

# The Unions Against Revolution



By Grandizo Munis and Benjamin Peret.

Translated by the League of Internationalist Communists.

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*We publish here, for the first time in English, the full version of Grandizo Munis and Benjamin Peret's "The Unions Against Revolution." Alongside a new introduction from Munis explaining the context in which the piece was meant to be published, we also include Benjamin Peret's substantial contribution to what was supposed to be a debate with syndicalism, newly translated into English.*

## Prologue

This writing has been published under very different conditions and at a very different time from those initially planned. It should have been a polemic between the defenders of revolutionary syndicalism, on the one hand, and Benjamin Péret and myself, on the other. In 1952, Fontaine, editor of *Le Libertaire*, the weekly in which the French C.N.T. and anarchism expressed themselves at the same time, agreed that the discussion should take place in the pages of that publication, and that Benjamin Péret should initiate it. Secondly, the anarcho-syndicalists would reply, and it would be my turn to reply, followed by a pro-syndicalist counter-reply and a summary of our own. Benjamin Péret's introduction was indeed published, but no reply came from the opposing side. Thus, the initial project remained there.

Then the events of the repression prevented me from making any contribution for years, and Benjamin Péret's health deteriorated. Shortly after I regained my freedom, my friend and inseparable comrade in struggle died prematurely, without our being able to realise the idea of finishing and publishing together the work on trade unions. Once I had written my text, it was still necessary to wait for events that would warn its content so that some publisher would agree to take it to the bookstore. This was made possible by the events of May 1968 in France, in the course of which the trade unions, those of the C.G.T.-P.C. in the forefront, played the most disgusting of roles.

The text of Benjamin Péret is given here in my translation, as it was published in *Le Libertaire*, in small articles. There is no question of retouching it, even if it is somewhat resented today as an introduction to a failed polemic, a convincing invitation to anarcho-syndicalists. In any case, even isolated it is still valid and an excellent picture of the evolution of the workers' defence organisations until the final trade union metamorphosis into an encirclement of capital to corner the wage-earning class. My text, written for the first time in French, I have rewritten it in Spanish, since it seems to me absurd to translate myself and risky to entrust the Spanish version to a third party. Needless to say, I consider the latter to be more concise than my own French version. The ideas are exactly the same, but some points are emphasised in response to a certain hollowness regarding the alleged reformist character of the unions.

The fact that for 40 years in Spain there have been no trade unions of the so-called free or workers' union type does not mean that in many workplaces there has been confirmation of the European and world experience since the post-war period. At the beginning, the partisans of the trade unions in the underground had to sing in chorus with the working class. The prohibition of strikes and repression forced them to accept the anonymous initiative and the factory assemblies themselves as decision-making bodies. But as the workers were taking up the right to strike, long before it was accepted by decree or even tolerated, the "free" trade union apparatuses appeared on the scene, taking advantage of their own clandestinity. This gained them the sympathy of the workers in general, and wherever they had their own men, they could appear as representatives democratically designated by the assemblies.

On the other hand, and consequently to the splendid workers' mobilisation from the first wave of strikes in Asturias, soon followed by a general upheaval, up to Catalonia and Andalusia, the ineffectiveness of the Falangist unions was evident. They were despised everywhere. In this respect, a document written by the mining companies is very eloquent. At the request of the government, they set out in it their desiderata for a strong increase in coal production, in anticipation of the "Development Plan". They asked, of course, for billions of pesetas to modernise the extraction technique, but they pointed out as the main problem the loss of respect and the rebelliousness of the working class, which did not pay the slightest attention to the agreements signed on its behalf, after any conflict, by the representation of the vertical unions. And they unequivocally demanded another type of union organisation, capable of making the workers respect its decisions. Even more explicitly, the mining companies assured the government that without this last condition, neither the billions of pesetas requested, nor the most perfect equipment would be effective.

Corroborating such employer's conviction, a Falangist ex-governor of Asturias explained at the same time, in a report to his people, that they should prepare to control the working class, not from outside, vertically, but in another way, according to the example set in Argentina by Perón.

As the workers were imposing their right to strike in the best of battles, the representatives of capital were realising that it was indispensable for them to deal with it through "workers" unions, European style, all the more so since this "Right of Man" figures among the requirements of the Common Market in order to open wide the doors to Spain. And so, there began to take hold in fact, in the practice of daily struggles, although without any tug of war, a convergence between capital and the clandestine unions (C.C.O.O; U.S.O. U.G.T., Basque unions, and in the rear C.N.T.). It would become sharper and more precise until the current confluence, which includes the government itself, and appears in more than one domain, as direct collaboration. For years, the intervention in the strikes of the already semi-clandestine union representatives has been moderating the demands, limiting the stoppage time, in certain

cases scabbing and always contrary to the simultaneity of the action on a national scale. As soon as the previous decade had passed, it began to be observed that wherever a conflict arose, the factory or farm workers' assemblies in the South took more radical decisions in the absence than in the presence of union men. And among all of them, the Camacho-Carrillo partisans, in unison with the unionists, stood out because of their restraining tricks, and they followed in their wake. Cases are known in which their strongmen have beaten in ambush workers who had denounced their activities in assembly. The pluralism of which they boast exposes their Stalinist core as soon as an authentic word is put in front of them. Because the mind, the habits and the interests of those who have unquestioningly accepted the misdeeds of the Kremlin against the Russian and world proletariat (and Carrillo welcomed them with a lapdog's glee, having personally been the protagonist of some of them) cannot fail to accuse their hidden nature. Their own bourgeois-democratic grimaces ooze hypocrisy.

Not only they, but also the other trade union centrals, oppose or will oppose in the immediate future the sovereignty of the workers' assemblies in each work unit. They want, it is essential for them, that the law confers on them the monopoly of workers' representation, with its numerous and juicy complementary gimmicks, among others the high bar on labour dismissals. There, and far beyond, the trade unionist pruritus of any party, very especially of those who have a long experience in the two Europes, Western and Eastern, not to mention that of the United States and Japan, marches forward.

First stage: to obtain the exclusive right to negotiate collective bargaining agreements and conflicts with capital, in the name of the working class, in the interest of "the national economy", the supreme interest, it goes without saying. Any demand is thus strictly subordinated to the best realisation of the Plan, it is a demand for this Plan, in no way for the working class. The improvements obtained by the latter, if any, will be to the greater benefit of the national economy, that is to say, of the expanded reproduction of capital. The unions appear, therefore, not as a representation of the working class, but as an organic and legalised delegation of capital to its producers.

As long as this first stage lasts, and thus the unions, their political grey eminences and capital's own economic-governmental demands will condition the fusion of their respective organic and human supports, as co-owners of a single nationalised capital. Centuries ago, the trade in agricultural and artisanal surpluses gave rise to the first investments of capital, properly speaking, in instruments of commodity production by means of wage labour. Thus, nowadays, the trade in the capacity of workers' production in which the unions shroud themselves, leads them to the co-ownership of capital where they still appear to oppose it. This is not a lucubration, nor a simple hypothesis. The merger is accomplished in Russia and similar countries, while in Western Europe the trade unions, with their mentors behind the scenes, have a hand in the management plans, intervene in the boards of directors, are shareholders of large companies

and in some cases own profitably invested capital; in return, they receive from the State and the companies a fraction of the profits, without speaking now of the bulk. In Washington, the State Department has set up a trade union section with an abundant budget, whose task is to train trade union cadres in numerous countries, Spain being no exception. For a long time, its head has been William Wester, ex-colleague of Carrillo and in his time no less prostrate than the latter at the feet of the living Stalin, let it be said incidentally.

In a supreme effort to survive, each and every one of the capitalist strata tends to unite in the State. But against each other, unions and coadjutant parties, the working class as a whole stands in exclusive and common antithesis. Its absolute opposition appears immediately, starting from the most pressing problem posed to it: to earn more by working less, much less. A brief reflection suffices to see it clearly. In effect, to earn more is a mere mercantile aspect of consuming, since the salary rations each worker in products and knowledge, while to work much less, desire of lazy people according to the same mercantile ethics, contains the latitude of indispensable time to enter in possession of the exterior world and of the interior world of man. Even under that bastardised formulation of the problem, underlies a whole new world, a whole civilisation so radically different from the present one, that by its own dynamics the pursuit of the endeavour to consume more by working much less aims at establishing private property in its only legitimate and necessary formula, because it is human and true: that of each person in the enjoyment of what material and culture he requires to possess himself. All that is indispensable to reach this objective is present, and from it are deduced the practical measures for its realisation: suppression of parasitic occupations and of any production alien to human consumption, reduction of working time to the minimum allowed by technology and by the number of people, generalised higher education, disappearance of wages and currency as a representation of values, which would then exist only as use.

The persistence of trade union activity, on the contrary, means the endless production and reproduction of the rental of labour, origin and sustenance of the universal venality of products and of human beings. To an experienced eye, this antithesis between unions and the working class has had many subterranean manifestations. It will have some of the most forceful ones in the near future.

G. Munis (1972)

## Antecedents

Societies that have survived to the present day have known internal struggles promoted by the disinherited classes against the classes or castes that kept them under their domination. The struggles could not reach a certain extent until the moment when the oppressed, recognising their common interest, were able to associate with the aim of improving their living conditions. Or with a view to the total subversion of society. In the course of the previous centuries, the workers, in the face of the corporations that included bosses or workers of the same trade (where the former operated at will and under the direct protection of the public authorities), the brotherhood associations (“compagnonage”) that grouped together only the workers represented, among other things, the first permanent bodies of the class struggle.

Even before that, around the 10th century, there were fraternities. They were groups that had to enter into the struggle against the upper layers of society, since their dissolution was several times considered. But we do not know of any document that could clarify its constitution or the purpose for which it was proposed.

The aim of the fellowship associations was not, as numerous court rulings systematically condemn them from the 16th to the 19th century, to bring about a transformation of society, which was inconceivable at the time, but to improve the wages of their members, the conditions of learning and thus the standard of living of the entire working class.

Their vitality in spite of all the persecutions they were constantly subjected to, their insurrection, following numerous court rulings, indicates that they corresponded to a pressing need of the workers of those times. At the same time, the fact that its structure seems to have remained unchanged for several centuries indicates that the form and methods of struggle corresponded well to the possibilities of the time. Incidentally, the first strikes, where they would also resort to boycotting, that history mentions in the 16th century were carried out by them.

