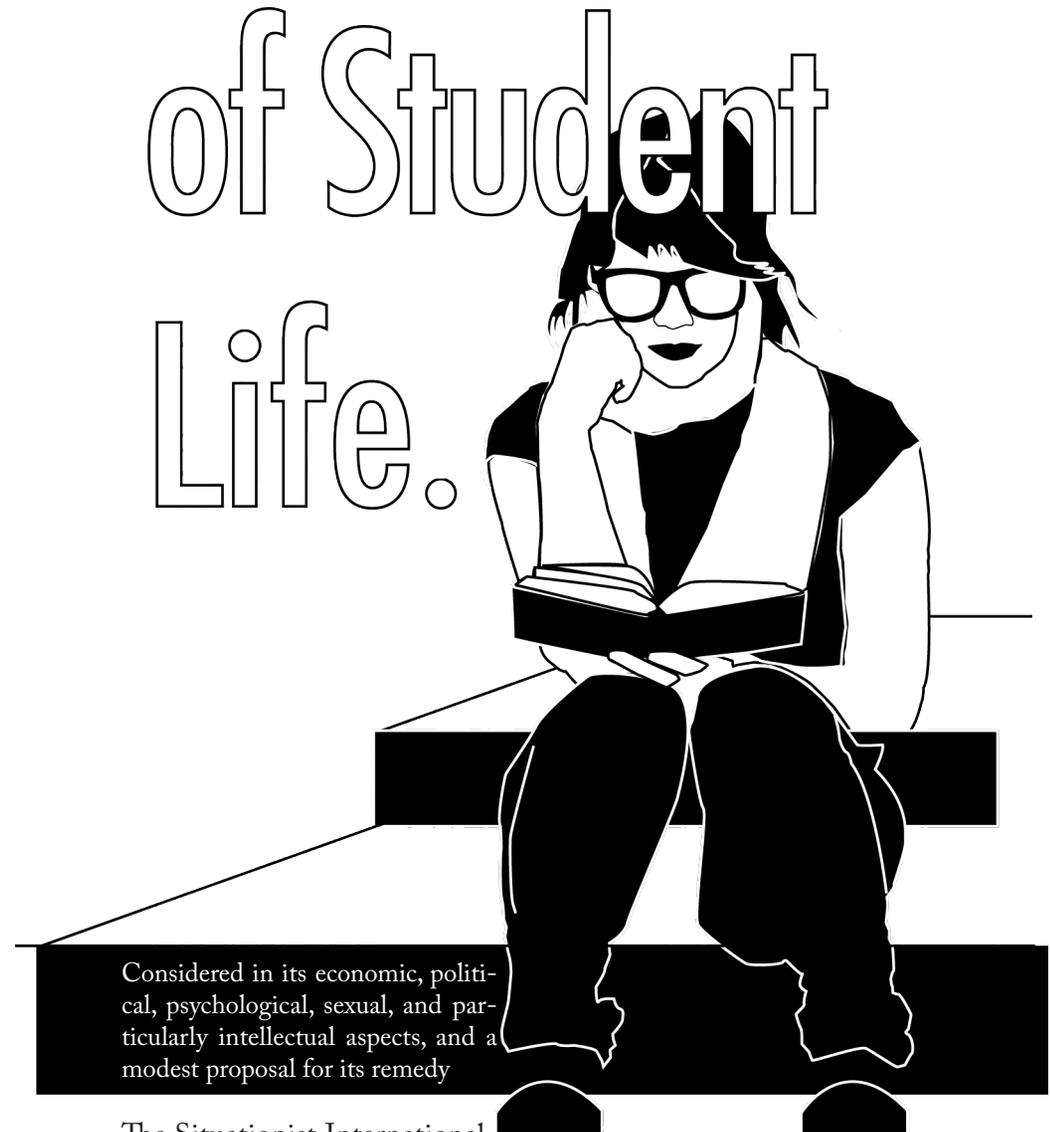


“Like the society to which it has played the faithful servant, the university is bankrupt. This bankruptcy is not only financial. It is the index of a more fundamental insolvency, one both political and economic, which has been a long time in the making. No one knows what the university is for anymore. We feel this intuitively. Gone is the old project of creating a cultured and educated citizenry; gone, too, the special advantage the degree-holder once held on the job market. These are now fantasies, spectral residues that cling to the poorly maintained halls.”

