibly be called free (Brenkert, 1983:94). In this mode, Marx hoped for the destruction of possessive, atomistic, competitive individualism.<sup>37</sup> He viewed such individualism as illusory - in reality, the individual was the social being<sup>38</sup> - and, once again, for Marx, the freedom offered by capitalism meant only the liberty of capital.<sup>39</sup>

The community aspect of Marxian freedom has been elevated above the romantic-individualist side by both critics and adherents. For Marx himself, species-being (or later “the social individual”) was to replace individual life, and communist society was to be organised into an association he called a commonwealth, commune, or *gemeinwesen* (Marx, 1994:41,50; Hunt, 1984:212). Rather than referring to community as a simple spatial concept, “*gemeinwesen*” carries nuances of “common essence”, “common system”, and “common being” (Nicolaus, 1993:223). This *gemeinwesen* will bring with it a transformation of the human being. People will transcend the egoism of contemporary social life, and they will see in their own capacities *social* capacities (Ollman, 1979:95; Marx, 1994:113; Brenkert, 1983:117). This means, it is clear, an ethical revolution, “the most radical rupture with traditional ideas” (Marx in Brenkert, 1983:20).<sup>40</sup> As Ollman (1979:92) puts it: “This is not only a matter of considering social independence as a facet of one’s own existence, but of thinking (and therefore, treating) the needs of others as one’s own,

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experiencing happiness when they are happy and sadness when they are sad, and believing that what one controls or does is equally theirs' and their doing, and vice versa."

It has been argued that the opposition to individualism provides a common negative ground for socialist consensus (Beilharz, 1994:72; Wright, 1986:23). This opposition functions at the level both of a rejection of philosophical individualism and as an elevation of the community and democratic solidarity above the individual. Left communists, both from the Marxian and the anarchist traditions, have emphasised the social origin of individuality and the necessity of establishing a world of harmony and solidarity, beyond the atomism of bourgeois society. For instance, espousing an ultra-structuralism and anti-humanism, criticising the atomist focus of bourgeois liberal-democracy, and emphasising communism as *gemeinwesen*, the Bordigist tradition has emphatically and consistently pursued the community line of argumentation. Against bourgeois individualism, Bordiga (1922:50) argued: "It is already evident that this conception is unrealistic and unmaterialist because it considers each individual to be a perfect 'unit' within a system made up of many potentially equivalent units, and instead of appraising the value of the individual's opinion in the light of his manifold conditions of existence, that is, his relations with others, it postulates this value *a priori* with the hypothesis of the 'sovereignty' of the individual." Instead, Bordiga (1922:52) maintained that "The collectivity is born from relations and groupings in which the status and activity of each individual do not derive from an individual function but from a collective one determined by the multiple influences of the social milieu." The more bourgeois society celebrates the person, the more he or she is but a marionette of social forces. Bordiga therefore viewed it as theoretically essential to reduce the individual factor in history to zero - in terms of both individual consciousness as a cause and the person as a subject of revolutionary action or even class conflict: "We are wanting to succeed in expelling the individual from history not with the help of *sub specie aeternitatis* metaphysical exercises, but as a result of historical development. It seems that the ME and the YOU would be our *drammatis personae*. The epilogue is their fusion in a category unknown to the ideological superstructure of pre-communist epochs: the human being, the social being in which - confirming the historical invariance of Marx's work - we find the social man of the *Grundrisse* of 1859" (Bordiga in Camatte, 1972). So opposed was Bordiga to bourgeois personalisation, and so convinced was he that all work was at once collectively and historically formed, he even refused to allow the individualised identification of his own theoretical contributions.

Rejecting the fictitious unity of people in state and money,<sup>41</sup> the Bordigists have proclaimed communism as the constitution of community, “the joyous harmony of social man” (Bordiga, 1965:3). The projected end to the illusory unification of value and nationalism means also, for the Bordigists, an end to democracy. As Barrot has argued, “Democracy served to harmonise the divergent interests in the framework of the bourgeois state. Now, communism knows no state, it destroys it; and nor does it know opposing social groups. It thus automatically dispenses with every mechanism of mediation which would decide what it would be fitting to do. To want communism and democracy is a contradiction. Since it is the end of politics and the unification of humanity it installs no power above society in order to make it stable and harmonious” (in ICG, n.d.:16). Such true unification, the achievement of species-being, would mean the supersession of the singular bodily sense by the collective human sense. Thus Bordiga spoke of the arrival of a “social mind” or “collective brain” (in Camatte, 1972).

The Bordigists’ accent on the alienation and separation of bourgeois existence and their hope for a re-established community is reproduced within primitivism. Moving from Bordigism to primitivism, Jacques Camatte has combined the anti-humanist, community focus of the former with an anti-progressivism, basing his entire socialism on the *timeless aspiration for community*. Communism, says Camatte (1995:64), “is not a new mode of production; it is the affirmation of a new community.” Such affirmation has been essential from the moment ancient communities were destroyed. There is no necessity in the alienation of industrial capitalism. In opposition to the “invariance” mainstream Bordigism ascribed to Marxian doctrine, Camatte (1995:71,179) insisted that “What is invariant is the desire to rediscover the lost community.” What matters for communism “is the reappropriation of *gemeinwesen* ..., which can only be done after the unification of the species, and this unification can only be conceived by grasping the aspiration, desire, passion, and will for community expressed through the ages” (Camatte, 1995:73).

Although few have been willing to follow the Bordigists’ extreme emphasis, freedom and community have been inextricably linked by many left communists (especially by those from within the Marxian tradition). Asserting that “Fellowship is heaven, lack of fellowship is hell”, William Morris (1994:30-1; Carpenter, 1973:9), for instance, claimed that middle class individualism is characterised by “the creation of a shabby average of dull comfort for a large class of the community ... and by idle and insolent waste on the other.” Similarly, Sylvia Pankhurst (1993:125,132) understood communism to be a “large and all-embracing fraternity”, and she argued optimistically “that a public opinion can be created which will

produce a general willingness to serve the community.” Typical of left communism, Pankhurst (1993:132) judged exceptions to spontaneous community-spirit as rare, and she believed that pity rather than coercion would be the response to such exceptions. In a similar mode, Anton Pannekoek (1970:95) maintained that “Community-feeling from the first is the main force in the progress of the revolution. This progress is the growth of the solidarity, of the mutual connection, of the unity of the workers.” Pannekoek looked forward to the overcoming of bourgeois individualism (the most characteristic aspect of bourgeois mentality). In place of the rapacious, animal-like features of capitalist life, there would develop a new concept of proletarian community, the “community of destiny” or the “great productive community”<sup>42</sup> (Gerber, 1989:104; Pannekoek, 1912:21; Smart, 1978:104; Bricanier, 1978:183). And for more recent Marxian left communists like Negri (1979:117) and Debord (1983:186), the establishment of community is *both a precondition and the objective* of socialised labour.

The anarchist tradition contains much the same emphasis on the connection between freedom and community. For instance, contrary to the stereotype of anarchist egoism, Bakunin’s (1953:148,156,158; 1972:236) work is marked by a fervent determinism and anti-individualism, where “every human individual from the moment of his birth is entirely the product of historic development”, and where “man completely realises his freedom as well as his personality only through the individuals who surround him, and thanks only to the labour and the collective power of society.” Freedom and solidarity were inseparable, argued Bakunin (1953:156,267), and *one could not be free unless all were equally free*. Likewise, Berkman (1972:188,297) raised freedom to the highest aspiration of anarchist-communist society, and, like Malatesta (1965:73), he insisted that “Man is a social being: he cannot exist alone; he lives in communities or societies”. In Marxian fashion, both Lagardelle and Kropotkin opposed the bourgeois fiction of “the abstract man”, the latter insisting that so ineradicably social was human life that the notion of evaluating the individual’s contribution to society was absurd (Jennings, 1990:12,93; Wexler, 1984:96). Anarchists like Pelloutier and Kropotkin also hoped for an overcoming of individualism and a new morality characterised by a sense of social duty and co-operation. Kropotkin (1911:217; 1975:54; Lunn, 1973:180), for instance, depicted communist society as bringing a harmonious blending of opinion in a “community of aspirations”. In his *Mutual Aid*, Kropotkin attempted to demonstrate that the instinct of human sociability was an ineradicable law of nature, essential to the survival and progress of a species (Osofsky, 1979:87,89): “The feeling of solidarity is the leading characteristic of all animals living in society” (Kropotkin, n.d.).<sup>43</sup> In a similar spirit, rejecting the false unity of nationalism,

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contemporary anarchist Murray Bookchin (1987:44; 1986:152) contends that freedom and what are considered questions of individual life are matters of sociality<sup>44</sup>: “[with the advent of anarchism] the community would become a beautifully molded arena of life, a vitalising source of culture and a deeply personal, ever-nourishing source of human solidarity”.

According to many left communists who have emphasised community, a predominant facet of the free and just future order is equality. Communism is often equated with the ascetic socialist aspiration to radical equality - for instance, Babeuf’s “Let there be no difference between human beings but in age and sex! ... let there be for all one education and one standard of life” (in Cauter, 1966:14). Marx (and Marxists since), however, rudely dismissed such equalitarian urges.<sup>45</sup> Of the “crude communism” that sought to impose a uniform standard of life on everyone, Marx asserted that it “has not only failed to go beyond private property, but has not yet even reached it” (in Wood, 1981:212). And as Wood (1981:211) notes, “from each according to their abilities, to each according to their needs” is not an equalitarian slogan.

As in the case of justice, anarchists have been more likely than the Marxians to champion equality, often as a *natural* human aspiration. In some of Bakunin’s utopian sketches for his collectivism, one does indeed discover the absolute equality that Marx criticised as “barracks communism”. For instance, Bakunin (1953:270) argued that within the anarchist utopia people were to have the same education, upbringing, work, and enjoyment. Such equality was, for Bakunin (1953:271; 1972:99), the vital requirement of freedom. In an 1866 article, however, Bakunin (1972:87) contended that equality did not imply a levelling down of individual differences; it meant, instead, an equal access to education and an equal opportunity to exercise one’s natural capacities and aptitudes. Kropotkin (1975:80; n.d.) also insisted that justice implied equality, as community rules would only be accepted by people who regarded each other as equals: “Equality in all things, the synonym of equity, this is anarchism in very deed ... It is in the name of equality that we are determined to have no more prostituted, exploited, deceived and governed men and women”. Once again, for Kropotkin (n.d.; 1924), this sense of equality was *natural* to human beings: “the consciousness of equity ... physiologically develops in man as in all social animals.”

Both Kropotkin and Bakunin argued that the appeal to equality was not a demand for equality of outcomes but for equality of opportunity. In much the same way, equality and a certain conception of justice were certainly the goal of Marx and subsequent Marxists. As Castoriadis (1984:314) points out, “True equality takes account of the ‘natural’ inequality of

individuals, and so allows us to go beyond it in and by way of proportionality.” Such equality, which Berkman (1972:205) designated “true equality”, implied the equal ability of members of the anarchist society to satisfy their tastes and needs: “True anarchist equality implies freedom, not quantity.” Thus, equality has been taken by left communists to denote “the equal right to be different” (Dolgoft, 1986). It is an equality based on the recognition of inequalities in capacity, ability, and needs (Bookchin, 1982:9).

Castoriadis (1984:329; 1991:132) also championed equality as an essential value for post-capitalist social organisation. Equal rights are important, but they mean nothing without an equality of conditions that allows for their effective exercise (Castoriadis, 1991:139). Castoriadis (1991:142) thus emphasised not passive rights but rather equality in activity, participation, and responsibility. Quarrelling with the *axia* proposed by Marx in his comments on the lower phase of communism, where people are best judged as workers, Castoriadis (1984:329) advocated immediate and absolute equality of incomes for people within the autonomous society. This was deemed necessary both because of the manifold inadequacies of all arguments for inequality and because such equality would take us beyond economic considerations and motivations, destroying the economic Proto-value by which society is regulated (Castoriadis, 1984:329). According to Castoriadis (1984:330): “An autonomous society will have to *institute* ‘equality’ and ‘commensurability’ of ‘economic’ labour as instruments of its own institution, so that the economic and the hierarchical can be toppled from their throne, the functioning of society made more intelligible to everyone, and a new and different *paideia* made possible for men and women.” Once again, Castoriadis rejected that such socialist values could be defended by recourse to naturalism or laws of history. As human beings are not born free/unfree or equal/unequal, “the meaning of these terms could never be definitely defined, and ... the contribution which theory can make to this task is always radically limited and essentially negative”.

What, overall, are we to make of the left communist emphasis on community? How, for example, does the goal of freedom square with the solidaristic and equalitarian urges? Does this tendency mean that the distinctive sense of individuality with which contemporary humans are endowed will disappear, so that people will effectively live like ants, directed towards common goals, unreflective, bereft of the complexities of modern life? Brenkert (1983:122) rejects claims that Marx’s vision presupposes humans as akin to insects, dumbly and unreflectively doing what is needed; instead, Marx’s communism posits “a community of reflective, rational beings who perceive themselves not to be divided by their interests but

united by those interests.” Brenkert is certainly correct that to emphasise the community and reject competitive individualism is not necessarily to reduce human beings to dumb automatons or unaware animals. However, there is without a doubt an element of this latter accent in left communist thought, and there will always be a certain tension between the emphases on individual freedom and on community well-being.

It is quite evident that the Bordigist and primitivist utopian visions have tended to dissolve any tension between socialist and liberal aspirations in favour of the tight, unified community. Notions such as the end of politics and of opposing social groups, the desire for a unification of humanity, the emphasis on the collective brain over the individual human being, and the conservative lament over the absence of a tight community all threaten individual liberty. Such emphases and commitments, based on the idea of species being, eradicates both ethics and politics. In part, such a tendency is an important signal of the structuralist discovery of the constitution (as opposed to the *self*-constitution) of the subject. It valuably rejects competitive individualism and the much vaunted, but largely illusory, freedom of late consumer capitalism. However, such aspirations also represent a danger to freedom and a one-sided emphasis that subverts individuality. Moreover, the frequent naturalism of such approaches, either within the notion of species-being or in Kropotkin’s speculations about animality, offers a misguided and obfuscating argument for the new world that left communism has sought to create. Such conceptions do not do justice to the complexities of humans and their societies. It is perhaps more in keeping with the socialist emphasis on history and collective life to maintain instead, as Laclau (1989:80) does, that humans are empty entities. Furthermore, such naturalism is incoherent. If humans were indeed naturally anarchistic, then how can the existence of state, private property, and bourgeois morality be explained (Pepper, 1993:172)? And, most importantly, viewing discord as unnatural is unnecessary. Kate Soper (1990:132) has most appositely argued that eliminating all tensions and conflicts from human relations would drain the meaning and interest from life. For Soper, “It is not, perhaps, the elimination of all tension that we ultimately desire, but the provision of means to experience it constructively.”

The reverse of left communism’s community focus has been a moment within the tradition that emphasises freedom as a property of the individual, viewing communism as individuation and self-realisation. While it must be stressed that this approach *appeals to individuation in opposition to capitalism’s competitive atomism*, it must also be recognised that this moment may still bend the stick too far in one direction. If the community communist emphasis threatens to negate politics and ethical concerns in favour of a

coercive, harmony of the organic community, so the reverse emphasis, at its most extreme, risks an evacuation of the political for the a-social pursuit by egoistic individuals of their own well-being. Notably, anarchists have often been charged with this failing.

Given the extent to which both are concerned with sociality, the separation of anarchism and Marxism on the question of freedom is difficult to sustain. Marxists since Marx, though, have tended to equate the whole of anarchism with an overweening emphasis on individuality. Identifying Stirner as the “founding father”, Marxists have depicted anarchists as bourgeois individualists, as nihilistic terrorists, and as atomists whose preoccupation with individual liberty and rejection of all authority make society impossible (Plekhanov, 1912:39,125; Lafargue, 1970; Engels, 1972:101,70). For instance, ostensibly battling against anarchist ideas, Morris argued: “I don’t want people to do just as they please; I want them to consider and act for the good of their fellows, of the commonweal, in fact” (in Woodcock, 1962:417). Perhaps this mistaken equation of anarchism and egoistic concerns only has arisen because, as Osofsky (1979:58) has pointed out, anarchists have tended to pose the problem of the establishment of an integral society in individualist terms.

Anarchism contains a moment that represents a radical extension of liberal, Enlightenment thought, which displays great optimism regarding human beings’ ability to spontaneously live together, and which champions natural rights and equality. Anarchism also includes those suspicious of the demands of association, those who fear the tyranny of the majority and who emphasise instead the uniqueness of the person. Here, the freedom of the creative individual, unhindered by the limitations of sociality, is essential. This second strand is every-bit as much as the first a descendent of the Enlightenment and liberalism. It is also, in its bohemian and nihilistic incarnation, a child to the malevolent trio of De Sade, Stirner, Nietzsche, that is, those who reject coercive community mores and who recoil from herdish, conformist pressures. The free individual must create his or her own guiding set of values, exploring the hitherto untapped and perhaps darker aspects of him or herself through an art which chaffs against the standards of beauty and taste of the ordinary mortal. Given that freedom cannot endure limitations and that all idols have been driven from the world and the mind, for these revolutionaries, “all is permitted” (Camus, 1969:32).

Such an emphasis on individual sovereignty is clear in the work of two classical anarchist thinkers, Godwin and Stirner. Insisting that society was simply an aggregation of individuals, Godwin went so far as to doubt whether the person of independent judgement could play in an orchestra or act in a play (Osofsky, 1979:67; Woodcock, 1962:82). Stirner’s

individualism is just as extreme but appears more corrosive. To be sure, the famous *Ego and its Own* calls for a “union of egoists”, and Guerin (1970:29) has persuasively argued that Stirner’s anti-social rhetoric should be interpreted as the lament of a hermit desirous of human contact. However, the relentless thrust of Stirner’s (1995:7) work is: “nothing is more to me than myself!”, and “we have only one relation to each other, that of *useableness*, of utility, of use. We owe *each other* nothing” (in Leopold, 1995:xxix). For Stirner (1995:190), “Liberty of the *people* is not *my* liberty”: “of what concern to me is the common weal? The common weal as such is not *my weal*, but only the extremity of *self-renunciation*.” One should sacrifice nothing to those “spooks” of society or humanity but instead, maintained Stirner (1995:229; Woodcock, 1962:88), praising anti-social urges, “Take hold, and take what you require! With this the war of all against all is declared.”

Drawing on Stirner’s appeal to the untrammelled liberty of the unique person, Emma Goldman also championed Nietzsche, Ibsen, and the American individualist tradition. This brought her to a highly individualised anarchism of a variety favoured by the numerous artists drawn by anarchism’s promise of autonomy and the unlimited expression of personality (Sonn, 1994; Marshall, 1992:402). For Goldman (1983:67), the goal of anarchism was the freest possible expression of all the talents and powers of the individual. Society being *but a collection of individuals*, it was the individual who was the true reality in life: “The sole legitimate purpose of society is to serve the needs and advance the aspirations of the individual” (Goldman, 1983:111,123). Although Goldman also insisted on the importance of solidarity, her work reveals a profound suspicion of collective life. Thus, Goldman (1983:78-83) viewed public opinion as tyrannical: “the majority represents a mass of cowards, willing to accept him who mirrors its own soul and mind poverty”. Viewing the masses as lacking originality, taste, and courage, Goldman assigned a vital historical role to heroic individuals: “Politically the human race would still be in the most absolute slavery, were it not for the John Balls, the Wat Tylers ... the innumerable individual giants.”

Perhaps the most notable contemporary expression of left communist commitment predicated on a new individualism is Raoul Vaneigem’s extraordinary *Trait De Savoir-Vivre a l’usage des jeunes generations* (translated as *The Revolution of Everyday life*). Espousing a drunken mix of Marx, Nietzsche, and surrealism,<sup>46</sup> Vaneigem (1994:235) posits the individual’s will to live (rather than to simply survive) and *irreducible subjectivity* as the ultimate emancipatory values: “There is no other guide to the emancipation of all than the individual will to live.” In Vaneigem’s estimation, the revolt against capitalism is intensely subjective, moral, and poetic (Plant, 1992): “The appropriation of people and things does

not disgust me as a manifestation of injustice or as the basis of class society. Rather because it sets limits to my desires, imprisoning them, terrorising them, and transforming them into pieces of property” (Vaneigem, 1983:34). Prefiguring the conception of subversion developed by Felix Guattari, for Vaneigem (1983:66,92), it is desire and the urge towards ludic pleasure that will see the demise of state and capital: “if you really embrace your desires wholeheartedly, how can you not reverse the very polarity of the old world.”<sup>47</sup>

Whilst individualists have rightly feared the results of the anxiety for wholeness and harmony, expecting the dull conformity induced by mighty public opinion to quash singularity and arrest initiative, collectivists have suspected individualist anarchists of being less concerned with the revolution than with living well in the present. Murray Bookchin (1995), for example, has argued along these lines in contrasting “social” with “lifestyle” anarchism. Far too many contemporary anarchists, complains Bookchin (1994), posit “autonomy” as the highest goal, emphasising the *self-rule of the individual*. One might consider here the consequences, in the case of Emma Goldman, of the substitution of collective revolutionary change for *bohème* and an intellectualist contempt for the masses. Goldman turned more and more to purely self-expressive activity and increasingly appealed to intellectuals and middle class audiences, who felt amused and flattered by her individualism and exotic iconoclasm. This egoistic and personalistic turn ignores the essential social anarchist aspiration to *freedom*, the commitment to an end to domination in society, the comprehension of the social premises of the individualist urge itself, and the desire to move beyond a purely negative conception of liberty.

Part of the issue here is the tension between living and making the revolution (Sonn, 1992:52). Consider Vaneigem’s (1983:81) insistence that “The moment the revolution calls for self-sacrifice it ceases to exist.” Surely such a premise is inimical to the revolutionary aspiration. It is not just that revolution demands from many a significant sacrifice, but also, as Taylor (1982) insists, it would appear that a stateless society is only feasible in the presence of a tightly knit community. Furthermore, left communists have emphasised that in the revolutionary process itself, human beings are to be changed completely into political individuals, active and informed participants in collective life. Perhaps, as Bookchin (1995;1994) has rather trenchantly asserted, the recent individualist and neo-situationist concern with subjectivity, expression, and desire is all too much like middle class narcissism and the self-centred therapeutic of New Age culture. Perhaps also, as Barrot (1991:24) has said, the kind of revolutionary life advocated by Vaneigem’s book *cannot be lived*. To suggest the reverse is to induce a hopeless search for wholeness and authenticity within a

society inimical to such aspirations. In the end, for Barrot, Vaneigem's urgings amount to little more than a pathetic "reformism of everyday life."

If, as a number of contemporary anarchists influenced by the Vaneigemist side of the S.I. imply, anything is permitted and the individual is to seek the fulfillment of his or her desires without limitation, then it seems likely that we would descend into a war of all against all, without the democratic participation promised by political community and without the suppression of capitalism's "infamous isolation" (Landauer in Lunn, 1973:280). Total freedom for any one individual necessarily means diminished freedom for others. As *La Banquise* (1993:13) argue, "Repression and sublimation prevent people from sliding into a refusal of otherness". Herbert Marcuse's contradictory statements on socialist freedom are interesting in this light. Marcuse (1973:159) insisted at one point that "In a truly free civilisation, all laws are self-given by the individuals ... Order is freedom only if it is founded on and sustained by the free gratification of the individual". Elsewhere, however, Marcuse (1973:159) seems to lay the basis for a quite different conception of the nature of freedom under socialism: "If a child feels the 'need' to cross the street any time at its will repression of this 'need' is not repressive of human potentialities. It may be the opposite."

Marcuse's example suggests that libertarian socialism cannot escape the requirement of a more solidaristic attachment to limitation and in particular self-limitation. There is without doubt more than a little truth in the community-focussed criticisms of the left communist individualist pole. For socialists, freedom must be an ineradicably social as well as an individual matter. The whole thrust of socialist politics is towards a *collective project that reconstructs those freedom-limiting structures of economy, power, and ideology* (Castoriadis, 1997:183-4). It seems unlikely that such ambitions could be achieved by those motivated solely by a Sadean ambition to seek satisfaction of their own improperly understood desires. Moreover, as the appeal of communitarian thought and the critique of neo-liberal individualism shows, the promise of a truer solidarity to come would prove a very powerful driving force for a renewed libertarian socialist project.

On the one hand, then, there has been a tendency within the left communist tradition that has elevated community goals to the very essence of socialism. This one-sided commitment to group solidarity diminished the possibilities for the creation of a political community and emphasised instead the perfect harmony of a projected organic whole. On the other hand, left communists such as Goldman and Vaneigem have accented individual creativity and desire in a manner that without doubt forecloses on the possibility of collective political life

and societal transformation. However, it must be recognised that many within the left communist tradition oscillate between socialist-community aspirations and liberal goals of individual self-realisation, rather than settle resolutely for one of the two poles. This oscillation can be seen as more than a static and unproductive contradiction: I view it as a productive tension. As Berlin noted, a decent social order demands that ethical and political questions should not be solved by appeal to naturalistic metaphysics or rationalist exercises. We will always be forced to evaluate and make practical judgements between incommensurable goals and conflicting goods. Acknowledging the worth and inescapability of conflicting values, and emphasising that such values will not be achievable or open to proper evaluation without the creation of a political community, a renewed left communism has much to offer.

Many left communists have sought to emphasise *both* the singular freedom of self-realisation *and* the social freedom made possible within a collective project. Here, socialism has meant both the creation of the accomplished and highly individualised communist person and the establishment of community.

This combination of liberal and socialist emphases can be found in a number of left communists surveyed hitherto as exemplifying one or other of the two poles of liberty. For instance, I have noted Bakunin's anti-individualist proclivities, but Bakunin (1953:147,156) also insisted that the human being was "more ferocious in his egoism than the wildest beasts", and he asserted that "respect for the freedom of someone else constitutes the highest duty of men". Similarly, insisting on the naturalness of sociality and harmonious community, Kropotkin (n.d.) quoted Fourier approvingly: "Leave men absolutely free ... Do not fear even their passions. In a free society these are not dangerous." The Marxian left communists - Morris, Pannekoek, and Pankhurst, for instance - insisted that the organic community would make possible the roundly-developed communist individual of whom Marx (in romantic mode) had spoken. And Malatesta (1965:24) championed *both* the "love of mankind" *and* anarchist egoism. Gustav Landauer similarly articulated a combination of a quasi-religious and romantically *volkisch* appeal to the rootedness and spirituality of *gemeinschaft*<sup>48</sup> with a Nietzschean individualism (Berman and Luke, 1978:3; Lunn, 1973:5): "socialism is the expression of the true and genuine community among men, genuine because it grows out of the individual spirit" (in Marshall, 1992:410).

I believe that the left communist promise of a society in which people might more effectively and productively confront and debate the problems of freedom and social

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coordination is best expressed in the work of Cornelius Castoriadis around the ideal of an autonomous society. Such autonomy pertains both to the collective and to each individual within society. Rejecting the contemporary tendency to posit others as limitations on our freedom, Castoriadis (1996:13) argued that others were in fact premises of liberty, “possibilities of action”, and “sources of facilitation”. Freedom is the most vital object of politics, and this freedom - always a process and never an achieved state - is equated with the “effective, humanly feasible, lucid and reflective positing of the rules of individual and collective activity” (Castoriadis, 1997a:337). An autonomous society - one without alienation - explicitly and democratically creates and recreates the institutions of its own world, formulating and reformulating its own rules, rather than simply accepting them as given from above and outside. The resulting institutions, Castoriadis hoped, would facilitate high levels of responsibility and activity among all people in respect of all questions about society (Howard and Pacom, 1997:92).

Castoriadis’ (1993:48) notion of socialism holds to the goals of the integrated human communities, the unification of people’s lives and culture, and the collective domination of people over their own lives. He was also committed to the free deployment of the person’s creative forces. Just as Castoriadis (1991:124; 1997:400-2) enthused over the capacity of human collectivities for immense works of creativity and responsibility, so he insisted on the radical creativity of the individual and the importance of individual freedom. Congruent with the notion of societal autonomy, Castoriadis (1997:177-80) posited the autonomous individual as, most essentially, one who legislates for and thus regulates themselves. Turning to psychoanalysis, he designated this autonomy as the individual’s discourse asserting itself over the discourse of the Other. For Castoriadis, these goals were not guaranteed by anything outside of the collective activity of people towards such goals. Such an outcome could not be solved in theory but only by a re-awakening of politics. Only in the clash of opinions, not determined in advance by naturalistic or religious postulates, could a true ethics emerge (Castoriadis, 1997a:400).

Left communism contains tendencies that both emphasise democratic and equalitarian values and that accent goals of individual self-realisation. I have argued against those left communist solutions that choose one side or the other of the dilemma. Efforts to organise a more just and free society will always be troubled by tension between these broad dispositions. Keeping both sets of values in acknowledged tension within a socialism that has unburdened itself of the illusions of final closure and harmony, and that remains

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committed to the project of collective societal transformation, is the best hope for those on the left towards a successful libertarian socialism.

### Conclusion

This chapter has argued that the left communist tradition provides ways to think past the crisis of socialist values. Left communism provides a vital planting of flags in answer to questions about the proper ordering of society, a planting of flags that advances on the shortcomings of the ethico-political conceptions of socialist orthodoxy, liberalism, and communitarianism. Socialist orthodoxy has been eclipsed as a programme for the good life. On the one hand, it devolves into a project of pragmatic expediency bereft of a political and ethical dimension, where statist administration submerges both individual and collective freedom (Fotopoulos, 1997:178). On the other hand, as social democracy the orthodox tradition coalesces into a variety of more or less straightforward liberalism. Liberalism tends to overstate the conception of humans as choosers, under-theorising and under-valuing the necessity of political community and the social dimension of individuality. The communitarian critique, however, too readily diminishes the gains of liberalism, subordinating people entirely to the horizons of community life and reducing politics to something like a “general will”.

Possessed of both liberal and communitarian features, post-modernism has introduced further skepticism about the idea of a unitary human essence. It has jettisoned the notion of humans as unencumbered choosers, and it has underscored the constructedness of all our values. In so doing, post-modernism has reintroduced the importance of politics and ethics, of responsibility and evaluation, into contemporary social thinking. Post-modernism offers a vital corrective to the tendency of socialist orthodoxy to bury the socialist insight as to the sociality and historicity of values. Nevertheless, advancing as it does on orthodox socialism, leftist post-modernism has still something to gain from an engagement with left communism. Post-modernism’s radical constructivism and its caution before the disasters of confident and unreflective modernity can issue in an ironic hesitancy, indicated in particular by an uncritical emphasis on pluralism and incommensurability that threatens to forever suspend evaluation (Norris, 1992:90). Post-modernism all too often takes the flight from universals and emancipation towards particularist - either individualist<sup>49</sup> or community-based - answers to questions of justice and the content of the valuable life. In contrast, left communists have remained engaged and universalist in orientation.

Left communists have not hesitated in committing themselves, most importantly, to *the emancipation of humanity without exception* (Zizek, 1997a). Such universalist commitments are, as May (1994:129,150) points out, a general characteristic of ethical discourse. Post-modernists themselves have often had to submit to this truth, smuggling into their analyses universally-binding ethico-political principles. Socialists must accept such universalising engagement, free from belief in the possibility of extra social guarantees “other than the free play of passions and needs” (*La Banquise*, 1993:13), and liberated from the expectation of a definitive end to tensions and dilemmas around general social ordering. On these terms, socialism becomes not simply the negation of liberal-democratic aspirations but rather a collective pressing of these aspirations to the very far limits of popular sovereignty (a subject explored further in Chapter Six). It is for these reasons that the stubborn durability of liberal and democratic goals may, against all expectations, be an auspicious sign for left communist utopianism.

I have now investigated left communism’s positioning on questions of politics, theory, and values. The following two chapters turn to consider the left communist critique of and utopian alternatives to those macro-structures of unfreedom: capital and the state. An evaluation of the issues arising here indicates a less substantial part for post-modernism. Post-modernism has proven itself relatively weak and undeveloped around questions of political change. Precisely for this reason, the issues canvassed in the remainder of this thesis are most pertinent. I will initially examine the left communist response - framed in terms of the critique of class and capital - to the advent of “really existing socialism”. Then, in chapter six, I will look at left communism’s attempt to distance its own democratic socialism from the state, bureaucratic administration, and nationalism.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Nietzsche (1977:102,114) championed the virtues of the powerful superperson (the thirst for resistances, enemies, and triumphs) and saw as “evil” the morality of *ressentiment*.

<sup>2</sup> Laclau and Mouffe (1985:183), for example, argue that those paradigms that seek a world beyond conflict, based on knowledge of the “ultimate foundation” of the social, end up in the Rousseauian paradox of trying to force people to be free.

<sup>3</sup> Derrida has also said that deconstruction seeks to “deconstruct the foundations of obscurantism, totalitarianism or Nazism, of racism and of authoritarian hierarchies in general” (in Howells, 1999:140).

<sup>4</sup> Mouffe (1992:1-2,13), for instance, insists on the necessity of a liberal pluralist political setting.

<sup>5</sup> Derrida contends that deconstruction implies limitless responsibility (Howells, 1999:154). In similar fashion, Laclau has argued that anti-foundationalism makes possible a “higher moral consciousness” (in Torfing, 1999:177).

<sup>6</sup> In typical Second International style, Kautsky, for instance, argued that “It [science] can certainly arrive at prescribing an *ought* but this can arise only as a result of insight into what is necessary” (in Lukes, 1985:18).

<sup>7</sup> Trotsky thus differentiated his own ethical stance from Stalinism, as Stalinism was not about establishing real socialism (Knei Paz, 1979:564). Trotsky, of course, was to be devoured by the operation of those same pragmatic postulates that he had endorsed so enthusiastically.

<sup>8</sup> From Nachaev's *Catechism*, to Bakunin's "I drink to the destruction of public order and the unleashing of evil passions" (in Gouldner, 1985:169), to propaganda by deed, to Trotsky's *Terrorism and Communism*, to the bourgeois-baiting immoralism of some socialism in the realm of art, sexuality, crime, and drugs. Raoul Vaneigem (1981:18), for instance, asserts that we must dispense with all necessities placed on love (for example, the incest taboo). And Guy Debord displayed a fascinated fixation on crime and outlaws - the Watts riots, the Bonnot gang, Jacques Mesrine, Villon, the Badder-Meinhoff gang, Lacenaire.

<sup>9</sup> For instance, rejecting that economics alone would generate socialism, Bernstein insisted on an independent ethical case for the new society. Jaures similarly emphasised the role of values above all else, and British socialism was deeply marked by moralism (Wright, 1986:26,49).

<sup>10</sup> "Where the proletariat is without rights it is unlikely to succeed in developing mass organisations or ... waging mass struggles" (Kautsky, 1983:112).

<sup>11</sup> It is interesting to note that, with its 1936 Constitution, even the Soviet Union signalled the modern obligation to pay lip-service to the ideals of freedom, democracy, and rights (Lukes, 1985).

<sup>12</sup> For instance, Eagleton (1996:113,127), complaining of its formalistic pluralism, asserts that much post-modernism "has the look of a sheepish liberalism in wolf's clothing."

<sup>13</sup> Mouffe (1992:6) argues that Rawls' commitment to equality and freedom does not assume private ownership of the means of production. For Mouffe this is important in that political liberalism, with its defence of rights, recognition of pluralism, limitation of the role of the state, and division of powers, must be the basis of any plausible and defensible progressive project.

<sup>14</sup> In fact, says Phillips (1991:141), current conceptions of equality developed out of seventeenth century liberalism.

<sup>15</sup> Thus, for Nozick, libertarian justice can be summed up thus: "From each as they choose, to each as they are chosen" (in Beauchamp, 1991:350).

<sup>16</sup> For example, Gray (1995:9) admits that there still exists no adequate theory of initial acquisition.

<sup>17</sup> Hume sought to base ethics on communities, historical traditions, and social conventions (Beauchamp, 1991:256).

<sup>18</sup> For instance, Hegel's critique of the "empty formalism" of Kantian ethics, his concern with the privatisation and atomism of the modern world, and his aspiration towards the establishment of an ethical community (Beauchamp, 1991:281; Rasmussen, 1990:4).

<sup>19</sup> Taylor, for instance, views contemporary "radical reflexivity" as intensely individualist and sees a possibility for the overcoming of social fragmentation in a "theistic perspective" (Phillips, 1993:180; Skinner, 1998:57).

<sup>20</sup> Phillips (1993:175) argues that the communitarian presumption that community was prominent in the past in a way that it is not today is wholly mistaken. And critics have pointed out that communitarians have failed to specify the content of their concept of community (Phillips, 1993:7; Plant, 1998:98).

<sup>21</sup> As Ferrara (1990:22) asks, could a Nazi society sensibly be considered just?

<sup>22</sup> Communitarianism often seems no more than a periodic correction to a liberalism that has bent the stick too far in one direction. For instance, Walzer (1995:62; Beiner, 1992:29) has admitted that he is, first and foremost, a liberal, and Etzioni (1995:2) has described communitarianism as *a source of reform for contemporary liberalism*.

<sup>23</sup> Kymlicka (1989:2,9,18,253-4) has noted that liberals (like Rawls and Dworkin) are *not* relentless skeptics regarding the category of the good: a good society is an association of free people who are equals in basic rights (Eccleshall, 1984:48). Similarly, liberals have denied that they have ever been seriously committed to an abstract conception of the person. Many liberals, like communitarians, have been concerned by the prospects of contemporary atomism - this social focus eliciting a tendency towards a positive conception of freedom (for instance, in Rawls' "thin theory of the good") and an emphasis on public freedoms (Eccleshall, 1984:67; Phillips, 1993:177; Etzioni, 1995:20; Kymlicka, 1990:216; 1989:17; Mouffe, 1990:219; Jacobs, 1997:111; Beiner, 1992:18; Bellamy, 1992:31).

<sup>24</sup> However, I do not believe that one need accept communitarianism's pluralist particularism.

<sup>25</sup> One last point must be made against liberalism. As Poole (1991:91) has noted, despite its concern with the individual, liberalism has never been particularly compelling in motivating people to accept its principles and fight on its behalf.

<sup>26</sup> Berlin's less than impressive political track record is also well worth noting. See, for instance, Hitchens (1998:3-8).

<sup>27</sup> In the General Rules of the IWMA, Marx spoke of "justice" and "morality", but in a letter to Engels he asserted that, though he was obliged to insert these words, they were "placed in such a way that they can do no harm" (in Lukes, 1985:6)

<sup>28</sup> *La Banquise* (1993) maintain that in the case of female circumcision, for instance, to assert one's right to control one's body is simply to remain on the terrain of property rights: our body, they assert, belongs to the human species.

<sup>29</sup> The function of law, maintained Kropotkin (1975:34), came from the domination of one class by another. Like numerous anarchists, Kropotkin was convinced in every case of "the uselessness and hurtfulness of law" and he was horrified by the conditions and effects of penal institutions.

<sup>30</sup> It is interesting to note Goldman's (1983) determinism on this issue - arguing that because humans were thoroughly products of their environment they were thus not responsible for crime - given her individualism and her resistance to the analogous determinism of the Marxian perspective.

<sup>31</sup> Held (1989:164-5) says something similar about the congruence of Marxian and liberal values: (1) both seek the creation of the most propitious conditions for humans to develop their potentialities and express their abilities; (2) both champion protection from arbitrary political authority and coercive power; (3) both hope for the involvement of citizens in the regulation of public life; (4) both aspire to the provision for consent of individuals in the maintenance, justification, and legitimation of regulative institutions; (5) both pursue the expansion of economic opportunities in order to maximise the availability of resources.

<sup>32</sup> The Austro-Marxists turned to Kant's ethics as socialist in essence, and Kautsky - though denying that morality could exist out-of-time - assumed that freedom of expression, assembly, and artistic freedom were part of the content of socialism (Lukes, 1985). In like manner, an important Eurocommunist theme was the acceptance of respect for human rights as well-founded (Femia, 1993:110,32,34). For example, the French and Spanish Eurocommunist leaders Marchais and Carrillo guaranteed "all individual and collective freedoms", and the latter sought a socialism "which would maintain and enrich the democratic political liberties and human rights which are historic achievements of human progress" (in Femia, 1993:110,113).

<sup>33</sup> Similarly, Dolgoff (1986) asserted that "Those who refuse to live up to their responsibility to honour a voluntary agreement shall be deprived of its benefits."

<sup>34</sup> In similar vein, Bakunin (1953:139) contended that the state was "a limited collectivity which aims to take the place of humanity and which wants to impose upon the latter as a supreme goal."

<sup>35</sup> As Marx (1993:225) argued in the *Grundrisse*, "Money thereby directly and simultaneously becomes the real community, since it is the general substance of survival for all, and at the same time the social product of all. But as we have seen, in money the community is at the same time a mere abstraction, a mere external, accidental thing for the individual, and at the same time merely a means for his satisfaction as an isolated individual. The community of antiquity presupposes a quite different relation to, and on the part of, the individual. The development of money ... smashes this community."

<sup>36</sup> Similarly, Lukes (1985:27) contends that the key to comprehending Marxism's simultaneous moralism and anti-morality is the distinction between the morality of *recht* and a morality of *emancipation*.

<sup>37</sup> In his 1843 essay, *On the Jewish Question*, Marx (1994:36) lamented the isolation, egoism, and war of all against all that characterised the privatised and competitive interactions of civil society

<sup>38</sup> As Marx (1993:84) maintained in the *Grundrisse*: "Man is in the most literal sense of the word a *zoon politikon*, not only a social animal, but an animal which can develop into an individual only in society. Production by isolated individuals outside of society - something which might happen as an exception to a civilised man who by accident got into the wilderness and already dynamically possessed within himself the forces of society - is as great an absurdity as the idea of the development of language without individuals living together and talking to one another."

<sup>39</sup> "It is not the individuals who are set free by free competition; it is, rather, capital which is set free" (Marx, 1993:650).

<sup>40</sup> As Marx contended elsewhere, "the revolution ... is no short lived revolution. The present generation is like the Jews whom Moses led through the wilderness. It has not only a new world to conquer, it must go under in order to make room for men who are able to cope with a new world" (in Brenkert, 1983:182).

<sup>41</sup> Signalling the influence of the Bordigist tradition, Jean Barrot (1997:20) argues that exchange relations destroyed the primitive community: "The community disappeared on the day when its

(former) members became interested in each other only to the extent that they had a material interest in each other. Not that altruism was the driving force of the primitive community, or should be the driving force of communism. But in one case the movement of interests drives individuals together and makes them act in common, whereas in the other it individualises them and forces them to fight against one another." Communism, for Barrot (1997:32-3), means an end to mediations like value: "In communism, an external force which unifies individuals is useless".

<sup>42</sup> "Instead of reckless fighting for personal interests there must be a common action for the interests of the class community" (Pannekoek, 1940:2).

<sup>43</sup> Similarly, according to Reclus' optimistic assessment: "whether it is a question of small or large groups of the human species, it is always through solidarity, through the association of spontaneous, coordinated forces that all progress is made" (in Fleming, 1979:150).

<sup>44</sup> "The making of a human being, in short, is a collective process, a process in which both the community and the individual *participate*" (Bookchin, 1987:35).

<sup>45</sup> Engels, for instance, argued that equality was "a historical product ... anything but an eternal truth" (in Lukes, 1985:13).

<sup>46</sup> In its extreme emphasis on the free gratification of individuals, it also has much in common with Marcuse's (1973:138) utopian projections.

<sup>47</sup> Both Goldman and Vaneigem did, however, on occasions express community-oriented sentiments. Goldman (1983:65), for instance, argued that "There is no conflict between the individual and the social instincts, any more than there is between the heart and the lungs ... The individual is the heart of society ... society is the lungs", and she, at times, championed the need for a positive conception of freedom: "True liberty ... is not the negative thing of being free from something ... real freedom, true liberty is positive: it is freedom to something; it is the liberty to be, to do" (in Fotopoulos, 1997:178). And Raoul Vaneigem (1983:26) looked forward to the establishment of *real* community, putting participation alongside self-realisation as the important virtues of a changed humanity. However, such emphases are very much the minor key in the work of these two thinkers.

<sup>48</sup> For Landauer, all of history could be read as the aspiration towards a genuine community of human beings (Buber, 1971:133). Thus, socialism was the discovery of something already here, as well as being, in a sense, a return - a notion that is found in much contemporary primitivism: "The state of nature is a community of freedoms" (Perlman, 1983:7).

<sup>49</sup> Best and Kellner (1991:178) have charged that some post-modernists - Lyotard, for instance - lack any conception of community intersubjectivity and interpersonal understanding.

## Chapter Five

### The Problem of “Really Existing Socialism”, and the World Without Wages

*“What then becomes apparent is that this nationalisation can lead only to the construction of state socialism, in which the state emerges as a single vast employer and exploiter” (Pannekoek in Appel, 1990:21).*

*“Dictatorship is trampling the masses underfoot. The Revolution is dead; its spirit cries in the wilderness ... I have decided to leave Russia” (Berkman in Avrich, 1972:xi).*

*“[T]he means of life, study and pleasure shall [under communism] be free, without stint, to everyone, to use at will” (Pankhurst, 1993:122).*

#### Introduction

With the events of 1989-1991, revolutionary communism has seemingly come to an end. Those communist aspirations that opened up between the July revolution of 1830 and the February revolution of 1848 - association based on *communaute*, involving an end to class and private property (Itoh, 1995:4) - are apparently over. The liberation from capital is now nowhere on the agenda (Miliband, 1994:188). Thus it was that, around those dramatic events in Eastern Europe, distinguished Marxists such as Eric Hobsbawm (1990:40) conceded that “The long historical cycle begun in 1917 has now come to an end”. For many, the question of “really existing socialism” is now closed: communist totalitarianism was founded upon the utopian illusions of ending private property and establishing universal harmony; however, with the collapse of East European socialism and the victory of really existing liberal democracy and its free market, the radical communist idea has reached an end.