Throughout this period, from the sixteenth century, during which fellowship societies were well established in history (indicating that they must have existed long ago), to the mid-nineteenth century (when large infant industry gave rise to trade unions), such associations made a strong contribution to maintaining the cohesion of workers vis-à-vis their exploiters. We are indebted to them for the formation of a class consciousness that is still rudimentary but

sufficient to acquire a full development towards the next stage, with the class struggle organisms that will succeed the unions. The unions inherited their role of raising forth demands from the fellowship societies, thus reducing these organisations to a secondary role that has continued to diminish ever since. It is useless to imagine that they could have existed before. In the following period (that of ascendant capitalism, when the workers still had to be grouped into trades), the trade unions were the extension of the brotherhood organisations, stripped of the secrecy that surrounded them and oriented only to economic demands, to the defence of the workers, making other objectives secondary and eventually disappearing.

On the other hand, because of the feudal system that did not grant them the right of existence, the fellowship associations had the character of secret societies, with all the superstitious and para-religious rites that such societies entailed, while the later epoch, especially after 1830, when the workers' societies saw themselves accorded a minimum right of existence. Allowed the appearance in full light of the fellowship groups, they soon showed their incapacity to carry on the energetic and indispensable struggle against the bosses' class. Their restrictive nature (only qualified workers could belong to them) does not allow them to bring together all workers, or even the majority, an objective that the trade unions have pursued since their creation.

Yet the working class does not pass directly from fellowship societies to the otherwise forbidden unions, in whatever form, during the first decades of modern capitalism. The working class is intuitively looking for a way forward. The mutual insurance companies, founded shortly before the 1789 Revolution, marked the first step of the congregation of all the workers of the same trade. They wanted to help their sick or unemployed members, but by utilising strikes as the best method of fighting against the bosses. These workers' mutuals sometimes gave assistance to the strikers, cancelling out any difference between different groups of workers.

Such "mutuals", which were few in number, were almost entirely made up of a few select workers. They were, therefore, inadequate for the conditions of the large infant industry that dragged large masses of unskilled workers from the countryside into the factory. This proletariat in formation was in a tragic situation at the time, which required a significant improvement, even if capitalism was to continue to develop.

The "resistance" companies, whose name clearly indicates the objective they were aiming for, then took over from the "mutuals". They were combat organisations but conceived defensively. They aimed to maintain the standard of living of workers by opposing wage cuts that employers might try to impose, and it is usually such cuts that gave rise to them. From defence, they soon moved on to attack, of course, and workers' demands gained prominence. However, even though, after 1840, the first political demands of the working class were for the spread of

socialist ideas, the “Resistances” and the “Workers’ Associations” continued to limit their struggle purely to the economic sphere. Only incidentally, and under the impulse of political elements, did they point to the subversion of the existing order. In fact, its essential objective is purely economic. In that case, the proletariat becomes aware of its strength, but wields it only for the satisfaction of its immediate demands.

## Trade Unions and the Class Struggle

The first union appeared only in 1864. Any idea of class struggle was alien to it, since it presented itself as proposing, on the contrary, to reconcile the interests of the workers and the bosses. Tolain himself did not assign it another objective. It should also be noted that the trade union movement is not at all initiated by the most exploited layers of the working class—the nascent industrial proletariat—but rather by workers in the craft professions. It thus directly reflects the specific needs and ideological tendencies of this segment of the class.

While the shoemakers and typographers, craftsmen par excellence, set up their trade unions in 1864 and 1867 respectively, the miners, who constitute the most heavily exploited proletariat, did not set up their first trade union until 1876 in the Loire (in 1882 in the North and in Pas-de-Calais), and in textiles, where the working conditions were particularly appalling, workers did not form a trade union for the first time until 1877.

Where did the fermentation of the spirits come from at that time, when socialist ideas (and the anarchist ideas that will only be differentiated later on) were propagated throughout the working class in the big cities, when the most exploited workers were so clearly repulsed by the trade union organisations, while those with a better standard of living were more aligned with them?

First of all, we have to remember that the first trade unions created by workers in the craft professions were only organising themselves for conciliation between classes and not for class struggle.

On the other hand, they represented the most suitable form of organisation for professions which, between multiple workshops, brought together a rather small number of workers of the same trade. It was the best way to bring together the workers of the same trade scattered in the workshops of the same city, to give them a cohesion that the working conditions tended to prevent.



It should also be remembered that the craft nature of a trade often means that employers and workers often work side by side and lead the same kind of life. Even if the economic situation of the employer is far superior to that of the worker, the human contact workers have with the employer often prevent the vast divergence of interests that separates workers and employers from rising to the surface, as it can in large industries.

Among employers and craftsmen, there is also a minimum degree of familiarity with the trade, which is completely absent and inconceivable in large industry. For all of these reasons, the craft unions were usually more conducive to conciliation between classes than to open struggle between them.

The situation of workers in the textile and mining industries (taking them as an example) was completely different. Among the miners as well as among the textile workers, large masses of workers of various professions were clustered in factories and wells, subjected to inhumane working conditions.

If the workers of the artisanal enterprises are the first to organise themselves to discuss their interests with the bosses, those of the big industries, subjected to the most implacable pressure of capital, are the first to perceive that their interests are irreconcilably opposed to the bosses', to rebel against the situation imposed on them, to practice direct action, to claim their right to life, with weapons in hand; they were the first, in short, to orient themselves to the social revolution. The rebellion of the "canuts" of Lyon in 1831, like the strike of the miners in 1844, clearly indicates this. Whereas, between 1830 and 1845, for example, typographers were not once on a list of the occupations that had been the subject of the highest number of convictions, miners were identified three times (the mining industry was then in full development) and textile workers almost every year.

The conclusion is that workers in the big industries did not agree with any interest to a form of organisation that proposed the conciliation (perceived as impossible by them) between adverse classes. They did not join the trade union movement until later and, so to speak, reluctantly, because of their very situation, since they were pushed into forms of open struggle with the bosses that the union did not take into consideration, at least at first. In fact, workers in the big industries would not join the trade union organisations until the moment when they inscribed the principles of class struggle at the head of their statutes. It was these workers who carried out the most consequential and violent struggles between 1880 and 1914. Through this concession to their aspirations, among several other reasons, they resigned themselves to joining the unions. First, because no other form of organisation was conceivable at the time. Moreover, the perspective of a broad progressive development of capitalism, from which the

need to tighten the cohesion of the working class in order to extract from the bosses more satisfactory conditions of existence, which would better prepare workers for the final battle against the regime of private property, had a great deal of currency among workers at the time.

From the very beginning, the decision to join the unions have appeared to workers in the big industries as a simple matter of getting by. It was attractive to them due to the survival of craft industry. The unions thus seemed like a positive solution in that era of continuous development of the capitalist economy accompanied by a steady growth of freedom and culture. Its recognition by the State and, through it, the right of association and the right to the press constituted a considerable acquisition.

However, even when trade unionism adopted the principle of class struggle, it never proposed, in its daily struggle, the overthrow of society; on the contrary, it limited itself to grouping the workers together with a view to defending their economic interests within capitalist society. Sometimes, defence takes on the aspect of a fierce struggle, but it never has the purpose, implicit or explicit, to transform the condition of the working class through revolution. None of the struggles of the time, even the most violent, were aimed at such a goal. At most, the union sees, for an indeterminate future, that it must grow its membership and spread its influence within the working class, and then will come the suppression of the bosses' class and wages, and consequently of the capitalist society that generates them. But it will never organise any concrete action in that regard.

The trade union, which is the spawn of a reformist tendency within the working class, is the purest expression that tendency. It is impossible to speak of the reformist degeneration of the union since it is born reformist. It does not, at any time, oppose capitalist society and the State in order to destroy them, but with the sole aim of conquering a place in their midst and settling there. Its entire history from 1864 to 1914 is that of the definitive rise and victory of the tendency towards integration in the capitalist Left flank, so much so that at the outbreak of the First World War, the vast majority of the trade union leaders assumed their places in the most natural way in the world alongside their respective capitalists, who are joined by new interests arising from the role that the trade unions have assumed, after all, in capitalist society. These union leaders were only opposed at the time by a tiny minority of trade unions that wanted to overthrow the system and prevent the war.

In the period before the First World War, the trade union leaders were not the legitimate representatives of the working class, but only to the extent that they had to assume this role in order to increase their influence in the capitalist state. At the decisive moment, when it was necessary to choose between the risk of compromising an acquired position by calling on the masses to reject war and the regime that generated it, they reinforced their position, opting for

the latter alternative by choosing the regime and putting themselves at the service of capitalism. This was not the case only in France, as the trade union leaders of the countries involved in the war adopted the same attitude everywhere. If the union leaders betrayed, was it not because the union's own structure and its place in society made such betrayal possible from the beginning and inevitable in 1914?

## The Unions and Revolution

The Russian revolutions of 1905 and 1917 brought about the emergence of a new combat organism, which stems from social reality itself: the factory committee or council, democratically elected in the workplaces, and whose members are revocable at any time. They were to appear in St. Petersburg and Moscow, at the end of the 1905 revolution, of which they marked the culminating point. However, still too weak and inexperienced, they proved incapable of fulfilling their assigned task: the overthrow of Tsarism.

They would reappear from the beginning of the 1917 revolution, then more self-confident, and would soon spread throughout the country. Encouraged by Lenin and Trotsky, they carried out the October revolution. In the meantime, the trade unions trailed behind them, holding back the movement with all their might. No revolutionary initiative is due to them, on the contrary. John Reed, in his *Ten Days that Shook the World*, reveals their hostility to the soviets on several occasions, to the point that the railwaymen had to violate trade union discipline to transport from Petrograd to Moscow the reinforcements necessary to reduce the counter-revolution of the Junkers in Moscow.

In the Spanish revolution of 1936, from the first days of the insurrection, committees sprang up everywhere, like mushrooms after a storm. But unlike in Russia, where the soviets relegated the trade unions to the background, the latter asphyxiated the committees (*juntas*). As a result, Stalinism triumphed without the unions really opposing it. They even united to collaborate in its triumph, by means of a C.N.T.-U.G.T. liaison committee and the revolution was betrayed by Stalinism, which then opened the door to Franco.

The German workers, soldiers and sailors who rose up in 1918 did not think for a single instant of turning to the trade unions to lead the struggle against the imperial regime; they created in the midst of the combat their committees of struggle, which seized the factories and the ships and expelled the capitalist authorities. The trade unions intervened only later, to slow down the struggle, to contain the revolution within bourgeois limits, that is to say, to betray it. That spectacle clarifies definitively the thinking of the German revolutionaries and indicates to

Hermann Gorter and the German-Dutch left the road to follow, making him at that time one of the first theoreticians of left communism and of a true tactic of class against class.

