



Workers Under Neo-Capitalism

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In the history of class society, the situation of each social class is a unique combination of stability and change. The structure remains the same; conjunctural features are often profoundly modified.

There is a tremendous difference both in standard of living and in social environment between the slave on the patriarchal Greek farms of the sixth century BC, the slave on Sicilian plantations in the first century BC, and a clerical or handicraft slave in Rome or the south of France in the fourth century AD. Nonetheless all three of these were slaves, and the identity of their social status is undeniable. A nobleman living at the court of Louis XV did not have very much in common with a lord of the manor in Normandy or Burgundy seven centuries earlier – except that both lived on surplus labor extracted from the peasantry through feudal or semi-feudal institutions.

When we look at the history of the modern proletariat, whose direct ancestors were the unattached and uprooted wage earners in the medieval towns and the vagabonds of the 16th century – so strikingly described by that great novel from my country Till Eulenspiegel – we notice the same combination of structural stability and conjunctural change. The proletarian condition is, in a nutshell, the lack of access to means of production or means of subsistence which, in a society of generalised commodity production, forces the proletarian to sell his labor-power. In exchange for this labor-power he receives a wage which then enables him to acquire the means of consumption necessary for satisfying his own needs and those of his family.

This is the structural definition of the wage earner, the proletarian. From it necessarily flows a certain relationship to his work, to the products of his work, and to his overall situation in society, which can be summarised by the catchword “alienation.” But there does not follow from this structural definition any necessary conclusions as to the level of his consumption, the price he receives for his labor-power, the extent of his needs or the degree to which he can satisfy them. The only basic interrelationship between structural stability of status and conjunctural fluctuations of income and consumption is a very simple one: Does the wage, whether high or low, whether in miserable Calcutta slums or in the much publicised comfortable suburbs of the American megalopolis, enable the proletarian to free himself from the social and economic obligation to sell his labor-power? Does it enable him to go into business on his own account?

Occupational statistics testify that this is no more open to him today than a hundred years ago. Nay, they confirm that the part of the active population in today’s United States which is forced to sell its labor-power is much higher than it

was in Britain when Karl Marx wrote **Das Kapital**, not to speak of the United States on the eve of the American Civil War.

Nobody will deny that the picture of the working class under neo-capitalism would be highly oversimplified if it were limited to featuring only this basic structural stability of the proletarian condition. In general, though, Marxists who continue to stress the basic revolutionary role of today's proletariat in Western imperialist society avoid that pitfall. It is rather their critics who are in error, who commit the opposite error in fact of concentrating exclusively on conjunctural changes in the situation of the working class, thereby forgetting those fundamental structural elements which have not changed.

I do not care very much for the term "neo-capitalism" which is ambiguous, to say the least. When one speaks about the "neo-reformism" of the Communist parties in the West, one means, of course, that they are basically reformist; but when the term "neo-socialists" was used in the thirties and early forties to define such dubious figures as Marcel Deat or Henri de Man, one meant rather that they had stopped being socialists. Some European politicians and sociologists speak about "neo-capitalism" in the sense that society has shed some of the basic characteristics of capitalism. I deny this most categorically, and therefore attach to the term "neo-capitalism" the opposite connotation: a society which has all the basic elements of classical capitalism.

Nevertheless I am quite convinced that starting either with the great depression of 1929-32 or with the second world war, capitalism entered into a third stage in its development, which is as different from monopoly capitalism or imperialism described by Lenin, Hilferding and others as monopoly capitalism was different from classical 19th century

laissez-faire capitalism. We have to give this child a name; all other names proposed seem even less acceptable than “neo-capitalism.” “State monopoly capitalism,” the term used in the Soviet Union and the “official” Communist parties, is very misleading because it implies a degree of independence of the state which, to my mind, does not at all correspond to present-day reality. On the contrary, I would say that today the state is a much more direct instrument for guaranteeing monopoly surplus profits to the strongest private monopolies than it ever was in the past. The German term *Spätkapitalismus* seems interesting, but simply indicates a time sequence and is difficult to translate into several languages. So until somebody comes up with a better name – and this is a challenge to you, friends! – we will stick for the time being to “neo-capitalism.”