Decades of erudite and intransigent attacks on the rule of capital have patently failed, and individualism and market ideals seem if anything stronger than ever (McGowan, 1991; Kumar, 1995:171,197; Lyon, 1994:13). And Alex Callinicos (1991:95) admits that, today, few on the left are willing to believe there is an alternative to market capitalism: now, most socialism is a variety of *market socialism*. This ebb in leftist confidence is exemplified in

the much remarked upon post-modern retreat from the analysis of class and capital (Callinicos, 1989:90-1,162-3; Bertens, 1995:187; Best and Kellner, 1991:197-204; Wood, 1986; Cloud, 1994). Thus, even while they secretly smuggle concepts such as commodification into their examination of the present conjuncture, post-Marxists Laclau and Mouffe tend to marginalise class and Marxian economic analysis in their efforts to avoid essentialism and utopianism (Sandler and Diskin, 1995:179).

Perhaps, though, the retreat from class analysis and the decline of strong utopianism are but a moment of a larger aspect of the post-modern condition: the general decline of modernist grand-narratives that promised “Progress, Reason, Revolution and Emancipation” (Kumar, 1995:134). According to Bauman (1992:166), for example, “Communism was made to the measure of modern hopes and promises”. Envisaging the good society as carefully designed, highly industrialised, and rationally managed, communism took capitalism to task as a deflection from the sound goal of progress along these lines and it “promised ... to do what everyone else was doing, only faster” (Bauman, 1992:166-171). Communism posited “modern technology and modern industry under a power conscious of its purpose in advance and leaving nothing to chance. Communism was modernity in its most determined mood and most decisive posture; modernity streamlined, purified of the last shred of the chaotic, the irrational, the spontaneous, the unpredictable”. Thus, post-modernists are inclined to discover between “really existing socialism” and Western industrial capitalism a vital similarity around the “quest for a rationalised world”, as embodied in the discredited grand-narratives of modernity (Lyon, 1994:6; Kumar, 1995:134).

Given the monstrous existence and decisive collapse of “really existing socialism”, and given the contemporary post-modern sensibility, it might seem that addressing the question of the Russian Revolution is a wholly antiquarian or eccentric exercise. However, I argue that such an examination remains of immense value and importance. The Russian Revolution was and continues to be a crucial juncture in twentieth century politics. The ideological consequences of “Red October” linger in the contemporary political imagination. It has become commonsensical to assume that Russia 1917 is the point at which revolutionary communism is founded *vis a vis* reformist, evolutionary socialism. And, *it is at this moment that the terrain of international socialism - split between Bolshevism and social democracy - is defined for the rest of the century*. Relatedly, it is here that the content of socialism *vis a vis* capitalism has been specified and fixed. Any reformulated socialist project must still come to terms with the legacy of Russia 1917, with the soviets, with the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly, with the show trials and the gulag, with

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Stalinism and Brezhnevism. As Blackburn (1991:7) comments, “the anti-capitalist Left will have no credibility unless it can account for the dire experience of Communism since 1917.”

The division, which accompanied the Bolshevik Revolution, of socialism into social democratic and Leninist strands had another effect, vital with respect to the present investigation: it meant *the effective eclipse of left communism*. This submersion has had contradictory effects for left communism. It effectively reduced to political impotence all those bearers of the left communist idea. Conversely, left communism remains to a significant extent unscathed by the experience of “really existing socialism”. Unscathed in terms of principles, that is, for the reputation of all socialist thought has undoubtedly been tarnished by the Soviet moment.

I believe that the left communist treatment of “really existing socialism” yields gains in terms of both *analysis* and *vision*. It is particularly in the encounter between left communists - who, after all, saw themselves first and foremost as *revolutionaries* - and the Bolsheviks that one glimpses a utopian alternative that functions according to completely different principles than the regime established in the USSR. According to these left communist analyses, “really existing socialism” was but a *new mode of managing capitalism*. I believe that the accounts and explanations of Soviet Russia developed from within the left communist tradition remain essential to a comprehension of the politico-economic configuration and the history of “really existing socialism”.<sup>1</sup>

For many left communists, the Russian Revolution was a great source of inspiration and a signal of the commencement of world revolution. Left communist hopes and the only impressionistic notion of what had actually occurred (due to the scarcity of information) meant that it frequently took some time for a libertarian socialist critique to emerge. Also, criticising the revolution, when it was under attack from all sides, seemed, as Mattick (1978:151) has argued, an automatic movement into the camp of counter-revolution. Thus, for a number of left communists it was left to Lenin himself to disabuse them of the illusion that they were Leninists (Jacoby, 1981:62). Once disabused, however, the left communists frequently came to the most penetrating analyses and severe rejections of all that Bolshevism represented. For left communists, as Acton (1990:43) contends, “The central drama of the revolution was precisely the attempt of the Russian masses to assert control over their own lives; its tragedy was their subordination to Bolshevik domination.” The character of such Bolshevik domination meant, most crucially for left communists, that *Russia remained a part of the capitalist world*.

Through their trenchant critique of the maintenance of capitalist relations under societal forms of an ostensibly socialist content, left communism has most thoroughly extended those critical perspectives - from More, to the Free Spirit, to Winstanley, to the Utopian socialists, through to Marx - that viewed the outcomes of private property, class division, and wage labour as deeply inimical to human freedom, equality, and true popular sovereignty. With this intransigent utopian dimension, left communism posits a wholly other conception of socialism from socialist orthodoxy: the “world without wages”, a society no longer under the domination of capital, no more subjected to the “dull compulsion of the economic”. And today, though there are many signs pointing to the dominance of market individualism, it is clear that democratic and equalitarian ideals still have popular currency. For instance, withdrawing from a fully-fledged socialist positioning on questions of capital and class, post-modern leftists have often retained an at least implicit critique of bourgeois society’s absence of economic democracy.<sup>2</sup> Further, because of the abundant evidence that capitalism continues to generate poverty and waste amidst plenty, anarchic violence over resources and zones of influence, catastrophic damage to the earth, and profound unfreedom for the vast bulk of the world’s population, the utopian dimension of the world without wages still has plenty of life left in it. Vanquished by capital and then eclipsed, the demise of socialist orthodoxy, as Callinicos (1991:135) notes, spells a contradictory moment of *both danger and hope* for socialism’s future.

This chapter traces and assesses the various left communist responses to the advent of “really existing communism”. In so doing, I have in mind, first and foremost, the economic realm and the question of capitalism. In the chapter to follow on administration and government, I examine opposition to the conquest of socialism by the state; here, I consider opposition to the conquest of socialism by capital. I begin with a historical sketch of the genesis of communist autocracy, and I examine the emergence of social democratic and Leninist critiques of the new regime in Russia. I argue that these socialist analyses of Russian communism fall far short of those early and largely ignored left communist investigations. I start my exploration of these left communist analyses with a description of the high hopes left communists of the period held as to the nature and implications of the Bolshevik victory. Very often, such high hopes were self-delusions or were the first step on the path away from the conflation of statism and nationalisation with communism. I track the process of disillusionment, as the Bolsheviks, attempting to consolidate their power, attacked leftist elements within and outside of Russia. The Bolshevik regime was eventually analysed by left communists as, in essentials, *capitalist*, most often as “state capitalist”, and left communists identified a new or emerging class that effectively functioned as capitalist

ruling class. This position emerges from left communism's various sub-traditions: from the German and Dutch lefts of the 1920s; from dissident Trotskyism; from the Italian far-left; from British impossibilism; some of the Western Marxists of the Frankfurt School came to analogous positions; and, finally, the anarchist tradition contains a number of similarly-articulated theories of Russian communism. Comparing its analyses with other socialist critiques of really existing socialism, I find left communism's conclusions very persuasive: the character of "really existing communism" is best viewed as a variant of capitalism, specifically as a *capitalism of underdevelopment*. Given that both Leninism and social democracy posit simply an alternative mode of managing capitalism, left communists, with their utopian vision of a *world without wages*, have provided an important socialist alternative to capitalism.

### **"A new form of dictatorship" -**

#### **Communist Autocracy and its Orthodox Socialist Critics**

The dreadful conditions that the Russian populace faced during the First World War elicited unrest and radicalisation, one important indicator of which was the re-emergence and spread of the soviets (councils of workers, soldiers, and peasants, struggling against autocratic conditions, and organising to mitigate impending and actual chaos). During 1917, the Bolsheviks were able to pick up on and, to some extent, express this restless mood. Thus, the frustrated and war-weary Russian people, tired of fighting, suffering mass unemployment, scarcity, and harsh, authoritarian working conditions, found their aspirations and discontent articulated in the Bolshevik slogans "Peace, Land and Bread" and "All Power to the Soviets".

During the winter of 1916-17, Lenin had drawn closer to Trotsky's assessment of the tasks at hand, expressed in the idea of "permanent revolution", and he believed that Russia was beginning to exhibit the most advanced phenomena of capitalism. After April 1917, Lenin saw the bourgeois revolution as completed and Russia as ripe for socialism. By September, Lenin argued that the Bolsheviks needed to seize power (Service, 1985:121,170,212). Increasing their prestige in relation to the other socialist parties over the crisis of state, the Kornilov rebellion, the dire economic plight of the mass of Russian people, and the lack of a firm peace policy, the Bolsheviks managed to win majorities in the Petrograd and Moscow soviets.<sup>3</sup> These results were taken as legitimating an immediate blow against the old regime, before the convening of the Second All Russian Congress of Soviets. The "soviet mandate" that the Bolsheviks took these victories to signify, though, always had far more to do with

providing the new regime with an acceptable democratic image than it had to do with any genuine commitment by Lenin's party to self-liberation and libertarian socialism (Keep, 1976:309). In reality, for both Lenin and Trotsky, "power to the soviets" meant "power to the Bolshevik soviets", and "socialism" meant *a combination of the productive bases of German state capitalism with revolutionary state power exercised by the Party* (Sirianni, 1982:253). The real aims of the Bolsheviks were quickly made clear after the Second Congress of Soviets, when effective power passed not to an executive committee of soviets, but to an all-Bolshevik Council of People's Commissars (CPC).

Following the revolution, the Bolsheviks were faced with the *fait accompli* of self-management, as workers and peasants, who overwhelmingly supported the idea of a soviet government, took seriously the notion that the productive machinery or the land actually belonged to them (Rachleff, 1976:131; Schapiro, 1977). That this assumption was mistaken was soon made clear, as the Bolsheviks, seeking power for themselves, moved to undermine mass working class organisations such as the soviets and the factory councils. Local soviets were increasingly subject to central and regional control, and intimidation and manipulation became commonplace (Schapiro, 1977). For example, elections to the soviets that put non-Bolshevik socialist forces in a majority might be ruled invalid and re-election called for; sometimes the soviet might even be dispersed (Service, 1985:9). In order to secure victory in such elections, harassment, an insistence on open voting, the amalgamation of soviets, and tampering with electoral rules and the franchise were all pursued. After 1921, no non-Bolshevik socialist representation was tolerated in the soviets (Pipes, 1994; Schapiro, 1977; Carr, 1979). Thus, in the constitution of July 1918, the soviets were defined as "the local organs of the state", and the Eighth Party Congress of March 1919 urged the "complete dominance [of the CP] in the state organisations of today - the soviets" and "undivided domination in the soviets, and the practical control over their entire work" (in Schapiro, 1977). Therefore, although the CPC was formally responsible to the soviet executive, of 480 decrees passed by the CPC in the first years of the revolution, only 68 went to the executive. And, by the Spring of 1919, the soviet executive had lost all power to the Bolsheviks (Keep, 1976:309; Anweiler, 1967:226; White, 1994:234). For the Bolsheviks, it was after all the party that was to rule Russia: "The dictatorship of the proletariat is impossible except through the Communist Party" (Lenin in Sirianni, 1982).

For the Bolsheviks, workers' organisations were to function as adjuncts of the state, and workers' participation was at best, as Sirianni (1990:257) has argued, "a matter of accounting and checking on the fulfilment of decisions made by others". Thus, by 1918,

Lenin was arguing for the retention of the structure of capitalist administration as long as possible against the ideal of workers' control, which he viewed as inefficient and as the cause of industrial chaos (Daniels, 1965:83).<sup>4</sup> In this period, Lenin chided the workers of Russia for their lack of discipline, spoke of the establishment of *state capitalism*, and promised draconian measures for idlers, hooligans, thieves, and disrupters (Keep, 1976:271).<sup>5</sup> He also argued for "one-man management", and enthused over piecework and the Taylor system: "We must organise in Russia a study and teaching of the Taylor system and systematically try it out and adapt it to our own ends" (in Schechter, 1994:16). In like manner, Trotsky viewed the militarisation and statification of labour as the way in which Soviet Russia might overcome its economic problems: "The young socialist state requires trade unions, not for a struggle for better conditions of labour ... but to organise the working class for the ends of production, to educate, discipline ... to exercise their authority hand in hand with the state in order to lead the workers into the framework of a single economic plan" (in Daniels, 1965:121).

Increasingly, the Bolsheviks were compelled to resort to force in order to maintain their rule. The Constituent Assembly was forcibly dispersed in 1918 after the Bolsheviks suffered a grave electoral defeat, and, without legal authority from the CPC, nor any reference to the executive committee of the Congress of Soviets, a security police, the CHEKA, was formed (Service, 1985:292). In the first years of the revolution, the CHEKA executed thousands of enemies of the new regime and conducted a campaign of terror and harassment against other socialist parties, so that, by Lenin's death, all non-Bolshevik socialist parties were effectively destroyed (Schapiro, 1977; Broido, 1987:x). The increasing Bolshevik attacks on leftist elements within Russia - from the Workers' Opposition to the Mahknovista - peaked with the bloody suppression of the Kronstadt rebellion in 1921.

The new regime soon had its socialist critics. A number of social democrats and Leninists came to reject that the Bolshevik regime was a good example of a socialist society. These socialists variously pointed to the lack of freedom and socialist democracy, the arbitrary exercise of state authority, and the emergence of a new form of domination within Russia. While these theories frequently made valid and important criticisms of the Russian regime, they all fall short of the analyses developed by left communists.

According to Salvadori (1979:16) and Walicki (1995:227), Karl Kautsky was the originator of the "new class thesis". Kautsky waited a year before responding in print to the Bolshevik revolution (Kautsky, 1983:97). In his *Dictatorship of the Proletariat* (written in 1918),

Kautsky made a plea for democracy in Russia, to which Lenin responded with *The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky*. Kautsky attacked again with his *Terrorism and Communism*, to which Trotsky replied with a book of the same name (Kautsky, 1994:205). For Kautsky, Russia's backwardness made socialism an impossibility, and the revolution could only be "a grandiose attempt to leap over necessary phases of development and to eliminate them by decree" (in Lukes, 1985:106).<sup>6</sup> Socialism, Kautsky argued, required a proletariat interested in societal transformation, working class numerical strength, and large scale industry. Russia's economic and political backwardness made the country unsuitable for socialism and drove socialists to methods of utopianism and dictatorship (Kautsky, 1946:67). Since the revolution could not possibly be socialist, said Kautsky, it must be *bourgeois* (Kautsky, 1994:218). In his *Terrorism and Communism*, Kautsky contended that the Bolshevik regime consisted of a bureaucratic dictatorship (politically) and state capitalism (economically). Kautsky asserted that, as in the French Revolution, a new class had arisen (Salvadori, 1979:289; Kautsky, 1946:99):<sup>7</sup> "The absolute power of the workers' councils has been transformed into the much more absolute power of a new bureaucracy ... This bureaucracy represents the third and highest of the three classes - the new ruling class" (in Salvadori, 1979:271). Not that Kautsky advocated rule by the soviets; he did not. For Kautsky, the soviets represented only part of the population, and therefore they should not govern (Kautsky, 1994:213). Instead, the Bolsheviks should have submitted to the will of the majority, embodied in the Constituent Assembly and a resulting socialist coalition government (Kautsky, 1946:59). Here, as at all times for Kautsky (1983:100,113,123), *democracy* was the essential component of socialism, and Kautsky's optimism regarding the evolutionary certainty of such democracy led him to see the setback as temporary: both Bolshevism and fascism were bound to collapse (Salvadori, 1979:300).

It was therefore not the lack of socialist relations of production or the continuing existence of state and capital that Kautsky criticised. Instead, what was vital was the *lack of parliamentary democracy* - which, one could argue, is a limited democracy in contrast to that promised by socialism's abolition of the domination of capital.<sup>8</sup> In fact, it seems clear that neither Bolshevism nor social democracy ever managed to break from the postulates of capitalism, private property, and the domination over society by the economic sphere. In the social democratic case, for instance, at the founding congress of the Second International, an inscription on a banner above the rostrum announced the International's central aim as: "Political and Economic Expropriation of the Capitalist Class - Nationalisation of the Means of Production" (in Brauntal, 1966:197). Such nationalisation meant not only the continuing centrality of the state, but also the continuing domination of exchange value. Thus it was

that Bebel spoke of the abolition of value, but not of the abolition of social regulation according to the average labour time socially necessary for the production of goods, the latter being, as Barrot and Authier (n.d:1) note, *the very principle of value*. Likewise, Kautsky envisaged retaining prices and wages, calling for the socialisation of money capital, and insisting that: “Money is the simplest means known up to the present time which makes it possible in as complicated a mechanism as that of the modern productive process ... to secure the circulation of products and their distribution to the individual members of society ... As a means to such circulation money will be found indispensable until something better is discovered” (Barrot and Authier, n.d:1; Kautsky, 1910:116).<sup>9</sup> In similar fashion, Bernstein believed that commodity exchange would continue, along with the state and bourgeois politics, into the foreseeable future (Harding, 1996:63). And Jaures did not reject the persistence of money and exchange into the socialist society: socialism “will be subject to the same fundamental laws as the capitalist order ... [the difference is that] all the labour furnished by the workers will yield them pay” (in Landauer, 1976b:1605). Within social democracy (and later, in Eurocommunism), these Second International conceptions evolved into the “social capitalism” of the post-war Keynesian compromise (Sassoon, 1996). Under such “social capitalism”, the most degrading and alienating effects of capitalism are seen as being mitigated or reformed to the margins by an active *political* intervention, and economic democracy is understood as the minimisation of socio-economic differences through state redistribution (Fotopoulos, 1997:239).

Because of the early work done by left communists in the years immediately following the Russian Revolution (see sections below), Richard Gombin’s (1975:31) claim that it was Trotskyism that opened a breach in the structure of world communism - providing a way through for every radical critique of Stalinism - is quite incorrect. It *is* true, however, that Trotsky’s dispute with Stalin provided the focus for and seeds of a number of socialist analyses of the nature of the USSR.

Forced into opposition in the 1920s, Trotsky argued for changes in the party apparatus, and he developed the idea of an emerging Russian “Thermidor”, with the peasantry as social base and with the emergence of a new ruling class as final possible outcome (Bellis, 1979:57-9). In 1935, Trotsky (1963:xiii) contended that, although a bureaucracy had broken up the Bolshevik party and the soviets, the regime still indicated how great were the economic possibilities of the nationalisation of the means of production. Because of its social basis, the Russian regime was better than fascism: “this bureaucracy is still fulfilling a progressive historical task, and has so far a right to the support of the workers of the world”

(Trotsky, 1963:xiv). In *The Revolution Betrayed*, Trotsky (1972:47,54) presented the soviet regime as in transition between capitalism and socialism. The Russian state had a dual character: (1) socialist - it defended social property in the means of production; (2) bourgeois - distribution was organised according to capitalist measures of value. On the one hand, then, "The nationalisation of the land, the means of industrial production, transport and exchange, together with the monopoly of foreign trade, constitute the basis of the soviet social structure", and these relations define Russia as a proletarian state (Trotsky, 1972:248). On the other hand, Trotsky variously spoke of a "Kremlin oligarchy", "a new aristocracy", and a bureaucratic "caste", which was increasingly dominating the masses (Trotsky, 1936:10; 1972:59; Callinicos, 1990:14). This bureaucracy, said Trotsky, engaged in *social parasitism* rather than class exploitation (Knei Paz, 1979:389). The bureaucracy had not yet created social supports for its domination in the form of special types of property; it did not have stocks or bonds and could not transmit its wealth to its heirs as a right - in short, *it was not a class* (Trotsky, 1972:249). Thus, Trotsky rejected the analysis of Russia as *capitalist*. When production is located in state regulation as opposed to free competition, when the means of production belong not to the capitalist class but are concentrated in the state and no private capital exists, it makes no sense, argued Trotsky, to speak of capitalism (Knei Paz, 1979:386; Trotsky, 1972:248).

Just as in 1921 Lenin had characterised Russia as "a workers' state with a *bureaucratic distortion*", so too, in his *Transitional Programme*, Trotsky assessed Russia as a "degenerated workers' state" (in Service 1985:163; Beilharz, 1987:68). According to Trotsky, "The basis of bureaucratic rule is the poverty of society in objects of consumption with the resulting struggle of each against all. When there are enough goods in the state the purchasers can come whenever they want to. When there are little goods the purchasers are compelled to stand in line. When the lines are very long, it is necessary to appoint a policeman to keep order. Such is the starting point of the power of the Soviet bureaucracy" (in McLellan, 1979:138). This bureaucratic degeneration, though, did not, as I have said, mean that capitalism had been established or that Russia should be abandoned by socialists: what was needed, Trotsky maintained, was a *political* rather than a social revolution (Knei Paz, 1979:415).

Trotsky's argumentative line is faithfully continued by thinkers like Ernest Mandel (1968:565), who argues that the Soviet Union is in transition between capitalism and socialism.<sup>10</sup> However, in the theories of dissident Trotskyists, Brunno Rizzi,<sup>11</sup> Max Schachtman, and James Burnham,<sup>12</sup> more penetrating questions are posed of Russia's

socialism, and the increasing place of the state and bureaucratisation in the world is accented. For all three thinkers, the new Soviet structure entailed exploitative relations (Rizzi, 1985:48; Burnham, 1941:71,108,123,137; Binstock, 1971:9). According to Schachtman (1962:32) - "The Stalinist bureaucracy in power is a new ruling, exploitative class. Its social system is a new system of totalitarian exploitation and oppression, not capitalist and yet having nothing in common with socialism." For Schachtman (1962:62), the political rule of the working class ended (with the great purges) somewhere between 1933 and 1936, at which time the proletariat finally lost all mastery of the state. Schachtman's analysis thus still centred on control of the political apparatus, and he therefore refused to name Russia capitalist: "The norm of capitalism is the private ownership of capital" (in Callinicos, 1991:56). Furthermore, this "bureaucratic collectivism" was not a step towards capitalism, but instead indicated the decay of capitalism (Schachtman, 1962:59,306). Burnham (1941:220-1), meanwhile, maintained that the Russian Revolution was not a socialist transformation; rather, it was a managerial revolution, with Leninism-Stalinism as the legitimating ideology of a new ruling class.<sup>13</sup> Soon, both Schachtman and Burnham rejected communism completely, the former siding against it as a Cold War warrior and supporting America's interventions against Cuba and Vietnam (Bellis, 1979:111).

In a rather different development from within the Trotskyist tradition, Tony Cliff (Ygael Gluckstein) broke with Trotsky's analysis in the late 1940s and argued that the regime in Russia was "state capitalist". For Cliff, the quantitative changes in Russia became qualitative around 1928-9 (with the first five year plan), and the bureaucrats became a ruling class, exploiting the working class and seeking rapid capital accumulation (Cliff, 1988:164; Harman, 1988:17).<sup>14</sup>

The Trotskyite analysis of the USSR as a transitional society and its conceptualisations of both capitalism and socialism are open to substantial criticism. Trotsky and Trotskyists, like Lenin and like social democrats, equate socialism with nationalisation rather than with socialisation, and they emphasise, above all, the narrowly *political* moment of revolution. In *The Revolution Betrayed*, for instance, Trotsky asserted that "The nationalisation of the land, the means of industrial production, transport, and exchange, together with the monopoly of foreign trade, constitutes the basis of the Soviet social structure. Through these relations, established by the proletarian revolution, the nature of the Soviet Union as a proletarian state is for us basically defined" (in Cliff, 1955:133). Here, there is no conception of socialism as an economic democracy, a society free from waged labour and capital - quite the reverse. Thus, according to Trotsky (1963:133,175), as human beings are

fundamentally lazy creatures and because the forces of production must be increased as quickly as possible, compulsory labour service under communism is a necessity and the socialist state must use the methods worked out by capitalism (Trotsky, 1972:46,53).<sup>15</sup> In fact, just as the transitional phase means, paradoxically, an increase in the size of the state and the scope of its activities, so too the transitional epoch will mean an extraordinary extension of trade, before the state can turn into a semi-state and money can lose its magical power (Trotsky, 1972:65,67).

It is important to note that the Trotskyist tradition operates with a conception of capitalism and class quite other than a Marxian one. While the fact of deviation is itself unproblematic, Trotskyists have claimed to be developing a Marxian analysis. Furthermore, I indeed agree that a Marxian conceptualisation of the content of capitalism is still useful. In opposition to Marxian postulates, the Trotskyist analysis has steadfastly ignored the relations of production of the new Russian social formation. For Trotskyists, a societal configuration that displayed an accumulation of capital, generalised production and circulation of commodities, and waged labour might still be judged non-capitalist. Thus, Mandel could assert that Russia did “not display any of the fundamental aspects of capitalist economy”, and he believed that Russia was exempt from the fluctuations in the world economy (Lane, 1976:36; Mandel, 1968:561-2). In a similar vein, Cliff’s notion of socialism is indistinguishable, as Buick and Crump (1986) note, from what he defines as state capitalism.<sup>16</sup> Their conceptualisations of socialism and capitalism have resulted in the invention by Trotskyists of a number of transitional phases and the positing of a series of thoroughly arbitrary cut-off points at which degeneration is said to occur. It has also meant, importantly, that when Trotskyists oppose the thesis that Russia is state capitalist their objections are misdirected – defining capitalism to mean solely capital accumulation by private capitalist enterprises. In contrast, I argue that what is vital is that, whether or not they had legal ownership of the means of production, the Communist Party hierarchy in the countries of “really existing socialism” had *effective ownership and control* by virtue of their position in the administrative apparatus. Finally, when Trotskyists like Cliff (1955) accept the designation “state capitalist”, in their attempt to distinguish Russian from Western capitalism, their analyses are marred by erroneous and thoroughly un-Marxian arguments (such as Cliff’s contention that under liberal capitalism workers are somehow endowed with a meaningful choice of work) and grave historical errors that, for example, deny the existence prior to Stalin of the strangulation of the soviets, benefits for high officials, and state domination over industry.<sup>17</sup>

In summary, then, I argue that the Trotskyist analysis of Russia suffers from faulty conceptualisation (of classes, of capitalism). It idealises a golden period of early post-revolutionary society, an idealisation that results in numerous historical errors. Furthermore, Trotskyist theories are importantly inadequate in designating the point at which degeneration begins, and, most importantly, Trotskyists display *an understanding of socialism that never adequately distinguishes it from capitalism*.<sup>18</sup>

Having examined the social democratic and Trotskyist approaches to the Russian Revolution, I shall begin to consider left communist analyses of “really existing socialism”, analyses that, I believe, lay a better investigative foundation than those previously explored attempts, as well as providing for a powerful utopian vision of post-capitalist social life.

### **“How not to impose communism” -**

#### **Initial Enthusiasm and Growing Disillusionment**

The early response of left communists to the Russian revolution was often one of elation and of rather uncritical support for the Bolsheviks. Thus Ruhle (1981:5) spoke of his “boundless sympathy” towards Russia, Aldred and Korsch<sup>19</sup> maintained their support of the Bolsheviks for a lengthy period, and Bordiga set aside his abstentionism to establish a unified Italian Communist Party. Even anarchists such as Kropotkin, Sorel, Berkman, Fabbri, Monatte, and activists from the CGT and the CNT praised the revolution.<sup>20</sup> In good part, this support is attributable to the lack of information emanating from Russia: Pankhurst’s group, for example, thought that the Russian Revolution had given the working class control of state power through the soviets, and Luxemburg did not realise that the Bolsheviks were a minority in the country (Shipway, 1988:39; Nettle, 1969:430). This support was also strengthened by an acceptance of Lenin’s “libertarian” texts as a faithful account of the practical achievements of the revolution and of the aspirations of the Bolsheviks. For instance, the Spanish syndicalist leader, Maurin, saw *The State and Revolution* as “the doctrinal bridge that linked Bolshevism with syndicalism and anarchism” (in Thorpe, 1990:241). Furthermore, a revolution of an ostensibly socialist nature could not help but impress thinkers who had been so disappointed by working class acquiescence in the war and revolted by the bureaucratic reformism and patriotism of social democracy.

Even after their break with Leninism, the radical self-emancipatory tendencies of the Russian working class remained an inspiration for leftists: “For us, the glorious tradition of the Russian Revolution consists in that, in the first explosions of 1905 and 1917, it had been

the first to develop and show to the workers of the entire world the organisational form of their autonomous revolutionary activity ... From this experience, confirmed later on, on a lesser level, in Germany, we have based our ideas on the forms of mass action which are appropriate for the working class and which it must apply for its own liberation” (Pannekoek in Rachleff, 1976:106). Such was the elation that, at the time, both Pannekoek and Pankhurst approved of the dispersal of the Constituent Assembly, and, in his *Reply to Comrade Lenin*, Gorter came down against the Kronstadt insurgents (Shipway, 1988:4; Bricanier, 1978:15). One final and important point must be made with respect to the early left communist devotion to Russia: to an extent the initial enthusiasm was a reflection of the degree to which the left communists had not been able to break with the old conceptions of the Second International tradition. Pannekoek, Gorter, and Luxemburg had all worked closely with Lenin from 1914-19 (or even earlier in Luxemburg’s case), and they had expressed few doubts about the Bolsheviks, just as they had also expressed few doubts about Kautsky and the Second International (Gerber, 1988:4). The decisive break with these old conceptions could not yet be made. It was the emerging disillusionment with the Russian Revolution that made this separation possible.

As hope of tangible support for the Russian Revolution - in the guise of a revolutionary upheaval in Western Europe - faded, the Bolsheviks looked to consolidate their power. This attempt at consolidation is visible in the Comintern’s twenty-one conditions and in the progressive transformation of the International into an instrument of the Russian State. It is also evident in Lenin’s *“Left” communism: An Infantile Disorder*. Lenin attacked those leftist elements in Germany, Holland, and Italy – among them, Pankhurst, Pannekoek, and Bordiga - who had refused to participate in trade unions and in parliamentary elections. One must be where the masses are, maintained Lenin, prescribing as remedy for this disorder the watchword “into parliaments and the trade unions”. If, as Gerber (1989:142) asserts, Leninism’s essence was not clear until *“Left” Communism*, from this point onwards, left communists increasingly came to see the new regime as involving statist and authoritarian methods of administration, the Bolshevisation of international socialism, and the continuance of capitalism.

The authoritarianism of the Bolsheviks soon became a major concern of both Marxian and anarchist leftists. Feeling reinvigorated by the revolution, Luxemburg (1970:391) nonetheless became increasingly distressed at the undemocratic methods of terror and decree utilised by the Bolsheviks: “The unheard of acts of violence and cruelties of the Bolsheviks do not let me sleep” (in Ryder, 1967:227). For Luxemburg (1970:387), the

elimination of democracy by the Russian communists was “worse than the disease it is supposed to cure; for it stops up the very living source from which alone can come the correction of all the innate shortcomings of social institutions. That source is the active, untrammelled, energetic political life of the broadest masses of the people.” Similarly, journeying through Russia in September 1920, Otto Ruhle (1920:2) complained of the Bolsheviks’ terrorism, authoritarianism, and vanguardist proclivities, which would, he insisted, strangle proletarian initiative and combativeness. For Ruhle, the truth was that real power now lay “with the bureaucracy, the deadly enemy of the council system” (in Smart, 1978:37). Likewise, many anarchists, who had at first put to one side their doctrinal disagreements with the Marxian Bolsheviks in the name of solidarity, began criticising the communists’ methods. Speaking shortly before his death, Kropotkin mused: “It seems to me that this attempt to build a communist republic on the basis of a strongly centralised state, under the iron law of the dictatorship of one party, has ended in a terrible fiasco. Russia teaches us how not to impose communism” (in Guerin, 1970:106). Travelling through Russia in 1921, Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman became increasingly disillusioned and alarmed at the weight of bureaucratic privilege, the repression of socialists and striking workers, and the use of forced labour (Shulman, 1983:31). Having witnessed the arrests of anarchists, the dispersal of Mahkno’s army, the destruction of the soviets, and - the final straw - the suppression of the Kronstadt rebellion, Berkman (1989:241,323-336) noted in his diary: “Dictatorship is trampling the masses underfoot. The revolution is dead; its spirit cries in the wilderness ... I have decided to leave Russia” (in Avrich, 1972:xi).<sup>21</sup>

As if to confirm Luxemburg’s early fears, left communists increasingly came into conflict with the Bolshevised International. Gorter replied to Lenin’s “*Left*” *Communism* with his *Open Letter to Comrade Lenin*, declaring Bolshevik tactics “excellent” but situationally-specific.<sup>22</sup> Similarly, Korsch denounced the “Red Imperialism” of the International, and Ruhle (1920:2; Smart, 1978:37) insisted that the “Russian revolution isn’t the German revolution”.<sup>23</sup> And when the KAPD refused to merge with the KPD in 1921 as the Third International had ordered, it was expelled from the CI (Gerber, 1989:147). Relatedly, Bordiga, though seeing himself as faithful to the creed of Leninism, rejected the Bolshevisation of the Comintern. For Bordiga, Russia was an exception to the historical rule, and the ideological terror and methods of humiliation used by the CI were contrary to the socialist urge<sup>24</sup> (Sassoon, 1980:64; Camatte, 1972:223). From 1923-6, such intransigence resulted in Bordiga’s loss of control of the PCI to the group around Antonio Gramsci.

Another important expression of the Bolsheviks' attempted consolidation of power was the repression of socialist opposition within Russia. As the growing authoritarianism of the Bolsheviks became evident, some left communists began to look towards (or, years later, looked back at) these oppositional movements as the true continuation of the animating revolutionary spirit of the Russian workers and as containing the seeds of the critique of Bolshevik Russia as *no break from capitalism*.

In the various early Russian critiques and analyses of the Bolsheviks - of the Left Communists (see page 33), the Democratic Centralists, the Workers' Opposition, and the Kronstadt rebels, libertarian socialist stirrings against the Bolsheviks are in evidence. These groups rejected the Bolsheviks' compromises before the Germans, their statism, authoritarianism, and substitutionism, the repression of opposition, the lack of freedom and democracy in the Party and in the soviets, the Bolsheviks' contempt for democracy and for the working class, and, most importantly in the context of this chapter, *the developing state capitalism within Russia*.<sup>25</sup> For these Russian communists, the revolution was in danger: "In the event of a rejection of active proletarian politics, the conquests of the workers' and peasants' revolution will start to coagulate into a system of state capitalism and petty-bourgeois economic relations" (Left Communists in Kowalski, 1997:194). Such a state capitalism, which many Russian socialists saw embodied most fully in the New Economic Policy (NEP), would mean a "new slavery" or a "New Exploitation of the Proletariat" (Daniels, 1960:204,206; Fernandez, 1997:86). And this exploitation was, insisted the Workers' Truth Group, generating a "new bourgeoisie (i.e., the responsible functionaries, plant directors, heads of trusts, chairmen of executive committees, etc.)", who, along with the NEP-men, lived in luxury at the expense of workers' democracy (Daniels, 1960:218,220).

Though they were soon isolated and defeated, one can detect in these early Russian leftist circles the emergence of attempts at a systematic understanding and critique of the developing social relations. These criticisms prefigured or coincided with the analyses arrived at by left communists outside Russia. As information filtered back from Russia and as a Russian-dominated Comintern increasingly treated communist groupings elsewhere as adjuncts to the Soviet state, those on the left were forced to reconsider their initially enthusiastic stance. Faced with a choice on the Russian question, left communists came to view Russia as *another form of capitalism*. That is, within Russia, waged-labour, the accumulation of commodities, alienation, state domination in the interests of capital accumulation, hierarchical relations in the work-place, etc. remained in evidence.

**“The last garb donned by a bourgeois ideology” -  
Leninism as Capitalism**

In the left communist analysis of the Russian Revolution, socialism (socialisation) is distinguished from state-administered capitalism (nationalisation). As early as the late nineteenth century, Morris' Socialist League had laid the basis of such a distinction: “No better solution would be that of state socialism ... whose aim it would be to make concessions to the working class while leaving the present system of capital and wages still in operation” (in Coleman, 1984:177). Similarly, in 1905 the Italian syndicalist Labriola asserted that “the substitution of state ownership for private ownership does not abolish the capitalist system of production ... the state bureaucracy replaces the capitalist and the worker remains a wage earner” (in Schecter, 1994:35). Having argued as early as 1908 that the historical task of the SPD was to “reorganise capitalism on a new foundation”, Pannekoek declared in 1919 that nationalisation would amount to nothing more than the emergence of the state “as a single vast employer and exploiter” (in Appel, 1990:21; Boggs, 1995:51). In like manner, Goldman (1983:406) asserted that: “In Russia land and machinery are not socialised but *nationalised*”; “when a thing is socialised, every individual has free access to it and may use it without interference from anyone.”

Nationalisation, for left communists, meant no real break from the essentials of a capitalist social order. In this vein, Ruhle (1981:19) developed an interpretation of the Russian Revolution as a wholly capitalist affair: “The dictatorship of the party is commissar-despotism, is state capitalism”.<sup>26</sup> A doctrine wholly aimed at solving the national problem,<sup>27</sup> Bolshevism resulted in a social structure that was of a bourgeois type. Stalinism, for Ruhle (1981), was the logical completion of the regime of Lenin, and Russia's capitalist development was inevitable given Russia's backwardness.

Also writing from within the Dutch/German left tradition, Gorter and, in particular, Pannekoek generated analyses of the Russian Revolution as a form of capitalism.<sup>28</sup> Very early on, Pannekoek (1948:75) was pointing to the Bolshevik state officials as a new ruling class who had disposal over the product of collective labour and who extracted surplus value from the exploited worker. The Russian revolution, said Pannekoek in 1921, was state capitalist (Shipway, 1987:207).<sup>29</sup> *1917 was a bourgeois revolution*: “the workers [in Russia] are no more masters of the means of production than in Western capitalism. They receive wages and are exploited by the state as the only mammoth capitalist” (in Aronowitz, 1974:177).<sup>30</sup> Even late in life, though, Pannekoek still cherished the example of militant

proletarian autonomy - embodied in the soviets - that the Russian Revolution had signified; and yet, Pannekoek's attempt to distance socialism from the Russian Revolution on the basis of historical necessity seems to deny or lessen the achievements of the 1917 revolution.

Writing of the Russian Revolution in 1940, Pannekoek (1940:2) insisted that "The proletarian revolution can be the result only of the highest development of capitalism." As Marx (1987:390) had declared in the *Critique of Political Economy*: "No social order ever disappears before all the productive forces, for which there is room in it, have been developed; and new, higher relations of production never appear before the material conditions of their existence have matured in the womb of the old society." Russia, then, could *not* have experienced a communist revolution. Pannekoek (1940:6) contended that the Bolsheviks "had to play in Russia the same role that in the West the middle class, the bourgeoisie, had played: to develop the country by industrialisation from primitive conditions to high productivity." Or, as the following theses from *International Council Correspondence* (a Pannekoek-inspired council communist journal) state: "The economic task of the Russian Revolution was, first, the setting aside of the concealed agrarian feudal system and its continued exploitation of the peasant as serfs, together with the industrialisation of agriculture, placing it on the plane of modern commodity production; secondly, to make possible the unrestricted creation of a class of really 'free labourers', liberating industrial development from all the feudal fetters. Essentially, the tasks of the bourgeois revolution"; politically, "the tasks confronting the Russian Revolution were: the destruction of absolutism, the abolition of the feudal nobility as the first estate, and the creation of a political constitution and an administrative apparatus which would secure politically the fulfilment of the economic task of the Revolution. The political tasks of the Russian Revolution were, therefore, quite in accord with its economic suppositions: the tasks of the bourgeois revolution" (in ICC, n.d.c:5). Therefore, for this revolutionary Dutch group, "It was not Lenin who conducted the revolution, but the revolution conducted him" (in Rachleff, 1976:185).

In his *Lenin as Philosopher*, Pannekoek (1948) attempted to show that Leninism was the theoretico-philosophical expression of a purely bourgeois revolution. For Pannekoek, Lenin's *Materialism and Empiriocriticism* not only displayed a profound misunderstanding of the philosophers that the Bolshevik leader dealt with, but it also exhibited "middle class materialism". This middle class materialism stood in a position of theoretical hostility to "historical materialism". Argued Pannekoek (1948:14): "The struggle of a new class for power in state and society is at the same time always a spiritual struggle for a new world

view.” The spiritual fight of a bourgeois revolution is primarily a fight against the religious world view based on the natural sciences. This is Lenin’s fight. Lenin accepted middle class materialism’s understanding of the natural sciences; he viewed our sensations as copying and reflecting independent matter. In contrast, historical materialism “lays bare the specific evolutionary laws of human society and shows the interaction between ideas and society” (Pannekoek, 1948:18,60). Pannekoek (1948:71) concluded that Lenin’s Marxism was “nothing but a legend.” The break between Leninism and communism was thus complete. And yet a tension remained in this account (not to mention the issue of Pannekoek’s ignorance of Lenin’s turn back to Hegel in his *Philosophical Notebooks*). Pannekoek wanted both to embrace aspects of the revolution and to write the Russian failure off as historically inevitable. This tension surfaced in a similar way with Paul Mattick (1978:viii,xi),<sup>31</sup> who advanced explanations of the state capitalist outcome in Russia based on: (1) isolation and the absence of general revolution in the West; (2) Russia’s backwardness and the necessity for an underdeveloped country of passing through an advanced capitalist phase; (3) the retarding influence of Bolshevik vanguardism. It is evident that any development of the left communist analysis will have to confront the problem of determinism and necessity and face the question of what can and cannot be salvaged and generalised from the Russian Revolution.

The anarchist tradition has provided prominent and important - though, as Acton (1992:390) points out, overly-polemical - histories of the Revolution and critiques of the Bolsheviks. Voline, Berkman, Maximov, and Arshinov surveyed the authoritarian elitism of the Bolsheviks and insisted on the persistence of exploitation and privilege. For a number of these anarchists, Marx’s theoretical system led quite directly to the party despotism and state capitalism of Russia under the Bolsheviks. Many anarchists saw as particularly prescient Bakunin’s predictions of a new scientific-political estate and Landauer’s (1978:70) assertion that the Marxist’s equation of socialism with government would lead to “state capitalism”. Contemporary anarchist John Clark (1984:106,111) asserts, for example, that Marx advocated a system of state capitalism, and that Bolshevik enthusiasm for methods such as Taylorism are “Typically Marxist”. There is undoubtedly evidence that Marx was unable to make a decisive break from capitalist postulates like productionism, and, as Korsch pointed out, Marx’s work was infected by Jacobinist and Blanquist elements (Kellner, 1977:242). However, these anarchist explanations of the Bolshevik regime - being far too one-sided and idealist - are not adequate. That is, anarchists have mis-read Marx, and they have tried to explain historical events and meta-historical trends solely by factors such as the force of ideas and the bad faith of leaders.

The disillusionment with the Russian Revolution expressed by the anarchists Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman elicited from them a sharp negative appraisal of the Bolshevik regime. “Soviet Russia, it must now be obvious”, insisted Goldman (1983:420), “is an absolute despotism politically and the crassest form of state capitalism economically.” Berkman had come to this conclusion as early as 1922, seeing in the Russian system “a combination of state and private capitalism” (Crump, 1987:47).<sup>32</sup> However, on his arrival in Russia in 1919, Berkman (1989:89) believed that capitalism had been “uprooted”, and he initially interpreted the NEP as the *introduction* of capitalism into Russia, an interpretation that indicates that Berkman was, at least at the time, working with rather hazy conceptions of both capitalism and communism.

For both Goldman and Berkman, a Marxian-type explanation of Russia’s fate as a necessary and objective passage through capitalism was unconscionable. The Russian masses, argued Berkman (1972:167), were not too backward at all: they destroyed capitalism and defeated Tsarism. Moreover, said Goldman (1983:384), the popularity of the slogan “All Power to the Soviets” was proof of Russia’s “ripeness” for revolution. Goldman (1983:383) asserted that revolution was not a matter of technical development but of “the psychology of the masses at a given period”, and she claimed that this psychology was present during the Russian Revolution. Despite all this, however, Goldman (1983:392) argued that the defeat was ultimately *cultural*. The reasons for defeat were to be found in the masses’ naïve faith in the power of the party and the power of the government - these being, surely, a matter of the inadequate “psychology” of the masses. So, in Goldman’s (1983:398) reading of the Russian situation, the defeat of the revolution was not only a result of the Bolsheviks with the Marxist state idea, but also of the underdevelopment of the people’s aspirations.

Following on from this obvious antinomy in Goldman’s thinking, how did left communists explain the advent of capitalism in Russia? In fact, the response on the Marxian side of left communism often seems close to that of Kautsky. Historically, it was not the Bolsheviks that were the movers; rather, the Bolsheviks were the *moved* (Rachleff, 1976:185). As Ruhle (n.d.a:13) maintained, from the beginning the Russian Revolution could only have been bourgeois. The Bolsheviks illegitimately sought to skip “a whole phase of history” (Ruhle), and Russia’s “objective unreadiness” (Mattick, 1978:xi) meant that the Revolution was only “the last in the long line of the great bourgeois revolutions of Europe” (Ruhle in Shipway, 1987:107), a “government of development” (Negri, 1994:263), or a “reflection of economic underdevelopment” (Debord, 1983). Thus, it would seem that, for many left communists, history will not allow anyone to push into line.