There is no doubt that Lenin, struggling with the civil war, foreign intervention and the almost insurmountable difficulties of restoring the Russian economy, did not appreciate the problems posed by the German-Dutch communist left. He emphasised the particular situation of his country, the general level of culture, the revolutionary thrust of the masses which it was indispensable to consolidate daily. Although Lenin was perfectly familiar with Western Europe, he was obsessed by the Russian revolution and by the methods used for its triumph under Tsarism. He did not see that they were inapplicable elsewhere. A direct product of the economic, political and cultural conditions of tsarist Russia, such methods were not applicable once transferred to Western Europe, where the situation of the working masses, their relations with the peasantry, the state of that same peasantry, and, in short, the structure of capitalism had almost nothing in common with the situation in Russia. Nor did he see the latent conflict present in Russia between the soviets and the trade unions, which only the irresistible impulse of the revolution, strengthening the soviets to the detriment of the unions, had mitigated.

In Germany, where the trade unions, much more powerful than in Russia, and were led by the most consistent reformists, one could be convinced that the latter would use every means at their disposal to sabotage the revolution in progress. It was a matter of life and death for them. On the other hand, if the trade unions were hostile to the revolution and the factory committees favourable to it, it was clear that it was necessary to support the latter against the former. Lenin opposed this, in the name of a tactic of overthrowing the bosses by the masses; but precisely, the unions embody the material power of the bosses, who have at their disposal the whole trade union apparatus and the direct or indirect support of the capitalist state, while the masses have only the committees created by themselves to overcome the power of the bosses. If the masses had not created in Russia their own organs of struggle, the soviets, the revolution would inevitably have been channelled and brought to defeat by the only organisations that sought to constrain the masses: the trade unions.

Against this German and Dutch left, Lenin wrote *The Infantile Disease of Communism*, to which Gorter responded with his *Reply to Comrade Lenin*, which contains a critique of the trade unions that is still entirely valid today. In substance, he says that the unions converge towards the State and that they tend to associate themselves with it against the masses, that the workers have practically no power over them, as in the case of the State, that they are inadequate to serve as instruments of the proletarian revolution, and that the latter cannot win without destroying them. It must be clearly stated that in this polemic (of which the 3rd International only made known to us Lenin's arguments, omitting to publish those of his opponents), it was Gorter who was fully right, at least on this point. In his pamphlet, he contrasts to the trade unions, where the workers have practically no greater power than that of

paying dues, the committees or factory councils democratically elected by the workers in the workplaces, whose members, under the immediate and constant control of those who chose them, are revocable at any moment. Such committees are obviously a direct emanation of the will of the masses in movement and facilitate their evolution. That is why, as soon as they appear, even in the provisional form of strike committees, they come into conflict both with the trade union leaders, whose power they threaten, and with the bosses. Both feel equally threatened, and in the same way, so much so that usually the union leaders intercede between bosses and workers to stop the strike. I am convinced that no worker who has participated in a strike committee will contradict me, especially with regard to the strikes of recent years. For the rest, it is normal that this should be the case. For the strike committees represent a new organism of struggle, the most democratic that can be conceived. It tends, consciously or not, to replace the union, which in such a case defends the privileges acquired by trying to restrict the attributions agreed upon in the strike committee. Imagine, then, the hostility of the unions to a permanent committee, called by the very logic of things to subordinate and supplant them!

## Critique of the Union-form

It has been seen that the trade union has never assigned itself a revolutionary objective, first of all because it could not assign it at the time of its creation. Conceived with a view to a reformist action of the working class within capitalist society, it could do nothing more than what it has done. Its activity has been, however, of the first order, since we owe to it a considerable improvement in the fate of the working class and of the class consciousness, which, whatever it may be worth, animates the proletariat today. Truthfully, such class consciousness is rather the work of the action put into practice by the revolutionary syndicalist minority, rather than syndicalist practice in general. That was all that could be expected from revolutionary syndicalism, and it achieved it within its own limited framework. It could not really take up the overthrow of capitalist society, much less starting from a misconception about the unions as organisations within capitalism, since these, whether revolutionary or reformist, are unsuitable for such a task. It is no mere accident that the war of 1914, laying bare the reactionary nature of the trade union leaders, led to the rapid disappearance of revolutionary trade unionism, such that the reformist betrayal should have produced, at the moment of crisis, a change in revolutionary trade unionism to the detriment of reformism. Instinctively, the working class felt that trade unionism, even revolutionary, was not the instrument it needed to undertake the transformation of society.

Finally, the resurrection of trade unionism after the war of 1914 resulted from a simple routine that revolutionaries, few in number, did not know how to break, but the time had come to put an end to them.

The union, in fact, resulted from an initial error, perhaps inevitable at the time. It was the best means of maintaining the necessary cohesion between workers of the same trade dispersed in numerous workshops; but industry, by concentrating production, pushed anachronistic workshops to the background and brought together in the same factory masses of workers from diverse trades. It was therefore necessary to set out from a real fact, which indicated the direction of the evolution of capitalism: the concentration at the same point of a great number of workers, of the social cell which constitutes the factory, in the present world as much as in the future society. Now, the union takes the workers out of the factory where their vital interests lie, in order to create for them other superficial ones, dispersing them in as many unions as there are trades. It destroys the natural cohesion ready to constitute itself in the factory itself—and which it is only a question of reinforcing—by joining workers in an organisation already obsolete at its birth, because it is a reflection of the interests of the ideological tendencies of the surviving working-class strata of a stage of production that has been surpassed.

In the workers' action there is a constant progression. The confraternal organisations first grouped the skilled workers, the unions then gathered the most conscious workers. The time has come for the factory committees to represent the entire working class in the fulfillment of its historic task: the social revolution.

Moreover, the union, as soon as it acquires some importance, withdraws its leaders from the factory, thus removing them from the necessary control of the workers. And in general, once outside the factory, the union leader never returns to it. The innumerable union leaders who have left the factory gradually create for themselves interests which are at first foreign, then opposed to those of the workers who elected them. First of all, they aspire to stabilise their new situation, which any action of the workers risks endangering. They are therefore seen intervening close to the bosses as soon as a strike threatens to break out, because the strike gives rise to a new form of workers' authority, whose existence is very eloquent with regard to the real relations between unions and leaders: the strike committee elected by the assembly of factory workers, unionised or not, which interposes itself between the union office and the bosses, as if to say to the latter: "The role of the union is over. Mine is beginning".

It should be noted immediately that the birth of the strike committee alone demonstrates the inability of the union to even lead a strike. Now, any strike is, at least potentially, a revolutionary action. The fact that, as soon as the workers judge necessary a revolutionary action, even a small one, they need to set aside the union and create a new organisation of struggle adequate to the action to be practiced, shows by itself that the union is not a revolutionary weapon. If it matters, for a revolutionary action, that the leaders of the same be under the direct and constant control of those who chose them, it follows that the union leaders are unsuitable for any revolutionary action, since they totally escape such control. They have

shown this repeatedly, and in particular during all the revolutionary crises of the twentieth century.

Once out of the factory, the trade union leaders immediately begin to vacillate between the opposing interests of the workers who have appointed them and those of the bosses. At first, they defend the former against the latter, thus remaining on the terrain of class struggle. But it does not take them long to abandon it, as they become aware of their role as intermediaries between the opposing classes, soon becoming agents of a class collaboration, the expression of which is the conciliation of their opposing interests. If to begin with they oppose the bosses, they soon realise that their main role is not on the plane of struggle.

They became aware of their importance as intermediaries between the enemy classes, and, instead of encouraging combat, they search only for armistice bargains. It is not the struggle which justifies the unions' existence. Instead, their value grows in proportion to the gains obtained through the bosses, who immediately understand their importance, while workers abandon the leaders mediating disputes with the bosses. Within the syndicalist framework, the class struggle, a necessary factor in any positive social action, is relegated to the background, the direct action of the workers becomes dormant, their self-determination disappears, the impulse towards emancipation degenerates into accommodations within the confines of capitalism.

If the emancipation of workers is to be the labour of workers themselves, which is the postulate of all authentic revolutionary action, it follows that the union, which stifles the creative power of the working class, opposes such emancipation, which would become, within and through it, the work of the leaders. This would be true even if the leaders were capable of organising such actions, or if they wanted to devote themselves to it. On the contrary, it can be seen today that any peon has no more common interest with a Jouhaux or a Frachon than they do with the President of the Republic (antimilitarist and "internationalist" in 1907) or with the director of the Bank of France, while the interests of Jouhaux and Frachon, of the President of the Republic and the director of the Bank of France, and many other capitalist notabilities, are closely intertwined vis-à-vis the workers.

## The Trade Union: Organ of State Capitalism

The trade unions have reached the end of their independent evolution and since 1914 have entered a new period, that of their integration into the capitalist State. They had been tending towards it for a long time, but it took the war of 1914 and the services they then rendered to capitalism in the Sacred Union, for the State to grant them a place in its deliberations. It is true that in this way they showed their power over the working class and that by this fact they became precious auxiliaries of capitalism. I note in passing that the first decisive step in this direction was taken in France, by Jouhaux, the representative of the workers of the oldest trust of the French capitalist state. It is impossible to see this as a mere coincidence.

The nationalisations (the monopoly of tobacco and matches is nothing else) confer on the trade union bureaucracy a lasting perspective as a particular organism of capitalist society, a perspective which it lacks by the simple exercise of its essential mediating function as trade unions. Nationalisations turn the unions into direct instruments of the State, in the same way that judges turn them into cops. Such a bureaucracy, at first rooted in the economy, from which it acted on the State, becomes an auxiliary mechanism of that same State, which controls the entire economy. In France, control is still indirect in many sectors, but economy and State have already merged in important domains (electricity, gas, coal, transport, etc.) in such a way that syndicalism and the capitalist state tend to merge into a single body to institute, as in Russia, a state capitalism, that to which the evolution of capitalism in a degenerative trance automatically leads.

However, capitalism is far from being animated by a single impulse pulling it in a single direction. Moreover, the relative dependence in which France has fallen in relation to the United States on the one hand, on the other the division of the world into two rival blocs, plus the absence of a powerful revolutionary movement, could not fail to be reflected in trade unionism, to the very extent that it is linked to the state and that, together with it, it weighs with all its burdens on the working class. The very division of the world into two blocs must inevitably lead, in such conditions, to trade union division. It should be noted here that the split occurred after the war, at the precise moment when each bloc was concentrating all its forces to launch itself into the "cold war". Any worker with some knowledge knows that today the CGT is a simple branch of Russian politics within the French working class, representing the interests of a trade union (and political) bureaucracy linked to Muscovite State capitalism and totalitarianism, of which it is an ardent propagandist, while the F.O. is an instrument of Washington and its remnants of liberal capitalism, through the American trade unions infeoffed to its State. As for the C.F.T.C., it represents quite well the neutralist tendencies on the part of French capitalism which the war frightens, and which counts on the prayers of the Pope to prevent it.