We shall define neo-capitalism as this latest stage in the development of monopoly capitalism in which a combination of factors – accelerated technological innovation, permanent war economy, expanding colonial revolution – have transferred the main source of monopoly surplus profits from the colonial countries to the imperialist countries themselves and made the giant corporations both more independent and more vulnerable.

More independent, because the enormous accumulation of monopoly surplus profits enables these corporations, through the mechanisms of price investment and self-financing, and with the help of a constant build-up of sales costs, distribution costs and research and development expenses, to free themselves from that strict control by banks and finance capital which characterised the trusts and monopolies of Hilferding’s and Lenin’s epoch. More vulnerable, because of shortening of the life cycle of fixed capital, the growing phenomenon of surplus capacity, the relative decline of

customers in non-capitalist milieus and, last but not least, the growing challenge of the non-capitalist forces in the world (the so-called socialist countries, the colonial revolution and, potentially at least, the working class in the metropolis) has implanted even in minor fluctuations and crises the seeds of dangerous explosions and total collapse.

For these reasons, neo-capitalism is compelled to embark upon all those well-known techniques of economic programming, of deficit financing and pump-priming, of incomes policies and wage freezing, of state subsidising of big business and state guaranteeing of monopoly surplus profit, which have become permanent features of most Western economies over the last 20 years. What has emerged is a society which appears both as more prosperous and more explosive than the situation of imperialist countries 30 years ago.

It is a society in which the basic contradictions of capitalism have not been overcome, in which some of them reach unheard-of dimensions, in which powerful long-term forces are at work to blow up the system. I will mention here in passing only some of these forces: The growing crisis of the international monetary system; the trend towards a generalised economic recession in the whole capitalist world; the trend to restrict or suppress the basic democratic freedoms of the working class, in the first place, free play of wage bargaining; the trend toward deep and growing dissatisfaction of producers and consumers with a system which forces them to lose more and more time producing and consuming more and more commodities which give less and less satisfaction and stifle more and more basic human needs, emotions and aspirations; the contradictions between the accumulation of wasteful “wealth” in the West and the hunger and misery of the colonial peoples; the contradictions

between the immense creative and productive potentialities of science and automation and the destructive horror of nuclear war in the shadow of which we are forced to live permanently – these epitomise the basic contradictions of today's capitalism.

The question has been posed: Hasn't the role of the working class been fundamentally changed in this changed environment? Hasn't the long-term high level of employment and the rising real wage undercut any revolutionary potential of the working class? Isn't it changing in composition, and more and more divorced from the productive process, as a result of growing automation? Don't its relations with other social layers, such as white-collar workers, technicians, intellectuals, students, undergo basic modifications?

Affirmative answers to these questions lead to political conclusions of far-reaching consequence. For some, the stability of the capitalist system in the West cannot be shaken any more, a theory which is nicely fitted to nourish a more material interest and psychological urge of adaptation to that system. For others, that stability could be shaken only from outside: first of all, from the non-industrialised regions of the world – the so-called villages, to repeat Lin Piao's formula – which will have to be revolutionised before revolts could again be envisaged in the imperialist countries themselves (Lin Piao's cities). Others, while not questioning the basic instability of neo-capitalism, see no positive outcome at all because they believe that the system is able to drug and paralyse its victims. Finally, there are those who believe that neo-capitalism raises its gravediggers from within its bosom but see these gravediggers coming from the groups of outcasts: national and racial minorities, superexploited sections of the population, revolutionary students, the new youth vanguard. All these conclusions share in common the

elimination of the proletariat of metropolitan countries from the central role in the worldwide struggle against imperialism and capitalism.

It would be easy to limit oneself to stating an obvious fact: All these theories spring from a premature rationalisation of a given situation, the fact that the Western proletariat has receded into the background of the world revolutionary struggle for the past 20 years, between 1948 and 1968. Now that the French May 1968 revolution has shown this phenomenon and period to be a temporary one, we should rather put at the top of the agenda a discussion of revolutionary perspectives in the West from now on.