Some critics of this view have pointed out that in 1917 Russia was the fifth largest industrial power in the world, possessing in the Putilov works the world's biggest factory (ICC. n.d.a:3). In terms of subjective development, socialist consciousness was widespread, and slogans like "All Power to the Soviets" were indeed extremely popular. Anarchistic left communists, as I have indicated, have rejected the determinism of the Marxian approach, and they have located Russia's failure, first-and-foremost, in the ideas and practice of the Bolsheviks. But for the retarding influence of Marxian doctrine, Russia could, then, have developed communism. Both with their equations of state capitalism with socialism and in their elitist substitutionism the Bolsheviks stifled the revolution. And yet, even here, anarchists often concede that the mass of people were unable to establish anything better or to reject Bolshevik leadership. As Acton (1992:397) points out, libertarian socialists have often admitted that the mass of people lacked experience, established organisations, and ideological clarity. The void left by the weakly-led and overlapping workers' institutions was filled by the flexible, experienced, and well-organised Bolsheviks (Acton, 1992:399). Both the weaknesses of the popular organisations and the Bolshevik conceptions and actions towards the tasks ahead were important. The Bolsheviks, of course, had no conception of libertarian communism. Most characteristic of Lenin's thought during this period, as Acton (1992:400) has pointed out, was his belief in the level of development of the forces of production as an indicator of socialism, an increasing obsession with managerial and technical authority, and a low regard for the capacity of ordinary people. The Bolsheviks undermined all possibilities for a more democratic alternative to the old regime. Their actions, however, were in no sense historically necessary: a Constituent Assembly and a coalition socialist government were possibilities and may indeed have meant a less obnoxious outcome for the mass of Russian people. And yet, whether or not the Bolsheviks had seized power, without a European revolution - which, it seems in hindsight only sensible to admit, was *nowhere* on the historical agenda - a form of capitalism was all that could have developed in a backward peasant country surrounded by powerful capitalist nations. Thus it was that capitalist development was forced on the Bolsheviks, and even if they had been committed to a democratic, non-statist, and non-market socialism from below, no such socialism was genuinely feasible.

Coming to these conclusions, and advancing beyond the anarchist tendency to remain at the level of sloganeering without offering analyses of the specificities of the rupture that separates communism from capitalism, the strictly Marxian "impossibilists" of the Socialist Party of Great Britain (SPGB) developed a very early and very thorough investigation of the Russian Revolution. The SPGB expressed scepticism as to the socialist content of the

Russian Revolution as early as 1918. At first, the SPGB avoided making a definitive statement, although they insisted that if the Revolution was indeed *socialist*, then Russia would have had to have seen an immense and unprecedented transformation in mental and material life (Bartrop, 1975:61). By 1920, the SPGB's journal, *The Socialist Standard*, was describing the Russian Revolution as "state capitalist": "Offers to pay war debts to the Allies, to establish a Constituent Assembly, to compensate capitalists for losses, to cease propaganda in other countries, and to grant exploitation rights throughout Russia to Western capitalists all show how far along the capitalist road they have had to travel and how badly they need the economic help of other countries. It shows above all that their loud and defiant challenge to the capitalist world has been silenced by their own internal and external weaknesses as we have so often predicted in these pages." For these world socialists, "capitalism has always existed in post-revolutionary Russia and the working class there has never had political power", and "the means of production are used to exploit wage-labour for a surplus. In other words, they function as capital" (in Fernandez, 1997:46-7). Russian capitalism is administered by the Communist Party, and these bureaucrats form a privileged and exploiting class with an "effective class monopoly of the means of production" (*Socialist Standard*, 1943; 1967; 1930). Here, class is defined in Marxian terms as referring to a group of people who share a position with respect to the ownership and control of the means of production. It is not necessary - in response to the Trotskyists' objections - that this control be legally recognised as private property or that privilege be generationally transferable. The fact is that *Party bureaucrats effectively own and control the means of production and draw their "property income" in the form of bonuses and large salaries* (*Socialist Standard*, 1967). As explanation, the SPGB pointed to Russia's large anti-socialist peasantry and vast untrained population,<sup>33</sup> to the impossibility - because of international economic interdependence - of socialism in one country, and they insisted that: "Had Lenin lived or Stalin died the result would not have been appreciably different" (*Socialist Standard*, 1948; 1934; 1920).

In an extensive and extremely useful analysis of the state capitalist phenomenon, Adam Buick (of the SPGB) and John Crump (1986) delineate as essential six principle features of capitalism: (1) generalised commodity production; (2) investment of capital in production with a view to profit; (3) exploitation of waged labour; (4) regulation of production by the market via the competitive struggle for profits; (5) accumulation of capital out of profits, leading to expansion and development of the forces of production; (6) a single world economy. The first five features, argue Buick and Crump (1986), are extant in the so-called

socialist countries (and thus the sixth feature is true also), where a new class effectively owns the means of production collectively through its monopoly of state power.

The SPGB has often evoked Marx's and Engels' own comments along these lines in support of the contention that Russia was still capitalist. For instance, as Marx noted, "capital presupposes wage labour; wage labour presupposes capital ... they reciprocally evoke each other", and "there can no longer be wage-labour when there is no longer any capital" (in Ollman, 1996:15). For the SPGB, wage-labour in Russia proves the existence of capital. Even more important are Engels' (1958:108) comments in *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*: "the transformation, either into joint-stock companies and trusts, or into state ownership, does not do away with the capitalistic nature of the productive forces ... The more it proceeds to the taking over of productive forces, the more does it actually become the national capitalist, the more citizens does it exploit. The workers remain wage-workers-proletarians ... State ownership of the productive forces is not the solution of the conflict".<sup>34</sup>

Left communists like the SPGB and Noam Chomsky (1988) have also gestured to the strong evidence in favour of the state capitalist thesis offered by Lenin and other Bolsheviks themselves. The Bolshevik leader frequently admitted that Russia was a form of, or was moving towards, state capitalism. For instance, in *The Impending Catastrophe and How to Combat it*, Lenin argued that "socialism is nothing but the next step forward from state-capitalist monopoly. Or, in other words, socialism is nothing but state capitalist monopoly which is made to serve the interests of the whole people and has to that extent ceased to be capitalist monopoly" (in Bellis, 1979:46). Similarly, Lenin's "On 'Left' Infantilism and the Petty Bourgeois Spirit" urged Russian socialists to "study the state capitalism of the Germans, to adopt it with all possible strength, not to spare dictatorial methods in order to hasten its adoption", and Lenin called for the transformation of all citizens "into hired employees of the state" (Wildcat, 1989:19; Hirsh, 1986:109). And, finally, Lenin (1964:106,109; 1965:245,252,407), threatening severe action against any workers who transgressed the laws of private property,<sup>35</sup> equated socialism with capital accumulation and the development of the forces of production: "In the last analysis, productivity of labour is the most important, the principle thing for the victory of the new social system ... Communism is the higher productivity of labour - compared with that existing under capitalism" (in Harding, 1996:259).<sup>36</sup> To a large extent, here, Lenin and the Bolsheviks inherited and never moved far from the Second International conception of socialism. Such passages provide evidence for the contention that, for the Bolsheviks, socialism was a *solution to the problems of capitalism within the framework of a form of capitalism*.

I have shown that Korsch and Bordiga were struggling with the overbearing Comintern in the early 1920s, and both thinkers developed analyses of Russia as a form of capitalism. Korsch's analysis was much of a piece with the German/Dutch left tendency,<sup>37</sup> but Bordiga's was somewhat different. From almost the beginning, Bordiga had maintained few illusions about Russia's backwardness and the implications of such underdevelopment: "The historical conditions within which the Russian revolution has developed do not resemble the conditions within which the proletarian revolution will develop in the democratic countries of Western Europe and America ... The tactical experience of the Russian revolution cannot be integrally transposed to other countries" (in Piccone, 1983:157). Bordiga came to see the October Revolution as proletarian on the political level and as bourgeois on the economic level (ICC, n.d.c). However, although 1917 did see a power seizure by the proletariat, for Bordiga, in the final analysis, the Revolution's sole real content was in its bourgeois side (Goldner, 1991:4).<sup>38</sup> According to Bordiga, capitalism is *the agrarian revolution* (Goldner, 1991:3). The Russian socialists' capitalisation of agriculture and the development of the forces of production are *capitalist, not communist, tasks*: "One does not *build* communism" (in Goldner, 1991:5,3). The absence of a capitalist class is beside the point, according to Bordiga (1953), as the Russian economy "is founded upon wage-labour and internal and external market exchange."

Following Bordiga's sidelining from political activity, the Italian left held for some time to a Trotskyist-type conception of Russia as a "degenerated workers' state", until arriving at the state capitalist thesis. Following the Second World War, Bordiga made more explicit investigations of the Russian question, arguing: "where there is money, there is neither socialism nor communism, as there isn't, and by a long way, in Russia" (in Buick, 1987:139): "to define communism by 'state property' is a nonsense because the idea of 'social property' is itself one: when society as a whole becomes the master of its conditions of existence because it has ceased to be torn by internal antagonisms, it is not at all 'social property' that comes into being but the abolition of property as a fact and so as an idea. For how is property to be defined if not by the exclusion of the other from the use and enjoyment of the object of property? When there is no longer anyone to be excluded there is no longer any property nor any possible property-owners, 'society' less than any other" (in Buick, 1987:134).

More thorough libertarian breaks from the Trotskyist position than those accomplished by Schactman, Burnham, and Cliff were made by the Johnson-Forest Tendency (JFT) in America and by *Socialisme ou Barbarie* (SoB) in France. For both groups, Trotsky's

analysis of the USSR, in its focus on distribution and consumption rather than the organisation of production, was more Proudhonist than Marxist (Binstock, 1971:37). In a submission to a convention of the Socialist Workers' Party in 1950, the same year that they broke with the Fourth International, the JFT asserted that: "state-property and total planning are nothing but the complete subordination of the proletariat to capital" (in Callinicos, 1990:61). C. L. R. James wanted to explore capitalism in Marxist terms of relations of production rather than in Trotsky's terms of property relations, and he wanted to emphasise the continuance of *alienation* under the Russian regime (Clever, n.d.a).<sup>39</sup> In Russia, we find the exploitation of a class of wage labourers by another class through the production of commodities (Clever, n.d.a): "The bureaucracy then becomes what Marx always insisted the capitalist class is, merely the representative, the agent, the personification, the incarnation of capital" (James in Binstock, 1971:42). And Dunayevskaya insisted that not only did Russia witness the continued workings of the law of value, but that the extent of repression indicated the existence of healthy class struggle (Clever, n.d.a).<sup>40</sup> For the JFT, Russia offered *no* advances towards socialism, and, in fact, "the development of Russia is a sign-post as to the future of capitalist society" (in Clever, n.d.a).

Moving left within and then outside of the Trotskyist movement, like James and Dunayevskaya, Cornelius Castoriadis and Claude Lefort<sup>41</sup> came to a fundamental critique of the Trotskyist analysis of the USSR. For Castoriadis (1997a:219), "To present the Russian regime as 'socialist' or as a 'workers' state'... represents one of the most dreadful attempts at mystification known to history." To characterise the regimes installed after World War II as "degenerated workers' states" would be absurd (Castoriadis, 1988a:8): how could they be said to have in any way "degenerated"? More generally, the Trotskyist tendency to create numerous transitional societies between capitalism and communism is unhelpful in understanding "really existing socialism" (Castoriadis, 1988a). For instance, using the Trotskyist theoretical framework, one could, quite ridiculously Castoriadis (1988a:40) felt, describe nationalisation in Western capitalist nations as developing "workers' states in gestation". Castoriadis (1988a:54,39), unlike other left communists and, in my opinion, quite mistakenly, rejected the state capitalist thesis, arguing that the law of value did not operate in Russia, that Russia did not experience organic crises, that classical private property had been abolished, and that the distribution of profit was made according to position not property titles. On the other hand, in a typically left communist manner, Castoriadis (1997a:220) rejected that socialist relations of production could be equated with state ownership of the means of production: "The form of state property does not determine the relations of production, but rather is determined by them"<sup>42</sup>; "To give to the nation

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means, in reality, to give to the ruling class of that nation” (in Binstock, 1971:40). The bureaucracy’s monopoly over the management of production and its effective possession of the productive apparatus gives its rule a definitely *class* character. Further, this class continues to appropriate surplus value (Castoriadis, 1988a:51). Trotsky never answered the question, “What about the relations of production?”, and this for the simple reason that these relations “are based on wage labour” (Castoriadis, 1988a:112): that is, they are capitalist, with the sole distinction being that “a bureaucracy has taken over the function of management of the economy and of the State previously performed by private capitalists” (in Bellis, 1979:213).

In terms of explaining the advent of “total bureaucratic capitalism” (versus the “fragmented bureaucratic capitalism” of the West), Castoriadis came to reject the idea of degeneration: “The formation of a bureaucracy as the managing stratum in production (necessarily having economic privileges) was, almost from the onset, the conscious, honest, and sincere aim of the Bolshevik Party led by Lenin and Trotsky” (in Binstock, 1971:184). The Bolsheviks wanted “to change the economy, and the pattern of ownership, and the distribution of wealth, but not the relations between men at work and the nature of work itself” (in Bellis, 1979:214). Thus, according to Maurice Brinton, the leading theorist in SoB’s British companion party, *Solidarity*, Bolshevism represented: “the last garb donned by a bourgeois ideology as it was being subverted at the roots ... the last attempt of bourgeois society to reassert its ordained division into leaders and led, and to maintain authoritarian social relations in all aspects of human life” (in Bellis, 1979:222).

I have surveyed left communist arguments about the character of “really existing socialism”. I believe that the left communist analysis of the Russian Revolution and the resulting social order of “really existing socialism” is worthy of serious consideration. Left communists insisted that Soviet Russia was in fact a form of capitalism: nationalisation was not socialisation; class division, exploitation, and capitalist domination continued, despite the official abolition of class; alienation and class struggle also persisted in “communist” Russia; the Bolsheviks’ policies such as the capitalisation of agriculture were indicators of a bourgeois social order; and Russia could not hope to escape the exigencies of the world capitalist order. These left communist arguments are, I believe, clearly separate from and superior to the theorisations of Russian “communism” developed by socialist orthodoxy.

**“The abolition of the wages system” -  
The World Without Wages**

Where do the above analyses lead us? I have argued that left communist thinking on the Russian question provides gains for socialist thought at the level of analysis. I will argue that it also means gains at the level of socialist vision or utopian thinking beyond. In this section, I will attempt to answer the question of the political and utopian result of the conclusion that the Russian Revolution was but a form of capitalism. If, as left communists argue, the Bolsheviks and the social democrats were unable to break from the domination of capital, if socialism became a political task of intervening to better administer and manage capitalism, if capital conquered socialism, and if statist socialism does not provide for popular sovereignty in the economic realm, what might left communism’s projected post-capitalist organisation involve as regards the spheres of production and distribution? In general, left communists have answered that their schema will mean a *world without wages*, a society that does not know wage labour or capital.

Nonetheless, the left communist advance over socialist orthodoxy has not always been straightforward. Notably, the idea of a transitional society in both anarchist and left-Marxist accounts has intervened in the space between capitalism and the world without wages. For Karl Korsch, such two-phase theories of communism had the effect of removing the prospect of real emancipation into an indefinite future (Kellner, 1977:282). And according to Crump (1987), it is important, in order to develop a non-market socialism, that communists make a final and total break with the notion of the transitional society. In the present section, I examine left communism’s utopian projections for a world without wages. I argue that, despite frequent ambiguities and shortcomings, it is only from within the left communist tradition that one catches sight of the break that Crump quite rightly argues is necessary if a libertarian communism embodying economic democracy is to distinguish itself from socialist orthodoxy’s submission to the domination of capital.

Marx himself, of course, called for the abolition of the wages system. In the *Grundrisse*, for example, Marx insisted that “no form of wage-labour, even though one may be less obnoxious than another, can do away with the misery of wage-labour”, and Marx looked forward to a society in which the slogan “from each according to their abilities, to each according to their needs” would hold (in Mattick, 1969:306). In keeping with such assertions, Rubel (1987:12) views the Marxian conception of revolution as identical with the *negation of the market economy*. On the other hand, what is the relation between these

ideals and the transitional regime? After the revolution, said Marx (1972), as communism would not have developed on its own foundations and would therefore be “still stamped with the birth marks of the old society from whose womb it emerges”, rather than free access, “the individual producer receives back from society - after the deductions have been made - exactly what he gives to it.” Marx (1972:17) maintained that “Right can never be higher than the economic structure of society and its cultural development conditioned thereby”. This “bourgeois limitation” would mean that the producer receives back the equivalent to the amount of labour he or she gives to society, and Marx (1972:15-16) saw this as facilitated by the use of labour certificates, which would represent - after deductions for the common funds - the amount of labour deployed. After this “lower phase” - what Lenin was to call “socialism” - comes a higher phase in which such a right of inequality will have disappeared and wherein people will be able to take freely from that which is communally produced. Marx’s socialism, then, does not break completely with the domination of exchange value and the autocracy of the economic sphere.

What of the anarchists? It has been said that the anarchists, while intransigently critical of state domination, did not arrive at a fundamental critique of capital. Such a conclusion can be sustained only if one limits investigation to Marx’s battles with the classical anarchists. For instance, for Max Stirner (1995:227), “What then is *my* property? Nothing but what is in *my power*! To what property am I entitled? To every property to which I *empower* myself.” Property should not be abolished: it must become *my* property (Stirner, 1995:230).<sup>43</sup> Similarly, Proudhon’s objection to private property was not, as his famous reply to his own question in *What is Property?* may encourage one to think, that it was *theft*, but rather “the earning of income from the labour of others through such means as rent, interest and wage labour” (in Vincent, 1992:136). In fact, “possession”, that is, control over dwelling, land, and tools, was viewed by Proudhon as a necessary foundation for liberty (Woodcock, 1962:105). Proudhon’s anarchism posited a world of producers bound together by a system of free contracts, in which a *people’s bank* would play the important role of fostering the exchange of products and providing credit (Woodcock, 1962:120,106).

If, then, neither Stirner nor Proudhon provide any sense of a society beyond private property, Bakunin is a more difficult case. Bakunin (1953:179,181) criticised property as a God, asking rhetorically: “Can the emancipation of labour signify any other thing but its deliverance from the yoke of property and capital?” Property and capital mean that the worker (one who is deprived of land and capital) will be slave to the bourgeoisie (Bakunin, 1953:181,189). In response, Bakunin (1953:410) called for the city and rural proletariat (as

the only classes still in existence post-revolution) to become collective owners - though at other points he insisted on the abolition of classes (Bakunin, 1953:411). Perhaps this contradiction is solved by knowledge of Bakunin's (1953:295) insistence that people in his collectivist society could enjoy the product of collective labour "only in so far as he contributes directly toward the creation of that wealth." Bakunin thus seems to have posited an exchange economy in which the instruments of production were to be held by a network of collectives, in which the right to hereditary property (the basis of existing society) was to be abolished,<sup>44</sup> and in which people would be cursed to earn a living by the sweat of their brow (Pengam, 1987:60; Joll, 1979:85; Woodcock, 1962). This is certainly the understanding of Pengam (1987:60), Carter (1971:5), and Woodcock (1962:152). And yet, there is some dispute. Kropotkin (1975:75), seen by many as overcoming the above conception of an anarchist society with his anarcho-communism, claimed that Bakunin's collectivism did not, in fact, determine in advance what forms of distribution the collectives of producers should adopt. More strongly still, James Guillaume, in a long unpublished letter of August 24 1909, argued that there was no difference between anarcho-collectivism and anti-state communism. The collectivists, Guillaume (1972:158) maintained, believed full communism would not be immediately realisable, but that it *would* come, and he concluded that "the collectivist Internationalists never accepted the theory of 'to each according to the product of his labour.'"

In 1874, Guillaume, a close friend and collaborator of Bakunin - Dolgoff (1972:378) goes so far as to call him Bakunin's "alter-ego" - wrote a tract entitled "On Building the New Social Order". This tract, Dolgoff (1972:378) contends, is the closest thing we have to Bakunin's own vision of the construction ahead. Initially, says Guillaume (1972:366,361), the producers will receive vouchers to the value of the products they produce, but eventually: "We should to the greatest possible extent institute and be guided by the principle From each according to his ability, to each according to his need ... In the meantime, each community will decide for itself during the transition period the method they deem best for the distribution of the products of associated labour." Arguing for labour vouchers in the transition period, Guillaume does envisage a society soon to be freed from the domination by exchange value.

In general, the early anarcho-communist vision for a future social order represents the most strenuous break within the left communist tradition from the society based upon commodity production and circulation. Although thinkers like Dejaque have been seen as pre-empting him,<sup>45</sup> it has been convincingly argued that Reclus was the real father of anarcho-

communism (Fleming, 1979). For Reclus, the products of labour could not be apportioned by labour as they were the result of the combined efforts of the people, including both existing and preceding generations. Each should have the right to draw from the common stock with the only guide being “that which grows out of the solidarity of interests and the mutual respect of his associates” (in Fleming, 1979:138). Likewise, popularly viewed as the founder of anarcho-communism,<sup>46</sup> Kropotkin (1975:98) rejected both collectivism and the notion of labour cheques, maintaining that each must either lead back to capitalism or become full communism. Kropotkin argued that “The most prominent characteristic of our present capitalism is *the wage system*”, and that labour vouchers - a “new form of wages” - would in effect mean society was still “a commercial company based on *debit* and *credit*” (Kropotkin, 1920; Pengam, 1987:72). In reality, “Service rendered to society, be it labour in factory or field, or moral service cannot be valued in monetary units” (Kropotkin, 1975:102). One cannot unproblematically draw a line between the work of one and the work of another, and neither can one measure this work by its results (Kropotkin, 1920). Said Kropotkin (1920): “It would be the extinction of the race if the mother did not expend her life to preserve her children, if ever man did not give some things without counting the cost, if human beings did not give most where they look for no reward.” We should, argued Kropotkin (1920), forget about trying to measure individuals’ contributions and instead, “recognise the right of all who take part in productive labour first of all to live, and then to enjoy the comforts of life”.<sup>47</sup>

While anarcho-communism seems to break with the domination of the wages system, syndicalism has often championed above all a more just distribution in favour of the working class: “Syndicalism is a natural product, peculiar to no nationality ... Even the British worker can understand the meaning of the phrase: ‘the product to the producer, the tools to those who use them’” (in Holton, 1976:27).<sup>48</sup> However, the CGT’s Amiens declaration aimed to unite those workers “conscious of the struggle necessary to obtain the disappearance of wage-earners and employers”, and the British Industrial Democracy League sought the abolition of the wages system (Jennings, 1990:7; Holton, 1976:146).

From the Marxian side of things, Morris echoed Marx in speaking of a transition period in which “currency will still be used as a means of exchange” (in Coleman, 1987:86). Similarly, the SLP extended the idea of labour vouchers into full communist society (Coleman, 1987:87), De Leon (1977:66) demanding that the worker get the *full return* of his/her labour. And the older councilist tradition, like syndicalism, appears at times to have advocated what Bordiga<sup>49</sup> would have called *production capitalism* rather than communism.

Thus, for Pannekoek (1970:25), the damage that revolution would bring meant that in the interim, as the productive forces were built up again and extended, the right to consumption would necessarily be coupled to the performance of work. For a number of the council communists, Jan Appel's work *Fundamental Principles of Communist Production and Distribution* was "the point of departure for all serious discussion and all research on the realisation of the communist society" (Mattick in Rachleff, 1976:231). At the time, Appel was a member of the Dutch councilist group, the GIK (International Communist Group). The GIK saw the problem of the economic form of communism as the leading task of the period: "It is obvious ... that, if a new world is to be constructed, its foundations must first be clearly determined" (in Bricanier, 1978:291). In answer to the fundamental question as to "how the basic relationship between producer and product is to be determined", Appel (1990:18) replied - "the computation of labour time", thus coming to much the same conclusion as Marx, though independently, because the latter's marginal notes on the Gotha Programme were only discovered by the GIK at the completion of the study (Appel, 1990:198). Despite the vigorous assertions by Appel and a number of other left communists that these labour vouchers would not exist as money - that they would not circulate, that they could not be accumulated, that, in spite of their existence, the law of value would not function - it seems that labour vouchers absolutely *would* measure value and *would* then function in the same way as money.

Opposed to the council communist and syndicalist stance on post-capitalist distribution, the SPGB have rejected the concept of labour vouchers completely, arguing that Marx's comments - made in a period of significantly lower development of the productive forces - should not be binding for socialists today. For the SPGB, our understandings of the words "worth" and "value" are polluted by linkage to capitalist markets. What is valuable and worthy is that which satisfies human need, not monetary or market value, and a socialist working class will have to have achieved the requisite consciousness to surpass these defective bourgeois notions (*Socialist Standard*, December:1987).

Such a conception of money-less communism is also to be found amongst the British anti-parliamentary communists who asserted that under communism "everyone will be able to obtain everything at will, without payment" (in Shipway, 1988:25).<sup>50</sup> Pankhurst (n.d:2,6), for instance, argued that communism was the abolition of private property in all its forms; instead, usage of products and possessions would be governed by need and desire. For Pankhurst, "So long as the produce of the land is to be brought and sold, there can be no Communism, not even State Socialism. So long as money is in circulation and profits can be

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made by trading, the evils of capitalism will remain, and must go on growing. Have we not seen the return to Russia of the old barbarous customs - inheritance, ... law, rent interest, and profit, and all the other capitalist methods of mis-managing production and distribution, *and of surrounding it by useless toil?*"<sup>51</sup>

The conception of socialism as workers' management seems to some extent embodied in Castoriadis' works. Castoriadis (1988:20,102,296) demanded not the abolition but the *immediate equality of wages* under socialism. However, Castoriadis' (1984:329) arguments for equality are based on the belief that such equality would undermine the economic motivation as the proto-value according to which society is regulated. For Castoriadis (1996), this equality signified an end to the market for labour power, it was the only arrangement compatible with collective autonomy (democratic self-regulation), and it would terminate both the domination of the economic over the rest of society and the related search for complete rational mastery.

Many left communists made a complete break from the conception of a societal form based on the domination of the economic, a domination evident in the persistence of wage labour and capital within Leninist and social democratic regimes. With the SPGB and, especially, the anarcho-communists, the contemporary notions of "worth" and "value" and the idea of objectively measuring and comparing the contributions that each person makes to society are deeply troubled. And in Castoriadis and other left communists, the autocracy of the economic is profoundly challenged. Completely submerged at first by the apparent success of socialist orthodoxy and now by the so-called "neo-liberal consensus", these socialist emphases deserve to be rediscovered. In rejecting the various transitional societies posited by other socialist currents, left communists like the SPGB and the anarcho-communists have emphasised the complete alteration of life, the utopian search for another world, a dimension absent from socialist orthodoxy and apparently lost from contemporary political thinking. Such a challenge to the realism of most thinking on societal organisation is relevant and valuable.

What about those left communists who did not completely make such a break? On the face of it, even when these left communists criticised Russian socialism as capitalism, it can appear difficult to draw a distinction between their formulations of the transitional stage and the Leninist conception. Both seem to have accepted the need for a period in which consumption would have to be regulated and tied to labour; both held to the conception of full communism as a stateless and money-less society of free access. It certainly does seem

that these communists did not envisage an immediate and decisive break with exchange value and commodity relations. However, on the basis of their critical commentaries on Russian socialism and in view of the socialist projections of thinkers such as Appel and Pannekoek, I insist on a clear separation between the traditions. For these left communists, the transitional period was envisaged as lasting weeks or months, not years as in the Leninist conception, where as Ryan (1982:162) points out, the state's withering is projected far into the future.

Of utmost importance, in my opinion, is that such temporary regulation or limitation, as Appel (1990:372, my emphasis) argues, is understood by libertarian communists as being "*implemented and carried through by the producers and consumers themselves.*" That is, it is a collective decision coming from the totality of those in the commune or the council. It is *self-regulation/self-limitation* and does not come, as in the Bolshevik conception, from a state/party apparatus separate from the control and decisions of the mass of people. To reformulate this once more, the left communists - in sharp contrast to both Leninists and social democrats - have been committed to *economic democracy*, to a societal configuration in which the decisions of production and distribution will be a matter of popular sovereignty.

### Conclusion

The question of the nature of "really existing socialism" remains of relevance to the left. For those arguing that socialism is still on the agenda after the fall of "really existing socialism", the confrontation with Russian communism and the attempt to distance that social formation from socialism are inescapable tasks. Post-modern leftism defines itself in opposition to the will to totality, to perfect harmony and final closure. While these latter are certainly embodied in Russian communism, post-modern leftists have tended to approach the question of "really existing socialism" as part of the more overarching problem of modernity. Those features most characteristic of the "communist" societal organisation - large scale production and planning, a faith in progress and the possibilities of science, the rational development of technique, and a coercively oblivious attitude to the reality of difference and contingency - are treated as an outer extreme of the project of modernity. Thus, post-modernists have refused to separate "really existing communism" from the project of Western industrial capitalism. Left communists have also maintained that there are essential points of similarity between Western capitalism and the East European regimes. And yet, left communism has stayed committed to an explicit macro-sociological analysis, focusing

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on class and capital (Russia as a form of capitalism). Moreover, left communism has retained a political-utopian vision (economic democracy, a world without wages) that draws on the differentiation of wage labour and capital from communist socialisation. This, I believe, is a significant improvement on a post-modernism that uses the too blunt theoretical instrument that is anti-modernity and that, committed though it is to democracy, has not been able to specify how the economic dimension of this aspiration might be realised. Post-modernist thought, it is true, has nevertheless often shown a lingering concern with the problem of capital. This concern indicates the persistence of the democratic ideal into the contemporary period. That is, it signals a real basis of dissatisfaction with the capitalist economy upon which a restated left communism might build.

The left communist examination of the Russian Revolution has much to offer, both in terms of a non-idealist, conceptually-coherent and convincing analysis of “really existing socialism”, and in terms of the utopian vision, the world without wages, that emerges as an alternative to the state capitalism posited by socialist orthodoxy. That is, left communism’s orientation on the Russian question is both good social science *and* it sustains a utopian space. The basis of the left communist analysis is to be found in the early writings of socialists such as Marx, Morris, Labriola, Kropotkin, Landauer, Pannekoek, and Korsch, who *differentiated nationalisation from socialisation*. Socialisation, implying the cessation of private property, would, left communists have asserted, spell the end of class exploitation, the commodity economy, and wage labour. Left communists have insisted that the Russian social regime remained in essence capitalist. This conclusion has been derived from the effective ownership of the means of production held by the Communist Party, the continuance of commodity production and circulation (one essential moment of which is, of course, the continuance of waged labour), and the lack of effective working class autonomy. The Russian Revolution, therefore, did not provide the great break from the capitalist epoch that socialists had hoped for.

I believe that the left communist case is compelling. Intransigently insisting that if freedom is to be attained capitalism must fall, left communists note the continuation within “really existing socialism” of waged labour and capital accumulation, the non-attainment of economic democracy. Against Leninism and social democracy, left communists have read capitalism as characterised by the functioning of the means of production as capital, by the generalised production of commodities, and by the exploitation of wage labour (Buick and Crump, 1986:57). In this respect, those socialist formulations that equate capitalism with private ownership capitalism only, denying that a class can exist and exploit another without

recognition of ownership and inheritance rights, miss what is vital and what is vitally objectionable about capitalist social relations. Left communists, unlike socialist orthodoxy, have shown themselves sensitive to the motivations that have produced the demands for economic democracy and the end to proletarianisation. With respect to economic questions, social democracy and Leninism have a rather similar essence, despite the historical division. Orthodox socialism in the twentieth century has meant a strong political intervention into the capitalist economic sphere. This political mediation is best thought of as representing a *new mode of management of capitalism*. This reorganised and newly administered society has, every bit as much as Western capitalism, involved class divisions and class struggles, alienation, domination, and exploitation, and it has rendered people unable to decide collectively on questions of production and distribution.

Given left communism's conception of capitalism, socialism becomes something quite other than the societal configurations advocated by social democracy and Leninism. It has been the struggle of left communists to separate their own understandings of communism from the capitalist idea, whether this takes the form of state capitalism from above or workers' capitalism from below. In differentiating their vision of the communist utopia from both the Bolshevik and the social democratic versions of socialism, left communists have emphasised the cessation of the domination that the economic realm has exerted over people and over society. This domination will be broken, say left communists, by the establishment of a world without wages. Thus, for left communists, in terms of socialist production and distribution, Russia 1917 provides no salutary model. On the other hand, in view of the anti-statist and self-emancipatory tendencies contained in the Russian Revolution, it is not without reason that left communists have continued to look to 1917 as embodying some important socialist gains and as an important historical example. Libertarians, as Acton (1992:391) notes, have continued to view Russia 1917 as a profound challenge by the mass of people to political and economic oppression, authority, and hierarchy. As Pannekoek (1940:3) asserted, the Russian Revolution's "power in decisive moments was the power of spontaneous mass action".

I will now shift my focus towards another moment of the libertarian socialist critique and vision developed by left communism. Just as I have specified here the left communist opposition to the domination of socialism by capital, so, in the chapter to follow, I examine the left communist alternative to the domination of socialism by the state and bureaucratic administration.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Acton (1992), for instance, has argued that recent investigation has provided much support for the libertarian interpretation of the Russian Revolution.

<sup>2</sup> Thus, Felix Guattari (1995:54,76; 1996:191,209) continued to prioritise the domination of society by the capitalist class and private ownership of the means of production. For similar anti-capitalist sentiments from post-modernist thinkers such as Foucault, Lyotard, and Deleuze, see May (1994:136).

<sup>3</sup> Acton (1990:204) has argued that: "By virtue of its relatively flexible, open and democratic character, its sensitivity to mass opinion, its ability to respond to pressure from below, the party had established itself as the prime vehicle for the achievement of popular goals." And, says Acton (1990:206), the Bolshevik party retained power due to the atomisation of the post-revolutionary period that effectively prevented the emergence of a coherent popular movement against the Party.

<sup>4</sup> Acton (1992:395) notes that, contrary to the Bolsheviks' fears and assertions, workers' control was an often successful attempt to *stem* the tide of industrial chaos.

<sup>5</sup> Lenin called, for example, for "an iron hand" and the "shooting [of] thieves on the spot" (in Walicki, 1995:307).

<sup>6</sup> An explanation of communist autocracy in terms of Russian underdevelopment was also developed by Edward Bernstein, and by the Mensheviks Dan and Martov (Hook, 1970:xv; Raptis, 1980:18; Coleman, 1984:148).

<sup>7</sup> According to Kautsky, "The only thing Lenin achieved was that the old exploiting classes disappeared, but he could not prevent classes of new exploiters and rulers from arising" (Kautsky, 1994:35).

<sup>8</sup> In its inability to break with capitalist social relations, in its fetishising of democracy (without any specification of the precise content of such democracy), and in its concerns with the terrorism of the Bolsheviks and the preservation of rights, Kautsky's objections to Russian socialism appear more liberal than Marxian. They thus tend to converge somewhat with the positions of liberal sovietology. The liberal-sovietological theory of "totalitarianism" was the most pervasive and well-known Western interpretation of communist Russia in the post-war period (Lane, 1976:44). The discourse of "totalitarianism" was an above all *political* approach, underpinned by individualist and pluralist assumptions - focusing on the state (and the world-wide movement towards statism and bureaucratisation), violence, and the "complete" absence of freedom for the mass of people (Lane, 1976:44,146). Versions of this theory of totalitarianism include those of Friedrich and Brzezinski (1965), Schapiro (1972), Wolfe (1956), Pipes, and Aron (Fernandez, 1997:151). Whilst the broad "totalitarianism" school provided an attempt at a characterisation of Soviet regime and a liberal condemnation of the barbarism of the supposedly classless society, its efficacy is limited indeed. As both Fernandez (1997:149) and Lane (1982:149) note, focusing on the absence of political rights and the inability of workers to create independent organisations, theories of totalitarianism assign little place for struggle, depicting communist society as static, massified, and thoroughly terrorised. Furthermore, the totalitarianism paradigm was strongly ideological, whilst all the time basking in its own supposed neutral empiricism and setting up a misleading dichotomy between the autocratic regimes of the twentieth century and liberal democracy (in the process, conflating stated principles with actual practice), the latter most often seen as embodied in the United States. Moreover, its explanatory procedure is irremediably idealist. That is, explanation of modern totalitarianism is typically sought by way of an analysis of doctrinal innovation. The Jacobins, Marxian socialism, Plato's *Republic*, or Rousseau's egalitarianism become the source and cause of modern mass movements and meta-historical trends (see for instance, Talmon's *Origins of Totalitarian Democracy*).

<sup>9</sup> At one point, Kautsky (1910:133-4) envisaged the cessation of the functioning of money as a measure of value; and yet, he called for the replacement of metallic money by token money, admitting that the "amount of labour time embodied will always have an important bearing in determining its [the good's or service's] value".

<sup>10</sup> For Mandel (1968:549), "The nationalisation of the banks, of wholesale trade, of all industry, and of all foreign property, and the establishment of a state monopoly of foreign trade, had, by the end of 1918, created a new economic and social structure in Russia."

<sup>11</sup> Although disagreeing with its thesis, Trotsky was open-minded when, in the late 1930s, he received the manuscript of an analysis of the trend to "*la bureaucratisation du monde*" by a Bruno R., a frequenter of Trotskyist and Bordigist circles, who identified the emergence of a new exploitative class that controlled the state (Knei Paz, 1979:421).

<sup>12</sup> Between the years 1939 and 1940, a schism occurred within the American SWP that revolved around the Russian question (Bellis, 1979:93). In 1940, Max Schactman and James Burnham left the

SWP to form the Workers' Party, and, probably influenced by Rizzi's thesis, the two developed analyses of "bureaucratic collectivism", rejecting orthodox Trotskyism's unconditional defence of the USSR (Bellis, 1979:93).

<sup>13</sup> According to Burnham (1941:4) in his *The Managerial Revolution*, the world was witnessing a social revolution that was replacing capitalism everywhere by managerial society. From World War I, the drive for dominance by a class of managers had seen the state (increasingly the property of these managers) intervening more and more in the economy, controlling crises, and exploiting the working class (Burnham, 1941:71,108,123,137).

<sup>14</sup> Until the first five year plan, argued Cliff, the bureaucracy did not receive any surplus-value from the workers; from 1928, however, surplus value was siphoned off, capital was accumulated, and a working class was rapidly created (Bellis, 1979:150).

<sup>15</sup> In 1932, Trotsky argued that "economic accounting is unthinkable without market relations" (in Blackburn, 1991a:29).

<sup>16</sup> For instance, Cliff (1955:110; 1988:140,172-5) continues to equate collective and state ownership of the means of production, and he is unable to convincingly differentiate a workers' state from state capitalism.

<sup>17</sup> For example, Cliff (1955:20) claims that "Under Lenin and Trotsky the workers had the right to defend themselves even from their own state". Cliff's (1955:72) constant refrain is that "In the early days, things were different".

<sup>18</sup> These inadequacies are also evident in the broadly Maoist strand of socialism, which developed a critique of Soviet communism that was centred around the rupturing of Sino-Russian relations. For instance, both Sweezy and Bettelheim looked to a Chinese-style Cultural Revolution to restore socialism in Russia, after a degeneration into capitalism that was traced to 1956 and Khrushchev's accession to leadership (Lane, 1976:30; Fernandez, 1997:65; Hodges, 1981:79; Bellis, 1979:176,181)

<sup>19</sup> Guy Aldred, a prominent member of the British Anti-Parliamentary Communist Federation, called Goldman a "scab" for her criticism of Russia, and he did not become hostile to the Bolshevik regime until after 1925 (Shipway, 1987). And Korsch, despite myth to the contrary, was an ultra-Leninist until the mid-1920s, viewing Leninism as the theoretical expression of the revolution, and supporting the NEP, the doctrine of socialism in one country, and all else that preceded this (Kellner, 1977:45-7).

<sup>20</sup> For instance, Kropotkin praised the Revolution's moves towards economic equality and the *soviet* aspect of the new regime (Woodcock, 1962:204). Likewise, Sorel, Monatte, and other syndicalists, inspired by the revolt of the producers against politicians and capitalists, the voluntarism and workers' control aspect of the new regime, and excited by the libertarian pronouncements of the Bolsheviks, supported the Revolution (Jennings, 1985:159; 1990:175,183; Carpenter, 1973:65,93). In a similar manner, having been deported to Russia in 1919, Alexander Berkman (1972:127,154; 1989:329) worked tirelessly with various socialists - including Bolsheviks - in some of the libertarian experiments being conducted. And, for Fabbri (1981:43), "It is the Russian Revolution that has raised the moral and ideal values of humanity and which has impelled our aspirations and the collective spirit of all peoples forwards towards a higher humanity".

<sup>21</sup> In similar fashion, writing from Russia to Pierre Monatte, the French syndicalist Lemoin spoke of his despair at the domination of workers by "a central committee which has all the apparatus of the state in its hands" (in Binstock, 1971:187).

<sup>22</sup> Roland-Holst had already in September 1919 noted the profound differences between the socialist tasks ahead in Russia and in Western Europe (Barrot and Authier, n.d:68).

<sup>23</sup> Ruhle (1920:5) confronted Lenin himself in what the former described as "a totally German manner", telling the Bolshevik leader how shameful his attack on the best (that is, left) communist forces was, how ill-informed was his understanding of the German situation, and how laughable were his ideas on trade unions and parliament.

<sup>24</sup> In 1926, Bordiga presented what Piccone (1983:158) describes as the only true dissenting attack ever delivered to the Executive Committee of the CI: "Lately, within the parties, a sport is practiced which consists in hitting, intervening, break, attack: and in these cases those who are hit are often excellent revolutionaries. I find this sport of terror within the party as having nothing in common with our work ... Unity is judged by facts and not by a regime of threats and terror ... We absolutely need a more healthy regime in the party; it is absolutely necessary to give the party the possibility to construct its opinion ... Factions do not represent the illness; they are nothing but a symptom of the illness, and if you want to cure the illness, you must first discover and understand it."

<sup>25</sup> See, for instance, Kowalski (1997:200-202,208), Daniels (1965:110,114), Schapiro (1977:221,223), White (1994:238), Service (1985:106), Pipes (1994:451), Anderson (1964:22), Voline (1955:8,22,28,35), Anweiler (1974:250).

<sup>26</sup> Ruhle (1981:19) presented the following nine these on Bolshevism: (1) Bolshevism is a nationalistic doctrine, aimed at solving the national problem; (2) Bolshevism is an authoritarian system, based on a leader myth; (3) Bolshevism is organisationally centralistic, and the working class' only task is to obey orders; (4) Bolshevism represents a militant power policy; (5) Bolshevism is dictatorship; (6) Bolshevism is mechanistic method; (7) the Bolshevik's social structure is of a bourgeois nature - it is capitalistic; (8) Bolshevism is state capitalism; (9) Bolshevism is not a bridge towards socialism.

<sup>27</sup> In a similar vein, primitivist left communist, Fredy Perlman (1985:36,41-2) spoke of the shift signalled in Leninism, from the goal of the liberation of wage labour to the goal of national liberation. Perlman contended that the Leninist parties "would develop capitalism ... would serve as a substitute bourgeoisie .... Lenin did not live long enough to demonstrate his virtuosity as general manager of Russian capital, but his successor Stalin amply demonstrated the powers of the founder's machine."

<sup>28</sup> In his 1921 manifesto for the proposed Fourth Communist International, Gorter came to argue that the Russian Revolution had been a "dual revolution": capitalist/peasant in the countryside, communist/working class in the cities (Shipway, 1987:107). Gorter initially located the triumph of the capitalist over the communist side in the NEP of 1921, but by 1923 he had abandoned the dual revolution thesis, insisting instead that Russia had been capitalist in content from the first.

<sup>29</sup> And, as such, said Pannekoek (1970:23) many years later in his *Workers' Councils*, it was part of the world-wide trend to state capitalism.

<sup>30</sup> Similar in many ways to the German and Dutch lefts, in 1921 *The Workers' Dreadnought* group in England spoke of a "reversion to capitalism", and they concluded in 1923 that Russian workers "remain wage slaves" and that the Russian regime was a dictatorship, not of the proletariat, but of "a party clique of officials over their own party members and over the people at large" (in Shipway, 1988:43). Pankhurst reported the anarchist, syndicalist, and left-wing critiques of Russia in *The Workers' Dreadnought*, and explained: "I was getting news from Russia that showed me reaction was developing steadily there. Workers' control of industry was less and less of a reality there. House rents, rates, charges for fuel and light were being established, concessions to the principle of private capitalism were being made everyday. A 'Workers' Opposition' of some of the best revolutionary fighters had been formed within the Russia Communist Party" (in Winslow, 1996:174). A disappointed Pankhurst said of the Bolsheviks: "they pose now as prophets of efficiency, trustification, state control and discipline of the proletariat, in the interests of increased production" (in Winslow, 1996:176).

<sup>31</sup> For Mattick, whilst the law of value could not operate in Russia, "the socialisation of the means of production is here still only the nationalisation of capital as capital. Though private ownership no longer exists, the means of production still have the character of capital because they are controlled by government instead of being at the disposal of the whole of society" (in Bellis, 1979:206-7).

<sup>32</sup> Other anarchists also came to view the new revolution as bringing no rupture with capitalist relations. Malatesta (1965:4) saw the Bolshevik's institution of all power in their own hands as a prelude to a reconstruction of capitalism to the latter's advantage. Similarly, in a 1922 response to Bukharin's anti-anarchist polemic, Fabbri (1981:31) argued: "Capitalism would not cease to be, merely by changing from private to 'state capitalism'... A multitude of bosses would give way to a single boss ... And the proletariat, in the factories and fields, would still be wage slaves." As early as 1920, the French syndicalist, Merrheim, declared Russia the dictatorship of the party over the proletariat, with Lenin playing the role of "red Csar" (in Jennings, 1990:173). And the syndicalist IWMA (in its declaration of principles drawn up by Rudolph Rocker), viewing the Bolshevik victory as "the beginning of the fascist counter-revolution in Europe" and as part of a world-wide movement towards state capitalism, maintained that Russian state socialism represented simply a change in masters (Heider, 1994:23; Thorpe, 1990:242-4). This new master class was labelled by Rocker the "Commissarocracy" (in Guerin, 1970:106).