-Communique from an Absent Future

# The Poverty of Student Life.



Considered in its economic, political, psychological, sexual, and particularly intellectual aspects, and a modest proposal for its remedy

The Situationist International.

*“When  
examined,  
answer  
with  
questions”  
-Graffiti  
Paris, 1968*



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To continue your education on why we need to destroy the roles we are in please read "Communique Fom An Absent Future," and "The Coming Insurrection,"

realized. To transform the world and to change the structure of life are one and the same thing for the proletariat--they are the passwords to its destruction as a class, its dissolution of the present reign of necessity, and its accession to the realm of liberty. As its maximum program it has the radical critique and free reconstruction of all the values and patterns of behavior imposed by an alienated reality. The only poetry it can acknowledge is the creativity released in the making of history, the free invention of each moment and each event: Lautréamont's *poésie faite par tous*--the beginning of the revolutionary celebration. For proletarian revolt is a festival or it is nothing; in revolution the road of excess leads once and for all to the palace of wisdom. A palace which knows only one rationality: the game. The rules are simple: to live instead of devising a lingering death, and to indulge untrammelled desire.

## The Poverty Of Student Life

**W**e might very well say, and no one would disagree with us, that the student is the most universally despised creature in France, apart from the priest and the policeman. Naturally he is usually attacked from the wrong point of view, with specious reasons derived from the ruling ideology. He may be worth the contempt of a true revolutionary, yet a revolutionary critique of the student situation is currently taboo on the official Left. The licensed and impotent opponents of capitalism repress the obvious--that what is wrong with the students is also what is wrong with them. They convert their unconscious contempt into a blind enthusiasm. The radical intelligentsia (from *Les Temps Modernes* to *L'Express*) prostrates itself before the so-called "rise of the student" and the declining bureaucracies of the Left (from the "Communist" party to the Stalinist National Union of Students) bids noisily for his moral and material support.

There are reasons for this sudden enthusiasm, but they are all provided by the present form of capitalism, in its overdeveloped state. We shall use this pamphlet for denunciation. We shall expose these reasons one by one, on the principle that the end of alienation is only reached by the straight and narrow path of alienation itself.

Up to now, studies of student life have ignored the essential issue. The surveys and analyses have all been psychological or sociological or economic: in other words, academic exercises, content with the false categories of one specialization or another. None of them can achieve what is most needed--a view of modern society as a whole. Fourier denounced their error long ago as the attempt to apply scientific laws to the basic assumptions of the science ("porter régulièrement

sur les questions primordiales”). Everything is said about our society except what it is, and the nature of its two basic principles--the commodity and the spectacle. The fetishism of facts masks the essential category, and the details consign the totality to oblivion.

Modern capitalism and its spectacle allot everyone a specific role in a general passivity. The student is no exception to the rule. He has a provisional part to play, a rehearsal for his final role as an element in market society as conservative as the rest. Being a student is a form of initiation. An initiation which echoes the rites of more primitive societies with bizarre precision. It goes on outside of history, cut off from social reality. The student leads a double life, poised between his present status and his future role. The two are absolutely separate, and the journey from one to the other is a mechanical event “in the future.” Meanwhile, he basks in a schizophrenic consciousness, withdrawing into his initiation group to hide from that future. Protected from history, the present is a mystic trance.

At least in consciousness, the student can exist apart from the official truths of “economic life.” But for very simple reasons: looked at economically, student life is a hard one. In our society of abundance,” he is still a pauper. 80% of students come from income groups well above the working class, yet 90% have less money than the meanest laborer. Student poverty is an anachronism, a throw-back from an earlier age of capitalism; it does not share in the new poverties of the spectacular societies; it has yet to attain the new poverty of the new proletariat. Nowadays the teenager shuffles off the moral prejudices and authority of the family to become part of the market even before he is adolescent: at fifteen he has all the delights of being directly exploited. In contrast the student covets his protracted infancy as an irresponsible and docile paradise. Adolescence and its crises may bring occasional brushes with his family, but in essence he is not troublesome: he agrees to be treated as a baby by the institutions which

here on earth. The world itself walks upside down. And like the “critique of religion” in Marx’s day, the critique of the spectacle is now the essential precondition of any critique.