Such an answer, valid though it may be, would remain insufficient and incomplete. For some of the theories we have just mentioned, while being obvious rationalisations of the *fait accompli*, have enough sophistication and candor not to limit themselves to description pure and simple. They try to draw conclusions about the declining revolutionary role of the proletariat in the West from changes introduced into the very fabric of neo-capitalist society by technological, economic, social and cultural transformations of historic proportions and importance. So we have to meet these arguments on their own ground, and critically re-examine the dynamics of working class struggles, consciousness and revolutionary potential against the background of the changes which neo-capitalism has effected in the classical *modus operandi* of the capitalist system.

Our starting point must be the same as that adopted not only by Karl Marx but also by the classical school of political economy: the study of the place human labor occupies in the economic life of contemporary monopoly capitalism. Three basic facts immediately demand our attention in that respect.

First, contemporary production and distribution of material wealth is more than ever based upon modern industry and the factory. Indeed, one could say that the third industrial revolution at one and the same time both reduces industrial labor in the factory as a result of growing automation and increases industrial labor on a vast scale in agriculture, distribution, the service industries and administration. For the automation revolution must be seen as a vast movement of industrialisation of these different sectors of economic activity, both economically and socially. We shall have to draw important conclusions from this trend. But what stands out is the fact that industrial labor in the broadest sense of the word – men forced to sell their labor-power to the manufacturing, cotton-growing, data-processing or dream-producing factory! – more than ever occupies the central place in the economy's structure.

Second, whatever the increase in consumption of the working class may have been, neo-capitalism hasn't modified in any sense whatsoever the basic nature of work in a capitalist society as alienated labor. One could even say that in the same way as automation extends the industrialisation process into every single corner of economic life, it likewise universalises alienation to an extent Marx and Engels could only have dimly imagined a hundred years ago. Many passages on alienation in the **Economic-Philosophical Manuscripts**, in **The German Ideology** and in the **Grundrisse** have only been truly realised in the last decades. And one could make the point that Marx's economic analysis of "pure capitalism" is much more a presentiment of what was going to happen during the 20th century than a description of what was happening under his eyes in the 19th century.

In any case, labor under neo-capitalism is more than ever alienated labor, forced labor, labor under command of a

hierarchy which dictates to the worker what he has to produce and how he has to produce it. And this same hierarchy imposes upon him what to consume and when to consume it, what to think and when to think it, what to dream and when to dream it, giving alienation new and dreadful dimensions. It tries to alienate the worker even from his consciousness of being alienated, of being exploited.

Third, living labor remains more than ever the sole source of surplus value, the only source of profit, which is what makes the system tick. One can easily reveal the striking contradiction of a productive process heavily pregnant with unlimited potentials of making use-values abundant, but incapable of functioning smoothly and developing steadily because these use-values must first of all slip into the clothes of exchange-values, be sold and meet “effective demand” before they can be consumed. One can note the absurdity of a system in which science, technological progress, humanity’s huge accumulated wealth of equipment, are the main basis for material production, but in which the “miserly appropriation of surplus labor” to use Marx’s **Grundrisse** phrase, continues to be the only goal of economic growth: “Profit is our business, and business after all only means profit.”

But all these contradictions and absurdities are real, living contradictions and absurdities of capitalism. These would attain their absolute limit in universal and total automation which, however, lies completely beyond its reach because living labor is indispensable for the further accumulation of capital. One has only to observe how the billion-dollar corporations haggle and shout like fishwives over a 50-cent wage increase here and two hours off the workweek there to see that, whatever ideologues and sociologists might argue, the hard facts of life confirm what Marx taught us: Capital’s unlimited appetite for profit is an unlimited appetite for

human surplus labor, for hours and minutes of unpaid labor. The shorter the workweek becomes, the higher the actual productivity of labor, the closer and more strictly do capitalists calculate surplus labor and haggle ever more furiously over seconds and fractions of seconds, as in time and motion studies.

Now precisely these three characteristics of modern labor – its key role in the productive process, its basic alienation, its economic exploitation – are the objective roots of its potential role as the main force to overthrow capitalism, the objective roots of its indicated revolutionary mission. Any attempt to transfer that role to other social layers who are unable to paralyse production at a stroke, who do not play a key role in the productive process, who are not the main source of profit and capital accumulation, takes us a decisive step backwards from scientific to utopian socialism, from socialism which grows out of the inner contradictions of capitalism to that immature view of socialism which was to be born from the moral indignation of men regardless of their place in social production.