It is also well known that the unions, “apolitical” in theory, have become—C.G.T. in the lead—mere agencies of the political parties within the working class. But it is a policy which the latter has not decided, which is imposed on it from outside. On the other hand, the factory committee is called upon to constitute, by its own structure, a kind of laboratory where the policy of the socialist revolution will be elaborated in favour of the awakening of the working class to social and revolutionary life, which that same committee favours to the maximum.

In such conditions, there is nothing surprising in the fact that the workers desert the unions linked to the various tendencies of capitalism, without, for example, rushing en masse to those of the C.N.T. Why should they have more confidence in one union than in another? The fact that the C.N.T. is led by honest revolutionary workers does not guarantee in the least that it will be capable of carrying out, if need be, a revolutionary task, nor even that it will not degenerate like the other trade union centres, since the trade union structure itself, by removing the leaders from the control of the workers, favours degeneration. True, no organisation, however perfect it may be and however well adapted to the revolutionary objective, is immune to degeneration. It is nevertheless advisable to oppose it with the maximum of obstacles. But the union, instead of placing obstacles in the way of degeneration, facilitates it in every way.

The trade union has given itself the objective of defending the interests of the workers within the framework of capitalist society. It amply fulfilled this role in the past, between 1890 and 1913, when, in periods of economic boom and crisis, strikes had a success rate ranging from 47.7% in 1911-13, to 62.3% in the most favourable period, 1905-1907. I do not know the percentage of victorious strikes during the last years, but I am sure that it will not be at all comparable to the results obtained during that period. But even if it were, it would not improve the standard of living of the workers, since the rise in prices always precedes the rise in wages, which run vainly within their reach, so that the distance between the two increases instead of decreasing. The conclusion that imposes itself is therefore that the struggle for demands is transformed into a struggle for empty demands, because the very precarious situation of French capitalism does not allow the workers to make the slightest gain. In this respect, it is no longer the form of organisation that is in question, since no other would give such results within that domain, but rather the objective pursued, inadequate to the present epoch and disproportionate to the sacrifices and efforts it demands. The union-led strike has expired, as has the union, whose only objective it was. It follows that, if the capitalist state is incapable of improving the lot of the working class, the latter has no other recourse than to destroy it. But it is not the trade union which will be able to accomplish this task, since it was conceived with a view to the struggle for demands within the framework of the capitalist system, a framework which it does not propose to break in any way. Today, only the factory committee is in a position to undertake with the workers the assault on society, because as a revolutionary cell today, it constitutes at the same time and from the moment of its creation, the social cell of tomorrow.

The degeneration of the trade unions is also characterised by the introduction into them, economic organisations, of various capitalist political currents, thus indicating the arbitrary nature of the separation of economics and politics. At the time when Marx and Bakunin were in agreement, the unions they advocated were elaborate economic organisms of their politics. It was only later, in favour of the division of the workers' movement, that the unions, limiting themselves to the economic plane, were constituted in today's traditional formula. It was also, at that time, the only means of uniting the working class for the struggle for demands, which, in the spirit of the trade unionists of that time, implicitly or explicitly constituted the preamble to the political struggle. However, this division has always been more apparent than real and profound, since in their best period the unions, leaders apart, were animated by a true revolutionary spirit. Now, the supreme political intervention is the revolution. For example, the Spanish F.A.I. represented, although it denied it, the political organisation of the C.N.T. It was normal that in a period of continuous development of capitalism, the trade union, situated on the economic plane, should occupy the first place, but in a period of crisis things could not be the same. Returning to the example of the C.N.T-F.A.I., if in a period of calm the F.A.I. was in the shadows while the C.N.T. was more visible, in a revolutionary period the F.A.I. was in the lead, which was natural.

However, the relationship between the F.A.I. and the C.N.T. was not a result of the life of the working class itself, since the F.A.I. represented a minority of the CNT and was organically external to the latter, which in fact assumed its leadership. The policy of the CNT was that of the FAI, but the CNT was not called upon to determine it, only to accept it. On the contrary, it is a question of arriving at a policy directly decided by the working class, and today there are no other assemblies capable of assuming such a task than that of the workers assembled in their workplaces to express their will and to designate delegates whose mission is to apply the decisions taken.

## The Factory Committees: Engine of the Social Revolution

No one will deny that capitalist society has entered a period of permanent crisis, which induces it to gather its flagging forces, concentrating more and more in the hands of the State all political and economic powers by means of nationalisations. Will the dispersed working-class forces continue to oppose this concentration of capitalist powers? It would be to run to definitive failure. And one of the main reasons for the current apathy of the working class lies in the endless series of failures suffered by the social revolution in the course of this century. The working class no longer has confidence in any organisation, because it has seen them all in action here and there and all, including the anarchist organisations, have proved incapable of dealing with the crisis of capitalism and ensuring the triumph of the social revolution. We should not be afraid to say that today they are all obsolete. On the contrary, only on the basis of such a statement, and without trying to reduce their scope through more or less circumstantial considerations, or through obfuscating the consequences of their own errors, will we be in a position to reconsider all theories (which today have in common the fact that they are largely outdated) and perhaps arrive at a fundamental ideological unification of the workers' movement, with a view to social revolution. It goes without saying that we in no way advocate a monolithic thought, but a united movement, in whose bosom truly revolutionary tendencies can enjoy the broadest freedom of expression.

On the other hand, it is clear that action must be taken immediately. It must obey two general principles. On the one hand, it must facilitate the ideological regrouping advocated here, and on the other hand, it must cease to consider the social revolution as if it had to be the work of future generations for whom the task should be prepared. We are faced with the dilemma: social revolution and a new flowering of humanity, or war and a social decomposition of which only weak examples are known in the past. History offers us a choice, the duration of which we do not know. Let us know how to use it to reverse the course of degeneration and bring about revolution. The present apathy of the working class is only temporary, it indicates, at the same time, the loss of confidence in all the organisations of which I have just spoken and a state of availability that it is up to us, revolutionaries, to know how to take advantage of in order to transform it into active rebellion. The energy of workers demands to be used. It is necessary to give it not only an objective—it has long sensed this—but also the means by which to attain it. Since for revolutionaries it has always been a question of arriving at a fraternal society, we need in the immediate future an organism in which this fraternity can form and develop. And at the present moment, where the workers' fraternity reaches its maximum is at the factory/workplace level. That is therefore where we must act, not by calling for a fantastical unity between trade union centres today in the state of the capitalist world, which could only ever be consummated if it was directed against the working class, since the unions represent different capitalist tendencies. In reality, there will only be a trade unionist "united front" on the eve of the social revolution against it, since the trade union centrals are equally interested in torpedoing it, in order to ensure their survival in the capitalist state. An integral part of the

capitalist system, they defend it by defending themselves. Their interests are their own and not those of the working class.

In addition, one of the greatest obstacles to workers' regroupment and revolutionary revival are the bureaucratic apparatuses of the trade unions in the factories, starting with the Stalinist apparatus. Today, the enemy of the worker is the union bureaucrat, as much as the boss, who without them would be impotent most of the time. It is the union bureaucrat who paralyses workers' action. The first slogan of the revolutionaries must therefore be: "Out with the trade union bureaucrats", but the main enemy is Stalinism and its trade union apparatus, for being a supporter of state capitalism, that is to say, of the complete fusion of the state and trade unionism. They are therefore the most far-sighted defenders of the capitalist system, since they point out, for such a system, the most stable form that can be conceived today. It will not be possible, however, to destroy an existing organism without preparing another adapted to the needs of the social revolution. The social revolution itself has taken care to show us, each time it has appeared, its instrument of choice: the factory committee directly elected by the workers in their workplaces, whose members can be revoked at any time. It is the only organism that can, without changing, direct the workers' interests in capitalist society without ceasing to aim at the social revolution, giving fulfillment to its tasks and, once its victory is assured, constituting the basis of the future society. Its structure is the most democratic that can be conceived, since it is elected in the workplaces themselves by the workers as a whole, who daily control its action and can always dismiss it to appoint another. Its constitution offers the minimum of risks of degeneration due to the constant and direct control that the workers can exercise on their delegates. Moreover, the permanent contact between those in charge and electors favours to the maximum the creative initiative of the working class, thus called to take its destinies in its own hands and to lead its struggles directly. Such a committee, which authentically represents the workers' will, is called upon to manage the factory, to organise its defence against the police and the reactionary gangs of Stalinism or traditional capitalism. Once the revolution is victorious, it will be up to it to indicate to the regional, national, and then international economic leadership (these also directly elected by the workers), the production capacity of the factory, its needs in raw materials and labour. Finally, the representatives of each factory will be called upon to constitute at the regional, national and international levels, the new government, distinct from the economic leadership, whose main task will be to liquidate the legacy of capitalism and ensure the material and cultural conditions of its own progressive disappearance. It is the revolutionary organism par excellence, both political and economic, which is why its simple constitution represents a kind of insurrection against the capitalist state and its trade union henchmen, since it agglomerates all the workers' energies against the capitalist state, even when that state is invested with economic powers. For that very reason we see it arise spontaneously in moments of acute social crisis, but in our epoch of chronic crisis, it is necessary for revolutionaries to advocate for factory committees from now on if they want to put an end to the interference of the trade union bureaucrats in the factories and return to the workers the initiative of their emancipation. Let us therefore destroy the unions

in the name of the factory committees: democratically elected by the assembly of workers in each workplace and revocable at any time.

Benjamin Peret (written circa 1951-52)

## II

No contradiction can exist between the economic and the political aspects of a revolutionary conception, even supposing the clearest organic and functional demarcation between them. The same is true for any reactionary conception. Hence the present inter-penetration, the agreement and collaboration between unions and political parties, economic and political organs respectively, gives us the key to understanding both, from whichever side one looks at the matter. This statement proceeds from an old and unalterable principle, more than proven by reason and verified by men in the course of a thousand years' experience: every idea or political action arises from an economic foundation, which then plays both a controlling and determining role. In the course of this work we will examine, under different aspects, the interpenetration of politics and economics and evaluate unions by taking a look at how they presently function.

The unions first appeared as defensive organs of the working class, faced with subhuman conditions of work, presenting themselves, on the industrial plane, as extensions of the old brotherhoods and corporations. On the basis of their aspirations, the unions do not even reach the level of reformism. Reformism, utilising ideological and economic analyses, sought to demonstrate that, by means of capitalist democracy, it would be possible to attain socialism through a legal evolution and without any need for revolutionary acts. For the unions, there was never a question of either evolution or revolution, still less of socialism. Unions go no further than attempting to obtain, for the exploited worker, conditions of labour which are less intolerable and less humiliating, but also, as time has demonstrated, more profitable for capital. In spite of this limitation the early unions were organs which, if not revolutionary, at least had a working-class spirit and a sound composition compared to the corruption and false class character of today's unions.