<sup>33</sup> A lack of socialist consciousness, argued the SPGB, was indicated in the 1918 elections for the Constituent Assembly (Coleman, 1984:144).

<sup>34</sup> "[B]ut", continued Engels, "concealed within it are the technical conditions that form the elements of that solution". I will consider the statist elements within the works of the founders in the next chapter.

<sup>35</sup> For example, Lenin (1965:407) threatened to shoot every tenth person caught plundering.

<sup>36</sup> In a similar way, for Bukharin, “State capitalism saved the capitalist state by an active and conscious intervention in production relations. Socialist methods will be a continuation of this active process of organisation ... It is clear that the same method is formally necessary for the working class as for the bourgeoisie at the time of state capitalism. This organisational method exists in the co-ordination of all political organisations with one all-encompassing organisation, i.e. with the state organisation of the working class, with the soviet state of the proletariat. The ‘nationalisation’ of the trades unions and the effectual nationalisation of all mass organisations of the proletariat, result from the internal logic of the process of transformation itself ... the system of state capitalism dialectically transforms itself into its own inversion, into the state form of workers’ socialism” (in Harding, 1996:191).

<sup>37</sup> In his *Anti-critique* (appendix to *Marxism and Philosophy*), Korsch (1970:126) insisted that the dictatorship of the proletariat was, properly speaking, the dictatorship of a class and not of a party or a leadership fraction. Soon, he was describing Russia as a “new capitalist state”, noting the “particularly close resemblance between the Communist dictatorship in Russia and its nominal opponents, the fascist dictatorships in Italy and Germany” (in Kellner, 1977:59,242). And, by 1932, Korsch asserted: “Marxism in Russia was from the beginning nothing more than an ideological form assumed by the material struggle for putting across the capitalist development in a pre-capitalist country” (in Kellner, 1977:159). A state capitalist thesis on the Russian question also developed from Pollock’s work and underlay Frankfurt thinking on the bureaucratic-political-statist convergence of the contemporary world (Jay 1973:152). For Pollock (1978:72), free-trade capitalism was globally on the way out, and economic means were being replaced by increasingly political means in a state-capitalism that took both democratic and totalitarian forms. “State capitalism” was the appropriate designation here, as this new political era was not socialism, profit still played an important role, and the state was increasingly assuming the functions of private capital (Pollock, 1978:72). One of the Frankfurt School’s most prominent thinkers, Herbert Marcuse (1958), composed a book - *Soviet Marxism: A Critical Analysis* - on the question of Russian social structure. Marcuse (1958:40,11,22,74,195; Lane, 1976:29,44) pointed to a convergence in “businesslike management, rationalisation, and centralisation”. He rejected that the working class ruled Russia, he criticised Leninist substitutionism and the Bolshevik prioritising of industrialisation over socialist liberation, and he gestured towards a socialist alternative based on Marx’s notion of a “free and equal association of the producers”.

<sup>38</sup> Bordiga designated the Russian regime “capitalist” rather than “state capitalist” (Fernandez, 1997:73).

<sup>39</sup> Eventually, for James, “Trotsky ... made *no* contribution to the struggle for international socialism. On *every* serious point he was wrong” (in Callinicos, 1990:65). James argued that Russia represented “the most complete expression of class society, a society of alienated labour” (in Bellis, 1979:209).

<sup>40</sup> Fernandez (1997:216) notes that Dunayevskaya’s work of the 1940s was the first to point to the existence of class struggle in Russia.

<sup>41</sup> Lefort (1988:12) argued that totalitarianism had both communist and fascist varieties. Early on, Lefort (1988:13) identified the roots of totalitarian logic in a process of identification that took place whereby the proletariat and the people, followed by the party and the proletariat, were unified as one and social division was denied. For Lefort, the Russian bureaucracy was part of a new social system based on a variety of exploitative relations (Thompson, 1986:4). This bureaucratic-exploitative tendency began within the Bolshevik party pre-revolution in a detachment that took place between the revolutionary and the masses and an anti-socialist emphasis on centralisation over democracy. Such a tendency culminated in 1921 with the suppression of the Kronstadt rebellion (Lefort, 1986:46-7).

<sup>42</sup> For Castoriadis, if the relations of distribution are non-socialist, as Trotsky contended, then it was impossible that the relations of production would be socialist.

<sup>43</sup> In response, Marx asked why Stirner, having attacked the “fixed ideas” of state, man, and freedom, did not attack the “fixed idea” of private property (Barker, 1986:88,104). It was, Marx insisted, not just a matter of changing ideas but of changing institutions.

<sup>44</sup> For Bakunin (1953:182), the right of inheritance should be abolished, and this issue was the source of the first clash in the International between Bakunin and Marx (Woodcock, 1962:157).

<sup>45</sup> “[I]t is not the product of his labour that the worker has a right to, but to the satisfaction of his needs, whatever may be their nature” (Dejaque in Pengam, 1987:64).

<sup>46</sup> Osofsky (1979:38), for instance, sees a 1879 article by Kropotkin as initiating anarcho-communism.

<sup>47</sup> Malatesta (1965:26), Goldman (1983:67), and Berkman (1972) followed fairly loyally in Kropotkin’s footsteps here. For Berkman (1972:27), the capitalist wage system was the biggest crime of all, producing war, overproduction, and exploitation. Like Kropotkin, Berkman (1972:196) contended that distribution according to the value of one’s work was impossible since such value

cannot be measured. And, rejecting labour notes, Berkman (1972:272) asserted that until we can provide according to needs we must institute a scheme of equal sharing and distribution *per capita*.

<sup>48</sup> Similarly, Bill Haywood of the IWW argued for “the emancipation of the working class from the slave bondage of capitalism...[which aims] to put the working class in possession of the full value of the product of their toil” (in Dubofsky, 1969:81). Relatedly, Landauer (1978:118,127-9) spoke in Proudhonian tones on behalf of a “just exchange economy”, the circulation of money, and ownership by co-operative or community, only to, in contradictory fashion, enthuse over the abolition of private property.

<sup>49</sup> Asserting that after the transition phase there will come two periods of communism, neither of which would know money, Bordiga contended that socialism meant that *the law of value is buried*. And Bordiga made an important contribution to the left communist tradition with his critique of private property: “property can only be conceived of as being *private*” (in Buick, 1987:133). Therefore, although in his theorisation of socialism’s “lower phase” he posited the existence of vouchers - mistakenly believing that these would not imply money, markets, or circulation - Bordiga constructed a clear rejection of those socialisms that would attribute the means of production to particular social groups, such as trade union categories or particular classes (in Buick, 1987:138).

<sup>50</sup> Pankhurst (1993:131) argued that socialism meant common property and that it would know no trading, money, wages, or direct rewards for work performed. Said Pankhurst (1993:122): “whilst work shall be a duty incumbent on all, the means of life, study and pleasure shall be free, without stint, to everyone, to use at will.”

<sup>51</sup> Pankhurst’s poetry often reflects the same concerns: “Burst ye the bonds of wagedom, Burst ye the bonds, O people, stirred by the sun that burns, O life giving sun that burneth. Why will ye chatter by the market barrows, Or show your wares behind glass when the sun, Is raging, Faded and Spoilt are the paltry wares ye are selling. Abandon this tedious barter in which ye waste your lives!” (in Winslow, 1996:184).

## Chapter Six

### The State, Revolution, and Socialist Democracy

*"The existence of the state and the existence of slavery are inseparable" (Marx, 1956:217).*

*"Socialism requires workers' councils not only because it is socialistic, but because it is also democratic, because it wants participation of all the people and wants the best from everyone" (Korsch in Kellner, 1977:11).*

#### Introduction

If the events of 1989-1991, the revolutions to end revolution, signal the apparent triumph of capital, they also seem to indicate a decisive defeat for the state. In the late twentieth century, Hegel's notions of the bureaucracy as a universal class and the state as a "divine idea" or as "ethical life" itself (Held, 1983:94) could not seem more out of tune with the times. Everywhere one finds skepticism regarding the activities of bureaucrats, dislike for state interference, ridicule of the state's ability *vis-a-vis* the free market to provide for the needs and desires of its citizens, and political withdrawal and disillusionment.

Today, the market is frequently elevated over state and society, and politics shrivels beneath the economic. However, the contemporary period has also witnessed a spreading of politics away from the state, so that, increasingly, *everything* is seen as political (Thomas, 1994:1-2). Post-modernist thinking is an important moment in this re-emergence of the political (Boyne and Rattansi, 1990:23). Part of the expression of the association of the realm of state politics with hypocrisy and "public relations" (Held, 1989:243), post-modernism is often expressly or at least implicitly anti-statist (Aronowitz, 1992:156; May, 1994). Post-modernists, though, contesting the Marxian privileging of macro structures, have often posited the state as of diminished relevance in the post-modern period (Best and Kellner, 1997:272). Foucault, for instance, has argued that the state is "a mythical abstraction whose importance is a lot more limited than many of us think" (in Hoffman, 1995:162). Instead of focusing on state power, post-modernists have turned to the politics of everyday life and away from the grander concerns and hopes of socialist thought. For example, Foucault has centered power in the quotidian, he has challenged the notion of power's pure negativity, and he has insisted

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that power is exercised at innumerable points (Walzer, 1992:54). For Foucault, there is no innocent outside of power and, as a result, no simple liberation from power that the anarchists and Marxists promise. This exemplary post-modernist conclusion has issued in a micro-political orientation that posits an endless series of local struggles and signals, some contend, an underlying pessimism and anti-utopianism (Schatzki, 1993:48).

With its rejection of totalising theorisations and its commitment to micro-politics, it is nevertheless often unclear as to where post-modernist political thinking stands with regard to the state. Post-modernism's ambiguous anti-statism can be read as, in part, a result of the failures and then eclipse of statist socialist orthodoxy and the apparent triumph of both economic and political liberalism. This liberalism is also equivocal with respect to the state. Economic liberalism elevates capital over state, and political liberalism focuses on concerns with legitimacy, consent, personal choice, and the dangers of political interference. Both strands of liberalism, then, appear to rest "upon anti-statist premises" (Hoffman, 1995:199; Held, 1989:13,22; 1983:86,91). However, as Hoffman (1995:107,199) has noted, liberalism suffers from a "schizoid malady", often showing itself relatively uncritical of the state: "When abstract premises come into collision with concrete social and statist realities, the former are simply abandoned in the interests of the latter." Against such ambiguity and against post-modernism's propensity to pay less attention than is required to the state, left communism urges us to devote significant attention to the state, and it makes good on the anti-statist urge visible in both liberalism and post-modernism.

Post-modernism, it has often been said (Beilharz, 1993; McGowan, 1991; May, 1994), also shares with contemporary liberalism a commitment to democracy. Post-modernists are frequently committed to pluralism, and, against the pressures of normalisation, they seek to extend freedoms equally in all directions. It is not clear, however, what form this democratic commitment takes. At times, as in Rorty, Derrida, and Mouffe, it can seem little more than a variant of the now universalised liberal democracy (Held, 1996:279). And yet representative democracy has certainly not managed to encapsulate the most hopeful projections of the democratic revolution, having foundered on the contemporary realities of a passive citizenry, the anti-democratic elitism of neo-liberal regimes, and the limits of governing institutions *vis-a-vis* unelected centres of power (Held, 1996:284). Again, I believe that left communism might bring some remedy to this situation. In its commitment to direct democracy and to administrative forms that it argues will promote popular sovereignty and reinvigorate politics, left communism has much to offer contemporary thinking about political freedom.

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If the statist side has triumphed over the anti-statist side of liberalism, and if liberal regimes have indeed betrayed their promises (Callinicos in Held, 1996:284), socialism has certainly not fared any better. The experiences of Western social democracy and East European communism have left socialism associated with inefficiency, clumsy and authoritarian state intrusion into the economy, bureaucratic privilege, and totalitarian management and surveillance of its citizens.

This is perhaps a paradoxical result as socialism promises an eventual liberation from the state<sup>1</sup> (and also a possible liberation - albeit in vague, allusive form - from politics altogether (Knei Paz, 1979:367)). Nevertheless, in the popular imagination, socialism has “merged around the state, whether welfare state or central planning, under the sign of the administered society” (Beilharz, 1993:7). How is it that the socialist project, embodying such sensational faith in the ability of human beings without a state to work cooperatively in order to satisfy - indeed, extend and develop - their needs and desires, has come to be represented in so many minds by Lenin, arch-statist and politician? How is it that the socialist project has become so intimately entwined with the statist project? And how will it separate itself from this project (Goldner, 1991:2)? The present chapter addresses these questions.

Hoffman (1995:1) has maintained that “If we are to secure a future for humanity, then we should think about looking beyond the state.” This contention, argues Hoffman (1995:196), is not “extremist”, and it does not posit a world without government or morality: “It is a problem inherent in democracy as a concept tied ... to a ‘daring vision’ which forever invites us to ‘look beyond, and to break through’ existing limits.” Hoffman’s judgement seems sound, and it will be a key argument of the present chapter that left communism can provide us with such a path beyond the state and towards the reinvigoration of politics and democracy. Re-orientating us towards that still massively important macro-structure, the state, left communism provides a corrective to post-modernism’s under-theorisation of this crucial political entity. I believe that post-modernism’s commitment to democracy and ambiguous anti-statism could be advanced by an engagement with left communism’s political insights and utopian alternatives.

I begin by examining the manner in which the state has come to conquer socialism. Both social democracy and Leninism sought to make use of the state machine, with the goals of national development and rational administration of economic life on behalf of the people. In the remainder of the chapter, I argue that left communism represents a possible

uncoupling of the relationship between the state and socialism. I start by contending that, on the question of the state and socialist transition, left communism goes beyond the Marxist-anarchist division to insist that state and capital are to fall at once and are to be replaced by popular and directly democratic administrative forms. For left communists, the state is viewed as an imposition of class or power and as an alienated and hierarchical mode of administering social life. As the state *qua* state is a historical evil, left communists have rejected the reformism that loses sight of the socialist goal and ends up tied to a bureaucratic politics of the present. In this vein, left communists have denied that one can simply oppose the truncated democracy of parliamentary capitalism with totalitarian regimes: both express the rule of capital and the domination of society not by the people but by a bureaucratic elite. I then turn to consider the related issue of left communism's resistance to nationalism's conquest of socialism. In contrast to both social democracy and Leninism, left communists have remained intransigently internationalist in orientation, thus retaining and extending that essential modernist assumption of humanity's broad unity. Finally, I examine left communism's alternative to the statism of socialist orthodoxy. The post-capitalist society, argue left communists, will see the administration of things secured in a communal, directly democratic manner. This is usually to be accomplished by organisational forms viewed as amenable to such aspirations, organisational forms such as the workers' councils or a network of people's communes. I conclude that, within socialism, it is only the left communist tradition that provides a road beyond statism, towards a more democratic and internationalist social order.

### **“The dictatorship of the proletariat is also a state” –**

#### **The State Conquers Socialism**

As Boggs (1995:56,93) notes, by the late 1920s, the "statist myth of socialism" had triumphed: democratic socialism had been defeated and the idea of socialism "had become inseparably connected with the reality of authoritarian politics". In this section, I trace the development - both within Leninism and social democracy - of this statist myth of socialism.

In their later years, after the defeat of the Commune and with the growing success of the German SPD, Marx and Engels often put an accent on the shift from barricades socialism to the possibilities of universal suffrage: "Slow propaganda work and parliamentary activity are recognised ... as the immediate tasks of the Party" (Engels in McLellan, 1977:50). Although Engels did not endorse the SPD's use of his famous 1895 preface to *The Class Struggles in France*,<sup>2</sup> his thought had tended towards the evolutionist, social reformist side,

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with the hope that “the old society” might “grow peacefully into the new” and that, in the words of some French socialists, the franchise could be “*transforme de moyen de duperie qu’il a ete jusque’ici en instrument d’emancipation*” (in Lovell, 1986:82).<sup>3</sup>

The long European slump of 1873 to 1896 saw the emergence of increasingly strong social democratic parties and the development of a strategy based less on the insurrectionary socialism of 1848 or 1871 than on patient work in parliament and in whatever workers’ organisations were available. Between 1890 and the First World War, a period Kolakowski (1978) describes as the “golden age” of Marxism, the membership of both trade unions and socialist parties rose incrementally, and a well-organised and powerful working class politics inspired by socialism developed as an important force throughout Europe (Geary, 1981:90; Sassoon, 1996:46). The emergence of working class organisation on such a scale gave rise to a number of important controversies within the socialist movement around the questions of the state, reform, and revolution.

In the 1880s, in response to French socialism’s poor electoral showing, a more pragmatic, gradualistic, and alliance-based strategy developed. Known as “possibilism”, as against those “impossibilists” who stubbornly clung to a maximum programme, this politics was forcefully promoted by Paul Brousse and Benoit Malon (Coleman, 1987:83): “It is necessary that everybody renounces the foolish hope to see the whole proletariat enter into the narrow orbit of his own thought, to mould it into the rigid form of one doctrine ... I prefer to abandon the all-at-once idea which has been practiced up to now and which has led us to nothing at all. We shall break up our ideal into aims realisable in stages, adjust some of our goals in some way to the presuppositions of immediate attainment, to bring all of them within the limit of possibility in the end instead of wearing ourselves out without really moving from where we stand now” (Brousse in Landauer, 1976a:291). By the 1890s, this conception of a peaceful and evolutionary process seemed well justified (and was further bolstered) by French socialism’s rapid electoral gains (Portis, 1980:43,66).

Even more influentially, in 1898, Alexander Millerand, an independent socialist, made a famous speech (known as the “Saint-Mande Programme”) in which he tried to define a minimum programme for all socialists. This programme involved the renunciation of force and an emphasis on gradual progress through universal suffrage (Cole, 1970:370): “to realise the immediate reforms capable of relieving the lot of the working class, and thus fitting it to win its own freedom, and to begin, as conditioned by the nature of things, the socialisation of the means of production, it is necessary and sufficient for the socialist party

to endeavor to capture the government through universal suffrage” (in Przeworski, 1995:16). Millerand’s strategy envisaged “Intervention of the state to convert from capitalist into national property the different categories of the means of production and exchange in proportion as they become ripe for social appropriation; capture of government through universal suffrage; international understanding between the workers” (in Landauer, 1976a:324). When, in June 1899, the Waldeck-Rousseau government came to power in France, Millerand was offered the position of Minister of Commerce. Millerand’s decision to accept the invitation saw him seated with the notorious butcher of the Paris Commune, Gallifet, causing a great stir in socialist circles (Joll, 1966:82,85). Nonetheless, Second International leaders refused to univocally condemn such tactics, indicating the realities and possibilities before the growing social democratic movement (Foster, 1955:169; Braunthal, 1966:272; Przeworski, 1995:10).<sup>4</sup>

The most important party of the Second International was the German SPD. Founded at Gotha in 1875 through a combination of the Marxists and the Lassalleans, the SPD was marked by Lassalle’s statism, his belief in universal suffrage as an “indispensable weapon”, and his hope for a “dictatorship of knowledge and good sense” (Guttsman, 1981:44; Landauer, 1976a:233,250): “Even in later years, when German social democracy had finally abandoned Lassalle’s programme, his spirit was still discernible in the party ... in the belief that the existing machinery of the state could be made to serve the interest of the proletariat” (Kolakowski, 1978:244). For instance, the party’s 1881 election manifesto declared the SPD’s aim as “the organisation of work by the state, the concentration of all economic power in the state and the greatest possible development of the state” (in Guttsman, 1981:64). And, increasingly aware of the impracticality of the revolutionary intransigence embodied in the phrase “not a penny, not a man to the system”, the party, said William Liebknecht, “found [itself] involved in practical matters” (Bricanier, 1978:119; Geary, 1981:108; Guttsman, 1981:54).

This practical focus is illustrated by the development of the party, through its network of cultural, sporting, and educational associations and activities, into an effective *state within a state* or a *sub-culture* (Ryder, 1967:30). Viewing this, the astute Max Weber noted the SPD’s non-revolutionary bearing, and he correctly predicted that it would, in fact, be the state that conquered social democracy and not the reverse (Barrot and Authier, n.d:14; Mommsen, 1987:95). This practical involvement and the SPD’s growing organisational strength meant that, for the party, the “day of the great sweep” existed as a slogan of intransigence towards a state that was hostile to them (Guttsman, 1981:72,273; Joll,

1966:195). In reality, such revolutionary “Sunday china” was never destined for use (Beilharz, 1993:61). Thus, while the reformist section of the SPD’s *Erfurt Programme* achieved more and more practical dominance, its revolutionary part was left to history. In effect, “before 1914 the SPD saw its role essentially as that of a parliamentary and electoral organisation operating in a legal framework” (Guttman, 1981:331).

“The Pope of Marxism”, Karl Kautsky, represented Marxist orthodoxy from Engels’ death until the collapse of the Second International (Hook, 1955:55). Initiated with Bernstein into the mysteries of Marx’s atrocious handwriting, Kautsky completed the “Fourth Volume” of *Capital*, and, say Fried and Sanders (1964:422), he exemplified the determinist patience of the SPD as a whole. When the German social democrats voted for war credits and the International collapsed, it was Kautsky who became the target of Lenin’s bewilderment and rage, becoming the “renegade”, the reviled bearer of apostasy and “betrayal”. And yet, as Salvadori (1979:253) points out, *there was no betrayal*: Kautsky moderated his revolutionary strategy over time, but strictly *within* a long-established framework that had been in place when Lenin still considered the former a “master”.

Kautsky was convinced that the rebellions of 1848 and the Paris Commune were no longer useful models of socialist revolution: *the strategy of overthrow had given way to the strategy of attrition* (Kautsky, 1983:54; Salvadori, 1979:13). With an evolutionist cast of mind and a pronounced distaste for violence, Kautsky saw socialism as guaranteed by historical laws: “just as the continuous expansion of capitalism necessarily and inevitably goes on, so the inevitable antithesis to this expansion, the proletarian revolution, proceeds equally inevitably and irresistibly” (in Fried and Sanders, 1964:436).

Socialism, for Kautsky, was necessarily democratic and parliamentary. Kautsky *always* believed that the dictatorship of the proletariat would be a regime established by free elections and that it would respect political and civil liberties (Salvadori, 1979:12). Although Kautsky (1971:93,109) contended that reforms could only be supported if they hastened the inevitable demise of capitalism and that the state’s main role was to safeguard the ruling class’ interests, his socialism was state-centred and evolutionist. Thus, for Kautsky (1971:109), “The economic activity of the modern state is the natural starting point of the development that leads to the Co-operative Commonwealth”. When parliamentary legislation is used for socialist purposes, parliament “ceases to be a mere tool in the hands of the bourgeoisie” and can henceforth raise the working class out of its economic and moral degradation (Kautsky, 1971:188). Arguing against the radicals, Kautsky contended that

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socialism entailed “the conquest of state power through the conquest of a majority in parliament and the elevation of parliament to a commanding position within the state. Certainly not the destruction of state power” (in Salvadori, 1979:162). Kautsky was here expressing the Second International’s conception of socialist struggle and transformation: “By political action we mean that the workers’ parties should make full use of political and legal rights in an attempt to capture the legislative machine and use it in the interests of the working class and for the capture of political power” (Second International in Braunthal, 1966:251).

Such a conception of the socialist tasks ahead set Kautsky in opposition to socialist revolutionism - of both the left communist and the Bolshevik variety. Against what he saw as the radicals’ adventurism, Kautsky placed his hopes on electoral breakthrough (Salvadori, 1979:174). In contrast to the “utopian” demands for direct democracy and a dissolution of the state, Kautsky asserted that a “class can rule, but not govern ... only an organisation can govern”, and he insisted that public affairs needed the attention of trained and expert people (Salvadori, 1979:259,161).<sup>5</sup> Rejecting the revolutionary and “subjectivist” impatience of the rebels, Kautsky maintained that the path ahead was a “gradual movement, through democratic and imperceptible means, from capitalism to communism” (in ICC, n.d.a:50). Contesting what he saw as Lenin’s dictatorial methods and contempt for democracy, Kautsky contended that “There is no socialism without democracy”, that nationalisation was only socialistic if carried out within the framework of a completely democratic state (Salvadori,1979:256,339). Eventually, believing that the ruling system had greater powers of reserve than initially thought, Kautsky moved away from the idea of a “dictatorship of the proletariat” to advocate a coalition-type government (Salvadori, 1979:326). At no time, though, did Kautsky sway from the supreme optimism he displayed regarding the eventual triumph of socialism.

Not only did mainstream social democracy follow Kautsky’s lead, but so too did the Eurocommunist parties of the post-World War II period (Salvadori, 1979:13). Accepting the market, seeking a politics of alliance, committed to pluralism and “bourgeois” rights and liberties, and believing that the forms of liberal democracy were the means by which socialism should be achieved, the political (the party elected to state power) was to adjust and guide the economic, making for a more just and rational social order (Femia, 1993:110; Kautsky, 1994:162).

Mirroring the crises provoked by the Dreyfus Affair and ministerialism in France, around the turn of the century the SPD was shaken by the “revisionist” controversy. Already in 1890, Georg von Vollmar was encouraging flexibility, “slow, organic evolution”, alliances, and adoption of the “tactics of practical reforming political action” (in Joll, 1966:91; Landauer, 1976a:299; Guttsman, 1981:276; Cauter, 1966:79). In a period of growing trade union and party membership, electoral successes, and international coordination, party activity had resolved itself into such battles as the extension of the franchise, factory legislation, and reduction of the work-day (Foster, 1955:84,141; Portis, 1980:40; Joll, 1966:48,71; Ryder, 1967:3). The working attitude of the Social Democrats was that of Serrati’s “we Marxists interpret history, we do not make it” (in Gluckstein, 1985:175). And yet, Bernstein’s public declaration - “For me, the final goal is nothing, the movement is everything” - was far too lucid.<sup>6</sup> As Auer wrote: “My dear Ede [Eduard Bernstein], one does not formally make a decision to do the things you suggest, one doesn’t *say* such things, one simply does them” (in Nettl, 1969:101). Bernstein was showered with abuse, and orthodoxy was restored with a series of complacent condemnations of revisionism, joined in by von Vollmar, Auer, and Bernstein (Tucker, 1969:190; Guttsman, 1981:296; Nettl, 1969:101).<sup>7</sup>

Social democracy’s social peace or “revolutionary waiting” (Steenson, 1981:227) and the integration of both the union<sup>8</sup> and party forms within the capitalist system in the period that preceded the First World War are seen by Coleman (1984) as expressing a frustrated contempt and pessimism concerning the masses’ ability to bring about socialism. It is, though, possible to read possibilism in other ways. For a start, Boggs (1984:153) has explained social democratic reformism by reference to the increasingly evident stabilisation of capitalism and the fragmentation of class consciousness. Meanwhile, Kolokowski (1978:24) has contended that the strength of “revisionism” lay not in the power of Bernstein’s arguments, but in the *practical situation of the German working class*, which was represented by the growing power (especially between 1911-14) within the SPD of the parliamentary group (Nettl, 1969:273,306). Similarly, Barrot and Authier (n.d:1,8), Geary (1981:114), and Stearns (1971) have argued that in this era workers fought for immediate gains, attainable from a capitalism in its period of historic ascendancy. As Stearns (1971:171,202-5,212) asserts, many of the working class in Europe sought and received a share in the rising prosperity and were, in practice, satisfied with the economic and political order: “The pragmatic bread-and-butter interest of workers in labour politics explains much of the evolution of socialism”, and “Given the moderate mood of the class as a whole the expansion of socialist voting guaranteed increasing reformism.” The SPD thus never “betrayed” a revolutionary heritage but merely expressed the fact of the relative prosperity

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of, and possibilities before, some sectors of the working class of the period. As Stearns (1971:152) says, social democracy therefore helped to *integrate* the working class into modern industrial life, impressing on workers the necessity of political action by parliamentary roads and endowing them with a belief in progress.

I have said that Lenin became obsessed with the apostasy of Karl Kautsky and the “opportunism” of the German Social Democrats, both of which he explained by recourse to Zinoviev’s “labour aristocracy” thesis (Service, 1985:33).<sup>9</sup> In response to the social democratic betrayal, Lenin went on the offensive, in search of the inseparable gulf dividing the Marxist from the Kautskyite conception of revolution. And yet, Lenin (1972:260) himself had hitherto been a firm partisan of the social democratic understanding of the state in revolution: “Socialists are in favour of utilising the present state and its institutions in the struggle for the emancipation of the working class, maintaining also that the state should be used for a specific form of transition from capitalism to socialism. This transitional form is the dictatorship of the proletariat, which is also a state.” Thus, in 1915, when Bukharin argued that a socialist government could not inherit a capitalist state, having instead to destroy it (thus making a marked revision in Russian Marxism’s understanding of its transitional tasks), Lenin characterised the argument as an unacceptable “semi-anarchism” (Service, 1985:111; Polan, 1984:13).

However, paralleling his war-time Hegelian philosophical turn, in the period leading up to the October Revolution, Lenin discovered and propagated an anarchistic anti-statism, insisting on the necessity of smashing the old state machine, rejecting parliament, and positing the soviets as the institutional basis of the dictatorship of the proletariat (Service, 1985:140; Lenin, 1969:35; 1970:12-20; 1972:261; Polan, 1984:80). In his “April Theses” and *The State and Revolution*, Lenin (1970:44) insisted that the Soviets of Workers’ Deputies “are the *only possible* form of revolutionary government”, and he called for production and distribution to be brought immediately under the control of these soviets. This new administrative regime was, said Lenin (1969:8,92), very ill-characterised as a “state”, being nothing more complex or sinister than “the simple organisation of the armed people (such as the soviets of workers’ and soldiers’ deputies)”, or, more simply still, “the armed workers”. The violence of the break from Lenin’s former positions is indicated by the astounded reaction of a number of Bolsheviks: “Lenin has now made himself candidate for one European throne vacant for 30 years: the throne of Bakunin!” (Goldenberg in Service, 1985:165).

Nevertheless, enigmatic formulations apparently counter to these anarchistic assertions were forever slipping in. For instance, Lenin (1972:261; 1964:103) spoke of a state of a *new* kind, and he equated the dictatorship of the proletariat with “the organisation of the vanguard of the oppressed as the ruling class”. What do such vacillations indicate? Ryan (1982:161) reads Lenin’s text as a *series of displacements* that install the vanguard party in the position that Marxism had maintained would be held by the working class. Lenin saw Marx’s theory of the state as “culminating” in the vanguard party, and Lenin was thus “set on preserving political power in its alien character, that is, as something external and objective that transcends the subjective will of the participants and exercises a power that is not their power but, rather, belongs to a detached and autonomous elite” (Ryan, 1982:161). To accomplish this displacement, Lenin interpreted Marx to be speaking of the bourgeois state when the latter was speaking of the state in general, and when Lenin talked of the withering of the state “he couples these remarks with such a pertinacious argument for centrism, discipline, and administrative austerity that one suspects his sense of a stateless society would have little in common with that of Marx” (Ryan, 1982:169). Perhaps, as Schecter (1994:10) suggests, Lenin hoped that all contradictions would work themselves out in practice. For others, Lenin’s libertarian period is to be read as nothing less than cynical manoeuvring in the quest for and defence of a power always destined to be held unilaterally by the Bolshevik party.<sup>10</sup> Perhaps, though, most convincing is Service’s (1985:224) interpretation that Lenin was, first and foremost, deceiving himself.

With the realities of power asserting themselves in a period of revolutionary ebb, Lenin’s “anarchism” soon gave way to the contention that communists must work with - not against - trade unions and parliament.<sup>11</sup> Lenin’s libertarian period gave way to a substitutionist equation of Bolshevik state power with working class/soviet rule (Service, 1985:150; Lenin, 1966:46; 1972:295). Calling for state capitalism, Lenin insisted that “it is we - we conscious workers, we communists - who are the state”. As Bukharin argued: “To maintain the dictatorship of the proletariat, we must support the dictatorship of the party” (in Walicki, 1995:357).<sup>12</sup> Similarly, Trotsky (1963:169) maintained that the road to stateless socialism lay, paradoxically enough, the way of “a period of the highest possible intensification of the principle of the state, which embraces the life of the citizens authoritatively in every direction”. Thus, “The worker does not merely bargain with the Soviet State: no, he is subordinated to the Soviet State, under its orders in every direction - for it is *his* state” (Trotsky, 1963:168).

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The Leninist projection of the withering away of the state ever more into the future (Ryan, 1982:162) is taken to its logical conclusion in the Stalinist period. According to Stalin (1970:43), “it scarcely needs proof that there is not the slightest possibility of carrying out these tasks [the dictatorship of the proletariat] in a short period, of accomplishing all this in a few years. Therefore, the dictatorship of the proletariat, the transition from capitalism to communism, must not be regarded as a fleeting period of ‘super-revolutionary’ acts and decrees, but as an entire historical era.” After 1930, talk of the state’s “withering away” was viewed as mere opportunism (Hoffman, 1995:138). And a strong state was identified with socialism itself: “The Soviet State is the main force, the main instrument of the construction of socialism and the realisation of the construction of communist society. That is why the task of strengthening the Soviet state by all means is the main task of present as well as of future activity in the construction of a communist society” (P.F. Yudin in Cliff, 1955:72).

The statist conception of socialism, the notion of the state’s “change of function” (Kautsky in Femia, 1993:100) and the theory of the “new state apparatus” (Lenin, 1964:102), and the displacement of the proletariat are clearly visible in questions around nationalism. In fact, both social democracy and Leninism represent nationalist statist solutions to the problems of capitalism that operate within and thus preserve the framework of capitalism.

Despite the internationalist efforts and optimism of Marx and Engels,<sup>13</sup> nationalism continued to thrive. The zenith of the labour movement (1880-1914) coincided with a veritable explosion in nationalist sentiment (Hobsbawm, 1987:142; Forman, 1998:67). Imperialism, says Hobsbawm (1987:70), had encouraged the masses to identify with the imperial state, and it also seemed to many in the socialist movement of this period that the working class *did* have an interest in the integrity and fortunes of “their” nation state (Wolfe, 1965:271). For instance, within the “jewel in the crown” of the Second International, the SPD, internationalism existed in name only. As the Dutchman Domela Nieuwenhuis had proclaimed in 1891: “The international sentiments presupposed by socialism do not exist among our German brothers” (in Joll, 1966:70).

Covert and overt nationalism and racism were not, of course, limited to the socialist successors of Marx and Engels. In fact, despite internationalist pronouncements (Bakunin, 1953:199,231; Marx, 1977:77), Marx, Engels, and Bakunin all displayed ugly nationalist, racist prejudices, and a progressivism that apparently legitimated any imperialist crime in the name of progress (Wolfe, 1965; Frolich, 1940:38; Nettle, 1969:501; McLellan, 1995:193).<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, the sentiments of the social democrats were of quite a different

order to the slippages of Marx and Engels, as the former looked for votes and attempted to protect their organisational structure from state repression. The SPD attempted to distance itself from the “negative colonial policy”, the unpatriotic anti-militarist leftism, that appeared to be losing the party support at a time of increased international tensions. For rightists in the SPD like Bernstein, David, Schippel,<sup>15</sup> and Noske, a more “realistic” colonial policy was needed (Salvadori, 1979:115; Foster, 1955:202; Joll, 1966:107; Braunthal, 1966). After all, socialism required capitalist development, and such development required raw materials in the developed world and thus the spread of capitalist relations to the periphery (Braunthal, 1966:319).

By 1896, the Second International had begun to adopt the notion of a nation’s right to self-determination. Socialists like Millerand and Jaures insisted that socialists could not avoid also being patriots (ICC, n.d.b:21; Nettel, 1969:502; Joll, 1966:82; Wolfe, 1965:237; Braunthal, 1966:306,331). Even a centrist like Kautsky, because he viewed democracy and national independence and unity as a necessary precursor to socialism, declared that the working class had an interest in maintaining the integrity of the national territory (Kautsky, 1983:94; Gruber, 1967:107; ICC, n.d.b:2; Kolokowski, 1978:110). When the German gunboat *Panther* sailed into Morocco in July 1911, the opportunism and diminished internationalism of SPD leaders fearful of electoral losses proved a dress rehearsal for the historic decision of August fourth 1914, when the SPD voted in favour of war credits: “In the hour of danger, we shall not leave the Fatherland in the lurch” (SPD in Dunayevskaya, 1991:25).

With the August vote, internationalist optimism and the International collapsed. The French and Belgian Social Democrats did not hesitate in voting for war credits (Joll, 1966:177). The PSI’s “neither support nor sabotage” policy effectively submitted to war fever. In Austria, the social democrats’ pre-war optimism about the impossibility of war gave way to Adler’s resigned: “Don’t expect any further action from us ... at a moment when hundreds of thousands are already marching to the frontiers and martial law exists no action is possible” (in Frolich, 1940:229). Likewise, Jaures stated that “once war has broken out, we can take no further action”, and Kautsky, recognising the ecstatic patriotism of the masses, contended that the SPD and the International could only function out of war, as both were effectively instruments of peace (Hobsbawm, 1987:325; Service, 1985:84). Even the most radical socialists were often carried away by nationalist fervour.<sup>16</sup> For instance, the CGT, before 1914 unconditionally opposed even to the existence of an army, supported national self-defence (Landauer, 1976a:513). In response to Lenin’s call to turn war into revolution,

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French confederal leaders maintained that “the working class of Paris ... would have shot us on the spot” (in Mitchell, 1990:39).

Although advocating an end to nationalism and an internationalist defeatist position on the war, Lenin followed Kautsky and Second International orthodoxy, insisting on the right of nations to self-determination. This stance, as Lenin himself noted, was “an exception to our general policy of centralism” (in Nettl, 1969:512; Forman, 1998:82). For Lenin (1983:25; Service, 1985:42), the equal right of all nations to their own state was a way to defend democracy, to dispel distrust of Russian imperial ambitions and so to pre-empt secessionism, and to encourage an alliance of proletarians of all lands on an equal footing.<sup>17</sup> The national state was seen by Lenin as a typical and normal part of capitalist development: “The working class could not grow strong, become mature and take shape without ‘constituting itself within the nation’, without being ‘national’” (Lenin, 1976:41). For Lenin (1983:23,26), any rejection of the right of nations to self-determination played - unconsciously in Rosa Luxemburg’s case - into the hands of oppressor nations and absolutism. However, in line with Marx and Engels’ approach, Lenin (1983:9,21) also argued that support would depend on the potential in each case for the development of the working class as a class.<sup>18</sup>

Lenin’s position on the national question centres on the distinction “between the nationalism of an oppressor nation and that of an oppressed nation” (Forman, 1998:82). In his tract on imperialism, an intervention aimed at explaining the failure of the Second International, Lenin divided the world into two great camps - the imperialist and the oppressed nations - and this division is located as a fundamental, history-making contradiction (Aronowitz, 1981:170; Stalin, 1970:5-6,27). Such a division has proved a highly resonant one within the socialist tradition, blossoming into an anti-imperialist, “third-worldist” ideology that articulates a concern with nation-building rather than socialism (Forman, 1998:115). Thus, between 1919 and the dissolution of the Comintern in 1943, such nation-building in general, and the defence of Russia (the homeland of socialism) in particular, became the obsession of the dominant strand of socialism, paving the way for a transformation of Marxism into a *doctrine of national liberation* (Forman, 1998:115,140). In this way, in analogous fashion to the above mentioned substitution of party and state for class, *the nation came to replace the working class* as the subject and agent of socialism (Forman, 1998:129; Aronowitz, 1981:152; Gottlieb, 1992:109).

I have argued that both social democracy and Leninism can be viewed as party-based modes of bureaucratic administration that operate within a distinctly national setting. Aiming at modernisation and rationalisation, orthodox socialism was carried to power through appeals to an improvement in the conditions of the people. In the case of social democracy, these goals were to be achieved by progressive reformism and electoral victory within the existing state apparatus; Leninism, meanwhile, took the revolutionary route within pre-capitalist settings, basing revolution on national liberation. In both cases, nonetheless, the state and bureaucratic administration conquered socialism, and the problem of socialist democracy was subordinated to the modernising and administrative goals of the party.

**“Radical Marxism merges with anarchist currents” -  
Marxism, Anarchism, and the State**

Writing in 1896, Emile Durkheim asserted that “There are two movements under whose influence the doctrine of socialism is formed: one which comes from below and directs itself towards the higher regions of society, and the other which comes from the latter and follows the reverse direction ... The result is two different kinds of socialism: a workers’ socialism or a state socialism” (in Yeo, 1987:221). This “workers’ socialism” has its theoretical roots in certain strands of anarchism, Marx and Engels’ comments on the Commune, and later socialists who differentiated bureaucratised state socialism from self-emancipation, who privileged mass self-activity over intellectuals and bureaucratic representation. In contrast to the statism, nationalism, and elitism of orthodoxy, left communism has promoted a directly democratic, anti-statist, and cosmopolitan socialism from below. In the sections to follow, I consider a number of issues around left communism and the state. I begin with a consideration of the Marxist-anarchist divide. I then investigate left communist hostility to the state and reformism, its critique of parliamentary democracy, and its response to the national question. Finally, I examine the problem of post-capitalist organisation and socialist democracy.

The historical split between Marxists and anarchists is traced, naturally enough, to Marx’s encounters with the nineteenth century anarchists. However, the anarchists were not finally purged from the Second International until the Congress of 1896, excluded by a clause that insisted upon the value of legislation and parliamentary activity (Abendroth, 1972:53). Thus, as Joll (1979) remarks, even at the end of the nineteenth century it was not at all certain just who was and was not an anarchist. This is not surprising, for anarchism and a section of the Marxian tradition have overlapped and influenced each other again and again.

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It is my contention that a certain stance towards the modern state, transition, and post-capitalist administration finds adherents amongst both strands of thought. A number of Marxian and anarchist theorists insist on the immediate destruction of the bourgeois state and an end of the domination of capital. They also argue for free and popularly-controlled organs of communist organisation. I maintain that, just as an over-emphasised division between social democracy and Leninism has served to submerge left communism, so the effect of rigidly separating Marxism from anarchism has been to obscure this socialist alternative to orthodoxy.

Numerous anarchists and Marxists have argued for the incommensurability of their respective stances on the question of the state. Anarchists have commonly followed Bakunin's objections to Marx as a potential strengthener of the state, and they have viewed the former's comments about the aims of the chiefs of the communist party as particularly prescient: "They will concentrate all the powers of government in strong hands, because the very fact that the people are ignorant necessitates strong, solicitous care by the government. They will create a single state bank, concentrating in its hands all the commercial, industrial, agricultural, and even scientific production; and they will divide the mass of people into two armies - industrial and agricultural armies under the direct command of the State engineers who will constitute the new privileged scientific-political class" (Bakunin, 1953:289). For Gustav Landauer (1978), John Clark (1984:77), Colin Ward (1988:15), and George Woodcock (1962:158), Marx and Marxists stand for the seizure of state power and nationalisation, in contrast to anarchism's desire for the destruction of the state and for workers' control. Clark (1984:93), for instance, concludes his survey of Marxism with the assertion that "the attempt to construct a *libertarian* Marxism by citing Marx's own proposals for social change would seem to present insuperable difficulties."

Defenders of Marxism have often also rejected the occasional suggestion that the only real source of disagreement between them and anarchists concerns the means and not the goals of the new society (Thomas, 1980:13; Draper, 1990). For instance, according to Barker (1986:31), Marx's alleged anarchism is not anarchism at all. It is the *political state* and not the state as such that is to disappear in Marx's schema. Anarchists, unlike Marxists, maintains Barker, see the state as relatively independent, arguing from state to society and positing the former as the source of all oppression. Similarly, Thomas (1980:2) contrasts Marxism's *political sensibility* to the anarchist insistence that all revolutions replacing one state by another will only preserve, perhaps even deepen, oppression.

On the other hand, a number of commentators have accepted that the distinction between Marxism and anarchism is difficult to maintain. The Marxian scholar, Maximilian Rubel (1987:26), for example, insists that Marx's work, though incomplete, was the first to develop a theory of anarchy. Henri Lefebvre (1968:126) also asserts that Marxian thought is fundamentally anti-statist in orientation. Similarly, R.C. Tucker (1969:85) speaks of Marx's "anarchism", arguing that, for Marx, *the state as state was an evil*. And April Carter (1971) contends that both Marxism and anarchism seek to abolish capital and the state, both reject parliamentary liberalism, and both seek to create a free society. Certain anarchists have been willing to lend some support to this convergence thesis. Thus, Rudolph Rocker, a German anarcho-syndicalist, found in Marx's early works an anarchistic interpretation of the state. Similarly, Alexander Berkman never condemned Marxism as a whole,<sup>19</sup> and he compared the statism of the German social democrats negatively with "their great leaders, Marx and Engels", who "clearly taught that the state serves only to suppress, and that when people will achieve real liberty the state will be abolished, will disappear" (Berkman, 1972:127; Heider, 1994). In like fashion, the contemporary anarchist, Noam Chomsky (1970:xv), embraces the "left Marxist" tradition, arguing that "radical Marxism merges with anarchist currents". Relatedly, those calling themselves Marxists, from Luxemburg to Sorel, Gramsci to Lukacs, Korsch to Mattick, and Pannekoek to Castoriadis, have been deeply influenced by the political theory and practices of anarchism and anarcho-syndicalism. After all, did not Marx himself identify his project with anarchism?: "All socialists see anarchism as the following program: once the aim of the proletarian movement, i.e., abolition of classes, is attained, the power of the state, which serves to keep the great majority of producers in bondage to a very small exploiter minority, disappears, and the functions of government become simple administrative functions" (in Draper, 1990:171).

It is a mistake, I believe, to argue for a strict and unbridgeable separation between anarchism and Marxism on the question of the state. In order to insist on any clean and total division, one must be selective and resolutely partial. For instance, in order to steel his argument that such a separation exists, Barker (1986) must limit his consideration of anarchism to Stirner and Proudhon in the main. Moreover, one must assume the untenable position that Marx and Engels' comments on the state are unitary, coherent, and complete (Maguire, 1978:221; Jessop, 1983:28). What is vital is a comprehension of the way in which history has been used and tradition created. It is necessary to understand the possibilities that flow from such creativity for the construction of a libertarian theory of socialist politics and post-capitalist organisation. I shall now examine some of these possibilities through an investigation of the historical clash between Marxism and anarchism.