Here we have to meet an objection often voiced both by so-called dogmatic Marxists and by avowed revisionists or opponents of Marxist theory. Haven't we given too general a definition of the working class under neo-capitalism? Shouldn't we restrict this category to the same group which came under this definition in the classical period of the socialist labor movement, to wit the manual workers actually engaged in production? Isn't it true that this category tends to decline, first relatively and then even in absolute figures, in the most advanced industrial countries of the West? Are not the mass of wage and salary earners to which we have constantly referred too vague and heterogeneous a grouping to be considered a social class in the Marxist sense of the

word? And isn't the fading of the revolutionary potential of the working class in the Western metropolitan countries causally linked to this diminution of the manual production workers in the gainfully employed population?

The debate which inevitably arises from an answer to these questions could easily degenerate into a semantic squabble if the qualitative, structural nature of the proletariat is forgotten. Authors like Serge Mallet have correctly argued that the very nature of the productive process, under conditions of semi-automation or automation, tends to incorporate whole new layers into the working class. We do not accept Mallet's political conclusions, which have not at all been confirmed by the May revolt in France. In the forefront of that revolt we did not find only the "new" working class of highly skilled workers and technicians in semi-automated factories like those of the CSF [General Electric] factory in Brest. Equally present were the classical conveyor-belt workers of Renault and Sud-Aviation and even the workers of some declining industrial branches like the shipyard workers of Nantes and Saint-Nazaire. The categories of the "old" and "new" working class created by Mallet do not correspond to the realities of the process.

But what is valid is the fact that the distinctions between the "purely" productive manual production worker, the "purely" unproductive clerical white-collar worker, and the "semi-productive" repairman become more and more effaced as a result of technological change and innovation itself, and that the productive process of today tends more and more to integrate manual and non-manual workers, conveyor-belt semi-skilled and data-processing semi-skilled, highly skilled repair and maintenance squads and highly skilled electronics experts. Both in the laboratories and research departments, before "actual" production starts, and in the dispatching and

inventory departments, when “actual” production is over, productive labor is created if one accepts the definition of such labor given in Marx’s **Capital**. For all this labor is indispensable for final consumption and is not simply waste induced by the special social structure of the economy (as for instance sales costs).

We can return to a point made before and state that just as the third industrial revolution, just as automation, tends to industrialise agriculture, distribution, the service industries and administration, just as it tends to universalise industry, so it tends to integrate a constantly growing part of the mass of wage and salary earners into an increasingly homogeneous proletariat.

This conclusion needs further elucidation. What are the indicators of the enhanced proletarian character of these “new” layers of workers which become progressively integrated into the working class? We could cite offhand a series of striking facts: reduced wage differentials between white-collar and manual workers, which is a universal trend in the West; increased unionisation and union militancy of these “new” layers, which is equally universal (in Brussels as in New York, schoolteachers, electricians, telephone and telegraph workers have been among the militant trade unionists in the last five years); rising similarities of consumption, of social status and environment of these layers; growing similarity of working conditions, i.e., growing similarity of monotonous, mechanised, uncreative, nerve-racking and stultifying work in factory, bank, bus, public administration, department stores and airplanes.

If we examine the long-term trend, there is no doubt that the basic process is one of growing homogeneity and not of growing heterogeneity of the proletariat. The difference in income, consumption and status between an unskilled laborer

and a bank clerk or highschool teacher is today incommensurably smaller than it was fifty or a hundred years ago.

But there is an additional and striking feature of this process of integration of new layers into the working class under neo-capitalism: That is the equalisation of the conditions of reproduction of labor-power, especially of skilled and semiskilled labor-power. In the days of 19th century capitalism, there was elementary education for the manual worker, lower-middle-school education for the white-collar worker, highschool education for the technician; the reproduction of agricultural labor-power often didn't need any education whatsoever. Universities were strictly institutions for the capitalist class.

The very technological transformation, of which neo-capitalism is both a result and a motive force, has completely modified the levels of education. Today, outside of completely unskilled laborers for whom there are very few jobs any more in industry, strictly speaking, and for whom tomorrow there might be no jobs available in the whole economy, conditions of reproduction of skill for industrial workers, technicians, white-collar employees, service workers and clerks are completely identical in generalised highschool education. In fact, in several countries, radicals are fighting for compulsory education up to 18 years in a single type of school, with growing success.