At the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century a so-called revolutionary unionism (syndicalism) appeared. This was an eclectic doctrine adapted to the situation then prevailing, drawn from the Marxist conception, the so-called apoliticism of anarchism, and the strictly economic demands made by the old trade unions. There is no paradox in the fact that the period of the greatest influence and the strongest thrust of this type of unionism coincided with the apogee of reformism.

Sorel and Bernstein, besides being contemporaries, had more points in common than differences. While Sorel offered, in syndicalism, the panacea to the problems of historical development, Bernstein and his tendency saw in parliamentarism, and even in the necessities of capital accumulation, the happy mechanism of a certain and harmonious evolution towards socialist society. In reality, revolutionary syndicalism and reformism were united by the same bonds to the formidable economic drive of the bourgeoisie. This was the period in which the bourgeoisie attained the zenith of its civilising possibilities, granting the greatest amount of liberty and illusions to those who, without completely escaping its ideo-economic complex, leaned to the left. For this reason, the political bankruptcy of 1914 would carry with it the syndicalists and reformists. Even the Spanish C.N.T. was not an exception, although the military neutrality of Spain spared it the capitulatory phrases and attitudes of the French C.G.T.; its particular bankruptcy, as we will see later, took place at the moment of the proletarian revolution in 1936-1939.

The numerical strength and the social weight of the unions has grown continually since 1914 and if in some countries, like France, their numerical strength has considerably diminished in the course of the last few years, their importance has continued to grow. It has been said that the disaster of 1914 was necessary for the unions to really come into their own. This is because until that time capitalism feared the unions as a destructive force and had not yet seen—except perhaps in England—the collaborative role that unions could play. But since the end of the first world war numerous experiences of "worker's control" in the factories have surprised the capitalists by their satisfactory effects. "Worker's Control" has attenuated the struggle of workers against capital, facilitating the operation of the factories and above all increasing output. The unions stood out not only as defenders of the fatherland—that specifically capitalist entity—but as effective collaborators in the mechanism of exploitation itself. That made their fortune and opened as yet unsuspected horizons to them. However, it was during the years 1936-1937, which for many reasons were a very important landmark in the history of the international workers' movement, that the unions took on their definitive orientation. In this period, they displayed the qualities thanks to which they have become one of the most solid pillars of capitalist society.

Twenty years separated the Russian and the Spanish revolutions, which were the first and the last explosions of the same offensive of the world proletariat against capitalism, an offensive marked by incessant attacks in many other countries. Meanwhile, the Stalinist bureaucracy had completed the construction of state-capitalism and just at the moment when the Spanish revolution was in full swing, the Stalinists got rid of all those who were really communists with guns and slander. This was to modify in a decisive manner all the organic factors of the class struggle and corrupt all the ideological factors. For a long time, Russian intervention in the international workers' movement had been negative; in Spain the Russian-controlled Communist Party, dragged along by the requirements of its own preservation, turned out to be

the principal counterrevolutionary police force. In July 1936, it attempted—happily—in vain to prevent the uprising of the proletariat which destroyed the army throughout most of the country. In May 1937, this same Communist Party would gun down the proletariat, which was revolting against the C.P.'s reactionary policies, defeat it, disarm it, and crush the revolution. What the military had failed to do in 1936, Stalinism accomplished 10 months later.

For the first time Moscow acted, outside its own territory, directly as a counter-revolutionary force. Up to now there has been no real appreciation of the immense reactionary consequences of this event. Yet this was the source of all the acts of world importance which followed: from the Hitler-Stalin pact and the second “great war” to the policy of “peaceful coexistence” and uprisings such as those in East Germany, Poland, and Hungary. The latter must be situated, not on the level of the revolt of the Spanish proletariat of May 1937, but at the most on the same level as the July 1936 insurrection, this time with the Stalinist army and police in place of Franco's army. Imre Nagy and his friends were in Hungary what the popular front was in Spain in 1936: the by-product of a revolutionary upheaval but not the core of the revolution.

It is significant that it was around 1936 that the unions revealed all their latent characteristics, incontestably manifesting themselves as auxiliary organs of capital. That in such a development it was Stalinism which won for itself the greatest influence in the unions—with the exception of the English and American trade unions—is quite natural. The economic empiricism of capitalism found in Russian counter-revolutionary empiricism a higher political expression, one which inspired and perfected it at the same time. Both of these elements were mixed and merged to create a more favourable milieu. Now this milieu exists under a more or less completed form: it is nothing other than capitalism at its present stage, taking each country, including the “backward” ones, not as an isolated case but as part of the world system.

We will look at the Western bloc, which prides itself on its democracy and more concretely on its right to strike. In reality, this right is given not to the workers but to the representatives which the law recognises them as having: the unions. Every strike launched by the workers themselves has to face a coalition of state and unions which seeks to smash it—sometimes by the direct defeat of the workers, sometimes by making the workers accept arbitration. Since the French revolutionary strike of 1936 was smashed by the Communist party (Thorez: “One must know how to end a strike”) and the Socialist party together (the Blum government and police commanded by “socialists”) almost every country has known strikes led to defeat by the unions because they ran counter to their economic and political interests. Thus, the strike has been in fact and in law taken over by the unions. But that is not all. Beyond the always exceptional situation of a strike, in the day-to-day relations between capital and labour—which is where the class struggle is forged—the unions appear not only as buffers between the two camps, but as messengers from capital to labour and as agents who help to adapt labour to the requirements

of capital. All the natural manifestations of the struggle of labour against capital, once monopolised by the unions, are turned against the worker for the benefit of capital.

We have only to recall certain facts to see that the above line of reasoning is undeniable. Workplace committees(1) as well as delegates from departments, shops, or occupational categories are not the expression of the free will of the workers, whatever may be the mode of their election, depending on the country. They represent the unions, within which workers are not free to elect anyone they want: even the famous British shop stewards need the assent of the trade unions. In most countries, the law has decided that the unions which it recognises represent the working class. The workers therefore no longer have the right to represent themselves as they see fit, still less to create organs other than unions in order to direct their struggles and to deal with the employers or the state. The rights of the working class and the rights of the unions are manifestly two distinct and contradictory things. Because of this the opposition between the workers and the factory committees or departmental delegates—an opposition which is always present in a latent form—sharpens whenever there is a conflict with the employer and becomes a direct encounter if the struggle broadens. In the course of the last twenty years, every strike which deserves the name has had to be called against the will of the unions and by outflanking its representatives in the factories; the workers themselves have had to elect strike committees. However, every time that these strike committees or factory assemblies, elected by the workers, have allowed themselves to be influenced by the union leaders, capital has gained the upper hand.

The goal of collective labour contracts was to limit the arbitrariness of the employers in various areas: working conditions and the length of the working day, intensiveness of exploitation (hourly productivity), wage range by category (hierarchical relations), hiring and layoffs, political rights, freedom of speech and assembly within the factories, factory regulations, etc. However, collective contracts have become, in the hands of the unions, who alone under the law have the right to negotiate and sign them, a formidable instrument for the subjugation of the proletariat to capital in general and to the unions in particular. Indeed, unions have become, at present, partially or totally, agents of exploitation. Layoffs and hiring are most often entrusted to the mercy of capital, except in the case of closed shops, which far from guaranteeing work for the labourers, simply grants the right of adjudication to the unions. This is reactionary economic coercion of the worst sort, as we will see below when we discuss unions in the Eastern zone.

Labour contracts sanction and encourage the division of the working class into hierarchical groups opposed to one another because of differences in wages and the prejudices attached to the category and technical function of the worker. The unions instinctively, by their very nature, contribute to the division of the proletariat on a hierarchical basis, without which the proletariat would form a compact bloc against capital. The necessity of dividing the proletariat through



hierarchical work relations, and of thus alienating it from its highest interest, is as important for the unions as it is for capital. For a century, the workers' movement fought against hierarchical relations within its midst, and in large part it destroyed prejudices in favour of hierarchy while limiting its material bases. In the course of the last few decades, the unions and their political inspirers have succeeded in largely re-establishing hierarchical prejudices and greatly increasing the number of work categories. Most workers today, even the worst off, think that hierarchical work relations are natural and "just."

Lastly, if the original idea of collective contracts was to put a curb on the arbitrariness of capital while awaiting its complete suppression, today they constitute an almost perfect way to regulate the capitalist system in accordance with its functional requirements. In negotiating and signing collective contracts the unions behave as if they were an integral part of the groups who monopolise the means of production. In the United States and in other countries, many unions are important shareholders in the companies which exploit their own members, which, far from prefiguring a socialist society, transforms the union into a beneficiary of exploitation in the fullest economic and ideological sense of the term. Where the unions do not actually participate in drawing up plans for the exploitation of the workers they seek this right.

The workplace, the large factories in particular, which are the scene of the class struggle, afford the most revolutionary workers a permanent and far-reaching practical and ideological activity. But this activity is made impossible by the unions. Frequently collective contracts stipulate that political propaganda and activity within the factory are prohibited, not to speak of discussions and meetings which are indispensable to any working-class activity. For many years the unions have conspired with the employers every time there was a question of dismissing revolutionary workers. Such dismissals are now legitimised by a written clause in collective contracts or surreptitiously acknowledged, since they are covered by the rules made by the employers in all the factories. The unions and their political inspirers have undertaken the task of acting as policemen against those who distribute revolutionary literature, when necessary, meting out beatings. In Italy, the Stalinist union leaders have granted to the employers the right to fire, without notice or compensation, workers guilty of distributing literature or any type of agitation.(2) In France, most of the factory rules permit as much and the restrictions on thought go so far that even the most rebellious workers are afraid to express themselves and so keep quiet. The situation is no better in Germany, England or the U.S., than in Russia or Spain. Thus, thanks to the convergent action of capital and the union organisations, the working class finds itself reduced to clandestinity even at the workplace, which is where it is exploited and fucked over.

The proletariat must recover its political freedom, which is impossible without throwing the present employer-union legal framework overboard. The complete freedom of people with respect to the exercise of their labour contains, in embryo, the future revolutionary democracy

and communism. We say communism because those who today call themselves communists are not communists at all and through legitimate revulsion towards them, those who really are communists often avoid claiming the name.

In the strictly economic domain, the situation of the working class was never worse than it is today. Everything said to the contrary is so much bullshit. The eight-hour day, which should have been replaced long ago by a four or five-hour day, now exists only on paper. In many countries, the refusal to work overtime is an immediate cause for dismissal. Everywhere the introduction of so-called “base pay” (a norm in Russia) which is deliberately kept low, and rewards and bonuses based on productivity, etc., not only forces the worker to accept, “of his own accord,” working days of ten to twelve hours but in fact abolishes daily or hourly wages by imposing anew the vilest of all types of labour: piece-work. Since its inception the workers’ movement has endeavoured to put an end to this oldest of all forms of exploitation, which physically exhausts the worker and dulls him intellectually.