The problem of revolution is once again a concrete issue. On one side the grandiose structures of technology and material production; on the other a dissatisfaction which can only grow more profound. The bourgeoisie and its Eastern heirs, the bureaucracy; cannot devise the means to use their own overdevelopment, which will be the basis of the poetry of the future, simply because they both depend on the preservation of the old order. At most they harness over-development to invent new repressions. For they know only one trick, the accumulation of Capital and hence of the proletariat--a proletarian being a man with no power over the use of his life, and who knows it. The new proletariat inherits the riches of the bourgeois world and this gives it its historical chance. Its task is to transform and destroy these riches, to constitute them as part of a human project: the total appropriation of nature and of human nature by man.

A realized human nature can only mean the infinite multiplication of real desires and their gratification. These real desires are the underlife of present society, crammed by the spectacle into the darkest corners of the revolutionary unconscious, realized by the spectacle only in the dreamlike delirium of its own publicity. We must destroy the spectacle itself, the whole apparatus of commodity society, if we are to realize human needs. We must abolish those pseudo-needs and false desires which the system manufactures daily in order to preserve its power.

The liberation of modern history, and the free use of its hoarded acquisition, can come only from the forces it represses. In the nineteenth century the proletariat was already the inheritor of philosophy; now it inherits modern art and the first conscious critique of everyday life. With the self-destruction of the working class art and philosophy shall be

one's own alienation, to program one's own survival (squaring the capitalist circle". The task of the Workers' Councils will not be the autogestion of the world which exists, but its continual qualitative transformation. The commodity and its laws (that vast detour in the history of man's production of him- self) will be superseded by a new social form.

With autogestion ends one of the fundamental splits in modern society--between a labor which becomes increasingly reified and a "leisure" consumed in passivity. The death of the commodity naturally means the suppression of work and its replacement by a new type of free activity. Without this firm intention, socialist groups like Socialisme ou Barbarie or Pouvoir Ouvrier fell back on a reformism of labor couched in demands for its "humanization." But it is work itself which must be called in question. Far from being a "Utopia," its suppression is the first condition for a break with the market. The everyday division between "free time" and "working hours," those complementary sectors of alienated life is an expression of the internal contradiction between the use-value and exchange-value of the commodity. It has become the strongest point of the commodity ideology, the one contradiction which intensifies with the rise of the consumer. To destroy it, no strategy short of the abolition of work will do. It is only beyond the contradiction of use-value and exchange-value that history begins, that men make their activity an object of their will and their consciousness, and see themselves in the world they have created. The democracy of Workers' Councils is the resolution of all previous contradictions. It makes "everything which exists apart from individuals impossible."

What is the revolutionary project? The conscious domination of history by the men who make it. Modern history, like all past history, is the product of social praxis, the unconscious result of human action. In the epoch of totalitarian control, capitalism has produced its own religion: the spectacle. In the spectacle, ideology becomes flesh of our flesh, is realized

provide his education. (If ever they stop screwing his arse off, it's only to come round and kick him in the balls.)

"There is no student problem." Student passivity is only the most obvious symptom of a general state of affairs, for each sector of social life has been subdued by a similar imperialism.

Our social thinkers have a bad conscience about the student problem, but only because the real problem is the poverty and servitude of all. But we have different reasons to despise the student and all his works. What is unforgivable is not so much his actual misery but his complaisance in the face of the misery of others. For him there is only one real alienation: his own. He is a full-time and happy consumer of that commodity, hoping to arouse at least our pity, since he cannot claim our interest. By the logic of modern capitalism, most students can only become mere petits cadres (with the same function in neo-capitalism as the skilled worker had in the nineteenth-century economy). The student really knows how miserable will be that golden future which is supposed to make up for the shameful poverty of the present. In the face of that knowledge, he prefers to dote on the present and invent an imaginary prestige for himself. After all, there will be no magical compensation for present drabness: tomorrow will be like yesterday, lighting these fools the way to dusty death. Not unnaturally he takes refuge in an unreal present.