Uniform conditions of reproduction of labor-power entail at one and the same time a growing homogeneity of wages and salaries (value and price of labor-power), and a growing homogeneity of labor itself. In other words, the third industrial revolution is repeating in the whole society what the first industrial revolution achieved inside the factory system: a growing indifference towards the particular skill of

labor, the emergence of generalised human labor, transferable from one factory to another, as a concrete social category (corresponding historically to the abstract general human labor which classical political economy found as the only source of exchange-value.)

Let it be said in passing that it would be hard to understand the dimensions and importance of the universal student revolt in the imperialist countries without taking into account the tendencies which we have sketched here: growing integration of intellectual labor into the productive process; growing standardisation, uniformity and mechanisation of intellectual labor; growing transformation of university graduates from independent professionals and capitalist entrepreneurs into salary earners appearing in a specialised labor market – the market for skilled intellectual labor where supply and demand make salaries fluctuate as they did on the manual labor market before unionisation but fluctuate around an axis which is the reproduction cost of skilled intellectual labor. What do these trends mean but the growing proletarianisation of intellectual labor, its tendency to become part and parcel of the working class?

Of course students are not yet workers. But it would be as wrong to define them by their social origin as it would be to define them by their social future. They are a social layer in transition. Contemporary universities are a huge melting pot into which flow youth of different social classes, to become for a certain time a new homogeneous social layer. Out of this interim layer there arises on the one hand an important part of the future capitalist class and its main agents among the higher middle classes, and on the other hand a growing proportion of the future working class.

But since the second category is numerically much more important than the first; and since the student milieu

(precisely because of its transitional severance of basic bonds with a specific social class and because of its specific access to knowledge not yet excessively specialised) can gain a much sharper and much quicker consciousness than the individual worker of the basic ills of capitalist society; and since intellectual labor is increasingly a victim of the same basic alienation which characterises all labor under capitalism, the student revolt can become a real vanguard revolt of the working class as a whole, triggering a powerful revolutionary upsurge as it did this May in France.

Let us restate the first conclusion we have arrived at. Neo-capitalism in the long run strengthens the working class much as did laissez-faire capitalism or monopoly capitalism in its first stage. Historically, it makes the working class grow both numerically and in respect to its vital role in the economy. It thereby strengthens the latent power of the working class and underlines its potential capacity to overthrow capitalism and to reconstruct society on the basis of its own socialist ideal.

Immediately new questions arise. If this be so, will not the increased stability of the neo-capitalist system, its wide use of neo-Keynesian and macroeconomic techniques, its avoidance of catastrophic economic depressions of the 1929-33 type, its capacity to shape the workers' consciousness through manipulation and the use of mass media, permanently repress these revolutionary potentialities? These questions boil down to two basic arguments which we shall deal with successively. One is the system's capacity to reduce economic fluctuations and contradictions sufficiently to assure enough reforms to guarantee a gradual easing of social tensions between capital and labor. The other is the system's capacity of integrating and engulfing the industrial proletariat as consumers and ideologically conditioned members of the society, to quote Baran and Sweezy's **Monopoly Capital**.

On the economic plane, we can briefly sketch the trends which make long-term “stability in growth” impossible for neo-capitalism. When the growth rate increases, as it did in Western Europe for 15 years from 1950 to 1965, then conditions of near-full employment enable the workers to rapidly increase real wages which, together with the rapidly increasing organic composition of capital, tend to push down the rate of profit. The system must react, and its reactions usually take two forms, or a combination of both. One is rationalisation, automation, that is, increased competition between men and machines through reconstitution of the reserve army of labor to keep down the rate of increase of real wages. The other is voluntary or compulsory wage restraints, income policies, anti-strike and anti-union legislation, that is, attempts to prevent labor from utilising relatively favorable conditions in the labor market in order to increase its share of the new value it creates.

Increased growth rates under neo-capitalist conditions of “administered prices,” “investment through prices,” state-guaranteed monopoly surplus profits and a permanent arms economy, also mean inflation.