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If, as Rubel (1987) claims, Marx was motivated in his pursuit of communism by those two evils he identified early in his career as a revolutionary - the state and money - then his views on this subject developed so that both of these institutions came to be seen as forms explicable by reference to something more fundamental. Marx's initial tendency to alternate between the notion that society was state-ridden and the thesis that the state was a mere reflection of social conditions was superseded, in the main, by the perspective, developed initially by Engels, that, under capitalist conditions, *property ruled* (Maguire, 1978:6; Jessop, 1983:9). For instance, greatly impressed by the Silesian weavers' revolt of 1844, Marx observed: "this *slavery of civil society* is the natural foundation on which the *modern state* rests ... The existence of the state and the existence of slavery are inseparable" (in Draper, 1977:179). Marx's more nuanced historical work aside, then, in general the state was viewed as but an illusory community that could not transcend the war of all against all. Moreover, given the persistence of class divisions, the state's particular form would be somewhat immaterial: the state could, regardless of form, be described as the "dictatorship of capital", the "despotism of capital", or the "autocracy of capital" (Tucker, 1969:83; Jessop, 1983:6; McLellan, 1995:61; Marx, 1987:223). However, alongside their revolutionary intransigence, Marx and Engels did support reforms and they did, at times, seem to expect a peaceful parliamentary transition to socialism. That is, their attitude to liberal democracy and bourgeois parliamentary regimes was basically *ambivalent* (Marx, 1987:594; Thomas, 1980:344; Walicki, 1995:33; Tucker, 1969:62).

What of the anarchists? For all three of Marx's prominent anarchist opponents, Stirner (1995), Proudhon, and Bakunin (1953:138-9), the state represented an immense historical evil. Thus, according to Proudhon, "To be governed is to be watched over, inspected, spied on, directed, legislated over, regulated, docketed, indoctrinated, preached at, controlled, ordered about, by men who have neither the right, nor knowledge, nor virtue. That is government, that is its justice, that is its morality" (in Woodcock, 1977:13). Anarchists have also charged the state with the sacrifice of life and natural rights (Bakunin, 1953:207), the restriction of the diversity of social life - its "worst crime", according to Rocker (1989:30) - and with being a surrogate for and negation of the proper "spirit" of organic society (Landauer, 1978:42). Regarding this last accusation, anarchists have frequently opposed the state as a synthetic growth imposed upon humanity. As Noam Chomsky (1988:762) says, "I think the state paradigm is a *very unnatural* one ... To establish the state system in Europe required hundreds of years of murderous and brutal warfare." In contrast, anarchist society would have the qualities of an organism, the anarchist viewing him or herself, says Woodcock (1962), as the representative of the *true evolution* of human society.

If Marx and Engels' stance on parliament, liberal democracy, and universal suffrage is inconclusive, varying between optimistic assessments of the possibilities for peaceful transition and cold rejections of bourgeois democracy as an illusory and hypocritical form of class rule, the anarchist position has tended to be far more decided. Anarchists have thus often read Marxist equivocations as signals of the latter's secret desire to wield and strengthen state power through which the Marxists would eventually emerge as a new scientific-political estate. For Proudhon and Nieuwenhuis, disappointment with the parliamentary politics in which they once engaged drove them to acute disgust and shuddering aversion: for Proudhon, "To indulge in politics is to wash one's hands in dung" (in Woodcock, 1962). And for Bakunin (1953:211,213), because of the domination of workers by a property-owning minority, the differences between a republic and a monarchy had little meaning.

Whereas it is said that anarchists reacted to the ever-expanding and encroaching nation state, the Marxists, it seems, responded to the abuses of an ever more dominating *laissez faire* capitalism (Sonn, 1992:5). Thus the two political positions seem inclined to split into the extreme ends of, on the one side, the abolition of the state without an accompanying abolition of capital, and, on the other, the abolition of capital without an accompanying abolition of the state. Such contentions, however, are difficult to sustain unless one restricts the field of vision to thinkers such as Nozick, Tucker, Stirner, Rothbard, and Proudhon, on the anarchist side, and Leninist and social democratic socialism, on the Marxian side. In reality, many anarchists come together with those from the Marxian tradition to insist that the state *and* capital are to fall together and at once to libertarian socialist institutions of the working class.

There *is* evidence for the Marxist contention (Barker, 1986:66; Tucker, 1969:89; Engels, 1972:69) that anarchists view the state as the most important locus of domination. Malatesta (1965:114,157), for example, argued that the first task of revolution must be the destruction of all political power, and he contended that: "economic slavery is the product of political servitude." Similarly, Fabbri (1981:20), in polemic against Bukharin, maintained that, as an anarchist, he believed that the state was not simply the outcome of class divisions but that it actually *created and established new class divisions*. On the other hand, the precise opposite sentiment has been expressed by the most well-known anarchists from Bakunin<sup>20</sup> onwards (for instance, Reclus, Goldman, Berkman, and Rocker<sup>21</sup>). For example, according to Kropotkin (1975:37), most laws protect private property and the remainder "exist to keep up the machinery of government which serves to secure to capital the exploitation and

monopoly of the wealth produced.” In the final analysis, argued Kropotkin (1975:13), the state and capital were *inseparable*.

If this division around the priority and relation of state and class cannot be upheld, then surely, some would assert, there exists a scission around the theorisation of transition and post-capitalist organisation. In general, Marxists have anticipated a period between capitalist and “free access” communism in which the productive forces of society will have to be replaced and/or augmented, where the administrative and productive apparatuses will have to be properly organised, and where the defence of communist gains from class enemies may have to be coordinated. At the same time, unfortunately, as Lovell (1986:64) notes, Marx failed to explain the purpose and structure of the transition period adequately, leaving Engels to front up to clarificatory questions after the death of the former. In contrast to what they see as ill-considered insurrectionary anarchism, and in line with Engels’ (1958) well known formulation, Marxists frequently argue that the working class seizure of power brings appropriation and statification of private property, which simultaneously means the end of classes and the dying out of the state. Here, the state is viewed as the instrument of a *transitional period* that lies between capitalist and fully communist society (Barker, 1986:212). On the basis of such passages and the statism of the *Manifesto*, Clark (1984:77), for instance, asserts that “Marx advocates a centralised, disciplined movement which seeks to capture state power in order to vastly increase that power.” And, although the 1872 preface to the *Communist Manifesto* goes a long way to refuting charges of statism,<sup>22</sup> Marx’s comments on transition are perplexing. What is the role of the state during this transition? What precisely does the notorious dictatorship of the proletariat involve? How important in Marx’s thinking was this dictatorship?<sup>23</sup>

J. G. Merquior (1986) contends that we will be hard pressed to regard Marx’s “dictatorship of the proletariat” as an anarchist notion. I argue, however, that such an assertion is quite mistaken. From the anarchist side of things, the conception of a transitional society often intervenes between capitalism and fully-formed communism/anarchy in which the slogan “From each according to their abilities, to each according to their needs” holds. Bakunin (1953:329), for instance, talked of a “transitional period”, and he tied consumption in post-revolutionary society to labour (Guerin, 1970:20).<sup>24</sup> Similarly, there are notions of a transitional regime, in which consumption must in some way be regulated, in Rocker, Berkman, and Fabbri (1981:26). On the other hand, in the Marxian tradition the notions of transition and the dictatorship of the proletariat have at times been tied to an anarchistic and anti-statist conception of revolutionary change. Boggs (1982:4) has perhaps rightly argued

that the effect of the notion of the “dictatorship of the proletariat” has been to immobilise Marxist thinking on political forms, strategy, democracy, and the state. The phrase is substituted for real consideration of the problems and possibilities of such a transition, and, because political and administrative forms are “superstructural”, the economic arrangements of communism, it is assumed, will automatically bring into existence the appropriate managerial configurations (Boggs, 1982). However, I do not believe that Boggs (n.d.a) can legitimately claim that the Marxian tradition has completely failed to produce a theory of the state and political action that could furnish the basis of a non-authoritarian revolutionary process. It is particularly with respect to Marx and Engels’ analyses of the Paris Commune, where the pair insist on the necessity of *smashing* at once the state apparatus, that such a foundation is formed. It is this foundation that is often used by left communists to develop their own anti-state vision of the revolutionary process. It is also with the Commune that Marxians and anarchists come together: “as an instance of a democratic and self-governing social organisation, the Commune stands at the intersection of anarchist and Marxist revolutionary ideals, where the historical opposition between anarchism and Marxism is blurred into an authentic social revolution in which the opposition is dissolved in the common vision of which they are alternative products” (Dirlik, 1991:6).

For left communist Jan Appel (1990:23,351), the Paris Commune of 1871 meant for Marx a shift from the perspectives of the *Communist Manifesto* (“A work”, says Appel, “still at the conceptual stage of state capitalism”): “It was especially after the experience of the Paris Commune that the view began to gain ground with Marx that the organisation of the economy could not be realised through the state but through a combination of Free Associations of the Socialist Society.” For left communists, the lessons of the Paris Commune, as “the political form at last discovered under which to work out the economic emancipation of labour” and as “a Revolution against the State itself” (Marx, 1987:552-3), included the following: (1) the proletariat cannot lay its hands on and use the existing state machinery; (2) the proletariat must develop a people’s militia; (3) the proletariat should reject parliamentarianism and the division of powers; (4) a commune-type regime is based on extensive local self-government of separate municipalities which are united into a confederation; (5) the commune organisation represents the transition to communism, abolishing private property and socialising the means of production (Anweiler, 1974:16). Anarchists have been skeptical about Marx’s enthusiasm for the Commune,<sup>25</sup> and Marx’s reservations before, during, and after the commune must be considered.<sup>26</sup> However, what is

of fundamental importance is the way in which Marx's comments on the Commune have been read by left-Marxians in search of a break from the statism of socialist orthodoxy.

As regards post-revolutionary organisation, many anarchists have separated themselves from Marxists, as advocates for decentralisation oppose centralisers. For these anarchists, Marxist notions of organisation - despite the Marxian annexation of the Commune - would clash with the fundamentals of anarchist administrative configurations. For Colin Ward, these configurations are distinguished by four principles: they are voluntary, temporary, functional, and small. Anarchists have consistently championed federalism. Bakunin, for instance, advocated "the right of secession: every individual, every association, every commune, every region, every nation has the absolute right to self-determination, to associate or not to associate, to ally themselves with whomever they wish and repudiate their alliances without regard to so-called historical rights or the convenience of their neighbours" (in Masters, 1974:168).<sup>27</sup> And, despite the centralist aspects of his thinking and practice (Draper, 1990:277; Carter, 1971:66), Bakunin (1973:65,74) insisted that political and economic organisation must flow upwards and inwards, rather than downwards and outwards. This altered modality of the exercise of power, for Bakunin (1973:71), would begin with the majority vote of all inhabitants within the autonomous commune.<sup>28</sup>

The anarchist claim that Marx was a centralist is lent support by Lenin's interpretation: "Marx was a centralist. There is no departure whatever from centralism in his observations [on the Paris Commune]" (in Ryan, 1982:167). However, followers of Marx could and do dispute the Leninist and anarchist charge of an inherent centralising urge in the Marxian tradition. These thinkers have been able to read the founders in quite other ways. For instance, rejecting Lenin's one-sided reading of Marx,<sup>29</sup> left communists have drawn on the anti-centralising instances in the thought of the founders of Marxism.<sup>30</sup>

On the other hand, for many in and outside the Marxian tradition, anarchism has meant the *rejection of organisation itself* and a wrong-headed aversion to "power", which should be thought of as no more than the ability of social groups to pursue a certain course of action, if necessary against the wishes of other social groups (Bottomore, 1979:7). Anarchists would disempower the oppressed by insisting that they remain unorganised: that is, anarchists on the one hand seemingly reject the exercise of social power required in the revolutionary process, while at another level, they champion despairing and impotent gestures of individual revolt in "propaganda by deed". The protagonists grossly caricature their opponents in this sort of exchange. Marxian left communists do not advocate political

centralisation, and anarchists like Bookchin, Berkman, Kropotkin, Bakunin, and Rocker can hardly be said to reject organisation. For instance, Dolgoff (1986), Malatesta (1965), and Bookchin (1969) have all argued that anarchism requires organisation and discipline, Dolgoff asserting that “Anarchism is not no government. Anarchism is *self-government*.”

Again, in this coalescence on the question of democratic socialism beyond capitalism, I insist on the impossibility of separating Marxism from anarchism. Overall, an examination of the historical divide that has separated Marxism from anarchism indicates that such a division cannot be maintained where left communist thinkers are concerned and considered. For left communists, statism and bureaucracy are to be rejected, and state and capital are to fall simultaneously to the libertarian organisational forms created by the mass of people themselves.

### **“Statism is the exact opposite of socialism” -**

#### **Left Communism and the State**

In whatever form it takes, the modern state is viewed by left communists as a basically and unreformably *bourgeois* mode of administration. The state functions, in the last analysis, to serve the interests of the capitalist class against the working class, and the manner of participation the state offers - no matter how open its form - is always an *alienated mode of politics*. For instance, Georges Sorel argued that “statism is the ideal of the petty bourgeoisie; it is the exact opposite of socialism” (in Portis, 1980:11). In like manner, for Karl Korsch, believing like Berkman (1989:341) that the state and revolutionary effort were irreconcilable, “The real aim of the proletarian class struggle is not any kind of state, however ‘democratic’, ‘communal’ or even ‘councils-based’, but the classless communist society” (in Goode, 1979:133). Arguing with Kautsky over the achievement of such a classless communist society, Pannekoek contended that “The content of this [the proletarian] revolution is the annihilation and dissolution of the instruments of state power by the instruments of power of the proletariat.” Given, then, that for left communists like Barrot (1992:8,26), the state has, in the main, *one function*, which it must fulfill, there can be no revolution without the destruction of the state. As Negri (1989:170) has argued: “Revolution has hitherto only perfected the state, the point however, is to destroy it”.

Of course, things have not been without ambiguity here. Luxemburg’s notion of revolution, for example, and the early conceptions of the AAUD, the AAUD-E, and the KAPD were riddled with state capitalist conceptions of socialism (Raden, 1968:18; Barrot and Authier,

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n.d:36).<sup>31</sup> Those two long-lived parties, the SPGB and the SLP, insist on a role for the state in transition, though this role is downplayed (De Leon, 1971:9; Lepore, 1996). Parliamentary action, say the SPGB (1997:12), need not be reformist: “When a majority of workers are socialist-minded and organised in a socialist political party, they can use their vote to elect to parliament and the local councils delegates pledged to use political power for the one revolutionary act of converting the means of living into the common property of humankind.” The abolition of classes and the state will, however, be *immediate*. There is no such thing as a “socialist government”, and, because “it won’t be ... the elected representatives or delegates who create socialism, it will be the people of the world as a whole”, socialist representatives and the state will merely “serve as a temporary focal point to administer the elimination of capitalism” (Coleman, 1987:91; World Socialist Movement, 1998). Most frequently, however, the state’s dissolution is viewed by left communists as immediate upon the constitution and spread of alternative working class and popular forms of administration and productive regulation (workers’ councils, soviets, communes, and industrial syndicates).

Left communism’s thoroughgoing anti-statism has manifested itself in an intransigent hostility to all varieties of reformism. Such anti-reformism has been evidenced in the notion of “de-radicalisation”. Much of left communism bears the mark of a reaction to the apparently increasing bureaucratisation, class collaboration, and quietism of the labour movement (Mattick, n.d.a:2). Those political and economic modes of working class organisation that developed from the 1870s until the First World War - the trade unions and the parties of the Second International - are frequently viewed as merging more and more into the bourgeois order, as “cogs in the system of exploitation” (Castoriadis, 1988b:193).<sup>32</sup> To a degree, these notions of de-radicalisation and integration of the unions and social democratic parties are confirmed by the dominance of men such as Legien in the trade unions<sup>33</sup> and Ebert and Scheidemann in the SPD (Geary, 1981:107,112). However, as Levy (1987:17) notes, such contentions posit an inaccurate image of a golden age of radicality prior to the assumed decline. Likewise, there is no real evidence for the labour aristocracy thesis<sup>34</sup> or for the idea of working class incorporation. As noted earlier, the evident lack of radicalism within the major labour organisations in this period was a signal of the material conditions of a large and influential sector of the working class at the time rather than a reflection of any betrayal either by that class or its leaders. However, even if the idea of “deradicalisation” can best be thought of as a revolutionary myth, the essential insight and the political implications remain important: struggle through the trade unions and parliamentary political activity represented no break from bureaucratisation and statism.

While Marx was at times optimistic about the trade unions and rejected the determinism that denied the possibility of wage rises under capitalism, he did not want workers to attach themselves to the state, and he was pessimistic about the possibility of permanent wage rises across the broad working class (Maguire, 1978:156-157; Marx, 1987:538; Moses, 1990:67). Many left communists have been even less enthusiastic about the trade unions, viewing them as deflecting and integrating the workers, as entirely ineffective, or as in essence inimical to the means and goals of socialism. The SPBG saw the unions as “tending to side-track” the workers from the task of emancipation (Coleman, 1984:122). Similarly, Luxemburg earned the lasting resentment of the trade union bureaucracy by describing the trade union struggle as a “labour of Sisyphus” (Bricanier, 1978:63). Pannekoek came to view the unions as signifying the dominance of leaders over masses on the material level and as having the function of normalising capitalism (Smart, 1978:113,191; Pannekoek, 1970:63).<sup>35</sup> Meanwhile, for Gramsci, “The trade union ... has an essentially competitive, not communist, character” (Boggs, 1984:74; Sassoon, 1980:41). From the anarchist side of things, Malatesta contended that “Trade unions are, by their nature, reformist and never revolutionary” (in Bookchin, 1992:51). And, for syndicalists like De Leon (1977:11), while revolutionary industrial unions were to be the basis of the new social order and the “sword” of transition, the ordinary unions were rejected as the “labour lieutenants of capital”, and the strategy of “boring from within” was jettisoned.

If the unions represented the industrial wing of such incorporation, then the working class parties, with their participation in elections and parliamentary reform, were the political wing. The left communist aspiration to autonomy from such statism and bureaucratisation is perhaps most evident in syndicalism, including the IWW and the Guild Socialist movement, for whom “*le syndicat suffit a tout!*” (Ridley, 1970:88). As Emile Pouget put it: “The aim of the syndicates is to make war on the bosses and not to bother with politics” (in Marshall, 1992:441). For syndicalist-influenced left communists such as Sorel, Landauer, Korsch, Gorter, and Luxemburg, political action was useless at best, and at worst it threatened to dull class consciousness and incorporate the workers into bourgeois society (Holton, 1976:65,78; Jennings, 1990:119; Kolakowski, 1978:165; Portis, 1980:46; Sorel, 1976:74).

Rosa Luxemburg (1971:20) recommended participation in elections as part of the fight for socialism, refusing to separate maximum and minimum demands in a non-dialectical way, and contending that it was *during the fight itself* that communist forces increased and were trained. However, Luxemburg’s mass-strike pamphlet was a part of her search for a new tactic that would separate her from the social democrats with whom she was in increasingly

bitter opposition (Nettl, 1969:308,204; Luxemburg, 1986:29). For Luxemburg, “the exploitation of the working class as an economic process cannot be abolished or softened through legislation in the framework of bourgeois society” (Mattick, 1978:21). Contending both that bourgeois legality hid the violence of class exploitation and that if parliamentary democracy were to threaten bourgeois rule it would be abolished,<sup>36</sup> Luxemburg (1986:28; Frolich, 1940:86) became increasingly aware of the degree to which the SPD leaders were tied to these old forms: “The plain truth is that August [Bebel], and still more so the others, have completely pledged themselves to parliament and parliamentarism, and whenever anything happens which transcends the limits of parliamentary action they are hopeless” (in Dunayevskaya, 1991:7).

Luxemburg’s positions are exemplary of the left communist opposition to reformism and parliamentary democracy. Here, parliament was, in William Morris’ words, “nothing but a committee for arranging the affairs of the land-owners and capitalists and their servants, or in plain English, their slaves, on the basis of servitude for the workers” (in Salmon, 1994:x). Further, Morris feared that cumulative ameliorative reform might lead to embourgeoisement: “the whole system of palliation tends towards the creation of a new middle class to act as a buffer between the proletariat and their direct and obvious masters” (in Salmon, 1994:xi,xii). For Morris (1994:xxxii),<sup>37</sup> as for the SPGB (1997:11), Bakunin (1953:212), and Pankhurst, concern regarding the deradicalising potential of parliament and reformism extended to the possible effects on socialists: “if propaganda by electioneering is practiced by any body of socialists they will have no time for any other means of propaganda.” In like manner, anarchist Errico Malatesta (1965:81) argued that reformism consolidated the existing regime and gave workers a vested interest in its continued existence: “There is always an element of contradiction between minor improvements, the satisfaction of immediate needs and the struggle for a society which is really better than the existing one.” While conceding that revolution meant a radical and rapid reform<sup>38</sup> and agreeing that election results could be better or worse for the masses, Malatesta (1965) refused to participate in elections maintaining that: “In most cases [reforms are] an illusion”.<sup>39</sup>

For many left communists, the very modality of parliamentary and reformist activity was inimical to socialist self-emancipation. According to Anton Pannekoek, for example, any organisational form that did not allow for control and direction by the masses was counter-revolutionary, inevitably tending “to inhibit the autonomous activity by the masses that is necessary for revolution” (in Smart, 1978:116). Concentrating on the ballot boxes, argued

Pannekoek, would lead to the emergence of the party deputies as a “special class, the ‘guides’” (in Boggs, 1995:52). Similarly, Pankhurst<sup>40</sup> and Lukacs (1973:55,xvi) rejected parliaments and cabinets for the workers’ councils (Shipway, 1988:16). For both Ruhle (1920:3-5) and Bordiga,<sup>41</sup> electionism and reformism gave longer life to a social system that should no longer be tolerated. Here, reformism would, in Ruhle’s words, shield the “essential heart of the capitalist system”. Meanwhile, by 1919, Gramsci, though not an abstentionist, was arguing that the proletarian dictatorship would be established “outside and against parliament” (in Boggs, 1984:74). Finally, the SPGB and the SLP under De Leon - who in 1911 still deplored the union of 1875 between the Marxists and Lassalleans (Hook, 1955:62) - completely eliminated the minimum programme,<sup>42</sup> ridiculed possibilism, downplayed the importance of their own participation in electoral activity, elevated working class self-liberation to the alpha and omega of socialism, and directed their gaze inwards to guard against the dangers of reformism, which would, in De Leon’s words, “sweet scent” class rule and distract the working class (Lepore, 1996).

Left communism unyieldingly rejected both parliamentary democracy (in favour of a future proletarian democracy) and reform (in favour of revolution). The choices it offers are thus highly attenuated and several arguments sit uneasily together: reformism is impossible; parliament inhibits the necessary autonomous activity of the masses; parliamentary democracy will give way immediately to autocratic domination if the former is threatened by popular power; bourgeois democracy is but a slender shadow of true, communist democracy; electoralism deflects the real interests and true aims of the working class. As Lovell (1986:37) notes, Luxemburg (and indeed many left communists) viewed parliamentary democracy both as a threat to capitalist rule (perhaps eventually calling forth a new, totalitarian state formation) and as no threat (reforms now being an impossibility, as the forces of production could unfold no further). Similarly, Morris, councilists (the ICC, for instance) wielding Luxemburg’s notion of capitalist decadence, and anarchists like Goldman (1983:74) have all denied that capitalism can grant the mass of people long-term improvements in their conditions of life. Besides the inadequacy of communist theories of immanent catastrophe for the capitalist mode of production, one must take stock of other difficulties in these formulations. For a start, reforms have obviously made a significant difference to a large part of the working classes in various countries and to specific sectors of the working class here and there. This has arguably been a matter in large part of the specific balance of forces and needs of capital in a particular period, but it is also a matter of the historical flexibility of capitalism and the relative autonomy of the state. Super-

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determinism results in a denial of the importance of politics and the efficacy of working class struggle, viewing capital as the only real historical actor within capitalism.

Further, in its apparent espousal of the principle “the worse, the better”, this tendency can accurately be characterised as the “millennial approach”, within which *the only immediate demand of socialism is socialism* (Herreshoff, 1967:107). This approach has been roundly and justly criticised. For a start, there are ambiguities within the intransigent field that undermine the simple dichotomy between reform and revolution. For instance, as already mentioned, Malatesta (1965), whilst taking a rigid anti-reformist line - “‘Social peace’ based on abundance for all will remain a dream, so long as society is divided into antagonistic classes” - accepted that certain results of reformist activity were more advantageous than others, and he contended that revolution was, after all, simply a radical and rapid reform. Similarly, surely the appeal by Luxemburg, Pannekoek, and council communists there-after to the idea of *revolutionary process* undermines the sharp distinction between revolution and reformism, as the workers make themselves revolutionary by engaging in the everyday battles precipitated by proletarian life. One should, then, conclude with Gramsci (1977) that it is necessary to reject “the conception according to which one should abstain from supporting or taking part in partial actions, because the problems which interest the working class can be solved only by the overthrow of the capitalist order and by a general action on the part of all the anti-capitalist forces ... [A]gitation around a programme of immediate demands and support for partial struggles is the only way of reaching the broad masses and mobilising them against capital.” As Gramsci showed, with his advocacy of everyday working class struggles for a better life and his continued hostility to reformism, such partial actions need not lead simply to an unprincipled, programme-less pragmatism.

One must, of course, bear in mind that the intransigent left communist position need not only be the unacceptable one that reform is impossible - a position which must be seen as, above all, a rhetorical flourish. Instead, the intransigent stance is based on an insistence that, in its essentials, capitalism is inimical to the well-being and autonomy of the majority of people, on an opposition to the institutionalisation of labour protest, and, most importantly, on an assumption that ordinary people might organise democratically in common for a better life without the separation and domination of bureaucratic and hierarchical organisational forms. In this way, the left communist critique still demands to be taken seriously. That these insights and this intransigence need to be connected to a realistic politics of the present is indicated in the related issue of left communists’ positioning in the debate around parliamentary democracy and totalitarian regimes.

The assumptions that parliamentarianism is pernicious, that reformism is illusory, and that proletarian autonomy (as a necessary prelude to popular sovereignty) must at all times be defended can be seen in the frequent refusal of left communists to defend any aspect of bourgeois democracy. Left communists have thus often declined to draw any qualitative distinction between parliamentary democracy and contemporary totalitarian alternatives: all are based on the domination of capital, and all are characterised by hierarchy and alienation. In contrast to Marx and Engels' ambivalent stance towards bourgeois democracy, left communists, confronted with the spread of fascism, the degeneration of the Bolshevik regime, and the acquiescence of social democracy, often refused participation in the anti-fascist fronts of the democratic left, the Trotskyists,<sup>43</sup> and, later, the Comintern.<sup>44</sup> Left communists viewed such fronts as indicating opportunism and the failure to break with capitalist and bureaucratic modes of societal organisation. For many left communists, the essential task was to make it clear that there was no other choice than that between communism and capitalism.

Therefore, whilst some left communists chose to work on behalf of parliamentary democracy when it was threatened by authoritarian/fascist forces,<sup>45</sup> many others denied that a correct communist perspective could allow such a course of action. These intransigents balked at the breach of working class autonomy that participation in any "united front" would entail. They rejected the notion that social democratic forces were preferable to fascist cliques and insisted that fascism was capitalism in other form<sup>46</sup> and was thus to be opposed, as always, to communism. Korsch (in Kellner, 1977:41,248), Pannekoek (1970:154), and Barrot (1992:5), for instance, saw fascism as part of the growth of capitalism itself, fulfilling capital's requirements under conditions in which the reformists and the trade unions could not. Ruhle (1981:14), Pankhurst (1993:129), and the Bordigists pointed to the fact that the reformist elements of capitalism had paved the road for the victory of fascism in Italy, Germany, and Spain. Anti-fascism was therefore but a mystification. Given that, as the Bordigists argued, "Democracy and fascism are two aspects of the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie at a given moment" (in ICC, 1992:147), and that dictatorship is simply a weapon of capital when threatened (Barrot, 1992:7-8), "To renounce socialism so that democracy may be defended, means ultimately the renunciation of both socialism and democracy" (SPGB, 1978:87). In the last analysis, says Barrot (1992:17), "The proletariat will destroy totalitarianism only by destroying democracy and all political forms at the same time".

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Such an apparently obdurate and sectarian position has been rather unpopular and has been blamed, particularly in its Comintern form (the “social fascism” thesis), for the success of fascism/Nazism or worse,<sup>47</sup> as it allegedly splits the potential forces of progressive opposition (Wood, 1990:42). This position, it is claimed, in accepting only a maximum programme, without paying attention either to the real possibilities for change here-and-now or to the fact that it is only through “pre-socialist” struggles that people will make themselves socialist, ends up supinely allowing the establishment of authoritarian regimes, or, worse still, is openly complicit in the triumph of reaction. It is also worth noting that the aspiration for democracy is always potentially subversive: the term retains its critical force despite everything. On the other hand, though, if one accepts that the anti-political millennialism of the sectarian left is insufficient to the tasks at hand, there remains much in the left communist position that resounds with a truth with respect to the essence of fascism and in light of the complicity of Western democracy with dictatorship in the modern world, from the rise of Mussolini and Hitler, to the Holocaust, to the emergence of contemporary dictatorial regimes such as those in Indonesia or Iraq. In what ways might left communism go beyond its historical failures, while holding on to those ultra-leftist insights cited? Such a way is perhaps gestured to in Engels’ insistence (during the Boulanger crisis), against the sectarian leftism of Guesde and the illusions of Brousse and Lafargue, that democracy might be saved by working class and revolutionary means (Draper, 1990:175,209-216). Similar is Gramsci’s rejection of frontism and social democracy alongside the assertion, contra Bordiga, of the need for a positive revolutionary strategy (Boggs, 1984:231; Hoare and Smith, 1978:lviii). Such historical examples, though unelaborated, point to an explicitly political and non-sectarian way of negotiating these problems of dictatorship, parliament, and socialist democracy.

The demand for proletarian autonomy and the refusal to consider any section of capital or any form of the state an advance over any other are also evident in the left communist position on nationalism. The contemporary world has seen a resurgence of interest in ethnic, religious, and national identity (Good and Velody, 1998:4; Calhoun, 1997:1). In such a climate, internationalism appears to be the height of utopianism or a totalitarian (totalising) enterprise threatening to squash difference in the name of some illusory universalism (Forman, 1998:8). Against such assertions, I concur with Forman’s (1998:8) judgement that “internationalism is the only practical concept capable of bearing our highest hopes”, and I believe that left communism has been the left’s most consistent bearer of such internationalist - or as Marx would have put it “cosmopolitan” (Blackburn, 1991a:28) - and universalistic hopes.

World War One was, as Geary (1981:146) points out, a watershed, marking a break with the politics of the pre-war *ancien regimes*, the emergence of “really existing communism”, and, though there had been turmoil and radicalisation in socialist ranks in the periods 1905-6 and 1910-11 (Stenson, 1981:121), a scission that divided or potentially divided left-Marxians from the socialist mainstream. The war drew an extraordinary wave of patriotic hysteria from the working class of Europe and spawned despair in revolutionaries like Sorel and Luxemburg (who seriously considered suicide) (Wolfe, 1965; Portis, 1980:101; Hobsbawm, 1994:325). Worst of all, the SPD submitted to patriotism and war-hysteria (voting for war credits) and the Second International collapsed. In response to the barbaric mutual slaughter, most left communists (for instance, the SPGB, Luxemburg, Pannekoek, Gorter, Roland-Holst, Malatesta, Berkman, Goldman, Rocker, and Bordiga) took up internationalist positions, refusing to support any national state or section of capital.

Rosa Luxemburg, as Nettl (1969:519) asserts, has justly been placed at the apex of Marxian attempts to surpass the anachronistic ties of nationhood through the idea of class struggle and the future human community that would be socialism. Famously turning Marx’s position on Poland upside down, Luxemburg viewed Polish independence as a nonsense, as capitalism was rendering all frontiers increasingly irrelevant and there could be no identity of interests between classes (Service, 1985:25; Dunayevskaya, 1991): “There is literally no social arena - from the strongest material relations up to the most subtle moral one - in which the possessing classes and a self-conscious proletariat could take one and the same position and figure as one undifferentiated national whole” (in Nettl, 1969:507).

Luxemburg’s emphatic rejection of nationalism and independence movements brought her into continual dispute not only with Kautsky and Bebel, but also with Lenin. According to Rosa Luxemburg, Lenin’s position was but a “variety of opportunism”, throwing “the greatest confusion into the ranks of socialism” (in Mattick, n.d.a:24): “Today the nation is but a cloak that covers imperialistic desires, a battle cry for imperialistic rivalries, the first ideological measure with which the masses can be persuaded to play the role of cannon fodder in imperialistic wars” (Luxemburg, 1970:307). Rejecting the “right of self-determination of nations”, Luxemburg (1970:304,379) most appositely contended that “it is a veritable perversion of socialism to regard present-day capitalist society as the expression of this self-determination of nations. Where is there a nation in which the people have had the right to determine the form and conditions of their national, political and social existence?” Apparently possessed of no sense of national or ethnic identity,<sup>48</sup> Luxemburg

(1970:305,422) looked forward to the solidarity and genuine self-determination that socialism would bring.

In similar fashion, Pannekoek soon found himself hostile to the Bolshevik leader's stance on the national question (Smart, 1978:23). Pannekoek had been the first to call for the formation of a new International, and though the Dutch had shown some early support for Third World struggles - Pannekoek arguing the case for a break from imperialism at its weakest link - they soon took the position that "self-rule relates only to the upper classes of these colonies" (in Bricanier, 1978:215; Gerber, 1989). Such internationalist opposition to imperialist war and the Leninist argument for self-determination of the peripheral nations was also held to by Gorter (ICC, n.d.b:31), Mattick (1978:viii), and Pankhurst (Winslow, 1996:89). As the Bordigists grouped around the 1930s journal *Bilan* put it: "the position of the proletariat in each country must consist of a merciless struggle against all the political positions which attempt to tie it to the cause of one or another imperialist constellation, or to the cause of this or that colonial action, a cause which has the function of masking from the proletariat the real character of the new world carnage" (in ICC, 1992:32).

Many anarchists have also been staunch internationalists. Goldman and Berkman valiantly organised against the First World War, the former asserting that "Patriotism ... is a superstition artificially created and maintained through a network of lies and falsehoods; a superstition that robs man of his self-respect and dignity, and increases his arrogance and conceit" (Goldman, 1911). Malatesta (1965:221) scolded Kropotkin, Grave, and other errant anarchists who had sided against the German powers (viewing the German nation as embodying the principle of the strong state) in the Great War: one "ought never to fight except for the social revolution" (Malatesta, 1965:219; Joll, 1979:133). For these anti-patriotic anarchists, nationalism (a product of state and capitalism<sup>49</sup>) increased the power of politicians over people, and conflated the nation state with the cultural needs of people (Kolakowski, 1978:178; Joll, 1979:45). In an exemplary syndicalist expression, Griffuelhes commented: "I am a stranger to everything that constitutes the moral dimension of our nation. I possess nothing; I must sell my labour in order to satisfy even my smallest needs. Therefore nothing which for some people forms a homeland exists for me. I cannot be a patriot" (in Jennings, 1990:40).<sup>50</sup>

With its extreme internationalist insistence on the constructed-ness of national identity and on the equal right to freedom of all human beings across all barriers, socialism speaks of a broad unity of humanity (Forman, 1998:4). This promise of a "universalism to come"

(Zizek, 1997a) has been disfigured by the linkage of socialism with both first and third-world ideologies of nation-building and national liberation. It is no accident that it was the question of internationalism, made painfully material by World War One, that ended the “fictitious unity” (Sassoon, 1996:31) of international socialism and launched the left communist current proper within the Marxian tradition. The section in the General Rules of the IWMA that proposed a social order that would “acknowledge truth, justice, and morality as the basis for ... [the working class’] conduct towards each other and towards all men, without regard to colour, creed or nationality” (in Forman, 1998:21) still expresses (when its gendered language is amended) an essential universalist aspiration. In this sense, left communism has viewed as vital socialist tasks the unmasking of the constructedness of the nation idea, and the deconstruction of the arbitrary divisions separating people from each other and more democratic social organisation. Perhaps it is true that, as Calhoun (1997:27) says, “Marx and Engels failed to consider that few people would respond to the real material challenges of global capitalist economic integration simply as workers”. Nevertheless, there is no need to accept that, because “Local relations remain important to people” (Calhoun, 1997:92), these relations demand the idea of a nation and nationalism’s characteristic hostility towards the other. In recent times, it has often been argued that it is now capital that is internationalist and cosmopolitan, while the progressive-left seems slow and out of tune with the times, effectively mired in old modes and fields of operation such as the nation-state. Left communism has the merit of having maintained its internationalist urge, an urge that deserves to be re-discovered by any revitalised progressive-leftist political project.

**“The battle of democracy” –  
Post-Capitalist Organisation**

Today, everyone is a democrat. Democracy is, as Crick (1987) notes, the most promiscuous word in the political lexicon. All political strands (liberals, conservatives, Stalinists) want to claim democracy as their own. Even those regimes most transparently committed to the elimination of citizens from political life and to stifling the free expression of opinion pay lip-service to democracy. Surprisingly, then, democracy, like freedom, has remained a critical concept with which reality can be tested and found wanting and about which debate is not futile (Arblaster, 1991:6). Democracy seems to have proved bigger than any of the political tendencies that have wielded it. In this vein, Laclau and Mouffe (1985:178) have argued that socialism has turned out to be but one moment in the larger, two hundred year old *democratic revolution*. This is a salutary approach, but, unfortunately, with the collapse of socialist hopes, more and more have democracy, liberalism, and capitalism come to

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commonsensically refer to the same thing (Pierson, 1995; Hoffman, 1995:197). Such a conflation hides the promise of the democratic aspiration. The democratic idea could be pushed much further than contemporary representative liberal democracy. This representative democracy has with much justice been viewed as politics made safe for the state, “democracy converted from unruly and incoherent master to docile and dependent servant” (Dunn, 1992:248). In fact, as Hoffman (1995:196,209) argues (pointing to the paradoxical nature of the phrase “democratic state”, given the state’s monopoly of legitimate force), those who gesture towards democracy are reaching beyond the limitations of the state. In this section, I focus on the left communist attempt to keep alive the aspiration for direct democracy beyond the state, an aspiration that left communists have contended might be embodied in administrative forms such as the workers’ councils or peoples’ communes. This appeal to direct democracy and the accompanying critique of the reality of contemporary representative democracy deserve reconsideration, promising as they do a fulfillment of democracy’s promises and a reinvigoration of politics.

Today, the equation of socialism and democracy seems improbable. Lenin’s (1970:27) claim that “Proletarian democracy is a *million times* more democratic than any bourgeois democracy” certainly had little to do with empirically existing political forms. Instead, Lenin’s assertions, as Lovell (1986:172) notes, were based on arguments about the class nature of the state and a connection of working class interests and Bolshevik aims. In reality, Lenin’s notion of a post-revolutionary regime was a *species of elite theory*. The popular democratic forms he championed had, in his eyes, the virtue of training the masses in discipline and administration, and politics was but a matter of stirring or cajoling the masses (Siriani, 1982). Here, the utopian “end of politics”, promised by the abundance socialism would create, becomes a justification for the forced exclusion of people from any decisions regarding their own lives. For some, like Femia (1993:120), such an outcome, although counter to Marx’s humanistic hopes, can be explained by Marxism’s failure to produce a convincing and coherent theory of democracy and by its covert elitism. Such failures are evident in social democracy’s fetishising of liberal democracy, as, in Kautsky’s words, the “light and air to the proletariat” (in Tucker, 1969:193), without, for all that, possessing any vision of a specifically *socialist* democracy (Boggs, 1982:101). Thus, social democratic commitment remains every bit as vulnerable to the penetrating critiques radicals have levelled at “bourgeois democracy”.

Left communists have rejected bourgeois democracy and the elitism of both social democracy and Leninism, and they have tried to specify the dimensions of a libertarian,

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democratic socialism. Bourgeois democracy, left communists insist, is limited to a narrowly political sphere, meaning that inequalities of wealth - fatal to democracy as they constitute a form of political power - are not examined (Cole, 1975:12): “[advocates of bourgeois democracy] ignore the fact that vast inequalities of wealth and status, resulting in vast inequalities of education, power and control of environment, are necessarily fatal to any real democracy, whether in politics or in any other sphere.” Instead, for Cole (1975:120), politics should be conceived of “in a broader and more comprehensive sense, ... [as] applying to all acts which men do in association or conjunction”. Furthermore, the notion of “representation”, integral to bourgeois democracy and orthodox socialism, is defective: administration is, in the end, to be left to skilled and experienced rulers, not the masses (Wolff, 1965:105). In contrast, for left communists, human beings cannot be *represented* as human beings (Cole, 1975).<sup>51</sup> Castoriadis (1957:98), for instance, argued that representation, as embodied in the vote, was a parody of democracy: “To decide who is to decide already is not quite deciding for oneself.” Democracy should mean *complete domination* over every sphere of human life, the ability to decide for oneself on all relevant questions with full knowledge of pertinent facts (Castoriadis, 1988b:98,145). The gulf separating “political affairs” from people’s everyday lives should be eliminated so that politics means nothing more than “the collective search for, debate about, and adoption of solutions to the general problems concerning the future of society” (Castoriadis, 1988b:145). For left communists, truly democratic decisions can only be made when the relevant “constituency” are confident, autonomous, and informed, not, in the vein of contemporary politics, cajoled, manipulated, or simply entertained.

For some left communists, the critique of bourgeois democracy and the vision of a new and complete democracy follows on from Marx’s aspirations. Left communists, that is, would view themselves as inheritors of the aspiration to win the “the battle of democracy”, to liberate politics from the state, and to raise people over political institutions (Barker, 1986:29). Further, left communists are in accord with Marx’s critique of representation as “something passive”, with his objection to political without economic democracy, and with his desire for a de-professionalisation of politics (Maguire, 1978:233; Hunt, 1984:129; Draper, 1977:100). However, Bordiga and some of his followers - Marxists *a la lettre*, they insist - are proudly *anti-democratic* (Goldner, 1991:6). For Bordiga (1922:48): “The Marxist critique of the postulates of bourgeois democracy is in fact based on the definition of the class character of modern society.” This bourgeois conception of democracy is, according to Bordiga, based on a worthless and incoherent individualism. Furthermore, the principle of democracy has, says Bordiga (1922:56), no intrinsic virtue; it is but a mode of organisation

which responds “to the simple and crude arithmetical presumption that the majority is right and the minority is wrong.” There is perhaps some merit in this claim, but Bordiga uses it to champion a post-capitalist administration in which the party will emerge as society’s “social brain”, administering on a scientific rather than democratic basis (Buick, 1987:136,141). Given such lingering vanguardism, I believe that Buick (1987) is correct in maintaining that Bordiga’s positioning as a left communist relates above all to his firm critique of private property, state socialism, production capitalism, and workerism. Bordiga’s importance also relates to the extent that he has emphasised the *content* over the forms of revolution (ICG, n.d:13). Thus, the Bordigists have been able to move beyond the conception of revolution as merely a new mode of management (Barrot, 1997:68).

Bordiga is not the only left communist whose democratic credentials look doubtful. It has also been argued that there is an ambiguous relationship between the democratic aspiration and anarchism (Vincent, 1992:137). George Woodcock (1962:30) and Hal Draper (1990:132), thinkers with violently irreconcilable political commitments, both confidently assert that anarchism is not democratic. Democracy signifies the sovereignty of the *people*, whereas anarchy means the sovereignty of the *person*. Despite sympathy for the participatory model, says Vincent (1992:137), anarchists fear the possibly nefarious consequences of majoritarianism, which may resolve into immoral decisions and may crush individual liberty. Malatesta (1965), for example, argued that having the majority on one’s side did not make one right. Humanity had advanced through the efforts of the minority and, therefore, anarchists did not recognise the will of the majority. In response, Marxists have complained that if, in the anarchist society, each person and each community is completely autonomous, a society is impossible (Engels in Draper, 1990:137). I reject the equation of all anarchism with asocial egoism, and, in the thought of the anarchists I have placed within the left communist tradition, the attachment to decentralisation and the concern for individual liberty are combined with a firm commitment to popular sovereignty.

In order to improve on bourgeois regimes and to fulfill the criterion of genuine or “total” democracy enthused over by left communists, the new communist administrative form must, says Castoriadis (1957:98), therefore be *direct democracy*. Such democracy is to begin in the workplace, in trades, neighbourhood, or region, and it is to be coordinated by delegates who, in contrast to representatives, would be instantly recallable and would exercise no separate power than the delivery of a mandate. Groupings of delegates, always directly responsible to those whose mandate they carry, would then come to decisions regarding social, political, and economic questions. Such aspirations are frequently seen as being most

likely realised in some sort of *councils democracy*. Schecter (1994:7), for instance, argues that the councils mend the split between citizen and worker, and Boggs (n.d.) describes the outcome of the councils as a de-professionalisation of politics, where the business of society becomes everybody's business: "by collectivising work and 'management' functions, councils can more effectively combat the social division of labour; by emphasising the transformation of social relations over instrumental power objectives, they can incorporate a wider range of issues, demands, and needs into popular struggles; by imposing the question of ideological hegemony, they can furnish the context in which the masses would develop their intellectual and political potential ... and finally, by encouraging political involvement that is centred outside the dominant struggles, the capacity to resist deradicalisation can be greatly strengthened."