It succeeded in eliminating piece-work in most of Europe. Even twenty years ago most workers considered it demeaning to accept piece-work of any kind. Today, however, piece-work is again the rule, less because capital has imposed it than through the deceit of the unions: in fact, we have here a proof of the ultimate affinity of the unions and capital.

With respect to the most profound aspect of exploitation, productivity per person and hour, the proletariat finds itself forced into a terrible situation. The production that is extracted from it each day increases at an enormous rate. First, technical innovations take away from the worker any creative intervention in his labour, measure his movements to the second and transform him into a living robot subjected to the same rhythm as the machines. Then, regimentation of time, that atrocious and repugnant snare, forces people to work over and over with the same tools and during uniform periods of time. Finally, the discipline of each enterprise reduces to a minimum the slightest suspensions of work, be that to eat, light a cigarette, or take a shit. The output that is extracted from each person by these means is enormous and so, in the same proportion, is the worker’s physical and psychological exhaustion.

To mention this problem is to put one’s finger on the evil of modern society and of the unions which are part of it. Moreover, there is no way to resolve these problems without overthrowing the present relation(3) between production and distribution, in short, without making the revolution. But in order to treat this question properly it is necessary to first of all see what unions represent in Russia which is the model that the whole Eastern bloc, and even many countries beyond it, must imitate.

Everything that has been said about the reactionary work of unions and the deterioration of the proletarian condition in the West is even more true for the Russian world. Ever since, under Stalin's aegis, state-capitalism was established in Russia, the whole of the old bourgeois world has been learning lessons in exploitation from it. These pertain to police repression too, but here we will limit ourselves to speaking about the specific relations between capital and labour and the role of the unions. Thus, if unions in general have, everywhere and for a long time, been a complementary force to capital within the working class, the Stalinist counter-revolution, by giving unions a very strong push in this direction and by providing them with a tempting example, has disclosed the intrinsic destiny of unions. Almost all the measures which, since 1936, have aggravated the exploitation of the proletariat in the West and heightened its objectification, have their model in Stalinist Russia.

The complete suppression of political rights and the right to hold meetings inside or outside the factory; overtime imposed by the employer or the inadequate base pay for the official working day; fines and disciplinary measures at the discretion of the employer, who also dictates the factory rules; regimentation of time and innumerable controls, piecework, hierarchical divisions within the proletariat based on wages and technical "qualifications"; collective contracts which only benefit capital, continuous increase of productivity to the detriment of the producers, prohibition of strikes in fact or by law; in short, everything which in the West transforms the union organisations into more and more negative institutions received a strong impetus from the Russia of the 1930's and was to inspire capital and unions throughout the world.

It is well known, at least by those who are familiar with the situation in Russia, that economic inequality between the privileged and the exploited is greater there than in any other place, as is the number of categories of workers and the differences between them. Inequality between the privileged and the exploited, which is at the same time the cause and the effect of capitalism, only concerns us in this essay as it affects the evolution and the prospects of the unions. It is sufficient to note for the moment that this inequality raises in Russia, as in every other country, the necessity for the expropriation of capital by the workers, which is impossible without an insurrection which completely demolishes the present governmental apparatus, including the official party and the whole body of law.

Better than any bourgeoisie, the Stalinist bureaucracy knows how to intensify exploitation by accelerating the rhythm of labour and by introducing into the proletariat the greatest possible number of job categories. The traditional means for capitalism to "stimulate" production is to substitute for the homogeneous historical interest of the proletariat a multiplicity of heterogeneous immediate interests, which are so many obstacles to a common revolutionary activity. Once again the Russian union and political "natchalniks"(4) have outdone their Western counterparts.(5) In Russia the worker-foremen receive a direct profit from the

exploitation of their comrades in labour: the Stakhanovists receive a bonus which is proportional to the surpassing of the “norm” and to the number of workers in their team. Thus, they see their wages increase by the exploitation of the common workers and are therefore led to intensify this exploitation. The Stakhanovists are therefore, still more clearly than foremen in the West (with their fixed salaries), turned into the enemies of their comrades in labour.

There is nothing astonishing in all this, since everything in Russia has been turned into its opposite. Once the revolution gave way to the counter-revolution, a capitalist dictatorship, which demagogically calls itself a proletarian dictatorship, presents—in reality, imposes—as socialist the most rotten features and principles of traditional capitalism. The labour law, approved in 1939, says:

“The basic feature which characterises wages in the capitalist countries is the levelling of wages between specialised and non-specialised workers. In the remuneration of labour, petit-bourgeois levelling is the worst enemy of socialism. For many years Marxism-Leninism has unceasingly fought against levelling.”

For many years the Stalinists have tried to take people in by presenting industrial development through waged labour as the loyal expression of Marxist thought. Marxism, on the contrary, establishes as its objective the abolition of waged labour, and the economic levelling of society, the unlimited satisfaction of all individual needs and the greatest freedom and liberty, which is indispensable to any personal or collective fulfillment. If we do not aim at that, nothing revolutionary can be done in the present historical juncture. In the old capitalist countries wage differences within the proletariat are a condition established by the direct market relation between capital and labour. In Russia these wage differences have, by constitutional law, acquired the status of a principle and consequently it is a crime to fight against them. The traditional relation between capital and labour, which the bourgeoisie never justified as a social relation between men but only through the subterfuge of the sacred “right of property”—which turns against itself when we consider as property, not the means of production or instruments of labour, but everything that is necessary to the material consumption and the full psychological development of each person—is transformed in Russia into a natural and permanent relation between people having different abilities. Thus, instead of social classes or categories delimited in fact by wealth we have classes delimited by law on the basis of their talents and special functions. Nonetheless delimitation in fact on the basis of wealth takes on importance instead of losing it. Worse still, the whole thing smacks of a biological justification for the exploitation of man by man.

Let us further point out that the principal object of the labour contracts imposed by the Russian unions is to put the working class at the mercy of capital, even juridically, “by guaranteeing the

fulfilment and over-fulfilment of the state production plan for the given establishment.”(6) It is a question of extracting higher and higher rates of production from labour:

“The main stipulation of the contracted obligation must be an increased demand from every worker. Without strengthening labour discipline and without ruthless struggle against the violators of state and labour discipline—pilferers and loafers—there can be no real fulfilment of obligations laid down in the collective agreement.”(7)

The very word contract is a mark of servitude for the working class. Whether collective or individual, verbal or written, “free” or imposed, the labour contract is the legal symbol of its condition as a wage-slave class, to use Marx’s term. This fact in itself is sufficient to expose the lies of the Russian exploiters. In a truly socialist economy neither capital nor waged labour would exist, and consequently the labour contract (the agreement for the utilisation of the labour force) would disappear with the disappearance of the contracting parties. In a socialist economy, the means of production would cease to be capital and human labour power would cease to be a commodity for sale. United in one economic and social entity, they would be as free from any contractual obligations as an individual is toward himself. By its very existence, the Russian labour contract places itself within the framework of the social bonds characteristic of capitalism. But it is the “innovations” of the Russian system, particularly the completely overt way the unions assume the role of slave-drivers with respect to the workers, that reveal the ominous contours of a society in decline whose despots seem to be more capable than anyone else of checking proletarian resistance.

In effect, these contracts, whose main point is to extract the highest productivity possible from each worker, are drawn up by the unions and, after the formality of government approval, it is the unions’ duty to ensure servility through promises of higher pay, by the use of threats, or by turning over to legal prosecution those workers who do not go along with the demands of production. It is through union channels that the Russian government punishes, as if it were a crime, the struggle to work less and earn more—”The Right to be Lazy” (8)—which the world revolutionary movement has always considered to be a just claim of the working class and a progressive demand.

Thus, in the eyes of the Russian workers, the unions appear as the organisation immediately responsible for their exploitation and for the cruelties characteristic of the counter-revolution. A great number of convincing documents (enough to fill several volumes) testify to this effect. It is impossible to list all of them here. One of the greatest weaknesses of the revolutionary movement, perhaps the cause of its limited support today, is the fact that it did not protest these ignominies. For the purposes of this article however it is enough to recall certain typically reactionary features of the Russian system: the laws forbidding workers to change jobs without

the permission of the plant manager—laws which have long since been eliminated in older capitalist countries; laws establishing wages proportionate to the productivity of each individual worker (piece rates), not to mention bonuses for political servility; laws which punish absenteeism, lateness, and other “disciplinary” infractions by fines, suspensions, firings, and forced labour; laws which transform everything which revolutionary thought considers an outrage into something honourable and profitable; in short, all the laws which crush the proletariat as nowhere else are in Russia the direct work of the unions. This legislation is both proposed and carried out by the unions. Furthermore, the forced labour camps—“re-education” according to official jesuitry—the burial ground of workers and especially revolutionaries, the method deliberately chosen to lower wages and to be able to claim that unemployment is non-existent, are also “institutions” created on the initiative of the unions, who share in the spoils of this system with the state and with its essential instrument: the police.

One can argue that the Russian unions, as everyone knows, do not really act on their own initiative. But their repudiation by the workers is no less absolute. International experience indicates that unions in their structure and function vis-a-vis the working class, always contained propitious elements for their transformation into a cog in the most centralised and absolute capitalist system.

Certainly, the Russian unions blindly obey the orders of the government; they are only its vulgar instruments. But their own leaders are integrated into the highest levels of the Party and the state and thus become both “co-managers” (“co-owners”) of an impersonal capital and at the same time “worker” leaders. Never could a company union dream of a more complete subjugation of the workers.

In Russia, today the unions’ function is part and parcel to the exploitative function of capital itself. The union is at the same time boss, foreman, and policeman. In each factory, it represents along with managers and technicians—all of whom are distinguished members of the union and of the “Communist” cell—the same thing as Hitler’s confidential councils (*Vertrauensrat*). Furthermore, the complete intermixing of capital and Party-State has erased all trace of any union autonomy or protest activity. No one has to teach Russian workers this fact; they have cruelly suffered its consequences for many long years.

In the trajectory of Russian society, there is a definite break between the soviet period and the period of the unions. The soviets were organisations which represented the workers, carried out their orders and those of the revolution. The unions on the other hand, are organisations of control over the workers executing the orders of the counter-revolution. The Soviets were paralysed and finally disbanded while unions gained in importance and prerogatives as the bureaucracy increasingly revealed its counter-revolutionary nature. The proletariat was

repressed to such an extent that today its subjection is nowhere as great as in Russia. Certainly, it is not the unions alone which inspired the counter-revolution. They themselves are part of a whole series of bourgeois ideas and interests, vestiges from the tsarist period; its main basis was the high administrative bureaucracy, both technical and political, whose numbers and privileges have monstrously expanded. But in their turn the unions, or if one prefers, their high-level leaders, form an inseparable part of the whole category of state-capitalists who rule the enormous corporation falsely called the "Soviet Union."