Every attempt to stop inflation strangles the boom and precipitates a recession. Investment fluctuations and monetary disorders combine to increase economic instability, further abetted by stepped-up capital concentration both nationally and internationally, so that the system tends towards a marginal increase in unemployment and a generalised recession in the whole Western world. Both trends push down the rate of growth, as does the system’s inability to constantly increase the rate of growth of armaments, that is, their share of the gross national product, without endangering enlarged reproduction, consequently economic growth itself. The accumulation of huge masses of

surplus capital and of increasing surplus capacity in the capitalist world industry acts in the same sense of dampening the long-term rate of growth.

What emerges in the end is less the picture of a new type of capitalism successfully reducing overproduction than the picture of a temporary delay in the appearance of overproduction – “*zurückstauen*,” as one says in German – by means of huge debt stockpiling and monetary inflation, which lead towards the crisis and collapse of the world monetary system.

Are these basic economic trends compatible with a secular decrease in social tensions between capital and labor? There is very little reason to believe this. Granted that the phases of rapid economic growth – more rapid in the last 20 years than in any comparable past period in the history of capitalism – create the material possibilities for increasing real wages and expanding mass consumption. But the attempts to base pessimistic predictions about the revolutionary potential of the working class on this trend of rising real wages overlooks the dual effect of the economic booms under capitalism on the working class.

On the one hand, a combination of near-full employment and a rapid rise of productive forces, especially under conditions of rapid technological change, likewise leads to an increase in the needs of the working class. That portion of the value of labor-power which Marx calls historically determined and is attributable to the given level of culture tends to increase most rapidly under such conditions, generally much more rapidly than wages. Paradoxically, it is precisely when wages rise that the gap between the value and the price of labor-power tends to grow, that the socially determined needs of the working class grow more rapidly than its purchasing power. The debate of the past decade in the United States and

other imperialist countries on the growing gap between individual consumption and unsatisfied needs of social consumption, publicised by Galbraith as the contrast between private affluence and public squalor, illustrates this point.

Furthermore, rising real wages are constantly threatened by erosion. They are threatened by inflation. They are threatened by structural unemployment generated through technological change and automation. They are threatened by wage restraint and wage-freeze policies. They are threatened by recessions. The more the workers are accustomed to relatively high wages, the more they react against even marginal reductions in their accustomed level of consumption, the more all the just-named threats are potential starting points of real social explosion.

It is no accident that the working class youth is quicker to react and move to the forefront of these revolts. The older generations of workers tend to compare their miseries in the depression and during the war with the conditions of the last 15 years and can even view them as a state of bliss. Younger workers don't make these comparisons. They take for granted what the system has established as a social minimum standard of living, without being at all satisfied, either by the quantity or quality of what they get, and react sharply against any deterioration of conditions. That's why they have been in the front ranks of very militant strikes over the last two years in countries as widely different as Italy, West Germany, Britain and France. That's why they played a key role in the May revolution in France.

Even more important than the basic instability and insecurity of the proletarian condition which neo-capitalism hasn't overcome and cannot overcome is the inherent trend under neo-capitalism to push the class struggle to a higher plane. As long as the workers were hungry and their most

immediate needs were unattended to, wage increases inevitably stood in the center of working class aspirations. As long as they were threatened by mass unemployment, reductions in the work-week were essentially seen as means of reducing the dangers of redundancy. But when employment is relatively high and wages are constantly rising, attention becomes gradually transferred to more basic aspects of capitalist exploitation.

The “wage drift” notwithstanding, industry-wide wage bargaining and attempts of neo-capitalist governments to impose incomes policies tend to focus attention more on the division of national income, on the great aggregates of wages, profits and taxes, than on the division of the newly created value at the factory level. Permanent inflation, constant debates around government fiscal and economic policies, sudden disturbances of the labor market through technological innovation and relocation of whole industries, draw the workers’ attention in the same direction.

Classical capitalism educated the worker to struggle for higher wages and shorter working hours in his factory. Neo-capitalism educates the worker to challenge the division of national income and orientation of investment at the superior level of the economy as a whole.