The student is a stoic slave: the more chains authority heaps upon him, the freer he is in phantasy. He shares with his new family, the University, a belief in a curious kind of autonomy. Real independence, apparently, lies in a direct subservience to the two most powerful systems of social control: the family and the State. He is their well-behaved and grateful child, and like the submissive child he is overeager to please. He celebrates all the values and mystifications of the system, devouring them with all the anxiety of the infant at the breast.

Once, the old illusions had to be imposed on an aristocracy of labour; the petits cadres-to-be ingest them willingly under the guise of culture.

There are various forms of compensation for poverty. The total poverty of ancient societies produced the grandiose compensation of religion. The student's poverty by contrast is a marginal phenomenon, and he casts around for compensations among the most down-at-heel Youth is in revolt, but this is only the eternal revolt of youth; every generation espouses "good causes," only to forget them when "the young man begins the serious business of production and is given concrete and real social aims," After the social scientists come the journalists with their verbal inflation. The revolt is contained by overexposure: we are given it to contemplate so that we shall forget to participate. In the spectacle, a revolution becomes a social aberration--in other words a social safety valve--which has its part to play in the smooth working of the system. It reassures because it remains a marginal phenomenon, in the apartheid of the temporary problems of a healthy pluralism (compare and contrast the "woman question" and the "problem of racialism"). In reality, if there is a problem of youth in modern capitalism it is part of the total crisis of that society. It is just that youth feels the crisis most acutely.

Youth and its mock freedoms are the purest products of modern society. Their modernity consists in the choice they are offered and are already making: total integration to neo-capitalism, or the most radical refusal. What is surprising is not that youth is in revolt but that its elders are so soporific. But the reason is history, not biology-- the previous generation lived through the defeats and were sold the lies of the long, shameful disintegration of the revolutionary movement.

In itself Youth is a publicity myth, and as part of the new "social dynamism" it is the potential ally of the capitalist mode of production. The illusory primacy of youth began with the economic recovery after the second world war. Capital was

without the Bolshevik afterthoughts. The proletariat can only play the game of revolution if the stakes are the whole world, for the only possible form of workers' power--generalized and complete autogestion--can be shared with nobody. Workers' control is the abolition of all authority: it can abide no limitation, geographical or otherwise: any compromise amounts to surrender, "Workers' control must be the means and the end of the struggle: it is at once the goal of that struggle end its adequate form."

A total critique of the world is the guarantee of the realism and reality of a revolutionary organization. To tolerate the existence of an oppressive social system in one place or another, simply because it is packaged and sold as revolutionary, is to condone universal oppression. To accept alienation as inevitable in any one domain of social life is to resign oneself to reification in all its forms. It is not enough to favor Workers' Councils in the abstract; in concrete terms they mean the abolition of commodities and therefore of the proletariat. Despite their superficial disparities, all existing societies are governed by the logic of commodities-- and the commodity is the basis of their dreams of self-regulation. This famous fetishism is still the essential obstacle to a total emancipation, to the free construction of social life. In the world of commodities, external and invisible forces direct men's actions; autonomous action directed towards clearly perceived goals is impossible. The strength of economic laws lies in their ability to take on the appearance of natural ones, but it is also their weakness, for their effectiveness thus depends only on "the lack of consciousness of those who help create them."

The market has one central principle--the loss of self in the aimless and unconscious creation of a world beyond the control of its creators. The revolutionary core of autogestion is the attack on this principle. Autogestion is conscious direction by all of their whole existence, It is not some vision of a workers' control of the market, which is merely to choose

of its coherence will be the compatibility of its actual form with its essential project--the international and absolute power of Workers' Councils as foreshadowed by the proletarian revolutions of the last hundred years. There can be no compromise with the foundations of existing society--the system of commodity production; ideology in all its guises; the State; and the imposed division of labor from leisure.

The rock on which the old revolutionary movement founded was the separation of theory and practice. Only at the supreme moments of struggle did the proletariat supersede this division and attain their truth. As a rule the principle seems to have been *hic Rhodus hic non salta*. Ideology, however "revolutionary," always serves the ruling class; false consciousness is the alarm signal revealing the presence of the enemy fifth column. The lie is the essential produce of the world of alienation, and the most effective killer of revolutions: once an organization which claims the social truth adopts the lie as a tactic, its revolutionary career is finished.