While elite theorists have viewed the masses as "incapable of action other than a stampede" (Schumpeter in Femia, 1993:63), left communists have seen the "remarkable persistence of the real tendency towards the power of workers' councils" (Riesel, 1989:271) as indicative of the creativity and ability of people to rationally manage their own lives. Viewing democracy's fate as dependent on the success or failure of socialism, Luxemburg (1971:405; 1986:48), for instance, contended that: "The councils must have all power in the state". Similarly, Pannekoek saw proletarian democracy as the essence of socialism and, in a pre-war debate with Kautsky, he asserted that with socialism would "emerge a new organisation of society - the structures of democratic struggle created by the proletariat itself" (Gerber, 1989:139; Salvadori, 1979:164). Pannekoek (1970:47) came to identify these structures of struggle as the workers' councils: "Workers' councils are the form of organisation during the transition period in which the working class is fighting for dominance, is destroying capitalism and is organising social production." The formation of workers' councils would, for Pannekoek (1920:117; 1970:48-50), signal the disintegration of the state and the coalescence into a unity of general regulation and practical productive labour politics and economics. Similar enthusiasm for the councils was displayed by Gorter,<sup>52</sup> the KAPD, the AAUD, Sylvia Pankhurst,<sup>53</sup> and Karl Korsch.

In a similar fashion to Korsch, for those other two fathers of Western Marxism, Lukacs (1973:69) and Gramsci, the radicalism of the period 1917-1921 meant a focus on the councils as leading the way from bourgeois society. According to Gramsci (1977:100): "Whereas in the union, workers' solidarity was developed in struggle against capitalism, in suffering and sacrifice, in the Council this solidarity is [a] positive, permanent entity that is embodied in even the most trivial moments of industrial production. It is a joyous awareness

of being an organic whole, a homogeneous and compact system which, through useful work and the disinterested production of social wealth, asserts its sovereignty, and realises its power and its freedom to create history.” Similarly, for those involved in the post-1918 upheaval in Germany, including Mattick,<sup>54</sup> Ruhle (1981:13), Appel (1990:341), Rocker, and Gustav Landauer, “The idea of a council system for labour was the practical overthrow of the state idea as a whole” (Rocker, 1989:76).

The council idea (though in slightly differing forms) was championed by such thinkers as C. L. R. James, Kropotkin,<sup>55</sup> the Guild Socialists, Murray Bookchin,<sup>56</sup> Sorel,<sup>57</sup> the French syndicalists,<sup>58</sup> the IWW, and the Situationist International (Debord, 1995:116). For the SI, workers’ councils would allow direct communication and mark the end of all specialisation, hierarchy, and separation (Debord, 1995:117). The SI’s Raoul Vaneigem (1989:284-6), for example, argued for workers’ councils as a first principle of “generalised self-management”, insisting that “Because they tolerate no power separate from the decisions of their members, the councils tolerate no power other than their own.”

The SI were part of a new generation of left communists, rediscovering the older tradition and inspired by the example of Hungary 1956. The most important moment in this new generation, however, was the intervention of *Socialisme ou Barbarie*. According to Castoriadis (1988b:84,198), the new historical forms of proletarian organisation and struggle against capitalism, from 1871 to 1956, realised “the greatest amount of proletarian democracy” and “were a practical refutation of the ideas that have dominated man’s political organisation for centuries”: “Universal workers’ councils (invoked for a long time by Pannekoek and given new rigor by the Hungarian example), aided by technical devices having no power on their own ..., is this solution that eliminates in one stroke the nightmare of a ‘state’ separated from society” (Castoriadis, 1988a:21).

After the demise of *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, Castoriadis continued to develop his socialist ideals - though outside of the language of Marxism - in terms of the goal of an “autonomous society”. Such an autonomous society means “the complete exercise of power over production and over the entirety of social activities by autonomous organs of workers’ collectives” (Castoriadis, 1988a:10). Castoriadis (1997a:276) thus remained committed to the historical tradition of direct democracy - the town meetings of the American revolution, the sections of the 1789 revolution in France, the Paris Commune, the workers’ councils - and he defined the commencement of revolution by the appearance of such autonomous mass organs (Castoriadis, 1997a:312). While heteronomous societies can neither question

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their institutions nor comprehend the fact of institution itself, and while they produce individuals unable to question the postulates of the social order, the autonomous society involves *explicit and lucid self-institution* (Castoriadis, 1997a:336,314). For Castoriadis (1997a:30), the self-institution of society characteristic of the autonomous society means that “the collectivity knows that its institutions are its own creations and has become capable of regarding them as such, of taking them up again and transforming them”.

What difficulties might left communist conceptions of post-revolutionary administration run into? Bookchin has provided some troubling arguments from within the tradition. Although at times in his career Bookchin has championed the councils, he is critical of them in his *The Ecology of Freedom*.<sup>59</sup> Within the workers’ councils, says Bookchin, there has been a tendency both to make policy decisions over simple coordinating activities and to depoliticisation. This is in obvious opposition to left communist hopes for transparency and political community. Similarly, councils have historically tended to degenerate and to acquire pyramidal form (Bookchin, 1982:338). Bookchin’s points are sound. Would there not be a tendency as we move from, say, workplace or affinity group to regional commune and upwards to find bodies coalescing that have become further and further removed from the control and decisions of the mass of people? Here authority and political power could just as easily as in bourgeois society become permanently institutionalised and reified in their workings. On the other hand, is not a certain solidity and permanence for the council structure necessary, against secessionist pressures and against the possibility of complete political immobilisation? There is in Marxian and anarchist thought a tension between decentralisation and autonomy and the ideal of the unionisation and cohesion of political society. Left communists have seldom dealt with this, and they have all too often simply assumed a spontaneous harmony that flows from the decline of the state and capital. This seems quite unrealistic, and left communists will have to more adequately address such organisational questions.

Moreover, on what principles are the councils to be based? Is it work? What of those who do not work? (Coleman, 1990). Is it trade? “The mines to the miners”, asserted left communists like Bordiga, remains a slogan of production capitalism, not of communism. Is it region or neighbourhood? Is there not potential in this scenario for parochialism and inter-regional conflict to arise? Is it a combination? If so, how are the participating elements to be weighed and coordinated? Left communists have far too often left these issues unspecified or have answered them in such a way that the evils they seek to combat - for example, the division of labour - seem to continue or to reappear in some form. Whilst the direction left

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communists have taken is an advance on Leninism - which ridicules bourgeois democracy but never coherently specifies the nature of the relations between soviets, party, and state (Boggs, n.d) - it has often remained rather vague about the functioning of such an arrangement. And whilst they have advanced on social democracy and Eurocommunism, positions that avoid speaking of the *content* of socialist democracy, left communists have tended to avoid giving detailed accounts of the future social order. The mere invocation of a councils system cannot be sufficient as proof of your higher democratic commitments or guarantee of the practicality of such a scheme.

Having said all this, however, I argue that, overall, for those interested in the development of a specifically socialist democracy, embodying the popular sovereignty to which the left has historically paid lip-service to, such administrative forms are hard to ignore, especially given their foundation in historical reality. These council forms have functioned in a libertarian, empowering manner to regulate production and distribution in some of the most difficult - even catastrophic - historical situations, from 1905 to 1956.<sup>60</sup> While some of left communism's claims have drifted into the realms of fantasy, there is good reason to believe that these directly democratic forms would provide a feasible administrative mechanism in a post-capitalist society. The idea of direct democracy issuing in total transparency and a complete absence of representation is indeed dream-like. However, against the inevitable objections of sceptical liberals, surely the democratic commitment inclines us towards the direct democracy argument and surely modern communications technology makes the direct participation of people in political debate and decision-making on a large scale practical (Arblaster, 1991:88). Further, despite the tendency of representative democracy to today be limited to legitimising existing power structures, the notion of democracy continues to have strong popular appeal. Such stubborn commitment surely forms a solid basis for a substantial reconsideration of left communism's appeal to the desirability and plausibility of direct democracy. The notion of political power flowing upwards and inwards rather than downwards and outwards, and the popular sovereignty that left communism wants to promote, are still potentially powerful mobilising aspirations.

### Conclusion

This chapter has examined left communist positions on the state, political transition, and post-capitalist administration. I have argued that, with respect to these questions, social democracy and Leninism are importantly similar. Socialist orthodoxy has functioned as a statist-national mode of rationalisation and modernisation of the economic by the political.

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Just as the overemphasis on the division between social democracy and Leninism has served to obscure the left communist alternative, so the rigid division between anarchism and Marxism has made an uncovering of the left communist alternative difficult. The figures within what I have designated the left communist tradition have moved beyond the stereotypical alternatives of Marxism or anarchism. This pathway past socialist orthodoxy and the Marxism-anarchism division leads to a clear rejection of the state and bureaucratic management, a rejection that is indicated in left communism's strong antipathy towards reformism and in its skepticism regarding the division between parliamentary and totalitarian government. Relatedly, rejecting the progressiveness of any particular section of capital, left communism has been socialism's most consistent critic of nationalism, viewing a strictly universalist and internationalist stance as the only proper one for socialists. Lastly, left communists demand that we re-consider the liberal assumption that society can only be organised through representative democracy, arguing instead for direct democracy, to be embodied in a councils-type organisation.

In the introduction to this chapter, I asserted that left communism might make good on political post-modernism's democratic and anti-statist urges. Unlike some post-modernism, left communism maintains that the state is still a vital focus for those interested in the workings of power and domination. The state is deeply inimical to the democratic aspiration and must be confronted, both theoretically and politically, head-on. Similarly, left communism challenges post-modernism's skepticism towards the universalism of libertarian socialism's anti-nationalist stance. In response to the contemporary re-emergence of particularistic hostility following the collapse of "really existing socialism" and the turn to identity politics,<sup>61</sup> left communism points to the possibilities contained within its democratic and cosmopolitan commitment to popular sovereignty.

Left communism's intervention in the sphere of democracy is, I believe, both challenging and highly relevant. In its insistence that one can and must separate the state from government, the state from democracy, and the state from politics (Thomas, 1994:2), left communism provides a way to re-think and re-invigorate politics and democracy. Contemptuous, like post-modernism, of the political realm, in as much as this realm is limited to the hypocrisy and self-promotion of contemporary electoral politics, left communist thinking on post-capitalist organisation need not be of a coercively perfectionist variety that assumes absolute and immediate harmony. Left communism's advocacy of direct democracy does not posit the absurd notion of a society without morality, government, economic management, and struggle (Hoffman, 1995:47,122). As Dauve

(1998) puts it: “Communism organises life on the basis of the confrontation and interplay of needs - which does not exclude conflicts and even some form of violence. Men will not turn into angels: why should they?” A reinvigorated politics would seek to embody Castoriadis’ (1991:160) hopes for the overall questioning of society, the confrontation of opinions, and “the explicit collective activity which aims at being lucid (reflective and deliberate) and whose object is the institution of society as such”. Such is promised by the direct democracy of the councils, where, as Boggs (n.d.) says, *society’s business is everybody’s business*.

Today, as I have said, everyone is a democrat. This democratic impulse is alive, for instance, in post-modernism. As Best and Kellner (1997:279) argue, “The postmodern political turn ... involves a radicalisation of the theme of participatory democracy that is advocated in a variety of fields and domains of social life.” Nevertheless, post-modernists frequently leave such commitments vague, failing to specify the institutional configurations that might allow for such democracy. In general, there is today an astounding absence of critical alternatives to representative democracy. The challenge of direct democracy appears to be off the political agenda. For instance, even post-Marxist, Chantal Mouffe (1997:16) insists on the necessary continuation of state and representative politics, rejecting out of hand the possibility of direct democracy. However, given the cynicism and withdrawal of citizens from state politics, the unresponsiveness of representative democracy to people’s needs, and the fact that, because it is limited to a narrowly political realm, liberal-democratic regimes cannot extend democracy to all spheres of social life, the spectre of direct democracy, pursued in its most extreme form by the left communists, will surely continue to haunt us.

In this chapter and the chapter that preceded it, I have examined both left communism’s sustained critique of state and capital and its utopian alternatives to the domination of these two macro-structures. In my final chapter, I turn to investigate left communism’s intervention in the cultural sphere. Following on from my emphases in this chapter and the one previous to it, I will underscore left communism’s utopian dimension as an important corrective to post-modernism’s relatively weak utopianism.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> It will, for example, be recalled that Engels (1972:170) boldly predicted that the communists would soon consign the state to “the museum of antiquities, by the side of the spinning-wheel and the bronze axe.”

<sup>2</sup> To Engels’ chagrin, the leaders of the SPD had cut from the text comments suggesting the continued possibilities of armed rebellion (McLellan, 1977:51).

<sup>3</sup> Engels triumphantly announced that the legal conditions and the institutions of the state provided by the bourgeoisie itself were proving to be to the advantage not of the status quo but to the party of the working class. Elsewhere, Engels (1972:170) is more pessimistic.

<sup>4</sup> For socialists of the time, such as Jaures and the English Fabians, democracy was “the largest and most solid terrain on which the working class can stand” (Jaures in Przeworski, 1995:16). Socialism, to be based on the social and political edifice as it existed, rather than on “the speculations of a German philosopher”, was to be achieved “by methodical and legal organisation under democratic conditions, and by making use of the general right to vote”. For Jaures, alliances aimed at preserving democracy - such as those around the Dreyfus affair - were viewed as essential for socialism (Braunthal, 1966:266; Joll, 1966:88; Layborne, 1997:20; Cauter, 1966:84; Cole, 1970:109,115-7; Hobsbawm, 1968:258-266; Laybourn, 1997:22; Lichtheim, 1970:185,197).

<sup>5</sup> According to Kautsky, public affairs “are today too complicated, too manifold, and too wide-ranging to be dealt with by amateurs working in their spare time” (in Femia, 1993:97). Instead, one must turn to “expert and trained people, paid functionaries who dedicate themselves to such tasks completely”.

<sup>6</sup> Impressed, during his English exile, by the strength of British political democracy, the power of the trade unions, the resilience of capitalism, and the Fabian organisation, Bernstein asserted that “The administrative body of the visible future can be different from the present-day state only in degree” (in Tucker, 1969:190; Fried and Sanders, 1964:422). Bernstein’s revisionism included the heretical hope that the SPD “could find the courage to emancipate itself from a phraseology which is actually outworn and if it would make up its mind to appear what it is in reality today: a democratic socialistic party of reform”(Tucker, 1969:190).

<sup>7</sup> Auer, counselling Bernstein, explained the perverse situation thus: “After all, the ‘new tactics’ [revisionism] are only what already happens in nine-tenths of the party, without it being openly admitted. It is a question of getting over the matter as quickly as possible” (in Guttsman, 1981:296). The empty reaffirmations of revolutionary commitment that provided a solution to the dispute were not, however, the full story: as Joll (1969:98) observes, the conflict saw the emergence of a group of radicals aware of the gap between the theory and practice of the SPD.

<sup>8</sup> As Stearns (1971:190) notes, after 1900, the primary function of union activity was the control rather than exacerbation of industrial conflict.

<sup>9</sup> “Opportunism was engendered in the course of decades by the special features of the development of capitalism, when the comparatively peaceful and cultured life of a stratum of privileged workers ‘bourgeoisified’ them, gave them crumbs from the table of their national capitalists and isolated them from suffering, misery and revolutionary temper of the impoverished and ruined masses” (Lenin in Hodges, 1981:174).

<sup>10</sup> Schapiro and Anweiler see Lenin’s libertarianism as brief and tactical: “It is unlikely that the more utopian parts of this represented Lenin’s convictions” (Schapiro in Polan, 1984:22-5).

<sup>11</sup> “Millions of backward members are enrolled in the Labour Party, therefore communists should be present to do propaganda amongst them provided Communist freedom of action and propaganda is not thereby limited” (Lenin in Winslow, 1996:156).

<sup>12</sup> In like manner: “The minutest cells of the labour apparatus must transform themselves into agents of the general process of organisation, which is systematically directed and led by the collective reason of the working class, which finds its material embodiment in the highest and most all-encompassing organisation, in its State apparatus” (Bukharin in McLellan, 1988:229).

<sup>13</sup> Marx and Engels had hopefully maintained that “The fear of a proletarian revolution as a result of a world war has proved to be an essential guarantee of peace” (in Landauer, 1976a:495).

<sup>14</sup> Championing a democratic and independent Poland, Marx and Engels displayed a fear of Russia as a bulwark of reaction, and both were, at times, infected with an ugly German nationalism and Eurocentrism (Frolich, 1940:38; Nettle, 1969:501; Dunayevskaya, 1991:51; McLellan, 1995:193). Similarly, Bakunin (1990:41), despite his avowed internationalism, still held tight to an odious racial theory of history, and he harboured a hysterical hatred of Germans and Jews in whom he saw embodied the very principles of the state.

<sup>15</sup> Schippel declared that colonies were essential to Germany’s future, and he considered colonisation a “historical duty” of European countries (Pierson, 1993:214). Similarly, Hildebrand supported colonisation because of the “release of economic forces” that it allowed (Pierson, 1993:216).

<sup>16</sup> Formerly vehement internationalists like Gustav Herve made dramatic about-faces. With the outbreak of the war, Herve changed the name of his insurrectionary and internationalist journal, *La Guerre Sociale*, to *La Victoire* (Harding, 1996:71; Goldman, 1911; Joll, 1966:113; Braunthal, 1966:325).

<sup>17</sup> “Every nation must obtain the right to self-determination, and that will make the self-determination of the working people easier” (Lenin, 1964:174).

<sup>18</sup> Encouraged by Lenin, Stalin’s 1913 tract, *Marxism and the National Question*, puts forward in characteristically simple terms the Leninist arguments detailed above.

<sup>19</sup> However, at times Berkman (1972:143) equated Bolshevik strong government with Marxism.

<sup>20</sup> “[T]he political State has no other mission but to protect the exploitation of the labour of the people by the economically privileged classes, the power of the state can be compatible only with the exclusive liberty of those classes whom it represents” (Bakunin, 1953:191).

<sup>21</sup> Reclus saw the social-economic system that gave rise to the state (which in turn protected this system) as the “source of all oppression” (Fleming, 1979:127); Emma Goldman (1983:51) argued that the state was only needed to protect property and monopoly; Alexander Berkman (1972:69,97) contended that law and government were always at the service of labour against capital: “The abolition of the capitalist order of things with its government and law would be the only real defence of labour’s interests”; and Rudolph Rocker (1989:110) maintained that the modern state was just the consequence of capitalist economic monopoly and the class divisions this has set up in society.

<sup>22</sup> In the preface, Marx argued that “no special stress is laid on the revolutionary measures proposed at the end of section II. That passage would, in many respects, be very differently worded today”. Such was the case due both to the strides of modern industry and to the example of the Paris Commune (Ryan, 1982:174)

<sup>23</sup> Lenin, for instance, saw the “dictatorship of the proletariat” as “the very essence of Marx’s teaching”, while Kautsky dismissed it as a “little expression” (in Hunt, 1974:284).

<sup>24</sup> It is also interesting to note that, contrary to notions of anarchism’s supposed voluntarism and opposition to Marxian determinism, Bakunin (1953:145) viewed the state as a historically-necessary evil.

<sup>25</sup> Lehning sees Marx’s address to the IWMA on the Paris Commune as a “foreign body in Marxist socialism” (in Guerin, 1969:3). For similar sentiments, see also Clark (1984:92) and Guillaume (1972:259).

<sup>26</sup> Marx had advised calm work towards republican liberty for the French working class prior to the Commune, he was very skeptical about the Commune’s chances of success, and, in a famous letter to Domela Nieuwenhuis, dated February 22 1881, Marx (1987:594) declared that the Commune “was merely the rising of a city under exceptional conditions, the majority of the commune was in no way socialist, nor could it be.”

<sup>27</sup> Relatedly, Ruhle (1920:2) argued that centralism is the organisational principle of the capitalist age and that the council system would work counter to this. And Kropotkin called for “complete independence of the Communes, the Federation of Free Communes and the Social Revolution IN THE COMMUNES” (in Dolgoff, n.d.).

<sup>28</sup> For Rocker (1989:90), it should commence with democracy in the absolutely autonomous local union.

<sup>29</sup> Lenin’s commentary on Marx’s interpretation of the Commune avoided quoting the following: “The communal arrangements of things once established in Paris and the secondary centres, the old *centralised* government would in the provinces, too, have to give way to the *self-government* of the producers” (in Ryan, 1982:167).

<sup>30</sup> Marx’s reply to Bakunin’s question as to whether all forty million Germans would be members of the communist government is one location of such possibilities: “Certainly, for the thing begins with the self-government of the community” (in Hunt, 1984:153). And Engels’ (1993:397) 1886 letter to Nieuwenhuis is another strong piece of evidence for this interpretation: “Along with England and Switzerland, Holland is the only Western European country not to have had absolute monarchy in the period between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, and in consequence enjoys a number of advantages, notably a residue of local and provincial self-government and an absence of any real bureaucracy in the French or Prussian sense. This is a great advantage ... for only a few changes will have to be made to establish here that free self-government by the working [people] which will necessarily be our best tool in the reorganisation of the mode of production”.

<sup>31</sup> In 1918, Luxemburg (1971:359) called for the demands of the second section of the *Communist Manifesto* - in particular centralisation in the hands of the state - to be immediately enacted, while, in the same period, demanding all power for the workers’ councils.

<sup>32</sup> Similarly, Bookchin (1987:185) contends that, through the parties and unions, the working class became a negotiator with, rather than the grave-digger of, capitalism.

<sup>33</sup> For the German trade union leaders, “To build up our organisation the labour movement will need above all peace and quiet” (in Guttsman, 1981:286).

<sup>34</sup> Hobsbawm, for instance, has argued that we can make no clear linkage between reformist or revolutionary disposition and workers’ skill levels, cultural tasks, or notions of respectability (Levy, 1987:18).

<sup>35</sup> Pannekoek’s views were echoed by other left communists, including Otto Ruhle, Cajo Brendel, the British anti-parliamentary communists, the SI, and the ICC, who all viewed the trade unions as vital parts of the capitalist machine, tying the working class to capital.

<sup>36</sup> “It is madness to believe that capitalists will ever submit to the verdict of a socialist parliamentary majority and abandon their property, their profits, and their privilege of exploiting their fellow-men” (in Frolich, 1940:249).

<sup>37</sup> Although Morris did accept that socialists might go to parliament if they went as rebels and that, in the last act of revolution, socialists might be obliged to use parliament in order to cripple the resistance of reactionaries (a position apparently close to the SPGB’s and De Leon’s acceptance of the purely negative work of the ballot for socialists), his emphatic conclusion was: “Ignore parliament; let it alone, and strengthen your own organisations” (*Socialist Standard*, 1984:23; Morris, 1994:482).

<sup>38</sup> Malatesta (1965) asserted that the anarchists would happily accept any reform they might wrest from the existing order: “we will take or win all possible reforms with the same spirit that one tears occupied territory from the enemy’s grasp in order to go on advancing, and we will always remain enemies of the government”.

<sup>39</sup> Similarly, Reclus argued that “The possession of power has a maddening influence; parliaments have always wrought unhappiness”, concluding that “To vote is to give up your power”. Relatedly, Goldman urged people, against the illusion of participation, not to vote (Wexler, 1984:90). And, of parliamentary socialists, Rocker (1989:83) maintained that “who eats of the state is ruined by it”.

<sup>40</sup> For Pankhurst (1993:85), parliament was “the product and instrument of the capitalist system”. Reforms, when possible, left the poor poor and the rich rich, and Pankhurst took up Bordiga’s desire for a party free from reformists and, ironically (given her early work for women’s suffrage), the latter’s abstentionism also (Winslow, 1996:127,135,142).

<sup>41</sup> For Bordiga and his intransigent wing in the PCI, “unless electionist and parliamentary activity is abandoned, it will not be possible to form a purely communist party” (in Buick, 1987:128).

<sup>42</sup> For instance, the SLP’s “no immediate demands” stance, and the WSM’s rejection of “activism” aimed at reforming capitalism (Foster, 1955:295).

<sup>43</sup> Rejecting what he saw as “vulgar radicalism”, Trotsky urged agreements between communists and social democrats. See, for example, Trotsky’s (1996:11,17) characteristically heavy-handed “Aesop’s fable”.

<sup>44</sup> The Comintern first viewed fascism as an instrument of the big land-owners, a view which was discarded for the thesis that fascism was an attack by the capitalist class on the working class in an era of impending capitalist collapse (in Kitchen, 1976:1,3). The sixth congress of the CI (lasting until 1935) called for an attack on social democracy, maintaining that fascism grew naturally from bourgeois democracy (Kitchen, 1976:4-5). However, this stance was reversed in 1935, and the CI urged communists to make alliances with the left, centre and even the moderate right, against what were now interpreted as the most reactionary, chauvinistic, and imperialistic elements of capital (Wood, 1990:42; Jessop, 1983:39).

<sup>45</sup> Rocker and Pankhurst supported France and England in the Second World War; Marcuse worked for the OSS (precursor to the CIA); generally, the Frankfurt School’s concern in the 1930s was the exposure, analysis, and destruction of fascism - although Horkheimer’s “whoever is not willing to talk about capitalism should also keep quiet about fascism” points elsewhere (Jay, 1973:141; Bronner and Kellner, 1989:7); and Chomsky has backed the formation of a radical parliamentary party to counter America’s drift towards fascism (Marshall, 1992:353; Walter, 1989:viii; Rai, 1995:111).

<sup>46</sup> The Bordigists refused to separate bourgeois democracy and fascism, seeing fascism as a simple “class reaction” of the capitalist class and as “the organ of bourgeois direction of the state during the period of the decline of imperialism” (in Piccone, 1983:150-2; ICC, 1992:78; Adamson, 1980:77).

<sup>47</sup> Recently, this much criticised “sectarian” aspect of ultra-leftism, particularly as articulated by Bordiga and Barrot, has been under attack in France as itself tending towards fascism. By de-emphasising the uniqueness of, say, the holocaust, such “ultra-leftism”, it is alleged, ends up converging with ultra right “*negationisme*” (denial or down-playing of Nazi crimes against Jews in World War II). Such accusations are gross misreadings of the Bordigist/far-left position (whose rigidity has not aided clarity on the issue).

<sup>48</sup> For instance, Luxemburg held no special sense of Jewish identity: “What do you want with this particular suffering of the Jews? The poor victims of the rubber plantations in Putumayo, the Negroes in Africa with whose bodies the Europeans play a game of catch, are just as near to me ... I am at home wherever in the world there are clouds, birds and human tears”(Luxemburg (to Wurm) in Dunayevskaya, 1991:63).

<sup>49</sup> For instance, in his tract, *The Continuing Appeal of Nationalism*, Fredy Perlman (1985:7,19,58) viewed capitalism as naturally and basically imperialistic and nationalistic. Nationalism was but “a methodology for conducting the empire of capitalism” and “a product of the capitalist production process”.

<sup>50</sup> In America, the syndicalist IWW took an anti-patriotic stance towards the war, insisting that the only worthwhile war was the class war (Dubofsky, 1969:350).

<sup>51</sup> For Cole, “Each man is a centre of consciousness and reason, a will possessed of the power of self-determination, an ultimate reality. How can one such will be made to stand in place of many? How can one man, being himself, be at the same time a number of other people?” (in Stirk and Weigall, 1995:311). What counts in Cole’s guild socialist vision is the fact that people have put themselves into an associated effort for some precise purpose. Such representation is to be specific and functional, never general and inclusive (Cole in Stirk and Weigall, 1995:311).

<sup>52</sup> For instance, Gorter’s poem, “The Workers’ Councils” (in Appel, 1990:452):

“The workers’ councils will one day become  
the essence of all humanity on earth...

They mean joy for humanity - they are the light.”

<sup>53</sup> Pankhurst (1993:85,100-104) viewed workers’ councils as “the executive instruments for creating and maintaining the socialist community”, and she drew up a detailed plan for household, district, regional and national soviets, even going so far as specifying the numbers of delegates of the executive committee and the regularity of assemblies.

<sup>54</sup> “Communism will be a system of workers’ councils or it will not exist” (Mattick, 1970).

<sup>55</sup> Kropotkin believed that all land should go to the communes and factories, arguing that “the form that the social revolution must take [is] the independent commune” (Osofsky, 1979:47; Bookchin, 1992). Kropotkin also supported both anarcho-syndicalist and councilist principles of organisation as compatible with anarcho-communism (Osofsky, 1979:58).

<sup>56</sup> Bookchin (1994) insists that “representative democracy” is oxymoronic, and he argues for the direct democracy and functional institutions of libertarian municipalism, the commune of peoples’ communes.

<sup>57</sup> Sorel (1976:93) argued that “the whole future of socialism rests on the autonomous development of the workers’ syndicates”.

<sup>58</sup> In the words of the CGT’s *Charter of Amiens*: “The trade union, which is today a fighting organisation, will in the future be an organisation for production and distribution and the basis of social reorganisation” (in Pataud & Pouget, 1990:xvii).

<sup>59</sup> However, Bookchin (1982:336,344) remains committed to direct democracy, advocating instead of councils the direct, face-to-face relations embodied in a system of communes, being composed in turn of many smaller communes and featuring the best elements of his beloved *polis*.

<sup>60</sup> There are a number of accounts, detailing both the difficulties and the successes, of these experiments. See, for instance, Anderson (1964), Anweiler (1974), Boggs (n.d.), Gluckstein (1985), Raden (1968), Ryder (1967), and Sirianni (1982).

<sup>61</sup> As Forman (1998:1) notes, “the belief that allegiance to national communities will always trump all other forms of solidarity has gained new force”.

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## Chapter Seven

### The Turn to Culture, and Utopia at the End of History

*"[W]e must abandon this world dominated by capital" (Camatte, 1995:170).*

*"We must begin to build up the ornamental part of life - its pleasures" (Morris, 1946:615).*

*"[W]ithout 'utopia', without the possibility of negating an order beyond the point that we are able to threaten it, there is no possibility at all of the constitution of a radical imaginary" (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985:190).*

#### Introduction

This thesis has argued that the left communist tradition is worthy of serious re-examination and might fruitfully be brought into negotiation with post-modernist leftism. Buried by the success of social democracy and Leninism, left communism survives the eclipse of socialist orthodoxy, an eclipse that the advent of post-modernism signals. In contrast to post-modernism, and in opposition to the conquest of socialist orthodoxy by these macro-structures of domination, left communists have maintained that the state and capital must remain a major focus for any contemporary theorising. Left communists have also rejected that the party or intellectual is to lead or to take power on behalf of the people, though they have not been immobilised by their critique of representation. In place of faith in the party/intellectual, and against the continuing domination of society by state and capital, left communists have advanced the utopian possibilities of a world without wages and a political order based upon direct democracy. Such a truly political community would allow, left communists have believed, a more just social order, wherein a free and equal confrontation and interplay of needs and desires might be possible.

In this final chapter, I concern myself with left communism's answers to the need for a reinvigorated and convincing politics of the present, and I explore the possibilities that left communism has viewed as currently in play. These possibilities as well as the barriers to

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social change have been located, above all, through a turn of attention by numerous left communists to broadly *cultural* matters.

I have argued that social democracy and Leninism provided no break from the freedom-limiting premises of state and capital. Socialist orthodoxy showed itself to be thoroughly enamoured with industrial production and progress, positing its own programme as a hard science, and understanding the socialist society in terms of a change in management rather than a change in life. Marginalising utopian aspirations for a radically new life and interested in cultural matters only insofar as they might contribute to a new industrial working class culture, socialist orthodoxy was overwhelmingly realist in orientation. For both social democracy and Leninism, the narrowly political (state, party, bureaucratic administration) was the route to a more progressive, less irrational, and fairer species of societal organisation.

In response to the dominance of socialist orthodoxy, the fact of reaction, and the reality of their own marginalisation and failures, left communists frequently made a cultural turn. Culture became the focus for left communists hoping to explain the defeat of libertarian socialism, to locate and understand the plethora of struggles within the contemporary world, and to explore the possibilities and strategies for revolutionary change (Aronowitz, 1981:xix). This cultural turn is variously to be located in analyses of cultural domination and ideology critique, in skepticism regarding the necessity of progress from capitalism to communism, and in the exploration of the potentialities for utopian transformation contained within everyday life. In these cultural moments, left communists have shown themselves to be aware that there would be nothing inevitable in the struggle against domination, that struggle depends, in part, on the possibility of conceiving of life in other ways, and that the reproduction of capitalist society and its characteristic relations occurs at the level of culture and everyday life (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985:152; Best and Kellner, 1997:276). Left communists have thus often come to emphasise the importance of needs, desires, feelings, subjectivity, psyche, and utopian imagination in societal transformation (Best and Kellner, 1997:276).

This cultural thrust, away from the industrial-economic and workerist fixations of socialist orthodoxy and towards a more expansive conception of need and desire, is also characteristic of post-modernism. Reliant on the 1960s, *gauchiste* merging of culture and politics, and concerned with subjectivity and the micro-struggles of everyday life,<sup>1</sup> post-modernists have quarrelled with the political logic of the old workers' movement, centred

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around trade union struggle and party political contestation (Katsiaficas, 1987:17; Sassoon, 1996:384). This *culturalist* focus, addressing the wider crisis of identity in post-modern societies, the questioning of relations of domination across everyday life, and the discovery and promotion of difference (Eagleton, 1996:70,122; Fotopoulos, 1997:285), is opposed to the values of bourgeois society and to the prioritisation of the economic and the productionism of Leninism and social democracy. Relatedly, post-modernism has rejected the notion of the working class' primacy and of the straightforward socialist linkage of class position, class interest, and class consciousness. In this vein, Judith Butler (1998:33-4,41), for example, has questioned the orthodox socialist reduction of the new social movements to the "merely cultural", problematising the socialist equation of culture with the trivial, the particularistic, and the non-material. Turning away from the promises of teleology, totalising thought, and the illusions of a universal subject of history, post-modernism has focused on identity as contradictory and fragmentary, championing a more particularistic micro-politics that engages in the guerrilla skirmishes of everyday life, without the illusions of an end to politics or the possibility of universal liberation (Sarup, 1996:47). Post-modernism is therefore often somewhat ambivalent and sceptical with respect to questions of power, liberation, and utopia. Power is everywhere, recuperation is a permanent danger, totalising designs and the notion of the theoretical God's eye view threaten totalitarian solutions, and the aim of fixing a pole around which liberation might be sought is seen as potentially dangerous and coercive (Best and Kellner, 1991:57,286; Boyne, 1990:131; McGowan, 1991:126).

I believe that a constructive engagement between leftist post-modernism and left communism might issue in a reformulated and robust libertarian socialist cultural politics. For instance, post-modernism's close attention to gender issues alerts us to the overwhelming masculine orientation of left communism as it has thus far been expressed. Relatedly, post-modernism cautions us against the vanguardist implications of workerism, pointing out that post-modernity as societal configuration is a quite different epoch to that in which the workers' councils first appeared. On these terms, left communist cultural analyses have, at times, prefigured many of the post-modernist advances over socialist orthodoxy. Left communism, however, is not simply an interesting precursor to a number of post-modern themes. As Simons and Billig (1994:6) note, "The problem is not that the postmodernist spirit lacks a critical impulse, but that critique is running rampant without political direction." Left communism, as I have argued in my previous chapters, and as I shall argue in this chapter with the broadly cultural in mind, provides a robust political orientation and utopian vision that post-modernism often lacks.

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Beginning with an analysis of socialist orthodoxy as little more than a new mode of the management of capital, I move on to consider the left communist “culturalist” reaction to economism, scientism, and productivism. This reaction has had both pessimistic and optimistic modalities. In pessimistic mode, left communists have frequently questioned the reality of both objective and subjective progress towards socialism. One contemporary left communist expression of this critical tendency is the primitivist critique of the modern world, where technology enslaves rather than liberates people, where the drive for accumulation threatens an ecological apocalypse, and where the masses are viewed as infantilised, withdrawn, and marginalised. The other side of this turn to culture, however, has been an attentive and hopeful consideration of contemporary possibilities. The attention to everyday life has been a predominant theme here. Concerned with spirit, new ways of living, authenticity, the re-discovery of play, art, and meaning in work, left communists have repeatedly turned to those little things of everyday existence that have been passed over by socialist orthodoxy. The cultural turn has problematised the assumed connection between material conditions, class interests, and revolutionary prospects, lending culture an autonomy and emphasising as crucially socialist, beyond any privileging of the working class subject, an end to the condition of proletarianisation. Most importantly, this cultural turn has meant a shift from a view of socialism as simply a more efficient and more just re-statement of capitalism. A libertarian socialism would, instead, mean a new mode of life, a renewal of humanity, beyond the dull compulsion of the economic and the exigencies of proletarianisation.

The realisation that revolution would not be automatic, that it might instead require an appeal to desires and an attention to the transformation of human beings and daily life, relates the accent on the cultural to the *utopian aspiration*. In the final section that concludes both this chapter and the thesis as a whole, I look at the problem of utopia at the “end of history”. The fact that the utopian dimension appears to have waned in the contemporary world is signalled in post-modernism’s political ambivalence and the withdrawal of most post-modernist thinkers from a strongly articulated utopian commitment. Concurring with the negative judgement post-modernist thinking has cast upon dreams of a closed and static, perfected human society, I argue that post-modernism’s ambivalence regarding the utopian dimension marks a point at which an engagement with left communism would be advantageous to the former. A utopian dimension, I conclude, is inescapable for any project that seeks societal change. Such utopianism certainly involves the hope and will that is (despite defeat) evident within the left communist tradition. However, left communism’s utopian dimension represents more than a simple hopefulness. Left communism’s utopian

vision encompasses an attempt to analyse and criticise the world as it stands, to present a societal alternative based on possibilities in the present, and to create a transformed commonsense and a desire for a new social order.

**“A single gigantic industrial concern” -  
Socialist Orthodoxy and the Interpretation of Culture**

As argued in previous chapters, socialist orthodoxy represented no break from the postulates of capitalist development and management. Socialist orthodoxy was optimistic about development of the forces of production, which it equated with socialist progress. Such an economic and administrative conception of socialism meant that the cultural was marginalised and/or reduced to the industrial. I will now examine these issues in more detail.

Despite its destruction of past ways of life and the exploitation and alienation it visited upon the working class, capitalism, for Marx and Engels, was a revolutionary and progressive force. For example, in Engels: “Fight on bravely then, gentlemen of capital. We need your help. We need even your rule upon occasions. For it is you who must clear from our path the relics of the Middle Ages and of absolute monarchy. You must abolish monarchy, you must centralise, you must change the more or less destitute classes into real proletarians - recruits for us” (in Bauman, 1976:57). Here, the development of capitalism rids the world of antiquated and regressive elements,<sup>2</sup> builds the preconditions for a better life, and, at some points, even seems to *make* revolution: “The mode of production rises in rebellion against the form of exchange” (Engels, 1958:119). The progress of capitalism and the development of technology *is*, it would appear, the progress of communism. Such faith in the evolutionary laws of history is to be found in Marx’s diverse successors: for example, in the astounding optimism and patience of a Kautsky, or in a less orthodox communist like Bordiga, whose battle cry was the rather abrupt “*Avanti Barbari!*” (in Goldner, 1991).

In this conception, capitalism both lays the necessary economic conditions and creates the requisite consciousness for communist transformation. The economic moment is decisive: it is the dynamic unfolding of the forces of production that does all the work. This tendency thus seems from the outset to preclude or to narrow the idea of a cultural politics - socialism is, after all, simply the end-point of an objective movement through immutable historical laws. Furthermore, such faith in industrial productivity and capitalist expansion, some have argued, means that under communism the whole world would become akin to a giant factory in which the proletarian condition was universalised rather than abolished. Although the

encounter with Marx and Engels yields other readings, there can be little doubt that such notions are present in the work of the founders of “scientific socialism” and, most importantly, it was this moment that proved essential in the theory and practice of both social democracy and Leninism.

Exemplifying the technological optimism and productivism of the Second International as a whole, Kautsky believed that capitalism itself would assume the task of socialist transformation, thus leaving the SPD a party in favour of revolution but not a revolution-making party (Sirianni, 1982:253). If the agent of change was History itself, the legislators of such transformation were, as I have noted, the qualified and expert intelligentsia. This intelligentsia would administer a socialist society that, for Kautsky (1971:138), was “nothing more than a single gigantic industrial concern”. And as social democracy matured enough to jettison its youthful and self-deluding revolutionism, its essence as a mode of national capitalist development and crisis management became increasingly apparent.

Social democracy’s narrow emphasis on the economic (identified with History itself) and the political (the state in the grip of the party of the working class, labouring on behalf of History) excluded a detailed engagement with questions of culture. The SPD was certainly hostile to the larger German social order (a hostility encouraged by state repression), and it attempted to provide its adherents with day-to-day alternatives in the form of youth groups, sports clubs, leisure activities, recreation, inns, and insurance systems.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, as Steenson (1981:113,233) argues, the SPD provided a sub- rather than a counter-culture in Germany, largely *mirroring* the larger culture (for instance, in its nationalism and regional particularism).<sup>4</sup> As Guttsman (1981:214) argues, “in as much as the party was in a variety of ways part of the official ruling system the content of its cultural life could hardly be an all-out opposition to the cultural tradition of the state in the formulation of whose fundamental aims it had been so closely associated.”

Such cultural conformism is much in evidence in questions around artistic production. Although *socialist realism* arguably has its roots in certain letters that Engels wrote after Marx’s death, the real development of such prescriptions took place within the Second International tradition (Laing, 1978:13). For the key figure in Second International reckonings on artistic practice, Plekhanov, only that art which served history rather than immediately pleased one’s senses was worthwhile (Eagleton, 1976:44): “the value of a work of art is determined, in the last analysis by its content” (in Milner, 1994:54). Socialist realism was characterised by a strong utilitarianism and by a hostility to a modernism

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autonomised from such utilitarian questions. It insisted that the artist represent social trends, and this tended to be interpreted in the sense of glorifying socialist progress, the factory, and the factory worker. Socialist realism was later to be taken to its coercive, ideological extremes in the cultural policy of the USSR (Laing, 1978:16).

Given Russia's underdevelopment and its desperate attempts to catch up in economic and political terms with the West (Laclau, 1990:240), the managerial-administrative essence of socialist orthodoxy and the resulting orientation with respect to cultural matters are even more clearly pronounced within Leninism. As Sirianni (1982:253) has asserted: "At the level of economic organisation, he [Lenin] held, socialism represented an essential continuity with the highest stage of capitalism"; "The capitalist infrastructure would remain intact as the socialist regime unfettered its tremendous productive capacity to serve the material needs of the people."<sup>5</sup> For Lenin, "In the last analysis, productivity of labour is the most important, the principal thing for the victory of the new social system ... Capitalism can be utterly vanquished by socialism creating a new and much higher productivity of labour" (in Sirianni, 1982:254). Socialism, then, required scientific innovation, increased productivity, industrial organisation and discipline.<sup>6</sup> As "Social emancipation would be a more or less direct and automatic result of technical progress", questions of consciousness and cultural change tended to slide beneath problems of administrative and technical control, and the part workers were to play in such administration was reduced, as Sirianni (1982:257,260,300) points out, to checking on the fulfillment of others' decisions. As Moshe Lewin has argued, Lenin "approached the problems of government more like a chief executive of a strictly 'elitist' turn of mind" than a Marxist (in Sirianni, 1982:302).

In terms of socialist hopes for the emergence of a new person and the transformation of the productive process, then, Paul Piccone (1983:186) has quite convincingly maintained that the Leninist revolution was a mere *shift in management*, in which the party commissar ousted the capitalist and the proletariat stayed unchanged. Similarly, Ryan (1982:171) maintains that there is no conception of emancipated labour in Lenin; instead, Lenin concerns himself predominantly with discipline, and order in the factory. As George says: "For Lenin, it is a matter of accepting the proletariat *as capitalism has constituted it* in order to carry out slightly different tasks. It has been well educated and well adjusted. In other words, the basic personality created by capitalism is the one upon which socialism must rest. The construction of socialism presupposes alienation in its most profound sense: submission to authority and repression of individual possibilities of imagination, autonomy, liberty, creativity, i.e., of organisation" (in Piccone, 1983:186).<sup>7</sup> Thus, for Lenin, with socialism,

“The whole of society will have become a single office and a single factory, with equality of work and equality of pay” (in Cliff, 1955:53).

In Leninism, even more explicitly than in social democracy, the economic is raised by means of the narrowly political over the social and the cultural spheres, or the cultural is narrowly conceived as a function and as a functionary of the industrial. This is illustrated by Stalin’s assessment of socialist artists as the “engineers of human souls” and by Lenin’s assertion that “Literary matters must become a general proletarian cause, must become ‘a cog-wheel and screw’ of a single, monolithic, great vanguard of the entire working class” (Laing, 1978:22; Service, 1985:235).<sup>8</sup> Finally and most clearly, it is evident in Zhdanovism, with socialist realism as a set of “exemplary myths”, embodying enthusiasm, optimism, cleanliness, sentimentality - a socialist art to reflect to the world socialist reality (Wood, 1990:34-5).

In opposition to the cultural postulates of socialist orthodoxy, and in response to the hegemony of orthodoxy and the defeat of libertarian socialism, a number of left communists turned seriously to problems of culture in an expanded sense. This cultural turn has consisted of two distinct moments - pessimistic and optimistic. In the following two sections, I explore both moments of this cultural turn.

### **“We are in an era of regression” -**

#### **The Pessimistic Moment**

Marx's ultimately optimistic conception of capitalism as at once progressive and catastrophic (Jameson, 1991) (capitalism’s unfolding creating the objective and subjective material preconditions for communism) and the frequent Marxist and anarchist<sup>9</sup> faith in the possibilities of technology and the reality of progress have been abandoned by a number of left communists. These left communists have variously argued that socialist victory is not in sight and that contemporary capitalism is most distinguished by technological enslavement, degradation of the natural environment, the loss of beauty and quality of production, the spread of alienation, and by an impoverished culture foisted onto a mass of increasingly manipulated and passive humanity.