Growing dissatisfaction with labor organisation in the plant stimulates this very tendency. The higher the level of skill and education of the working class – and the third industrial revolution leaves no room for an uneducated and unskilled working class! – the more do workers suffer under the hierarchical and despotic work organisation at the factory. The stronger the contradiction between the potential wealth which productive forces can create today and the immeasurable waste and absurdity which capitalist production and consumption implies, the more do workers

tend to question not only the way a capitalist factory is organised but also what a capitalist factory produces. Recently, these trends found striking expression not only during the May revolution in France, but also at the Fiat plant in Italy where the workers succeeded in preventing an increasing number of different types of high-priced cars from being manufactured.

The logic of all these trends puts the problem of workers' control in the center of the class struggle. Capitalists, bourgeois politicians and ideologues, and reformist Social Democrats understand this in their own way. That is why different schemes for "reform of the enterprises," for "co-management," "co-determination" and "participation" occupy the center of the stage in practically all Western European countries. When de Gaulle launched his "participation" demagogy, even the bonapartist dictatorship of Franco in Spain proclaimed that it was likewise in favor of working class participation in the management of plants. As for Mr. Wilson, he didn't wait a month to jump on the same bandwagon.

But parallel to these various schemes of mystification and deception is the growing awareness in working class circles that the problem of workers' control is the key "social question" under neo-capitalism. Questions of wages and shorter working hours are important; but what is much more important than problems of the distribution of income is to decide who should command the machines and who should determine investments, who should decide what to produce and how to produce it. British and Belgian trade unions have started to agitate these questions on a large scale; they have been debated in Italy at the factory level and by many left groupings. In West Germany, Sweden, Norway and Denmark they are increasingly subjects of debates in radical working

class circles. And the May revolution in France was a clarion call for these ideas emanating from 10 million workers.

There remains the last objection. Have the monopolists and their agents unlimited powers of manipulating the ideology and consciousness of the working class, and can they not succeed in preventing revolt, especially successful revolt, notwithstanding growing socio-economic contradictions?

Marxists have recognised the possibility of “manipulation” for a long time. Marx wrote about the artificially induced needs and consumption of the workers a hundred and twenty-five years ago. Marxists have many times reiterated that the “ruling ideology of each society is the ideology of the ruling class.” One of the key ideas of Lenin’s **What Is to be Done?** is the recognition of the fact that, through their own individual effort and even through elementary class struggle on a purely economic and trade-union level, workers cannot free themselves from the influence of bourgeois and petty-bourgeois ideology.

The classical socialist labor movement tried to achieve such an ideological emancipation through a constant process of organisation, education and self-action. But even during its heyday it didn’t rally more than a minority fraction of the working class. And if one looks at the extremely modest proportions that Marxist education assumed in mass socialist parties like the German or Austrian Social Democracy before World War I (not to speak of the French CP before World War II), if one looks at the figures of subscribers to the theoretical magazines or students at study camps or workers’ universities in those organisations, one can easily understand that even then they merely scratched the surface.

Of course things have become worse since the classical labor movement started to degenerate and stopped inoculating the working class vanguard in any consistent

manner against the poison of bourgeois ideas. The dikes collapsed, and aided by modern mass media, bourgeois and petty-bourgeois ideology have penetrated deeply into broad layers of the working class, including those organised in mass Social-Democratic and Communist parties.

But one should guard against losing a sense of proportion in respect to this problem. After all, the working class movement arose in the 19th century under conditions where the mass of workers were far more dominated by the ideas of the ruling class than they are today. One has only to compare the hold of religion on workers in large parts of Europe, or the grip of nationalism on the French working class after the experience of the great French revolution, to understand that what looks like a new problem today is in reality as old as the working class itself.

In the last analysis the question boils down to this: Which force will turn out to be stronger in determining the worker's attitude to the society he lives in, the mystifying ideas he receives, yesterday in the church and today through TV, or the social reality he confronts and assimilates day after day through practical experience? For historical materialists, to pose the question this way is to answer it, although the struggle itself will say the last word.

Finally, one should add that, while "manipulation" of the workers' consciousness and dreams is apparently constant, so after all is the apparent stability of bourgeois society. It goes on living under "business as usual." But a social revolution is not a continuous or gradual process; it is certainly not "business as usual." It is precisely a sudden disruption of social continuity, a break with customs, habits and a traditional way of life.