The interpenetration of the unions and the Russian counter-revolutionary bureaucracy was neither artificially imposed by the latter nor was it an accident. It is the spontaneous result of the intrinsic nature of unions from which the government assassinated or "purged" certain union leaders along with former revolutionaries.

The government eliminated them not for their union activities but for their communist attitude, either real or imagined. Because of their adaptive powers, the unions conformed perfectly to the specific aims and routine functioning of the counter-revolution. To understand this clearly, it suffices to examine the nature of unions.

Unions are totally inconceivable without the existence of wage-labour, which in turn presupposes the existence of capital. As long as capital is held by individual owners engaged in competition and represented by many individuals and parties in the government, unions are at least able to bargain for an improvement in the conditions of labour exploitation. Their function is to regularise the sale of labour-power, a function which has become indispensable to the modern capitalist system. From this fact derives their importance as complementary structures of the state, if not part of the state itself, everywhere in the world today. But this very function, which in the past allowed unions to at least serve as instruments of the working class was also a narrowness indicating their limitations and reactionary future. Their existence as an organisation is entirely dependent on the continued existence of the labour/capital duality. They would be immediately eliminated by the destruction of this duality. However, they can side with capital as much as they choose without destroying this duality. On the contrary, they become increasingly indispensable to the maintenance of the capitalist system. As a result, the more gigantic and anonymous the concentration of capital, the more the unions take the side of capital and consider their role to be directly determined by the great "national" interest. Even Stalinist union leaders in the West, agents of Russian imperialism, are careful to present their union policies as an element of national welfare. They are not lying; their only future is to establish themselves as the firmest bastion of statified capital.

All unions without exception are in the process of changing from the stage of "free competition" between the supply and demand of labour power into the stage of the control of the supply by

the demand: that is, the control of workers by monopolistic or state capital. In most cases, the unions already share, directly or indirectly, in the profits of capitalism or else they sense the opportunity to do so.(9) In Russia this evolution was completed with the counter-revolutionary transformation of the country in general. The law bestows on the unions all power over the working class without leaving the smallest possibility for workers, collectively or individually, to discuss, accept, or reject the conditions of their exploitation. All working conditions—even what the workers should think—are directly dictated by the unions in the name of capital. As always, economics and politics intertwine and end up united in the most strict absolutism.

The historical examples of a truly working-class unionism were all the results of revolutionaries' activities and belong to an age (which ended with the Spanish Revolution) which allowed a certain margin for the class struggle within capitalism. But today revolutionaries who stubbornly persist in regarding unions as any sort of advantage for the future of socialism are condemning themselves to ineffectiveness or worse: betrayal. The past struggles of French, Spanish, or Italian syndicalism were inspired by revolutionary tendencies, either Marxist or anarchist, in moments of social development that concealed their incompatibility with syndicalism. The Spanish CNT would have been nothing without the FAI (Iberian Anarchist Federation) and it is the FAI itself which must be held responsible for the reactionary alliance with Stalinism during the Civil War. The year 1936 marks the bankruptcy of Spanish syndicalism comparable (in all ways) to the bankruptcy of the French CGT in 1914. Not only did the FAI-CNT voluntarily submit to Stalinism (a submission presented, as usual, in the interests of "national welfare") but it established an alliance with the leaders of the reformist UGT, an alliance which would have meant, in explicit enough terms, state-capitalism. The CNT will never pick itself up after such a fall. Any revolutionary group coming from these roots must seek other horizons.

The experience of the collectivisations in Spain were only syndicalist by default. This movement was set off by the impetus of revolutionary militants and by highly radicalised sections of the masses; the unions found themselves faced with a *fait accompli*. The same can be said of the uprising against the military on July 19, 1936, and of the magnificent insurrection of May 1937. When, after revolutionary action, the unions intervene and take over, the entire process is reversed: the activity of the proletariat and the participation of revolutionaries recedes and retreats—the prelude to defeat. In the same vein, the experiences of the strike in Nantes(10) in 1956 should be remembered. The strike, the work of several revolutionary militants in the local union, was betrayed by the national union. Hundreds of similar examples can be found in any country in the world. Attempts to give unions a revolutionary content, through the use of internal oppositional caucuses or even by creating completely new unions, are doomed to failure. The only result of such "tactics" is to demoralise the revolutionary experience of those who attempt it or to turn them into simple bureaucrats. Unions bring to bear all the powerful, deformative forces of capitalist society which constantly eat away at men, changing and destroying even the best of them. There is about as much possibility of "changing"



unions in a revolutionary direction as there is of “changing” capitalist society in general; unions use men for their own particular ends but men will never be able to make unions serve a revolutionary goal; they must destroy them.

Attempts to “change” unions are futile even from a practical point of view. In most countries workers are no longer in unions. Even if they still carry a union card in their pocket, whether voluntarily or because the law forces them to do so, the suspicion and disgust they feel for unions is no less strong. In countries which have had the most extensive experience with unions, workers have recourse to unions only if they feel that their “rights” under capitalist law are being flagrantly violated. This is a tedious formality but necessary, on the same level as going to the police when something is stolen. But everyone knows it is useless to go to unions to get something outside the limits of capitalist “law” because unions are a part of that law. Consequently, we see, in many cases, a decline in the number of union members and a general desertion from union meetings by the majority of workers. Unions, having a bureaucratic and legal life of their own, merely use the working class as a docile mass to manipulate in order to increase their own power as a legal institution in our society. Unions and working people have completely different daily lives and motivations. Any “tactical” work within unions, even if guided by the purest intentions, will impede the self-activity of the exploited class, destroying their fighting spirit and barring the way to revolutionary activity.

Lenin and Trotsky’s position on revolutionary work within unions is entirely outside the realm of today’s realities. Their position explicitly supposes that the proletariat, otherwise inexperienced and unorganised and full of illusions, meets in the unions where freedom of speech would permit revolutionaries to expose the opportunist leadership and thereby spread revolutionary ideas.<sup>(11)</sup> In addition to the argument citing the prevalence of workers’ illusions about unions, the key premise of the Leninist tactic was the fact that unions were considered as ideologically reformist and therefore supposedly interested in wresting concessions from the declining society by playing left-wing to the “liberal democrats” of an earlier age. These conditions no longer exist and those who continue to orient their activity towards them are acting in vain. Time after time, the proletariat has experienced the control of the unions and the parties which dominate them firsthand and have seen them change in an undeniably reactionary direction. To act towards them as though they were still reformist is a ridiculous expression of today’s opportunism.

The most solid basis for a revolutionary critique of unions concerns, not tactical or contingent considerations, but the question of principle and strategy. These questions had not been taken into account by Lenin and Trotsky probably because the changes in the unions had not clearly developed until the last few decades. The fact is that the unions and their political defenders have been completely assimilated by the capitalist world, not as part of the “democratic wing” of the bourgeoisie but as henchmen for the exploitative society and for the new needs of the

counter-revolution. The polemic between Lenin, Trotsky, and Tomskey on the union question, which occurred before the sinister shadow of the Stalinist police had ravaged revolutionary thought, finds its synthesis after long periods of trial and error, in the political conclusions of this article.

There are still revolutionaries who refuse to see the problem and repeat like a credo: “since the conditions which gave rise to unions still exist, we do not see how today one can deny their utility.” At the same time they postpone the elimination of unions until the moment when the “specific characteristics of bourgeois society disappear,” that is, when the separation between workers and instruments of production has disappeared.<sup>(12)</sup> This is more sententious subterfuge than reasoned argument. In a sense, this argument can be used against itself. If when we speak of conditions which have given rise to unions, we mean the purchase of human labour power by the monopolisers of the means of production, or in a more general way, the characteristic relations of capitalist society as a whole, then it is clear that unions are part of this whole network of relations and that unions continue to exist with it and for it. From this point of view, to attribute a useful function to unions in the revolutionary process is as unthinkable as seeing revolutionary potential in the stock market. Unions are as much a part of capitalist value production as the stock market, even if we examine only the aspects of negotiating and contracting of wage labour, aspects which are not unconnected to the market values of stock.

In addition to these conditions which gave rise to unions, conditions of a historically more limited nature must be dealt with. In the period of capitalist ascendancy, free competition, including free competition in the labour market, permitted workers to benefit from the greatest number of advantages compatible with the system. The regulation and administration of these advantages constituted the fundamental *raison d’être* of the unions. However, with the system’s transformation into giant trusts and state-capitalism, the unions, which it nourished, naturally began to play a reactionary role. They could not continue to maintain their function without adapting themselves to changing market conditions now no longer free but controlled and despotic, indeed Malthusian since it prevents the realisation of human and economic potential.

Thus, in a strict sense the conditions which gave rise to the unions no longer exist; they died at the same time as that which justified the existence of capitalism as a historically progressive social form. Unfortunately, it is revolutionaries who are way behind in recognising the facts and drawing the logical conclusions.

The reasoning of *Programma Comunista* which offers the best theoretical justification for all tendencies (including anarchism) still clinging to an oppositional or revolutionary unionism, is in fact completely mistaken. Their reasoning is very dangerous especially in the event of a

victorious revolution. The subterfuge of putting off the disappearance of unions until the obliteration of all traces of capitalism—until the advent of full communism—would give unions a harmful monopoly over the proletariat in the transitional period. Far from bringing society closer to communism, this would raise still another obstacle, and not a minor one, promoting the growth of state-capitalism as it did in Russia. Bordiga's analysis links the disappearance of unions to the disappearance of violence within society, meaning in fact the disappearance of the state. However, the withering away of the state and of all social violence can only be a consequence of a preceding disappearance of the exploitation of labour, waged labour to be exact. Unions are in complete contradiction to such a transformation, both in terms of interest and in principle.

A century ago, Karl Marx reproached unions for restricting their demands to questions of money, hours of work, etc., while they ignored the issue of the abolition of waged labour, the key to the destruction of capitalism. Today, Marx would be treated as a petty-bourgeois egalitarian by the men of Moscow and as a crazy ultra-leftist by those who believe they can reform unions. Marx did not see the elimination of unions as part of the far-distant future, well after the revolution, but as concomitant with the revolution or even its cause. He believed that already in his lifetime the industrialised countries disposed of sufficient material means to tackle the problem of revolution. We, revolutionaries of today, are able to add that unions stand in the way of every aim of social revolution because they have become an indispensable cog in the machinery of the exploitation of man by man. Their role in the present economy is comparable to that of the guilds in the age of small-scale manufacture—with this difference, however: guilds proved unable to adapt to large-scale industry, whereas unions adapt perfectly to the most resolute type of capitalism, the statified form. Unions will be destroyed only by the victory of the revolution; more precisely their destruction is a pre-condition for this victory, without which the unions will continue to grow into a huge coercive apparatus complementary to the state-capitalist machine. That is the greatest counter-revolutionary danger of our time. If humanity proves unable to face this problem in the West as well as in the Stalinist East, it will witness the most ominous era of our history.