For a number of these left communists, Marxism, with its positivist optimism and cold commitment to modern industrial production, is (in Spengler’s words) little but the *capitalism of the working class* (Jacoby, 1981:33). Formulating his theories in the shadow of

Darwin, in a period characterised by faith in progress and the powers of human reasoning, Marx (and Marxism), it is asserted, shares far too much with the bourgeois world view (Jacoby, 1981; Taylor, 1982:1; Camus, 1969:161). For instance, Camatte (1995:200) sees the proletarian movement itself as *retaining and embodying the very presuppositions of capital*: its vision of progress, the exaltation of science, the necessity of distinguishing human from animal (with human as superior), the exploitation of nature.<sup>10</sup> Early in the century, Gustav Landauer (1978:32,60,74) had described Marxism as a “plague” on socialism. For Landauer, the Marxian vision of progress - the idea that 1910 was better than 1870 - was wrong-headed (Lunn, 1973). Senseless and cultureless capitalist production and ownership were not at all about to evolve into communistic relations, but were the complete antithesis of such relations; and, contrary to progressivist conceptions of the arrival of the new social order, Landauer (1978:100) insisted that: “Socialism is possible at all times, if enough people want it.”

For both French sociologist Richard Gombin (1978:5-6) and anarchist Murray Bookchin, Marxism has been an important actor in the story that has seen the working class progressively integrated into capitalist society. According to Bookchin (1986:34), Marxism is inextricably implicated in the contemporary domination of nature and the domestication of human beings. Viewing the natural world as stingy, communism has become a matter of, as Trotsky asserted, subjecting nature to technique: “to compel the raw materials to give anything to man that he needs” (in Sonn, 1992:107). Against this, Bookchin (1986:11) argues that we are now within sight of a *post-scarcity society* (in opposition to the society of scarcity in which Marx’s thinking developed), a society to be founded on the principles of participation, balance, variety, complexity, and locality in a non-hierarchical framework.

Like Bookchin, Cornelius Castoriadis moved from a position within the Marxian tradition to first criticise and then break completely from it. To preserve the spirit of Marxism, declared Castoriadis, one must put the body to death: the choice facing contemporary socialists was - *Marxism or revolution*. Rejecting the Marxian notion that socialism was merely a matter of the working out of objective economic laws, from 1950 to 1954 Castoriadis made an extensive critique of Marxist economics. There was, noted Castoriadis (1988a:13,14), no absolute or even relative pauperisation of the working class, no rise in capital’s organic composition, no tendency of the rate of profit to fall, and no autonomy of the economy and its “laws”. Beginning in the period 1930-9, capitalism has become increasingly state-based (Castoriadis, 1988a:83). Since then, the ruling class has been able to obtain a degree of

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control on the level of economic activity, argued Castoriadis (1993:252), a control that meant that crises of overproduction were not necessarily intrinsic to capitalism.

Such scepticism towards the guarantees of Marxian catastrophe theory is also found in Debord, Camatte, and Negri: Negri speaks of the liberation of capital from the law of value (Moulier, 1989:3); Camatte (1995:39) talks of the absorption of crises and the overcoming of the law of value; and Debord (1995:82) argues that intervention by the state has succeeded in preventing the tendency to crisis. Quite evidently, given the re-appearance of economic decline and the apparent end to the post-war Keynesian solution after the late 1960s, such complacent assumptions are revealed as historically limited. All four thinkers appear to have been too willing to project developments from a particular phase of capitalism into a permanent alteration that rendered Marxian concepts invalid once-and-for-all. Whilst a return to catastrophe theory - under the ominous shadow of the domination of liberal economics and apparently intractable economic decline - is certainly not warranted given the historical flexibility of capitalism, Marxian scepticism about the possibility of eradicating crisis will, as Derrida (1994) has noted, remain a spectre haunting contemporary society.

The questioning of Marxian orthodoxy meant, for Castoriadis, not only a rejection of the Marxian prophecy of decline and collapse, but also an argumentative stance *vis-a-vis* Marxism's whole philosophy of history. For Castoriadis (1978:11), Marxism did not transcend Hegelianism at all, but rather still held that "All that is real and all that will be real, is and will be rational." Here, the future *must* be desirable, and the facts that confront us are somehow secretly arranged so that the good must ultimately manifest itself (Castoriadis, 1978:13). "Matter" may very well take the place of "logos" or "spirit", but the essence of the philosophy of history remains identical (Castoriadis, 1978:44). Thus exploitation or, indeed, any crime of the capitalist class, while denounced at one level, is reappropriated as positive and justified by its contribution to "material progress" at another level (Castoriadis, 1978:49). In this sense, Marx was a purveyor of capitalist ideology,<sup>11</sup> and Marxism has played a "catastrophic" role within the working class movement, replicating capitalism's aim for an unlimited expansion of rational mastery (Castoriadis, 1984:125; Howard, 1988:241).

Moreover, argued Castoriadis, Marx remained imprisoned in nineteenth century positivism and his work contained that most essential element of capitalist rationality - the assumption that the worker was an object, a commodity. The revolutionary element in the young Marx

is, then, in complete revolt against the analysis of *Capital* (Castoriadis, 1978:48). Under the guise of producing a *scientific* analysis of capitalism, Marx, the thinker who had discovered class struggle, buried any notion of such struggle beneath the iron laws of economics (Castoriadis, 1978). Against the reduction by Marx of labour power to a commodity, Castoriadis (1993:32) asserted the importance of struggle, invention, and contingency: *history, it must be remembered, is creation.*

Castoriadis' rather one-sided sentiments violate his own admission that Marx was ultimately an antimonic thinker (Castoriadis, 1984:124). However, his effort at distancing socialism from Marxism, his attempt at finding a living language for the former, and his prioritisation of struggle and invention are well-founded and are necessary elements for a libertarian socialist politics.

The above-surveyed scepticism regarding the benefits of development of the productive forces and the reality of capitalism's progress finds its most extreme expression in left communist "primitivism". Traces of primitivism are to be discovered within the socialist tradition from the nineteenth century onwards. As mentioned, Landauer rejected the idea of progress (viewing the contemporary world as one of decay) and, repelled by urban life and industrial production, he championed the existence of the peasant and craftsperson (Lunn, 1973:5; Landauer, 1978:38,60). Anarchism, such as that represented by Landauer, has, says Marshall (1992:15), always contained a primitivist tendency: an assumption that the best part of human history was pre-state, and a belief that the acquisitions of modern civilisation were evil. It is perhaps more surprising to find such primitivism in the Marxian tradition. Nonetheless, as McLellan (1977:37) points out, Engels' *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* contains the suggestion that sexual and productive relations had in some way been superior in primitive society. And Marx's son-in-law Paul Lafargue revived the myth of the noble and contented savage, whose magnanimous character and natural beauty were untouched and untainted by the "poisonous breath of civilisation" (in Kolakowski, 1978:145). Similarly, William Morris (and, following him, guild socialism) looked back towards the Medieval Guild - with its gleaming solidarity and respect for the beautiful products of craftspeople - as a well-favoured society, in contrast with the unhappy labour and growing ugliness he detected in nineteenth century England (Vernon, 1980). More recently, the Frankfurt School critical theorists questioned the ideas of progress and the supposed neutrality of technology: Marcuse (1989:124) condemned the tendency of technology to enslave human beings and nature<sup>12</sup>; Adorno regarded "progress" in history as none other than that which led "from the slingshot to the megaton bomb" (in Bernstein,

1991:3); blown into the future by civilisation's "progress", Benjamin's "angel of history" looks back in sympathy with history's victims, as catastrophe after catastrophe piles up in front of him (in Bronner and Kellner, 1989); and, in Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Odysseus's travels serve as an allegory of the vengeance wreaked by civilisation on the prehistoric world (Jay, 1973:37).<sup>13</sup>

The contribution of the Frankfurt School has been of enormous importance to the contemporary primitivist critique of modern capitalism (Bookchin, 1982; Clark, 1984:212; Perlman, 1989:92). For primitivist left communists like Fredy Perlman, John Zerzan, Jacques Camatte, and those around contemporary journals like *Fifth Estate* and *Anarchy* in the United States, and *Green Anarchist* in Britain, capitalism, indeed modernity itself, tends to be judged an unmitigated disaster, distinguished only by the shrivelling of the spirit, ubiquitous alienation, ugliness and filth, and damaged human beings living grief-stricken lives. The mood is frequently anti-science, anti-Enlightenment, and even, in the case of Zerzan, anti-civilisation itself.<sup>14</sup> For Zerzan, technology promises not liberation but enslavement. We have become dependent on machines we do not understand and cannot fix, we are not enabled but infantilised by the development of technique, and technology equals separation and alienation from other human beings and from nature (Zerzan, n.d:1): "Never before have people been so infantilised, made so dependent on the machine for everything; as the earth rapidly approaches its extinction due to technology, our souls are shrunk and flattened by its pervasive rule. Any sense of wholeness and freedom can only return by the undoing of the massive division of labour at the heart of technological progress." Lacking any faith in historical process and evolution (Merquior, 1986:39), these primitivists call for a spiritual and libidinal "tiger's leap" (Benjamin in Bronner and Kellner, 1989) away from hierarchy, urbanism, the division of labour, and technology. Instead, they have advocated a return to smaller-scaled societies (casting an approving eye in the direction of humanity's long and noble period as hunter-gatherers), characterised by immediacy and transparency in human relationships.

Perlman, Zerzan, and Camatte all moved from the broadly left-Marxian tradition to critique and then break with Marxism around questions of technology and progress.<sup>15</sup> For instance, beginning to question Marxism during the events of 1968, Camatte came to view the former as part and parcel of a lamentable "wandering of humanity": the ceaseless quest since the sixth century BC to develop the forces of production (Trotter, 1995:7; Camatte, 1995:15). Today, says Camatte (1995:39-40), capital has "run away" (become autonomous), coming to exercise real domination over society, and humanity as a whole is now hopelessly

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domesticated and exploited. In similar fashion, Fredy Perlman moved from a left Marxist to a primitivist position. His growing appreciation of earlier cultures (Perlman, 1989:92), together with the influences of the SI, Reich, and anarchism, culminate in his *Against History, Against Leviathan*. Here, Perlman writes in visionary and poetic mode against armouring, hierarchy, technical and bureaucratic domination, and exploitation and for the re-establishment of authenticity and organic community.

In general, primitivism has emphasised both that capitalism is not *objectively* working its way to communism, and that also *subjectively* the masses are not making progress in the direction of liberation. Left communists have frequently expressed extreme pessimism regarding the masses' subjective readiness for socialism, in pointed contrast to the typical socialist assurance that "being determines consciousness", that "The very structure of modern society prepares the working class and sections of society to undertake immediately the creation of socialist institutions" (C.L.R. James in Le Blanc, 1994:24). With the non-advent of revolution and the emergence from crisis of rightist reaction rather than socialist sentiment, left communists have often turned to cultural questions - in particular, to that most important facet of culture in socialist thought, *ideology* - to explain the "great mystery of civilised life" (Perlman, 1983:37), the gap between imputed and actual class consciousness (Milner, 1994:51; Aronowitz, 1981:xix). That is, cultural considerations have come to fill the gap opened up by the realisation that capitalist exploitation is not a necessary and sufficient condition for socialist revolution (Aronowitz, 1981:173). Again and again - from the Dutch councilists' attention to matters of "spirit", to Gramsci's prison writings on hegemony, to Lukacs' comments on reification, to the Frankfurt School analyses, to the Situationists' notion of spectacle - left communists have advanced theories of cultural domination, ideological manipulation, and the malign workings of something like a "culture industry", as commodification spreads rapidly through social life and those upon whom communists had pinned their hopes are found to be integrated and domesticated.

Left communists of the early part of the twentieth century, disappointed by widespread acquiescence to and eager participation in bourgeois life, often expressed their disillusionment and irritation at a working class, who "corrupted by high salaries, have become indifferent to everything" (Sorel in Portis, 1980:101), whose minds were "scribbled all over by every charlatan who has let himself loose" (De Leon, 1977:55), who had rejected integrity for "display" (Goldman, 1983:82), and who were "stupified by work and alcohol, by the prejudices of the family, the school and the barracks" (Yevtot in Jennings, 1990:31). More constructively, coming to something akin to Gramsci's conception of "hegemony",

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Pannekoek noted the influence of those who produced and disseminated bourgeois culture - journalists, artists, politicians - in creating the “spiritual weakness” that he detected amongst the proletariat (Smart, 1978:105).<sup>16</sup>

Perhaps best exemplifying the pessimistic mode of culture critique in the Marxian tradition are the Frankfurt School theorists, who, as Jay (1973:296) points out, went so far as to end up challenging the idea of a historical subject capable of implementing a rational society. According to Adorno and Horkheimer (1973), for example, a “culture industry” was increasingly manipulating mass consciousness. The combined effect of such manipulation was, for Adorno (1991:92), one of “anti-Enlightenment”. Here, resistance and individuality are virtually eliminated, and “Real life is becoming indistinguishable from the movies” (Horkheimer and Adorno, 1973:xi,120,126; Jay, 1984:37,119). In a characteristically melancholic formulation, Adorno asserted that: “irony’s medium, the difference between ideology and reality, has disappeared. The former resigns itself to confirmation of reality by its mere duplication ... There is not a crevice in the cliff of the established order into which the ironist might hook a fingernail” (in Jay, 1984:43). Similar in tone is Marcuse’s notion of “affirmative culture” and his bleak prognosis in *One-Dimensional Man*, where it is argued that the working class has been integrated into a now stable consumer society. Advanced capitalism, the “society of total reification”, had succeeded in containing social change, in imposing false needs, in undermining critical reason, corrupting language, and deflecting authentic individuality (Kellner, 1984:231-242,258-260). For Marcuse (1973:42,49,82), the performance principle dominated, individuality was in name only, and the mass manipulation of the entertainment industry directly controlled leisure time: “The people, efficiently manipulated and organised are free; ignorance and impotence, introjected heteronomy is the price of their freedom” (Marcuse, 1973:12). Viewing the working class as “contained” and “in no sense a revolutionary potential”, Marcuse (1973:13; 1989:284; Johnston, 1984:97) turned his attention instead to the supposedly “non-integrated” nations and groupings within Western society that might, by their very marginality, break the veil of ideology and act as catalysts to revolution.<sup>17</sup>

An influential and important contemporary version of socialist culture and ideology critique was developed from the 1950s by Guy Debord and the Situationist International. Guy Debord’s theses on “the society of the spectacle” are to be found principally in two books: the first bearing that name and appearing in 1967; the second, titled *Commentaries on The Society of the Spectacle*, published in 1989. In *The Society of the Spectacle*, Debord (1995:1) claimed that all modern life “presents itself as an immense accumulation of spectacles. All

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that was directly lived has become mere representation.” Debord (1995:4) analysed the spectacle as a social relationship established between people rather than merely a collection of images. For Debord (1995:6), the spectacle was best viewed as a *weltanschauung*, what Levin (1989:73) calls simply “the alienation of late capitalism”, translated into the material realm of news, propaganda, advertising, or the consumption of entertainment.

The spectacle demands passivity, turning the real world into images and mere images into real beings (Debord, 1995:18). Here, “the perceptible world is replaced by a set of images that are superior to that world yet at the same time impose themselves as *eminently* perceptible” (Debord, 1995:36). The world has effectively been commodified, as alienated consumption joins with alienated production to colonise the worker’s life through an endless manufacture of pseudo-needs and leisure-time pursuits (Debord, 1995:42). The spectacle was, then, said Debord (1995:215), like ideology: it represented the impoverishment, enslavement, and negation of real life. However, for Debord (as for Lukacs, much of whose argument Debord follows), now that the commodity occupied the entirety of social life, it could at last be generally understood. Debord was thus optimistic about the potential for revolutionary change, viewing the May events as dramatic confirmation of the other side of the society of the spectacle: the refusal of passivity and alienation, the demand for authentic self-realisation, solidaristic participation, and festival.

Twenty or so years on, writing in a tone of melancholy and loss, Debord (1990:3) seemed to hold few hopes of revolutionary change against a strengthened spectacle that had raised a whole generation according to its laws. A new “integrated” spectacle had emerged which encompassed: (1) incessant technological renewal; (2) integration of state and economy; (3) generalised secrecy; (4) unanswerable lies; and (5) an eternal present. There was now no space left, lamented Debord (1990:19), in which people might discuss the realities of their lives free from the “crushing presence” of media discourse. Logic had dissolved, censorship was perfect, scandal was no longer possible, secrecy was total, the only identifiable progress was that of venality and cowardice, and the population had become resigned to its fate. Further, people’s sense of history had been destroyed, and even language and conversation were, contended Debord, almost at an end.

Jacques Camatte, Murray Bookchin, and Cornelius Castoriadis have all arrived at somewhat similar, pessimistic positions to Debord. For Camatte (1995:14,40-4,170), capital has become autonomous of human control, it has *domesticated* not only nature but also the human being (humanity, not capital, is decadent). Even the intellect and imagination have

now been thoroughly pervaded by capital.<sup>18</sup> In like manner, Bookchin (1987:6) charts the increasing manipulation of the masses, the siphoning off of dissent through ideology and media, and he asserts that “Everyday life has steadily acquired almost bovine characteristics. Society is little more than a pasture and people a herd grazing on a diet of trivialities and petty pursuits”. Finally, Castoriadis (1988a:76; 1993:47-51,227; 1997a:346) noted the privatisation, apathy, and conformism of the period after the 1960s.<sup>19</sup> And, in a similar vein to Debord and the Frankfurters, Castoriadis (1988a:35) came to the conclusion that modern capitalism is able to recuperate even the most transgressive and seditious of gestures: capital possesses an “unbelievable capacity to reabsorb, divert, and recoup everything that challenges it.”<sup>20</sup>

What is one to make of the pessimistic moment in left communism’s cultural turn? In his book, *Western Marxism*, J. G. Merquior (1986:201) argues that the type of *kulturkritik* exemplified above is simply another episode in the lamentable history of *Western irrationalism*. The pessimism and rage directed at modern society, says Merquior (1986:189), are not justified, and the most useful aspect of Hegel and Marx - their understanding of history as *process* - is discarded. Taking up residence in the “Grand Hotel Abyss” (Lukacs) is no answer and it has spawned little but repetition, moody assertion over argumentation, and gloomy self-enforced isolation. This variety of thinking is grumpy and elitist;<sup>21</sup> it deserves to be disregarded (Merquior, 1986:201; Klare, 1972:13). Merquior thus accepts Perry Anderson’s (1976:93) harsh judgement of Western Marxism - “method as impotence, art as consolation, pessimism as quiescence”.

There is more than a grain of truth in Merquior’s savage assessment, which can reasonably be extended to a number of left communists that his survey does not directly deal with. In chapter four, I spoke of the dangers represented by primitivism’s tendency to reject contemporary life *in toto* while holding to an unrealistically romantic interpretation of times gone by. These dangers have been examined by Murray Bookchin in a recent polemic with the primitivist current. Bookchin himself has played a central role in sensitising libertarian socialists to the necessity of an ecologically literate critique and vision. Bookchin, arguing that nature is intrinsically anarchistic,<sup>22</sup> pioneered the ecological dimension of the communist critique: drawing attention in the 1950s to the problem of food additives; warning of the greenhouse effect in the 1960s; opposing monoculture, crop hybrids, and the extensive use of chemicals; and advocating the use of solar, wind, and tidal power (Osofsky, 1979:152; Vincent, 1992:124; Biehl, 1997). Championing his own “social ecology”, Bookchin has accused primitivist “deep ecology” of drifting to irrationalist, counter-

Enlightenment, even fascistic, misanthropic, and xenophobic positions. Fearing a “regression of rationality into intuitionism, of naturalism into supernaturalism, of realism into mysticism, of humanism into parochialism, and of social theory into psychology”, Bookchin (1995:33,174,177; Bielh, 1997) promotes the ethical objectivity of “dialectical naturalism”. Claiming that “The imbalances man has produced in the natural world are caused by the imbalances he has produced in the social world”, Bookchin has boldly asserted History over randomisation, Civilisation over cultural relativism, and Progress over pessimism. Primitivists, on the other hand, have insisted that they *do* continue to recognise the reality of class divisions. As Bradford (1989:50) notes, “capital, technology, and the state are an interlocking, armoured juggernaut that must be dismantled and overthrown if we are to renew a life in harmony with nature and human dignity”. Some primitivists have depicted Bookchin’s “garden vision” as yet another example of arrogant anthropocentrism and old, only partially reconstructed Marxism (Chase, 1991:16).<sup>23</sup>

Making a welcome break from socialist orthodoxy’s naïve faith in the development of the forces of production,<sup>24</sup> primitivists and other pessimistic left communists look set to be overcome by irrationalism. They also seem to drift towards political withdrawal or demobilisation of a variety similar to the tendency of post-modernism represented by Jean Baudrillard. When one is able to detect in contemporary culture only the collapse of logic, the erasure of personality, the crushing presence of media discourse, growing commodification, the loss of reality, unanswerable lies and venality (Debord, 1990), then there is, in fact, nothing to be done, and the socialist might as well simply “go back to bed”. This commonplace dystopian fantasy of a world so thoroughly ideologised that rebellion is either contained or erased altogether misses the workings of ideology; and it is little but a paean to the power of capital and to the bourgeois view of the worker, leaving only paralysis and dyspepsia (Eagleton, 1994:18).

Just how inappropriate such an analysis can be is indicated by the fact that Marcuse could write *One Dimensional Man* but a few years before the explosion of May 1968. In fact, such pessimism has usually been only one side of the left communist cultural turn. Despite their pessimism, for instance, Camatte, Bookchin, and Castoriadis all still hope and appeal for a revolutionary reversal. Thus Camatte (1995:170) declares that “we must abandon this world dominated by capital, which has become a spectacle of beings and things”, a hope apparently precluded by his gloomy comments on socialism’s audience. Scrutiny of the left communist tradition reveals a violent oscillation between dreams and despair, optimism and pessimism. When in pessimistic mode, left communists are apt not to look hard enough for

opportunities and openings in the capitalist edifice, allowing themselves to propound a one-dimensional critique. With post-modern scepticism about the separation of science and ideology, the type of ideology critique indulged in by pessimistic left communists is far from popular (Eagleton, 1994:1; Simons and Billig, 1994:1); however, such a critical stance is indispensable to a libertarian politics of the present. Such critique will, though, need to pair what Jameson (1981:287) calls its “negative hermeneutic” with a “positive hermeneutic”, emphasising the *compensatory exchange* that ideology always involves. It would, that is, need to recognise that all class consciousness, including that of the ruling class, is *utopian* (Jameson, 1981:286,291). As Žižek (1997a:30) has put it, the ruling ideas are precisely *not* directly the ideas of those who rule.<sup>25</sup> Such a pairing of optimistic and pessimistic moments could avoid the one-sidedness, the grumpy elitism, and the exclusive focus on the working class as simply reactive (and the consequence of this - the privileging of the intellectual) (Cleaver, 1993). It can acknowledge that, as Guattari (1995:66) says, in every social system there are lines of escape, that, as Negri (1994:9) puts it, there are definite limitations on capital’s ability to integrate its subjects, meaning that subversion and revolution are *permanent possibilities at the very heart of the system*. On the other hand, such a critical pairing of emphases might avoid the equally inadequate extreme of celebratory and wildly romantic optimism, found, for example, in post-modernist commentary on popular culture (the work of John Fiske, for instance). Here, it would remain essential to theorise capitalism’s always partial freedoms, its vacuous consumerism, the penetration of capital into the social fabric, and the continual constraints capital places on any liberatory tendencies. In summary, though vital, the pessimistic mode of the cultural turn needs supplementing. The implied independent efficacy lent to the cultural can only be properly developed by the discovery of an optimistic moment in the cultural turn, a moment that I designate “warm communism”.

**“Warm communism” -  
The Politics of Everyday Life**

“Warm Communism” was, for Bloch (1986), the neglected side of a necessary synthesis. In opposition to the “conformist communism” that considered the words romantic, subjectivity, and dreamer to be expletives, the warm communist would refuse to separate bread and violin, and would look for utopia within the everyday (Jacoby, 1981; Bloch, 1986). I use the term “warm communism” to signal the theorised cultural possibilities for a reversal of the alienation identified by ideology critique. A number of left communists have refused to concentrate only on “realistic” “bread and butter” questions, and they have rejected the

reduction of culture to a mere signal of the economic. While insisting on a necessary focus on those macro entities of unfreedom (the state and capital), these left communists have insisted on culture (in both broad and narrow senses) as eminently worthy of consideration by socialists, as the locus of many significant possibilities for social change, and they have asserted that authentic revolution will necessarily embrace *all* spheres of life. Against the frequent lapse of a variety of socialisms into economic determinism and workerism, left communists have accented desire, subjectivity, the transformation of everyday life, and art, realising that: “A new society will never be attainable until it is experienced as a need, for new modes of community, work, experience, social interaction, and relations to the natural world that can never be satisfied within capitalism” (Best and Kellner, 1997:278). In the words of Felix Guattari (1996:209), “the concept of the political has to be broadened to include the whole of the micropolitical dimension involving the various styles of living, experience, speaking, projecting the future, memorising history, etc..”

The *liberation of desire* has been a common left communist preoccupation. Such desire, it is asserted, would allow us to transcend the repetitive routines of everyday life and the domination of the common-place. Here, to paraphrase Bloch and the SI, banality is a counter-revolution against the spirit of socialism (Howard, 1988:28). The promise of a freed sexual desire, in particular, has been a recurrent and potent theme. For instance, Emma Goldman, whose extraordinary, sexually-charged letters to lover Ben Reitman speak of her unashamed joy in sexuality, saw sex as an essential source of the creative energy that was both anarchism’s hope and ultimate aim (Wexler, 1984:93). And left communists, seeking to transgress bourgeois norms, have turned to the sexual utopias of De Sade, Fourier, and, in particular, Wilhelm Reich.<sup>26</sup>

For some left communists, the realisation that force alone could not account for people’s acquiescence to the social order inclined them towards an understanding of the “psychic composition of men in various social groups” (Horkheimer) and “the socio-psychological precondition[s]” (Korsch) for rebellion (Jacoby, 1975:7,87). Reich concerned himself precisely with this “reproduction problem” (Jacoby, 1975:91). Troubled by Freud’s relative neglect of social factors, Reich urged a social cure (communism) for the sexual misery he witnessed amongst the German and Austrian working classes (Ollman, 1972:xii,xiii). The bourgeois family - the most important ideological workshop of capitalism - generates “orgastic impotence”<sup>27</sup> and “character armouring”, which in turn militate against pleasurable release and sexual autonomy, producing resignation, irrationality, and the paralysis of rebellious urges (Reich, 1972:238,241; Ollman, 1972:104). For Reich, the notion of

character structure theorised the gap between the material conditions of capitalism and the Marxian conception of ideology, and he employed such arguments in his analysis of the “mass psychology of fascism” (Ollman, 1972:205). The fascists, Reich noted, had been better able than the socialists to capture and direct the emotional longings evident in daily life (Boggs, 1984:202).<sup>28</sup> The task, then, for communists (and this was the aim of Reich’s sex-political organisation), was to intervene and attend to “the small, seemingly incidental and secondary phenomena of the life of the masses” so that sexual unhappiness might be addressed, so that “the sexual needs of human beings will once more come into their own”, so that the masses might become “structurally mature” (Reich, 1972:198,273,349; 1975:29).<sup>29</sup>

Reich’s example has indicated to left communists the promise of a psychoanalytic perspective that would allow the enlisting of desire in the struggle for a new social order. Such desire was, for the SI, the means and end of the struggle against the old society which, as Vaneigem (1983:8) put it, having eliminated the threat of starvation, still “entails the risk of dying of boredom”: “we need to work toward flooding the market ... with a mass of desires whose realisation is not beyond the capacity of man’s present means of action on the material world, but only beyond the capacity of the old social organisation” (Debord in Knabb, 1989:6). For Raoul Vaneigem (1983:91,198), insisting that the only perversion was the negation of pleasure, “The complete unchaining of pleasure is the surest way to the revolution of everyday life, to the construction of the whole man.” Likewise, according to Bookchin (1982:9,89,348), it is in the utopian quest for pleasure - against bourgeois society’s repressive sensibility - that humanity begins to obtain sight of the most glimmering emancipatory possibilities. Finally, psychoanalytically-inclined communist Felix Guattari (1984:86; 1995:75; Best and Kellner, 1991:90) insisted (contra Freud and Lacan) that desire was overwhelmingly primary, positive, productive, and “revolutionary in its essence”. Opposed as he was to the discipline of work, hierarchy, sacrifice, and bureaucratisation, for Guattari (1984:219,238), *deterritorialisation* (the unchaining of desire) was fundamental in the battle against the real madness of capitalism and the micro-fascisms of everyday life.<sup>30</sup>

Also turning to psychoanalysis, Herbert Marcuse sought to unleash desire against bourgeois repression. In polymorphous perversity,<sup>31</sup> fantasy, play, and imagination, Marcuse (1973:13,50; Frosh, 1987:157) detected a rejection of the procreative imperative and a revolt against the performance principle on behalf of socialism: “The memory of gratification is at the origin of all thinking, and the impulse to recapture past gratification is the hidden driving power behind the process of thought” (Marcuse, 1973:40). For Marcuse, because of the

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possibility of the liberation from work, because of the creativity of unconscious forces (the “truth value of the imagination”), and because the renunciations of capitalist domination never completely triumph over the pleasure principle, desire’s forces may be enlisted in the struggle for a new society (Marcuse, 1973:31,42,112; Elliott, 1994:49; Frosh, 1987:157).

In 1979, Castoriadis left his position at the OECD to become a practicing psychoanalyst. Initially within the Lacanian camp, Castoriadis (1984:53) came to reject the clinical “perversions”, hierarchical cultishness, and pessimistic theoretical premises of the “master” - in particular, the eradication of interpretation, judgement, and truth, the overvaluing of lack, and the abolition of the person and of the idea of an end of analysis. Castoriadis, like some of the left communists surveyed, believed that psychoanalysis could be integrated within the project for a socialist order, and he also stressed the creativity of the unconscious and the constitutive force of the imagination (a creative force on which socialism is based). However, Castoriadis avoided the untenable romanticism and irrationalism of some of the libertarian interest in the psyche. For Castoriadis (1984:63), psychoanalysis was part and parcel of the struggle for autonomy. The goal of psychoanalytical practice was analogous to the aim of libertarian politics and pedagogy in its concern with *self-regulation* over regulation by another (the assertion of one’s discourse over the discourse of the Other) (Castoriadis, 1997a:177). Through analysis, the person would become self-reflective and capable of deliberation and will. He or she would become able to reflect on rather than repress the contents of the unconscious, in what would ultimately prove to be the person’s capacity for self-analysis (Castoriadis, 1997b:128-9). Castoriadis’ major contribution to the psychoanalytic project, though, lies in his notion of *sublimation*. Posing the idea of an original “psychical monad”, which is “radically mad - arational, afunctional” and which can never be fully socialised, Castoriadis viewed sublimation as the violence that made the equation society-psyche possible (Castoriadis, 1993:315; Curtis, 1999; Gougouris, 1997). Castoriadis’ psychoanalytic contribution clearly diverges from the project of thinkers like Lyotard and Deleuze and Guattari, who posited a simple unchaining of desire. For Castoriadis (1997b:130), the society championed by these “philosophers of desire” would be one of universal murder. However, the sublimation Castoriadis speaks of was not to involve the simple substitution of the strong ego in the place the unruly unconscious, which Castoriadis viewed as the source of much of human creativity; instead, psychoanalysis should aim at autonomy, a self-directedness in which the unconscious might emerge in more creative ways, and in which the person would escape from subjection to the forces that he/she did not understand (Gougouris, 1997:39).

When the unnecessary barriers currently restraining desire are removed, when sex and work are freed from their miserable modern associates - power and anxiety - life might draw closer to *play*. In this vein, contemporary left communists - Bob Black, Hakim Bey, Marcuse, Lefebvre, the SI - have emphasised the *ludic* aspect of revolution and seditious living as both means and end in the quest for socialism. Emphasising the time that will be liberated once the manifold unnecessary professions are eliminated and "dirty work" is mechanised, society may, as in Fourier's visions for the future, be organised according to the passions. In such a world, the conception and organisation of what we currently call work and play will have been transformed entirely.

The emphases on play, on sex, and desire, are all moments in the larger concern with *the revolutionary alteration of daily life*. Concerned, as I have shown, with the deleterious consequences of state and capital, left communists have rejected socialist orthodoxy's narrow focus on the realm of high politics and great industrial disputes. They have frequently emphasised that it is at the level of the everyday, the quotidian, that these macro structures dominate and that opposition might be organised. For instance, for Perlman (1969:24), capital "is a form of daily life; its continued existence and expansion presuppose only one essential condition: the disposition of people to continue to alienate their working lives and thus reproduce the capitalist form of daily life." Left communists have frequently viewed the everyday both as the locus of alienation and, simultaneously, as the well-spring of powerful but unacknowledged potentialities for a new mode of being, a potentially prefigurative realm in which the struggle for a new existence can begin. Hoping for a moral change, new values, new art forms, new relationships and institutions, authenticity, and the universally-developed individual, left communists have sought the new world within the crumbling shell of the old. Left communists inclined in this direction have seen that "The energy of the revolution is collected in the little things of everyday" (Reich, 1972), and they have expounded a socialism that critiques and seeks to revolutionise everyday life, in the process restoring<sup>32</sup> consciousness and subjectivity to the centre of socialism (Klare, 1972:6).

Historically, the anarchists have tended to be far more attentive than Marxists to the importance of the cultural and the need to change everyday life. They have stressed the importance and possibility of prefiguring here-and-now the relations of the new world in cooperatives, free schools and theatres, and in the cultivation of bohemian life-styles (Dirlik, 1991:34). As Bookchin has said: "Life compels the anarchist to concern himself with the quality of urban life, with the reorganisation of society along humanistic lines, with the subcultures created by new, often indefinable social strata - students, unemployables, an

immense bohemia of intellectuals, and above all a youth which began to gain social awareness with the peace movement and civil rights struggles of the early 1960s" (in Biehl, 1997). Goldman (1983:394,400; Wexler, 1984:93) viewed the content of the communist challenge as a Nietzschean revaluation of all economic, social, and cultural values, a mental and spiritual regeneration, wherein the worker would come to resemble the artist. Similarly, Berkman (1972:209,223,278) hoped that, endowed with a new moral courage and solidarity, everyday life could become an art and a joy. And syndicalism sought in the working class' own institutions the "economic and moral values of the new society", a *complete change in human existence* (Lagardelle in Beetham, 1987:123).<sup>33</sup> Lastly, Gustav Landauer (1978:44,26,37; Buber, 1971:46; Ward, 1988:22) was a forerunner to the culture-centred leftism of the 1960s, seeing everyday relations as having a statist quality and calling for prefigurative ways of life as the prerequisite for the hoped-for "rebirth" of the people that socialism would bring.

Anton Pannekoek was politically close to the syndicalists, and like Sorel he emphasised the importance of revolutionary will and an autonomous proletarian culture. Early and unusually within the Second International, Pannekoek argued that Marxism had not concerned itself with the essential question of human "spirit" (Gerber, 1989:16). The Dutch left communists looked to the subjective role of ideas, will, and morality, emphasising that the revolution was also to be a victory of mind and revolutionary spirit (Gerber, 1988:2): for Pannekoek (1970:29), "They [the working class] must overcome the spiritual sway of capitalism over their minds before they actually can throw off its yoke". The struggle for socialism would stimulate the working class to create their own values and forms of life, signalling both an opposition to bourgeois culture and a "gigantic moral elevation" (in Gerber, 1988:2: 1989:106). The formation of an autonomous working class culture would work against the "spiritual superiority of the ruling minority" that Pannekoek detected (Gerber, 1988:2). This complete change in thinking was not to be foisted upon the working class from without, but *would come from the inner lives of the workers themselves* and those feelings of solidarity and class identity generated by the historical process (Smart, 1978:11; Gerber, 1988:3). For Pannekoek, this hope for a "total revolution in the spiritual life of men" came to be embodied in the workers' councils (Gerber, 1988:1).

It is similar with Antonio Gramsci. Examining class domination, Gramsci looked outside of the economic and political to the cultural, moral, and to everyday life (popular beliefs and attitudes, and cultural forms) (Joll, 1977:8). With the failure of the councils movement, Gramsci emphasised the extent to which ideas became internalised and commonsensical, the

way in which the bourgeois had been “waiting in ambush” within the minds of the Italian working class. With this in mind, Gramsci contended that the revolutionary process would be “concentrated, difficult and ... [it would require] exceptional qualities of patience and inventiveness” (in Ransome, 1992:146; Boggs, 1984:167). As Femia (1981:59) has argued: “While Marx obviously realises that no revolution can be made without some sort of prior change in proletarian consciousness, he constantly denies that this change has any independent causal significance.” Gramsci dealt with this independence through his concepts of the intellectual, the party, and hegemony. Hegemony, a version of ideology (though largely stripped of ideology’s negative connotations), denotes the war of position, the battle to win consent in the “trenches” of civil society and the state (Gramsci, 1971:243; Ransome, 1992:128; Eagleton, 1997:195). Looking beyond the directly coercive interventions of the state, Gramsci tracked the “submission and intellectual subordination” that followed on from, and simultaneously created, the conditions for the adoption by the working class of bourgeois moral, intellectual, and cultural axioms (Femia, 1981:43). For Gramsci, the notions of party and organic intellectual addressed the problem of establishing, through the “battle of ideas”, “a new reality”, an “intellectual and moral reform”, a “new moral life”, “a new way of feeling and seeing reality” (Gramsci, 1988:70,395; Ransome, 1992:163,218; Femia, 1981:133). Given that “The proletarian revolution cannot but be a total revolution”, socialist theory and politics would need to insert itself into the apparently trivial aspects of workers' experience (Gramsci, 1988:70; Boggs, 1984:208).

In a somewhat similar manner, as early as the 1930s, Henri Lefebvre opposed Marxist economism and began to develop a politics of everyday life (Jay, 1984:34). Lefebvre’s critique of everyday life, says Trebitsch (1991:xxiv), was a rejection of inauthenticity and the promotion of a truly human world of love, art, community, and self-realisation. According to Lefebvre, modern capitalism was characterised by the ubiquity of alienation (Poster, 1975:241): “The extension of capitalism goes all the way to the slightest details of ordinary life” (Lefebvre, 1988:79). Daily life in the “bureaucratic society of controlled consumption” was marked, argued Lefebvre (1988:79), by boredom and passivity: it was mass-mediated, repetitive, and “completely manipulated”. And yet, a sense of unrest and unpredictability pervaded everyday life, signalling the possibilities inherent therein (Lefebvre, 1971:80). Hoping for a rejection of consumerism’s meagre rewards, Lefebvre looked to a completely new life - though one whose seeds could be detected here-and-now - characterised by festival, the creation of “situations”, and the democratic and imaginative alteration of the city (Poster, 1975; Lefebvre, 1971:36). In essence, for Lefebvre (1988:80),

“authentic Marxism” became a “critical knowledge of everyday life” aiming for changes in “*la vie quotidienne*”.

The SI took up Lefebvre’s concerns and read Sartre’s concept of the “situation”<sup>34</sup> through the former. In true existentialist fashion, the notion of the situation acknowledged freedom as *immediately present* in daily life,<sup>35</sup> and not as the quality of a special and removed sphere. A person’s life was viewed as made up of a succession of situations, the majority being mediocre and empty (Debord in Knabb, 1989:24). The “creation of situations” referred to the reversal (usually through cultural experiment and sabotage<sup>36</sup>) of the non-intervention and consumerist passivity of the spectacle, a reversal that was seen as revelatory of authentic life and the liberatory possibilities contained within the crumbling old world.

Such concern with the quotidian is also characteristic of the thought of Castoriadis, James, Camatte, and the Italian *autonomia* movement. For these thinkers, in Camatte’s (1995:56,124) formulation, communism is not a new mode of production but rather a new mode of being: “The problem is to create other lives.” Both *Socialisme ou Barbarie* and the Johnston-Forest Tendency were thus concerned with “*L’expérience prolétaire*”. As “Everything that has happened in the Western world for the past one hundred and fifty years is, in enormous part, the result of working-class struggles”, and because socialism’s goal is the transformation of daily life, it was essential that revolutionaries got to grips with what was important to people at large (Castoriadis, 1988a:20; 1997a:26). As Castoriadis (1988b) argued, “The revolutionary movement ought to appear as a total movement concerned with everything that people do and are subject to in society, and above all with their real daily life”. Such keen attention to the everyday and to emergent new struggles (feminism, sexuality, youth), meant that both groups were tremendously enthusiastic about the possibilities before them (Singer, 1979:43): “[F]rom the stories that we get everyday ... we can see a new form of struggle emerging. It never seems to be carried to its complete end, yet its existence is continuous. The real essence of this struggle and its ultimate goal is: a better life, a new society, the emergence of the individual as a human being ... all [these struggles] tend to smash down the old and help the new emerge ... This is the struggle to establish here and now a new culture, a workers’ culture ... It is this that we must be extremely sensitive to. We must watch with an eagle eye every change or indication of the things that these changes reflect” (James in McLemee, 1994:236). In similar fashion, Negri and the Italian autonomy movement theorised the struggle from below and looked to the sphere outside of the factory - *the social factory* (Red Notes, 1979:x). Insisting that the capitalist class was, in fact, subordinate to the working class,<sup>37</sup> the autonomists accented

working class struggle as the important factor in change (always interrupting integration and exploitation, and always anti-capitalist in content) (Tronti, 1979:10; Fernandez, 1997:18). An important part of the autonomist analysis, the idea of proletarian “self-valorisation” involved the re-appropriation by workers of wealth and power and, most importantly, it entailed the “refusal of work” (Negri, 1979:113,124): “The falling rate of profit, the crisis of the law of value, the rearticulation of the law of value within the indifference of command, are direct ... effects of the refusal of work” (Negri, 1979:123-124,129).<sup>38</sup> This attention to the refusal of work and the necessity of thinking and living “in another way” (Guattari and Negri, 1990:131) saw the autonomists displacing the focus on labour-power for one on the working class’s *invention power*.

Within left communism’s expanded conception of cultural politics, art has been a privileged sphere. Art has been tied to the left communist urge in a number of ways. Left communists have hoped that life and work may become art within the socialist order, which allows the expression of humanity’s creative powers (the “emancipation of the senses”) by negating the division of labour and the predominance of quantitative concerns (Adams, 1992:246,252,270; Lunn, 1982:66). Further, just as art can work to integrate people into the social order and dull their critical faculties, so it can possess critical and disruptive possibilities.

The freedom that anarchism promised artists has generated a historic link between anarchist commitment and the arts, a link symbolised by Bakunin’s relationship with Wagner and Proudhon’s friendship with Courbet. For Landauer (a prominent literary critic), the artist discovered and communicated the longing for community within the individual spirit and thereby created common symbols for the battle against loneliness (Lunn, 1973). Every regeneration and growth of humanity depended crucially, said Landauer, on the metaphorical mediations of art (Berman and Lukes, 1978:7). Kropotkin (1915) also accented the possibilities of art, writing a book on Russian literature (*Ideas and Realities in Russian Literature*) and demanding that art be put at the service of humanity (Osofsky, 1979:98). Even the strictly materialist and workerist syndicalists showed an interest in art. Thus, Rocker (1937:503) contended that: “Every great art is free from national limitations and affects so overpoweringly just because it rouses in us the hidden stirrings of our humanity, reveals the mighty unity of mankind”. As “the finest interpreter of social life”, said Rocker (1937:517), art would “contribute to the preparation for a higher social culture which will overthrow state and nation to open for humankind the portals of a new community which is the goal of their desires”.<sup>39</sup> Like a number of left communists, Emma Goldman paid

increasing attention to art over politics. For Goldman, art spoke a “language all its own”, it dealt most importantly with “great social wrongs”, it upset dogmas, it was “the strongest and most far-reaching interpreter of our deep-felt dissatisfaction”, and, thus, it could “rouse the consciousness of the oppressed” (Wexler, 1984:98,124; Goldman, 1911).<sup>40</sup> Influenced by the Frankfurt theorists and the SI, later anarchists, such as Bookchin, Zerzan,<sup>41</sup> Perlman, and Black, have turned increasingly towards art, as both announcing the baseness of late capitalism and, at other more exclusive modernist moments, revelatory of the utopian impulse alive and well in the modern world.

For many Marxian left communists, as Lukacs put it, although politics was the means, culture was the goal (Merquior, 1986). For instance, although, as Levitas (1990:119) points out, he did not foresee art playing an important role in the establishment of communism, art was, for William Morris, an important aim of socialism. The first major artist to become a Marxist, Morris argued that the capitalist system was negating art,<sup>42</sup> a negation that could only mean a brutish existence for human beings (Solomon, 1979:79). For other left communists, art was *both* goal and means. For example, the Frankfurt theorists refused to relegate artistic production to superstructural status. According to some of these thinkers, within modernist art one could detect the “faint heartbeat of utopia amidst the deafening cacophony of contemporary culture” (Adorno in Jay, 1984:110).<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, the fragmentation of such art promised to tear down “the soothing facade” of capitalist life (Johnston, 1984:89,94).<sup>44</sup> And Marcuse (1986:46,58,68) even contended that art’s very *aesthetic form* demanded - against the given - that things must change.<sup>45</sup>

Art was also the means for left communists like Dutch poets Herman Gorter and Henriette Roland-Holst. Likewise, in England, Sylvia Pankhurst employed her own poetry as political lever in the journal *The Workers’ Dreadnought*, and she attempted to start a literary journal (to be named *Germinal*) for the workers of London’s East End (Winslow, 1996:183-4). At the same time, Antonio Gramsci, worried about Marxism’s indifference and inability in the cultural realm, associated his journal, *L’Ordine Nuovo*, with the Russian Proletkult movement, provided information on the Italian futurists for Trotsky (who was writing *Literature and Revolution*), and himself wrote literary criticism (Femia, 1981:22; Laing, 1978:92). Gramsci (1985:37) rejected the contention that communism was the enemy of beauty and art: “once in power, the proletariat tends to establish the reign of beauty and grace, to elevate the destiny and freedom of those who create beauty.” The communist revolution, being a “total revolution”, would mean, asserted Gramsci (1985:41,98), a new art too.