The problems of the revolutionary potential of the working class cannot be answered by references to what goes on every

day or even every year; revolutions do not erupt every day. The revolutionary potential of the working class can be denied only if one argues that the sparks of revolt which have been kindled in the working class mass through the experience of social injustice and social irrationality are smothered forever; if one argues that the patient and obstinate propaganda and education by revolutionary vanguard organisations cannot have a massive effect among the workers anywhere, anytime, whatever may be the turn of objective events. After all, it is enough that the flame is there to ignite a combustible mass once every 15 or 20 years for the system ultimately to collapse. That's what happened in Russia. That's what the May revolution in France has shown can happen in Western Europe too.

These epoch-making May events allow us to draw a balance sheet of long-term trends which confirm every proposition I have tried to defend here today. After 20 years of neo-capitalism, functioning under classical conditions, with a "planning board" which is cited as a model for all imperialist countries, with a state television system which has perfected a system of mass manipulation to uphold the ruling class and party, with a foreign policy accepted by a large majority of the masses, in May 1968 there were in France twice as many strikers as ever before in the history of the working class of that country; they used much more radical forms of struggle than in 1936, in 1944-46 or in 1955; they not only raised the slogan of workers' control, workers' management and workers' power more sharply than ever before, but started to put it in practice in a dozen big factories and several large towns. In the face of this experience it is hard to question the revolutionary potential of the working class under neo-capitalism any more. In the face of this experience it is hard to question the prediction that France, which is the politically classical country of bourgeois society, in the same way as

Britain and the United States are its economically classical countries, is showing the whole Western world and not least the United States a preview of its own future. *De te fabula narratur!* [The story being told is about you!]

We have no time here to examine the interconnection between the workers' struggle for socialism in the Western metropolises and the liberation struggle of the colonial and semi-colonial countries as well as the struggle for socialist democracy in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. These interconnections are manifold and obvious. There are also direct causal links between the upsurge of an independent revolutionary leadership in the Cuban and Latin American revolution, the heroic struggle of the Vietnamese people against US imperialist aggression, and the emergence of a new youth vanguard in the West, which, at least in Western Europe, through the transmission belt of working class youth, has started to influence directly the development of the class struggle.

The main striking feature here has a more general and abstract character: the reemergence of active internationalism in the vanguard of the working class. The international concentration and centralisation of capital, especially through the creation of the "multinational corporation," gave capital an initial advantage over a working class movement hopelessly divided between national and sectional unions and parties. But now, in France, at one blow, the advanced workers have cleaned the field of the rot accumulated over decades of confusion and defeat. They have cut through the underbrush of bourgeois nationalism and bourgeois Europeanism and have come out into the wide open space of international brotherhood.

The fraternal unity in strikes and demonstrations of Jewish and Arab, Portuguese and Spanish, Greek and Turkish,

French and foreign workers, in a country which has probably been more plagued by xenophobia over the last 20 years than any other in Europe, triumphantly culminated in 60,000 demonstrators shouting before the Gare de Lyon: "We are all German Jews." Already a first echo has come from Jerusalem itself where Jewish students demonstrated with the slogan: "We are all Palestinian Arabs!" Never have we seen anything like this, on such a scale, and these initial manifestations warrant the greatest confidence in the world which will emerge when the working class, rejuvenated after two decades of slumber, will move to take power.

Most of you know that, both through political conviction and as a result of objective analysis of present world reality, I firmly believe that we are living in the age of permanent revolution. This revolution is inevitable because there is such a tremendous gap between what man could make of our world, with the power which science and technology have placed in his hands, and what he is making of it within the framework of a decaying, irrational social system. This revolution is imperative in order to close that gap and make this world a place in which all human beings, without distinction as to race, color or nationality, will receive the same care as the rulers today devote to space rockets and nuclear submarines.

What the socialist revolution is all about, in the last analysis, is faith in the unconquerable spirit of revolt against injustice and oppression and confidence in the ability of mankind to build a future for the human race. Coming from a continent which went through the nightmares of Hitler and Stalin, and emerged hardly a generation later holding high the banner of social revolution, of emancipation of labor, of workers' democracy, of proletarian internationalism, and witnessing in France more youth rallying around that banner

than at any time since socialist ideas were born, I believe that faith is fully justified.