After the revolution, all workers (without need of any union affiliation whatsoever) must decide on the economic questions posed by society's progress towards communism. No organisation, whether a union or a party, can be identified with society as a whole or invested with its attributes. The existence of differing ideological currents (based on the foundations of the revolution) all competing for a majority will only further ensure the possibility of direct participation of all in social decisions. But a union-style management of the economy will necessarily prove anti-democratic and stifling; it would exclude non-members and impose itself on everyone. Of course, ideologies can degenerate or betray but only through the spread and growth of revolutionary ideas can man win his freedom. Even today the proletariat's immediate demands elude union formulations. Faced with exploitation heightened by technology, forced overtime, piecework, speed-up, etc., it is essential to demand a reduction of the workday to a

maximum of five to six hours without reduction of wages or bonuses. On such a basis, demands for constantly decreasing work schedules in inverse proportion to technological progress are urgently needed. This is the way to challenge today's crushing workday and to prefigure a reorganisation of socially necessary work by eliminating the enormous amounts of waste production in industry as well as in the government and administrative bureaucracies.

The necessary complement to this demand is the refusal to go along with any increase in production, whether caused by improvements in machinery or by speed-up, unless the working-class benefits; the working class represents the interests of society as a whole. This is an unlimited demand, not only against capitalism and its threats of constant war, but as an idea of the kind of considerations which would govern a future revolutionary society; underlying this demand is the necessity for the destruction of the present system.

Politically, workers must impose complete freedom at the point of production. They must reject any rules which have not been established by the democratically elected delegates of the workers, as well as discussed and approved by the latter. In the case of problems or conflicts, workers' committees, elected outside of all union structures, are revocable at any time. Any agreement with management must have the consent of the interested parties themselves and not the unions, even if they claim to represent the majority. Finally, co-ordination among the different workers' committees would prepare the way for the demand, as an immediately realisable objective, for workers' control of production and distribution.

A careful study of the problems which confront the working class today would only reinforce these conclusions. The three types of problems, which encompass all the others, amply demonstrate the reactionary conservatism of unions and the fact that it is impossible for workers to make a move ahead without coming up against them. Without getting rid of them, the proletariat will never escape its present difficulties and will never gain a revolutionary perspective.

The future of unions is indisputably linked with that of capitalism and not revolution. Their ability to adjust to the reactionary transformation of society was largely overlooked by even the most far-seeing revolutionaries. An exception must be made for an almost unknown theoretician, Daniel DeLeon, whose thoughts on this subject have proven visionary. From 1905 DeLeon saw that unions and the "official" workers' parties harboured serious counter-revolutionary dangers. The work in which he succinctly expressed his ideas deserves the attention of all revolutionaries.(13)

DeLeon's judgments are excellent historical analyses which he expresses with revolutionary passion. On the basis of international experience, particularly with the British and American trade unions and their respective labour leaders, he predicts that the victory of these organisations would kill any social revolution.

"The present labour leaders represent a disguised position, a strategic point and a force sustaining capitalism and their true nature cannot but produce a disastrous de-moralisation of the working class."

He compares the labour leaders and their organisations with the leaders of the plebs in Rome. Just as the plebeian leaders used the plebeians to acquire the rights and privileges of the patrician class without giving anything more than crumbs to the dispossessed masses, modern labour leaders and their organisations use the proletariat to consolidate their economic and political position within the capitalist system of exploitation.

"Like the leaders of the plebs, labour leaders are practical men as they boast; they do not live on visions or chase rainbows. Like the pleb leaders, labour leaders do not see any alternative to the existing social system, and they aim to put out the flame that devours the working class. Like the plebeian leaders of Rome, today's labour leaders, if we do not counteract them. . . will nullify all the possibilities which our age offers: they will divert the important and powerful actions of the masses until they lose the name of action."

The aptness of the comparison between the leaders of the Roman plebs and our union (and party) bureaucrats is even clearer if we examine the role of the so-called plebeian party in Roman history. This party, born in the time of the Tarquins, supposedly in irreconcilable opposition to the patrician ruling classes, enjoyed its greatest influence during the Republican period. Its power did not serve the true plebs, the poor masses, either enslaved or free, but worked to the benefit of a privileged minority which represented the plebs in name only and belonged to the plebeian class only by accident of Roman legal definition. Caesar and Augustus, the founders of Empire, constantly used the trick of referring to themselves as originally "plebs" or "on the side of the plebs." Their victory, the high point of the party of the pleb leaders, destroyed forever all possibility of revolution in Rome. The plebeian usurpers replaced by and large the old patrician class. They did not open the way to a new or superior type of society but merely prolonged the decadence of the ancient world over which they presided in its final stage.

Despite the great structural and ideological differences between Greco-Roman civilisation and capitalist civilisation, the analogy between the role of the pleb leaders and today's labour leaders is close. Whether they call themselves apolitical, Communist, or Socialist, in their

innermost being and out of vile interest they are situated outside the proletariat and against it. In effect, in place of the main contradiction of capitalism, which is immanent to it, inseparable from it until the suppression of the system, the so-called labour leaders have substituted another contradiction, no longer inessential or secondary, but much worse than that: a contradiction that capitalism must overcome to affirm itself, whose overcoming makes these leaders along with their organisations indispensable, and excludes by its very nature any anti-capitalist intervention by the workers themselves.

The bourgeoisie and the proletariat represent the human condition, the anthropomorphic image of the social contradictions between capital and wage labour. This contradiction is unresolvable except with the abolition of capital—an act which must simultaneously abolish waged labour itself. Here ends capitalism and begins the social revolution: a new and unlimited horizon of a new civilisation.

The spirit of the so-called labour leaders as well as their organisations are absolutely incompatible with the solution of this contradiction. They attempt to resolve only a secondary contradiction within the framework of exploitation—that is, the anarchy of private capitalism with its cyclical crises which calls for an ordered planning of production and a severe regimentation of labour-power, the unemployed included. In this way, the interests of the labour leaders coincide with that of big capital, which every day demands more economic regulation, more concentration. In other words, that which they perceive and want to change are the difficulties which the system encounters on the road to one huge monopoly, not at all the difficulties which the system as a whole poses for the forward march of humanity towards communism. With the concentration of all the means of production in a huge state monopoly, labour—upon which depends consumption, liberty, culture, the whole life of human beings—appears as an element which is as subordinate to the exigencies of the plan as iron ore, leather, or any other raw material. The elimination of the bourgeoisie does not in any way mean the elimination of capital or the proletariat. Capital is an economic function, not a proprietary function; in becoming an anonymous function, it completes its oppression of man and bars his march to communism with a new counter-revolutionary force. The use of the purely anthropomorphic representation of the contradiction between capital and wage labour (bourgeoisie and proletariat) gives the union and party leaders the opportunity to present the elimination of private capital as the elimination of capital in general and their economic and political management as the solution to social contradictions. They know from the experiences of the Stalinist counter-revolution and from Yankee and British trade unions that the more complete the concentration of capital, the bigger the share of profits for them to pocket.

The most menacing aspect of this tendency of the labour leaders is that it coincides with the law of capitalist concentration and with the development of material and ideological coercion which is its consequence. But they are really dangerous only because of the passivity of the

proletariat, whom the revolutionaries, attached to the old ideas and tactics, do not know how to stir into action. Chained to old formulae, they are cursed with sterility. But a careful look around suffices to realise that the human necessity of a total transformation challenges capitalism itself and the labour leaders, a challenge which will open an unlimited field to revolutionary action.

Humanity does not need technocratic plans in order to produce plans which are used for exploitation and war. The crisis which our civilisation is living through will not find its solution until all production is oriented towards consumption without regard to selling. All individuals by their very existence must be able to utilise the material and spiritual resources of society. The marketing of one or the other leads to the dissatisfaction of the immense majority, the impossibility of individual fulfillment, and the venality of culture. Only the elimination of individual proprietors and the giant trusts will lead to the elimination of the proletariat: the class which does not consume but lives only on its salary. Thus, it is wage labour which must be eliminated. In this way capital will necessarily be abolished as an economic function along with the exploiters, be they bourgeois or bureaucrats. Any plan for production must be established with regard to the non-mercantile needs of human consumption, with all that these words imply in terms of political and cultural liberty. The true anthropomorphic aspect of the problem is the abolition of wage labour which will give to man the possibility of determining his own destiny. By substituting for this the idea of simply eliminating the bourgeoisie (and by putting themselves in its place) union leaders offer us a series of fetishes—the economic plan in place of God, father and judge of man, with the big union and party bureaucrats playing the role of the priesthood.

Revolutionaries must expel from the factories and professional organisations all the union representatives; and all the Thorezes, the Nennises and the Reuthers of all countries, with the Vatican crouching behind the Christian unions, will be paralysed. The working class will have regained its freedom of thought and action and will be able to transform society from top to bottom. It will have gained the strength to wrest humanity from the mire of degradation.

G. Munis (published in 1972)

**These are our organisational points of unity, to which every member and sympathiser must adhere:**

1. We denounce capitalism, whatever its apparent form of government, as a social system based on the exploitation of the modern working class (proletariat) and the destruction of the environment.
2. We denounce the self-proclaimed “socialist” countries; they are state-capitalist countries in which the state assumes the role of private capitalist.
3. We support communism—a global society without states, borders, classes, or markets—as the only way to save humanity from extinction under capitalist barbarism.
4. We reject all interclassist struggles and ideologies—e.g., nationalism, feminism, environmentalism—as alien to the proletariat and contrary to its interests as a universal class, whose struggle carries within itself the potential for the liberation of the entire human species.
5. We denounce unions and parliamentary elections as instruments of economic exploitation and political submission of the proletariat to the capitalist system.
6. We affirm, in this moment, the total decay of the capitalist system in all its incarnations—its inability to continue contributing positively to general social development—and the immediate need for a world proletarian revolution to overthrow it.
7. We advocate the establishment of a class political organisation, also global, to act as a compass in the class war, always pointing the path forward to freedom.
8. We agitate for the self-organisation of the working class and the formation by it of its own organisations of struggle as the only basis of its social power and instrument of its emancipation.

**If these positions seem agreeable to you, or you would like clarification about them and/or our perspective, then contact us directly at:**

**[internationalistcommunists@gmail.com](mailto:internationalistcommunists@gmail.com)**