The former Trotskyists, Castoriadis<sup>46</sup> and James, were equally attuned to art's importance. James, a sometimes novelist and short-story writer, was interested in the connection between popular culture and political mobilisation (Worcester, 1996:18,87). Unlike the elitist, pessimistic, and politically immobilised Frankfurt thinkers who were unable to transcend European high culture, James did not reject popular art forms such as the comic strip, the gangster movie, and the musical comedy (Worcester, 1996:102). In a letter to his wife, for example, James maintained: "Like all art ... the movies are not merely a reflection, but an extension of the actual, but an extension along the lines which people feel is lacking and possible in the actual" (in Worcester, 1996:103). James' attentiveness to everyday life illustrates that coming together of the critical and utopian-optimistic examination of cultural matters important to a revived left communism.

In terms of the production of a revolutionary art, Guy Debord cuts a rather interesting figure. An artist and a revolutionary, Debord's interest in cultural production and its link with everyday life began with Lefebvre (1971:203), who declared that everyday life should "become a work of art!", who looked to the transformation of the city and architecture, and who saw the work of the surrealists, for instance, as prefiguring a possible generalised cultural-revolutionary change.<sup>47</sup> The modernist moment, maintained Debord (1995:40,189), attempted to destroy the confinement of art to a privileged sphere and artistic practice to the privileged few. Emerging from the post-surrealist movement and initially staffed with poets, painters, and sculptors producing seditious works and engaging in cultural sabotage of differing varieties, a post-1962 split between artists and revolutionaries saw the S.I. adopting a unitary revolutionary practice and rejecting the generation of autonomous art works (Wollen, 1991:25). This is signalled in Debord's own artistic work - the six films he directed - in his eventual refusal to generate new images, and in his insistence on using only found footage over which a soundtrack was laid, reversing and negating the original intention. Such "diversion" was seen by Debord (1995:208) as "the fluid language of anti-ideology". Diversion would keep a necessary distance from what had become stable and unquestionable. It exploited the author's "expression, erases false ideas, replaces them with correct ideas": it was economical, critical, ironic, and playful.

Today, much of left communism's warm current looks a little too romantic and idealistic. This current has often naively appealed to authenticity, sexuality, subjectivity, and it has showed great enthusiasm for the revolutionary art championed by Debord and the artistic interventions of the *avant-garde* (applauded by the Frankfurt School), which have, in reality, had very little real effect in terms of stirring the masses to rebellion. Vague and jargon-

ridden assertion all too often act as substitute for a clear thinking through of the projected new mode of life. And yet, for all this, the distancing from the dull economism and progressivism of socialist orthodoxy, and the attempt to expand the communist urge out into that which concerned people day-to-day are insuperable gains for a libertarian socialist movement. In taking everyday meaning seriously, the left communists surveyed have allowed for the possibility of a cultural politics radically different from the narrow conceptions of socialist orthodoxy. At its best, such a cultural politics would see the combination of both a critical and an optimistic-utopian moment. In this vein, left communists like C.L.R. James have been properly attentive to all artistic production - as Simons and Billig (1994:4) suggest, from Rimbaud to Rambo - as indicative both of bourgeois ideology *and* of this ideology's compromise with something more, a signal of fractures in the monolith through which seep traces of and possibilities for utopia.

It is necessary to explore one final, vital component of the cultural turn. In what relationship does warm communism stand to workerist communism? Warm communism is apparently the implacable opponent of workerism, the "socialism of the stomach" that has concerned itself with the security and dignity of the working man, the development of the productive forces, efficiency and progress (Beilharz, 1993:10). Workerism has been viewed by numerous left communists as evacuating the imaginary and the poetic from life, as oriented towards the transformation of society into a giant workhouse, and, therefore, as counter to the struggle for socialism (Kofman and Lebas, 1996:23; Herbert Read, 1974:152; Tucker, 1996:132): "To make labour into a transcendent category of human activity is an ascetic ideology ... Because socialists hold to this general concept, they make themselves into carriers of capitalist propaganda" (Horkheimer in Jay, 1973:57).

Anarchism<sup>48</sup> and Marxism both contain such ascetic and workerist tendencies. Conversely, both traditions also contain aesthetic, culturalist tendencies, concerned with the achievement of "rich individuality" and the struggle against the proletarian condition.<sup>49</sup> Murray Bookchin provides a good example of this latter tendency. When a large strike at General Motors in 1946 ended with his co-workers passively accepting a number of reformist measures and returning to work, Bookchin's union activity and his faith in the working class came to an end (Biehl, 1997). The capitalist factory certainly disciplines, unifies, and re-organises the working class, but it does so, says Bookchin (1986:205) (completely reversing Ruhle's workerist evaluation), in a thoroughly bourgeois way.<sup>50</sup> The worker becomes revolutionary precisely to the extent that he or she *undoes* his or her worker-ness: working class people become radical *despite, rather than because, they work* (Bookchin, 1986:210; 1987:186).

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Thus, Bookchin (1986:153; Heider, 1994:75) sides with the Dadaist slogan of unemployment for all, and he favours *bohème*, youth, sex, and anti-authoritarianism, over the emphases on economics, labour, and class struggle. Says Bookchin (1987:185): “no radical change is possible unless ‘The Proletariat’ transcends its suffocating class being and becomes a revolutionary human being. This transcendence involves the erosion of the worker as a class being, the acculturation of what is still a class into a people with a conscious sense of the public good in contrast to class interest.” In short, one must speak to people in *human* and *ethical* terms, challenging hierarchy, and facilitating the development of a community rather than a class consciousness (Bookchin, 1987:187; 1992).<sup>51</sup>

Such scepticism about the ennobling and class consciousness-raising character of capitalist work has been a prominent feature of more recent left communist argument. The SI proudly and aggressively espoused the slogan “Never Work!”, choosing *homo ludens* over *homo economicus* (Bracken, 1997:144). Similarly, the Italian autonomists emphasised contemporary liberation as the liberation from work (Negri, 1989:181).<sup>52</sup> For thinkers like Negri, the exodus from proletarian life means, in part, that the factory can no longer be seen as the paradigmatic site of radical contestation and revolutionary subjectivity (Negri and Hardt, 1994:267). In this respect, 1968 signalled a new era in capital-labour relations, with the emergence of the “social worker” (Negri and Hardt, 1994:267): “New cultural models and new social movements are constituted in this flux in the place of the old workers’ subjectivities, and the old emancipation *through* labour is replaced by the liberation *from* waged and manual labour” (Negri and Hardt, 1994:281).

In more recent works, then, some left communists have, in line with what Offe (1987) calls the “new politics” of the 1960s onwards, chosen concerns with alienation over concerns with scarcity, qualitative over quantitative demands, being over having, and freedom over equality. There is much common ground between the *gauchiste* demands of the New Left and the anti-workerist “culture-communism” of a number of left communists. In response to the alienations and cultural conditioning of welfare state capitalism, the New Left championed self-expression, self-realisation, a new sensibility, autonomy, participation, and they looked beyond societal organisation based on economics to the promise of direct democracy and counter-institutions (Klare, 1972:4,14; Marshall, 1995:61,542). Many left communists have been highly suspicious of socialists who have uncritically placed work at the very centre of their aspirations, criticising, for instance, the syndicalist slogan “the mines for the miners” as no more than “production capitalism”. As Castoriadis (1984:128) argued:

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“The self-management of the assembly-line by the assembly-line workers is a sinister joke. To establish self-management, it is necessary to destroy the assembly line.”

This move beyond workerism and economics indicates something more far-reaching: *an emphasis that socialism entails the destruction of the condition of proletarianisation*. The clarity and consistency of this aim has emerged alongside and in answer to a number of troublesome issues around interests, identity, and agency for socialists in the post-modern period. Most prominent among these issues have been the apparent changes in the contemporary class structure and the emergence of the “new social movements”, movements that resist evaluation simply in terms of class (narrowly defined) and work.

The industrial working class in the West has declined. There has also been fragmentation within class categories, and an acknowledgement of the unpredictable mediation of culture precludes any complacent assumption about homogeneous interests and consciousness. And there is, today, an accent on qualitative concerns and everyday life. In response to all this, a number of left communists - Castoriadis, Debord, Marcuse,<sup>53</sup> and Negri, for instance - have attempted to rethink the question of the revolutionary subject. This rethinking has entailed a movement away from an exclusive focus on the industrial working class and a shift to a concern with the effects and necessary overcoming of the condition of proletarianisation, a condition whose effects extend beyond the factory floor. For example, with the development of struggles around sexual, familial, personal, pedagogical, and cultural relations, Castoriadis saw labour conflict as becoming less integral to a comprehension and transformation of society (Singer, 1979:43). According to Castoriadis (1988:9), a new division had appeared within post-war society: *the scission between directors and executants*.<sup>54</sup> In the increasingly bureaucratised society, more and more is everyone included in the latter, subjected category (Castoriadis, 1988a:24). With this development comes a new fundamental contradiction, summarised by Castoriadis (1993:228) as “capitalism’s need to reduce workers to the role of mere executants and the inability of this system to function if it succeeds in achieving this required objective.” (Later, a more pessimistic Castoriadis was to assert that the executant-director division had given way to a fundamental division between those who accepted and those who combated the system.)

Accepting Castoriadis’ contentions, the SI reformulated the executant-director division as meaning that the proletariat were now best thought of as those “who have no possibility of altering the social space-time that society allots for their consumption” (in Shipway, 1987:161; Knabb, 1989:255,395). As with the SPGB, who define the working class as all

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wage labourers, the abolition of the proletarian condition remains of foremost importance for Debord (1995:164; Situationist International, 1990:19), as he rejects the idea of a new middle class and attempts to claim the variety of struggles in and around 1968 as part of the communist project: “in rising up against a hundred particular oppressions, they in fact challenge alienated labour. What comes to be the order of the day now, is the abolition of wage labour”.

Similarly, viewing the factory as no longer central and arguing that capitalism’s effects and labouring processes are increasingly afflicting the entirety of social life (“the social factory”), Negri (1979:38; 1989:178,183; Negri and Hardt, 1994:9) contends that one must acknowledge the “wealth of the proletariat”, the “diffuse proletariat”. Sensitive to the contemporary importance of the advent of “marginalised subjectivities”, Negri re-theorises class to focus on *the appropriation of time*. In this vein, Negri’s some-time collaborator Felix Guattari (1996:248-253) sought to develop a new revolutionary subjectivity<sup>55</sup> and to distance the socialist project from the “resentment, empty repetition and sectarianism” of the old politics: “It is clear that the discourses on workers’ centrality and hegemony are thoroughly defunct and that they cannot serve as a basis for the organisation of new political and productive alliances, or even simply as a point of reference”.

Guattari’s assertions are important. Too often socialists have been all too willing to relegate the new movements to a wholly subordinate position. Here, post-modernism’s close attention to gender issues, for instance, proves a vital corrective to left communism, which, as the sexist language left unamended in my quotations indicates, has most often remained oblivious to or complacent before the particular problem of gender, and which has often viewed emancipation as springing from industrially-based, and therefore male-dominated, workers’ councils. A new libertarian socialist project cannot, as Butler (1998:38) has argued, look to re-domesticate and re-subordinate these struggles to a dated conception of class.

In seeking to address the challenges of the contemporary period, then, left communists have emphasised the continuing negative presence of state and capital, and the reality of proletarianisation. In so doing, many left communists have distanced their project from socialism understood as the privileging of a narrowly conceived working class as the agent of socialism. For left communists, the decline and fragmentation of the working class does not mean an end to the condition of proletarianisation, and therefore it does not spell the end of the socialist critique and alternative. Capital and the state continue to have

overdetermining effects on other struggles against domination, effects observable at the level of the quotidian. Thus, for instance, autonomist Marxist Harry Cleaver (1993) assigns the new social movements an autonomy from class, but still sees them as posing an anti-capitalist challenge - being movements *against the constraints of the capitalist social factory*. Just as socialism can no longer be guaranteed by appeals to historical laws and capitalist collapse, so it cannot be justified by the idea of a universal subject of history. The changes post-1968 towards a new politics and post-materialist values and the successes and strength of post-modernist culturalism makes this clear. However, such changes have unfortunately not issued in a new vision of society and a new cohesive movement for socialism. In fact, and despite the hopes inspired by the radical 1960s and 1970s, some left communists like Castoriadis (1997b:37-9) have interpreted the post-modern period as a closing of the emancipatory project, the end of that radical thinking beyond that had haunted the modern era.

**“The partisans of possibilities” -**

**Left Communism and Utopia at the End of History**

Left communists have posited a future reconciliation of humans with nature, an end to alienation and the division of labour, and a flowering of human talents, as all human beings become “universal” individuals. Today, such hopes appear extraordinary. These culturalist aspirations are elements of left communism’s *utopian dimension*, a consideration of which concludes the present study.

The liberal opposition to utopia is apparently pervasive in the post-modern period. The post-modern has been read by some as the ideological and political end of history, a closing of the age that could harbour earnest hopes about the achievement of societal and human perfection. The ideas of final closure, complete satisfaction, control and harmony, and the aesthetic quality of communist projections, are most likely to be seen today as a source of danger, as inevitably clashing with the complexities of human beings and life in the modern world (Winter, 1989:81 Kumar, 1987:90; Geoghegan, 1987:2; Walicki, 1995:61). Such liberal claims about the practical conclusions of utopian theorising are lent support by the torturous reality of “really existing socialism”: “If freedom equals social unity, then the more unity there is, the more freedom”; “Perfect unity takes the form of abolishing all institutions of social mediation, including representative democracy and the rule of law as an independent instrument for settling conflicts” (Kolakowski, 1978:418,420). Communism’s demise, towards the end of a century of unmitigated disasters, in which the

yearnings for human perfectibility (humans as gods), harmony, ease, and progress have come tumbling to earth, has been viewed as meaning also the demise of utopia (Kumar, 1987:421). In a world no longer convinced by metaphysical postulates, utopia looks far too religious in structure: "Utopia replaces God by the future. Then it proceeds to identify the future with ethics; the only values are those which serve this particular future. For that reason utopias have almost always been coercive and authoritarian" (Camus, 1969:176). And surely history - from the French Revolution to Stalinism and beyond - confirms the anti-utopian mood: a "world beyond antagonism" is just not realisable (Tucker, 1969:53).

Thus, the most common sense of "utopia" in contemporary discourse is a condemnatory, denoting a rather unwise preoccupation with the dream rather than the real world (Bauman, 1976:9). With the decline into dystopia of those two great utopian experiments - America and communist Russia<sup>56</sup> - there has been, it is argued, a decline in utopian thinking, evidenced in the rise of anti-utopias and the diminishing of the literary utopia (Kumar, 1987:386,421; Kolakowski, 1990:137). Kolakowski (1990:136-7,143) argues that "today's life of the mind is antiutopian ... one can hardly quote an important utopia written in our epoch ... The utopian mentality ... is withering away." Similarly, Jameson (1994:53), speaking of the political fatigue and demoralisation of contemporary men and women, maintains that "It would seem that the times are propitious for anti-Utopianism". According to Marin (1993): "This principle of hope is one of the possible names that can be given to the utopian drive whose figure and concept made their appearance with Thomas More at the dawn of modern times, the end of which, with postmodern culture, we are said to be living today."

Despite such claims, post-modern theorising often seems marked by an *ambivalence* with respect to utopia. On the one hand, as noted, post-modernist thinking seems inimical to utopian thought. Post-modernism criticises totalisation and the notion of transparent and completely harmonious social relations. And apparently at least covertly pessimistic about the possibilities of escape from the monolith, post-modernism has committed itself to an apparently more partial and realistic politics, emphasising difference and caution (McGowan, 1991:1,126; Boyne, 1990:131; Best and Kellner, 1991:57,285; Laclau, 1990:232; Hutcheon, 1989:26).<sup>57</sup> Here, to be "post" modern surely implies an exhaustion of historical possibilities; after-all, what could conceivably follow such post-modernity? On the other hand, though, post-modernists often seem to remain attached to a utopian position of some variety. For instance, Beilharz (1993) and McGowan (1991:28) have argued persuasively that, in post-modernism's commitment to a more pluralistic and democratic

social order, an order that would enshrine difference and negotiation across such difference, we have a utopia, albeit an often “residual” one. The post-modern reluctance to abandon utopia is signalled in Derrida’s continuing attachment to the discourse of emancipation, in his decidedly leftist interpretation of the tasks of deconstruction, and in his notion of a democracy that is always “to come” (Mouffe, 1996:11; Howells, 1999:150,153).

Such mixed feelings around the question of utopia are also to be discovered within the socialist tradition at large, beginning with Marx and Engels. Socialism has been paradoxically both utopian and anti-utopian. However, the most significant impression left by the Marxian tradition has been the contrast, made famous in Engels’ pamphlet, between scientific and utopian socialism (Lukes, 1985:41).<sup>58</sup> Thus, although Marx and Engels acknowledged their own debts to the utopian socialists (Cabet, Saint Simon, Weitling, Fourier, Owen) and praised them for their imaginative construction of a new world and their relentless critique of the old, the founders of “scientific socialism” ridiculed the disciples of the utopian socialists and scoffed at the earnestly detailed schemes for the realisation of their aspirations (Lukes, 1984:155; Draper, 1990:3; Levitas, 1990:51; Engels, 1958:57; Solomon, 1979:458). With Marx and Engels’ accent on necessity, and scientific laws, “utopian” comes to connote thought that is actually or intellectually situated prior to the development of industrialisation, the proletariat, and class war (Buber, 1971:5; Engels, 1958:83-4; Kumar, 1987:53).

Following such an emphasis on the guarantees of science and History, socialist orthodoxy sharply rejected the utopian dimension. Thus Kautsky (1971:119), insisting that the *a priori* construction of a plan of society was “wholly irreconcilable with the point of view of Modern Science”, argued that the details of the dictatorship of the proletariat could “tranquilly be left to the future” (in Geoghegan, 1987:38).<sup>59</sup> The Second International distaste for talk of the post-revolutionary order is indicated by the fact that, between 1882 and 1914, the SPD’s foremost theoretical journal, *Neue Zeit*, featured only one article dealing with the future socialist society (Sassoon, 1996:20). In like manner, Lenin (1964:113; 1965:425), appealing to realism and the need for enlightened administration, was eager to separate his socialism from utopia: “We are not utopians. We know that an unskilled labourer or a cook cannot immediately get on with the job of state administration”; “When the new has just been born the old always remains stronger than it for some time”.<sup>60</sup>

I want to argue, against both socialist and post-modernist ambivalence, that a political theory cannot jettison utopia and that left communism has provided a robust and rational (that is,

based on a cogent critique of the present and real possibilities here-and-now) yet visionary project that deserves serious reconsideration. Meaning both “nowhere” and “somewhere good”, the utopian dimension has often been considered a ubiquitous feature of social thought (Levitas, 1990:2). Indeed, it would be difficult to imagine a political or social theory that lacked any utopian trace, that was bereft of images of the good society (Beilharz, 1993:55). And, despite their anti-utopian urges, elements within both Marxism and post-modernism have been willing to acknowledge the necessity of a utopian dimension. For instance, socialist Kate Soper (1990:132) rejects the illegitimate Marxist tendency to ask us to accept that a certain form of societal organisation is better than current arrangements, all the time pretending that it only speaks of an actual movement and that it does not posit utopian images of the future. And from the post-modernist side, Laclau and Mouffe (1985:190) have argued that “without ‘utopia’, without the possibility of negating an order beyond the point that we are to threaten it, there is no possibility at all of the constitution of a radical imaginary.”

Utopian thinking, as Levitas (1990:1,87,180,192) points out, is not pure compensation, not just a distracting dream, not even simply an expression of hope. For instance, upon leaving William Morris’ *Nowhere* - a world in which money is a museum relic, criminality and sexual jealousy are unheard of, and people are graceful, noble, and sensuous - one is unsettled by the return to an ugly, disharmonious, and unhappy world. Here, we see the other side of utopia’s dream-like quality: *its foot in reality, the way it opposes as it proposes*, holding up a mirror to society in which are reflected its defects and sadnesses (Morrison, 1984:139; Kumar, 1991:107). Utopia, then, contains a vision for a new world, a critique of the old, and a desire - and sometimes a means by which - to move from one to another (Levitas, 1990:7,97). Such imaginative conjecture beyond the actually existing, the unfavourable contrast between the old and the alternative new world, and the delineation of the possibilities for such change are essential for any successful leftist-socialist politics.<sup>61</sup>

Forced into political obscurity by the victory of socialist orthodoxy, left communists have critiqued the really existing social order on the basis of their projected alternative. At times, left communists have been willing to distance themselves from scientism and realism, emphasising instead the utopian dimension. Goldman (1983:105), for instance, rejected the pejorative usage of “utopian”. Similarly, Kropotkin maintained that utopia was an essential in the struggle for social transformation: “It offends the human spirit to throw it into a destructive struggle unless it has a conception ... of what might replace the world it is going to destroy” (in Lukes, 1985:71). Bookchin, Lefebvre, and Marcuse<sup>62</sup> denied the equation of

utopianism with impotent dreaming or dangerous irrationalism. Instead, they emphasised the creative essence of such thinking (the utopian, said Lefebvre (1971:192), is the “partisan of possibilities”), and the rationality and reasonableness of utopian desires: “The utopian claims of imagination have become saturated with historical reality” (Marcuse, 1971:192).

I have argued that the utopian dimension encompasses more than simply a vague hopefulness or romantic dreaming. Criticising the existing order and delineating the possibilities for a new world in the here-and-now are of a rational-intellectual as well as of a imaginative-creative kind. Left communism’s critique of the present, the detection of possibilities in that present, and the construction of plausible models of a libertarian socialist future have been feats of great imagination, powerful rhetoric, and supreme logical and moral force. Some indication of this is gained from even a casual acquaintance with left communist works such as Pannekoek’s *Workers’ Councils*, Pankhurst’s plans for a councils democracy, Berkman’s *What is Communist Anarchism?*, or Castoriadis’ (1988a and b) *On the Content of Socialism*. These works are remarkable signals of the tennaciousness of hope amidst perpetual political failure and marginalisation.

The left communist tradition is rife with tales of miserable fates, isolation, despair, withdrawal, and the virtual eclipse of whole sub-traditions. Many left communists have indeed, as Coleman (1990) argues, ended their lives deluded or disillusioned: witness Cafiero’s descent into madness, Berkman’s and Debord’s lonely suicides, Mattick’s and Ruhle’s American isolation, William Haywood’s (of the IWW) sad, alcohol-soaked Russian exile, Korsch’s desperate final years in an American psychiatric institution, Pannekoek’s and Bordiga’s decades of obscurity and political withdrawal. Remarkably, amidst such defeat, left communists often retained their hopefulness. This hope has been found in the beautiful future that history guarantees: as the French communists around the journal *La Banquise* (1993:14) put it, “When time is killing us, the only excuse at our disposal is that history will avenge us.” The sources of such hope are also to be found in the secrets of humanity’s essential being (the idea of the instinct for freedom or of humanity’s long-possessed dream, for example). Lastly, and related to the previous two instances, such hope has been discovered in the faith socialists have placed in ordinary people. Thus, courageously facing her own death, Luxemburg was to tranquilly predict that the old order was built on sand and that the revolution would return, declaring its ineradicability (in Dunayevskaya, 1991:75; Walicki, 1995:248).<sup>63</sup>

Having described left communism's recourse to such revolutionary myths to sustain utopians in times not propitious to their goals, it is necessary to emphasise two things. Firstly, in the post-modern period, such mythic appeals to Nature and History are not sufficient. Today, as Castoriadis has noted, all communists can say is that: "we aim at it [socialism] because we want it and because we know that other people want it - not because of the laws of history, the interest of the proletariat, or the destiny of being" (in Howard, 1988:265). Secondly, though, this reality does not mean the drying up of socialist hopes. As Beilharz (1994:111) has argued, "Hope we need to retain as a human category, but not (with Marx) as an escatological or teleological category. Redemption is off the agenda, then, but domination is not." There are good reasons for such hope in the possibilities that left communists have detected in the present. These propensities are evident in the dissatisfaction and unease regarding the "banker's fatalism" that at times has seemed to block out any rational thinking beyond in the present climate (Bourdieu, 1998:126-8).<sup>64</sup> In a similar way, the sense of the bankruptcy of contemporary political and cultural life, and the, at times, utopian bearing of post-modernist thinking, indicate that the utopian dimension still has plenty of life left in it.

I believe that a robust, rational utopianism is required in post-modern times. A society without utopian thinking beyond (even if that dystopian fantasy were a realistic possibility in the contemporary world) would be, as Castoriadis has maintained, heteronomous, closed, and conformist. And, as Murray Bookchin (1997:177) has argued, a transformatory movement without a "principle of hope" is unlikely to grow. More recently, even Leszek Kolakowski (1990:144) has lamented the apparent decline of utopian thinking. Kolakowski rejects the domination of social and political thought by two extreme and diametrically opposite poles. The first is the utopianism that equates human freedom with perfect, harmonious fraternity; the second, a misanthropic skepticism, based on the thesis of humanity's total corruption, is equally unsuitable as a basis for any social system (Kolakowski, 1990:144). Instead, says Kolakowski (1990:145), we must learn to live between these two irreconcilable claims, cognizant of the indispensibility of both utopia and skepticism for our cultural survival. Kolakowski's (1990:132,138) rejection of utopia - when utopia signifies an aspiration to perfection and when it insists on the possibility of complete and frictionless human fraternity - is sound. As Castoriadis has argued, utopia in the sense of an absence of all resistance, thickness, and opacity is mythical and dangerous (Singer, 1979:53). However, neither utopia in general nor communism in particular need mean this. Utopian thought today should and, in my opinion, can contain *both* a skepticism towards dreams of final societal closure *and* the thinking beyond found within the left communist

tradition. In the former mode, utopians today should distance themselves from those conceptions that posit a static, perfectly transparent and harmonious social order free of politics. However, utopians must not be afraid to posit the possibilities of a better life, away from those institutions – particularly the state and capital - that are seldom questioned, and, much worse still, appear today as unquestionable. As Laclau and Mouffe (1985:190) have put it, each radical emancipatory project must seek a path between the coercive myth of the Ideal City and the positivist pragmatism of a reformism without a project.

The left communist utopian project deserves to be heard. Left communism has persisted with a critique of existing institutions as inimical to popular sovereignty - the democratic ideal that still possesses much life and popular currency. It has promoted a rational utopian politics that promises a concrete way beyond a number of the more intractable difficulties facing humanity today. The value of left communist utopianism is, I have argued, in its “scientific” (the critique of existing institutions, the development of a societal alternative, and the theorisation of tangible possibilities in the present towards this utopian beyond) as well as in its imaginative-speculative element - a *mixture of science and dream*, as Rubel (1987:12) characterises Marx’s work. Profound critics of the unfreedoms and sadnesses of bourgeois society, acute observers of the struggles that these unfreedoms have generated, and creative utopians, sensitive to the possibilities that might allow humanity to leave the old world and to create a freer and more democratic society - this, above all, is the left communist legacy.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Post-modernists, in Foucault’s words, have “cut off the head of the king” to reveal the micro operations of power (May, 1994:75).

<sup>2</sup> Thus Marx viewed England’s crimes in India as an “unconscious tool of history”, swinish perhaps, but aiding history’s inexorable progress all the same (Lukes, 1985:44).

<sup>3</sup> By 1914, there were 1,100 workers’ libraries in Germany, and no German town was without a workers’ daily, a consumer co-operative, or a workers’ sports club (Stenson, 1981:132; Abendroth, 1972:56).

<sup>4</sup> As Stenson (1981:233,153) argues, the social democrats “simply adapted broader German [cultural] forms to the specific needs of its members”.

<sup>5</sup> Socialism, for Lenin, was “inconceivable without large-scale capitalist engineering based on the latest engineering based on the latest discoveries of modern science. It is inconceivable without planned state organisation which keeps tens of millions of people to the strictest observance of a unified standard of production and distribution” (in Clark, 1984:109). Similarly, for Trotsky: “Marxism sets out from the development of technique as the fundamental spring of progress, and constructs the communist programme upon the dynamic of the productive forces” (in Clark, 1984:112).

<sup>6</sup> Lenin (1965:59) thus argued for the Taylor system and piece work. Lenin (1965:269,268) extolled the virtues of “socialist discipline” and asserted that workers must learn to “unquestioningly obey the single will of the leaders of labour”, calling for “iron discipline while at work, with unquestioning obedience to the will of a single person, the Soviet leader.” Capitalism could only be defeated and

socialism built, said Lenin (1965:275,427,514), through the higher productivity of labour, the smashing of laxity, and “more individual authority and more dictatorship”.

<sup>7</sup> For example, in 1914, Lenin asserted: “We shall not invent the organisational form of the work, but take it ready made from capitalism - we shall take over the banks, syndicates, the best factories, experimental stations, academies, and so forth; all that we shall have to do is borrow the best models furnished by the advanced countries” (in Gouldner, 1985:43).

<sup>8</sup> As Lenin admitted, he was no expert in the sphere of aesthetics - “I entirely confess my lack of competence in this area” (in Service, 1985:234). Lenin’s tastes were, like many communists of the era, including Rosa Luxemburg and Anton Pannekoek, conventional and classical - Turgenev, Chekov, Beethoven, Tolstoy (Gerber, 1989:1; Nettle, 1969:17; Service, 1985:234). However, this relative neglect of art, and Lenin’s overwhelming concern with the political sphere, does not mean that there are not some indications in Lenin’s work of the later doctrine of socialist realism. After the revolution, for instance, Lenin chided the editors of a literary journal for having forgotten that “our journals are a mighty instrument of the Soviet State in the cause of the education of the Soviet people ... They must therefore be controlled by the vital foundation of the soviet order - its politics” (in Hook, 1955:220). Trotsky was more cosmopolitan, calling at one point for the “complete freedom of art” against any constraint, and he was, perhaps surprisingly, impressed by Celine (Knei-paz, 1979:448,471). On the other hand, says Knei-paz (1979:462), Trotsky *did* tend to ask the utilitarian question of the place of a particular work for particular political and social goals.

<sup>9</sup> From the anarchist tradition, Bakunin (1953:89,172-5), Berkman (1972:217), and Kropotkin displayed technological determinism, a great faith in science and progress, and a conviction that humanity “must subdue [nature] ... and wrest from it ... [its] freedom and humanity” (Bakunin, 1953:89). Thus, if Woodcock (1962:445) is correct that anarchism was, in essence, the great uprising of the dispossessed, those thrust aside by the immense material advances of the nineteenth century, many anarchists were liable, all the same, not to eschew such changes, but to judge themselves as part of progress’ secret plan.

<sup>10</sup> John Zerzan and John Clark (1984:109-112) make similar criticisms of Marxian productionism.

<sup>11</sup> That is, Marxism insists on the primacy of production and technique, the domination by the economy over all other spheres, the justification of unequal wages, rationalism, etc. (Howard, 1988:241; Castoriadis, 1997b:69).

<sup>12</sup> “Concentration camps, mass exterminations, world wars, and atom bombs are no ‘relapse into barbarism’, but the unrepressed implementation of the achievements of modern science, technology, and domination” (Marcuse, 1973:23).

<sup>13</sup> In a similar vein, in a melancholy letter to Bertolt Brecht, Karl Korsch questioned Marxian optimism: “it has become quite clear to me that on the world wide scale we are in an era of regression. This retrogression in intellectual and cultural matters can be traced almost from day to day. It is also useless to point to the continuing ‘progress’ of technology. On the contrary, the intellectual decline will reach an extent in the foreseeable future which will bring even the progress of technology to a halt” (in Kellner, 1977:287).

<sup>14</sup> Zerzan judges the neolithic revolution as an important moment in the coming of the alienation and domestication of humanity.

<sup>15</sup> For Perlman (1985:21) for example, Marx’s blind-spot – an uncritical enthusiasm for rationalism, material progress, and the application of science to production - meant that Marx forgot his own fundamental insight that every minute spent in the capitalist labour process meant the erection by the worker of a power that opposed him or her.

<sup>16</sup> In 1944, Pannekoek declared that “The workers have lost their class; they do not exist as a class anymore; class consciousness has been washed away in the wholesale submission of all classes under the ideology of big capital” (in Gerber, 1989:191).

<sup>17</sup> “When, in the more or less affluent societies, productivity has reached a level at which the masses participate in its benefits, and at which the opposition is effectively and democratically ‘contained’, then the conflict between master and slave is also effectively contained. Or rather it has changed its social location. It exists, and explodes, in the revolt of the backward countries against the intolerable heritage of colonialism and its prolongation by neo-colonialism” (Marcuse, 1973:13).

<sup>18</sup> “Capital has realised the negation of classes - by means of manipulation”, and now capital has turned to attack and conquer the last frontier - the imagination (Camatte, 1995:62).

<sup>19</sup> “People say each individual is ‘free’ - but in fact all people passively receive the sole meaning the institution and social field propose to them and in fact impose on them: teleconsumption, which is

made up of consumption, television, and consumption simulated via television” (Castoriadis, 1997a:346).

<sup>20</sup> For all of the SI’s attempts to resist this recuperation, as Jay (1994:417) says: “Twenty years later, the Situationists, who so fervently sought to unite art and life and thus make the Revolution, were in danger of being turned into yet another canonised entry in the dreary succession of modernist movements seeking to outdo their predecessors in radicality”.

<sup>21</sup> This elitism is illustrated in Marcuse’s assumption that a preference for *Lolita* over, say, *Anna Karenina* was a sign of shallowness (Geoghegan, 1987). It has been much commented on that, for these thinkers, all culture was ideology except that high culture which they, as middle and upper class writers, had access to and familiarity with.

<sup>22</sup> That is, Bookchin (1982:352) emphasised nature’s diversity, spontaneity, complementarity, and freedom from hierarchy and domination. For Bookchin (1987:49), nature is not stingy or cruel, but is “a *participatory* realm of interactive life-forms whose most outstanding attributes are fecundity, creativity, and directiveness, marked by complementarity that renders the natural world the *grounding* for an ethics of freedom rather than domination.”

<sup>23</sup> More recently, the enmity has been continued in Bookchin’s *Social or Lifestyle Anarchism* and David Watson’s *Beyond Bookchin*, where Bookchin appears ever more vitriolic and pessimistic, and where Watson accuses Bookchin of being too much the modernist, feeling that social ecology must be liberated from the weight of Bookchinism (Watson, 1996:3).

<sup>24</sup> A left communist notion of epochal decline and a questioning of the idea of steady societal progress similar to the primitivist account is to be found in the notion of *capitalist decadence*. This idea has been very much a feature of the councilist tradition, from Luxemburg, to Pannekoek and Mattick, and through the various analyses of imperialism, and, finally, it has achieved the status of theoretical cornerstone in the systematic conceptions of a group like the ICC. This theorised period of capitalism’s permanent historic decline - when it ceases to be a socially progressive system of production, offering the working class no further living standard increases - tends to have the councilists converging with the notion of an age of permanent decline and reaction held to by the primitivists.

<sup>25</sup> In a similar way to Jameson, Zizek (1997a:29,30) argues that, in order to function, the ruling ideology has to be able to incorporate elements in which the ruled will be able to see their authentic longings.

<sup>26</sup> See for example, Bookchin, Vaneigem (1983:85), and Voyer (1973). Voyer (1973) links character to the domination of value over daily life and the spectacle effect. Such character, divesting the individual of sociability, sexuality, and individuality, is the precise opposite of the situationists’ promotion of the slogan “never work!” and their attempt at constructing “situations”.

<sup>27</sup> Orgastic potency was, for Reich, the capacity for uninhibited surrender to the flow of biological energy and discharge of sexual excitation (Ollman, 1972:202)

<sup>28</sup> For Reich (1975:24), “fascist mysticism is orgastic yearning, restricted by mystic distortion and inhibition of natural sexuality”. Unfortunately, said Reich (1975:39), socialists had “failed to take into account the character structure of the masses and the social effect of mysticism.”

<sup>29</sup> “When a young man discovers that the inhibition of his natural sexual strivings is not necessitated by biological considerations ... but fulfills definite interests of those who wield social power; when he discovers that parents and teachers are merely unconscious executors of this social power, then he will not take the position that this is a highly interesting scientific theory. He will comprehend the misery of his life in a new light, deny its divine origin, and begin to rebel against parents and their taskmasters. He might even become critical for the first time and begin to think about things. This and only this is what I understand as sex-politics” (Reich, 1980:288).

<sup>30</sup> For Guattari (1996:191), “Private ownership of the means of production is intrinsically bound up with the appropriation of desire by the individual, the family, and the social order. One begins by neutralising the workers’ access to desire, through familial castration, the lures of consumption, etc., in order to appropriate his capacity for social work. To sever desire from work: such is the primary imperative of capitalism. To separate political economy from libidinal economy: such is the mission of those theoreticians who serve capitalism.”

<sup>31</sup> Sexuality, for Marcuse, was the most “disorderly” of the instincts.

<sup>32</sup> “Restores”, because, as Klare (1972:7) reminds us, much of Marx’s work (particularly the *Paris Manuscripts*) is precisely a critique of everyday life and a utopian aspiration towards the “universal individual”.

<sup>33</sup> For instance, Pelloutier's *Bourses du Travail* (revolutionary labour exchanges) were originally intended to provide workers' libraries, workers' museums, and technical education, which he hoped would become the very centre of workers' lives.

<sup>34</sup> Recently, left communist Hakim Bey (1991:98) has developed a concept in many ways similar to that of the situation with his notion of the "temporary autonomous zone" (TAZ). Attempting, like the SI, to deflect the inevitable pressures of incorporation, the TAZ is an enclave partially free from the compulsion of alienation: as Bey describes it, a constant guerrilla war that battles all alienation. And this TAZ is, to the horror of community-oriented thinkers like Bookchin, concerned less with utopian futures than with the possibilities of freedom in the present: "There is no becoming, no revolution, no struggle, no path; already you're the monarch of your own skin" (Bey, 1991:4).

<sup>35</sup> The Scottish novelist and one-time participant in the SI's early work, Alexander Trochhi (1991:178), wrote of a cultural revolt, the "invisible insurrection of a million minds", which would be "the necessary underpinning, the passionate substructure of a new order of things", polluting, deflecting, corrupting, eroding, and finally out-flanking the old social-cultural order.

<sup>36</sup> For example, the SI's early work on experimental behaviour around the practices of "drift" and "psychogeography" and situationist cinematic interventions: "Revolution is not 'showing' life to people, but making them live" (in Knabb, 1989:312).

<sup>37</sup> Tronti (1979:10) argued that this is so because capital is from its birth the consequence of productive labour. And, for Negri (1979:133), the contemporary crisis is rooted in the inability of capital to anticipate the cycle of working class struggles.

<sup>38</sup> The refusal of work, says Negri (1979:127), is firstly the refusal of the most alienated work, then the refusal of capitalist work as such, and, finally, the tendency to the questioning of the entire mode of production.

<sup>39</sup> In like manner, Pataud and Pouget (1990:226) insisted that the new communist order would bring with it a ubiquity of art, to be produced by all, rather than merely by privileged individuals. And Pelloutier attributed great importance to art as both "the servant, the accomplice of bourgeois society", doing more than any other social force to maintain the situation of domination, and, conversely, as potentially revealing lies and destroying religion and the family (Jennings, 1990:20).

<sup>40</sup> In her article, "The Modern Drama: A Powerful Disseminator of Radical Thought", Goldman (1911) claimed that Ibsen's *Ghosts* "has acted like a bomb explosion, shaking the social structure to its very foundations", and that, in general, "the modern drama, operating through the double channel of dramatist and interpreter, affecting as it does both mind and heart, is the strongest force in developing social discontent, swelling the powerful tide of unrest that sweeps onward and over the dam of ignorance, prejudice, and superstition."

<sup>41</sup> Zerzan (1994:99), for instance, says of popular music: "It is also as totally integrated into commercialised mass production as any product off the assembly line. The music never changes from the seemingly eternal formula, despite superficial variations ... Its expressive potential exists solely within the limited confines of consumer choice ... As a one-dimensional code of consumer society, it is a training course in passivity." Against popular music's "overt pacification", Zerzan (like Adorno) champions atonal music.

<sup>42</sup> "[T]he chief accusation I have to bring against the modern state of society is that it is founded on the art-lacking or unhappy labour of the greatest part of men" (Morris, 1883).

<sup>43</sup> For Horkheimer: "since it became autonomous, [modernist art] has reserved the utopia that evaporated from religion" (in Jay, 1973:179).

<sup>44</sup> For Adorno (1991), authentic art (for instance, some of the music of Schoenberg) - by resisting false harmony, reconciliation, and completion, and remaining fragmentary and difficult - allowed us to destroy the false harmony of capitalist social life (Johnston, 1984:89,94).

<sup>45</sup> Art represented, argued Marcuse (1986:69), the ultimate goal of all revolutions: the freedom and happiness of the individual.

<sup>46</sup> According to Castoriadis, the arrival of modern art was a liberatory moment: this art, which "abolishes our tranquil and stupid assurance about our daily life; ... reminds us that we forever live at the edge of the Abyss - which is the main thing an autonomous being knows, although that does not prevent him from living and creating" (Castoriadis, 1997a:346). However, Castoriadis (1993:115,304) came to pessimistically assert that, with the end of the *avant-garde*, art was ever more "full of the void", signalling the vapidness of contemporary social life and the possible closure of the project of autonomy.

<sup>47</sup> Lefebvre (1988:83), who was involved with the dadaists and the surrealists and who wrote extensively on all aspects of culture, argued that “Art metamorphosises reality and this metamorphosis returns to reality”.

<sup>48</sup> See, for instance, Woodcock (1962:25), Joll (1979:266), Bakunin (1953:87), Sorel (1976:92), Ridley (1970:240), Jennings (1985:154; 1990:58), and Sonn (1992:71).

<sup>49</sup> Lafargue (1975:35), for instance, championed “*le droit a la paresse*”. Declared Lafargue (1975): “let us be lazy in everything, except in loving and drinking, except in being lazy.”

<sup>50</sup> Bookchin (1987:180) argues that command, obedience, and rationalisation have become the working class’ most definitive traits, and it is these traits which make up its conception of societal re-organisation.

<sup>51</sup> For instance, Bookchin (1992) insists that we must understand that workers have always been more than mere proletarians: they live in communities, not just in factories (Bookchin, 1987:191). On the other hand, Bookchin (1995:1,8,101) is concerned that anarchism does not shift from a focus on politics and the social towards decadent, bourgeois personalism.

<sup>52</sup> Zerzan (1981-2:188,193), too, theorised the anti-work situation, evidenced in absenteeism, lateness, the use of drugs at work, sabotage, etc., as “approaching an unprecedented structural counter-revolution.”

<sup>53</sup> Apparently anticipating post-Marxist arguments, Marcuse argued that “no particular class can be the subject of the universal emancipation” (in Levitas, 1990:150).

<sup>54</sup> Mattick’s (1969:339) characterisation of Keynesian capitalism as a division between a “decision-making class” and a class subject to these divisions was rather similar to that of Castoriadis.

<sup>55</sup> Said Guattari (1996:252), “The development, defence and expression of changing productive subjectivities, of dissident singularities, and of new proletarian temperaments has become, in some respects, the primary content and task of the movement.”

<sup>56</sup> “Communism and its marvellous, life-size collapse ... is the liquidation of the social, of the political as idea as value, as utopian ideal, in the disaster of achieved utopia. But isn’t it the same in the West: the life-size failure of the achieved utopia of happiness?” (Baudrillard, 1998:10).

<sup>57</sup> Lyotard, for example, does not aim at a more harmonious and less unjust state, he simply seeks more diversity (Williams, 1998:117). Using this kind of evidence, Best and Kellner (1991:285) have argued that “Postmodern politics reject all ideals and models exterior to the existing system and thus all utopian alterations”.

<sup>58</sup> Not only Marxism, but anarchism too, has displayed a frequent anti-utopianism. Bakunin, for instance, never described an anarchist utopia, and Sorel rejected utopias as the product of intellect rather than will, preferring the movement to the goal (Levitas, 1990:64; Jennings, 1986:138; Masters, 1974:xix,262).

<sup>59</sup> In similar fashion, Bernstein (1970:204,219), arguing that “the ultimate aim? Well, that just remains an ultimate aim”, contended that “One has not overcome Utopianism if one assumes that there is in the present, or ascribes to the present, what is to be in the future. We hope to take working men as they are.”

<sup>60</sup> At various times, of course, Leninists have slipped into utopian mode. For instance, in *Literature and Revolution* Trotsky contended: “Man, who will learn how to move rivers and mountains, how to build people’s palaces on the peaks of Mount Blanc and at the bottom of the Atlantic ... Man at last will begin to harmonise himself in earnest ... raise his instincts to the heights of consciousness ... Man will become immeasurably stronger, wiser and subtler ... The average human type will rise to the heights of an Aristotle, a Goethe, or a Marx” (in Walicki, 1995:387). In reality, as Beliharz (1987) notes, Trotskyists have historically exhibited a desperate though secret pessimism about human beings, and Trotsky’s own record in power offers a heavy stick with which to beat utopianism. Similarly, a consciously utopian communist like Bloch, for whom real thinking meant going beyond *mere reality*, could happily support the Stalinist leadership through the Moscow trials, and he was able to chide the Frankfurt critical theorists for their failure to realise that one could only choose between Hitler and Stalin (Jay, 1984:193).

<sup>61</sup> As Bauman (1976:13) says, “One cannot be critical about something that is believed to be an absolute.” Utopia, argues Bauman (1976:11-14) - “those aspects of culture in which the possible extrapolations of the present are explored” - belongs to the same category as invention, and it is a necessary condition of historical and social change.

<sup>62</sup> Marcuse (1973:108-117,164-66), imagining that socialism might even overcome the problem of death, enthused over utopia’s subversion of the reality principle, insisting that with increased

production fantasy's demands - for complete freedom from repression, uninhibited desire and gratification, and an existence without anxiety - had become easily realisable.

<sup>63</sup> Such hopefulness is evident in the various socialist predictions of coming revolution, for instance, in the following excerpt from one of C. L. R. James' letters: "I live at present in daily expectation of the beginning of an upheaval ... marking the beginning of socialist revolution. I think of that many hours every day" (in Mcleeme, 1994:235).

<sup>64</sup> Bourdieu (1998:128) contends that a "Reasoned utopianism ... is undoubtedly what is most lacking in Europe today."

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