All the positive aspects of the Workers' Councils must be already there in an organization which aims at their realization. All relics of the Leninist theory of organization must be fought and destroyed. The spontaneous creation of Soviets by the Russian workers in 1905 was in itself a practical critique of that baneful theory, yet the Bolsheviks continued to claim that working-class spontaneity could not go beyond "trade union consciousness" and would be unable to grasp the "totality." This was no less than a decapitation of the proletariat so that the Party could place itself "at the head" of the Revolution. If once you dispute the proletariat's capacity to emancipate itself, as Lenin did so ruthlessly, then you deny its capacity to organize all aspects of a post-revolutionary society. In such a context, the slogan "All Power to the Soviets" meant nothing more than the subjection of the Soviets to the Party, and the installation of the Party State in place of the temporary "State" of the armed masses. "All Power to the Soviets" is still the slogan, but this time

able to strike a new bargain with labor: in return for the mass production of a new class of manipulable consumers, the worker was offered a role which gave him full membership of the spectacular society. This at least was the ideal social model, though as usual it bore little relation to socio-economic reality (which lagged behind the consumer ideology). The revolt of youth was the first burst of anger at the persistent realities of the new world--the boredom of everyday existence, the dead life which is still the essential product of modern capitalism, in spite of all its modernizations. A small section of youth is able to refuse that society and its products, but without any idea that this society can be superseded. They opt for a nihilist present. Yet the destruction of capitalism is once again a real issue, an event in history, a process which has already begun. Dissident youth must achieve the coherence of a critical theory, and the practical organization of that coherence.

At the most primitive level, the "delinquents" (*blousons noirs*) of the world use violence to express their rejection of society and its sterile options, But their refusal is an abstract one: it gives them no chance of actually escaping the contradictions of the system. They are its products--negative, spontaneous, but none the less exploitable, All the experiments of the new social order produce them: they are the first side-effects of the new urbanism; of the disintegration of all values; of the extension of an increasingly boring consumer leisure; of the growing control of every aspect of everyday life by the psycho-humanist police force; and of the economic survival of a family unit which has lost all significance.

The "young thug" despises work but accepts the goods. He wants what the spectacle offers him-- but now, with no down payment. This is the essential contradiction of the delinquent's existence. He may try for a real freedom in the use of his time, in an individual assertiveness, even in the construction of a kind of community. But the contradiction remains, and kills. (On the fringe of society, where poverty

reigns, the gang develops its own hierarchy, which can only fulfill itself in a war with other gangs, isolating each group and each individual within the group.) In the end the contradiction proves unbearable. Either the lure of the product world proves too strong, and the hooligan decides to do his honest day's work: to this end a whole sector of production is devoted specifically to his recuperation. Clothes, records, guitars, scooters, transistors, purple hearts beckon him to the land of the consumer. Or else he is forced to attack the laws of the market itself--either in the primary sense, by stealing, or by a move towards a conscious revolutionary critique of commodity society. For the delinquent only two futures are possible: revolutionary consciousness, or blind obedience on the shop floor.

The Provos are the first organization of delinquency--they have given the delinquent experience its first political form. They are an alliance of two distinct elements: a handful of careerists from the degenerate world of "art," and a mass of beatniks looking for a new activity. The artists contributed the idea of the game, though still dressed up in various threadbare ideological garments. The delinquents had nothing to offer but the violence of their rebellion. From the start the two tendencies hardly mixed: the pre-ideological mass found itself under the Bolshevik "guidance" of the artistic ruling class, who justified and maintained their power by an ideology of provo-democracy. At the moment when the sheer violence of the delinquent had become an idea--an attempt to destroy art and go beyond it--the violence was channeled into the crassest neo-artistic reformism. The Proves are an aspect of the last reformism produced by modern capitalism: the reformism of everyday life. Like Bernstein, with his vision of socialism built by tinkering with capitalism, the Provo hierarchy think they can change everyday life by a few well-chosen improvements. What they fail to realize is that the banality of everyday life is not incidental, but the central mechanism and product of modern capitalism. To destroy it, nothing less is needed than all-out revolution. The Proves

As for the various anarchist groups, they possess nothing beyond a pathetic and ideological faith in this label. They justify every kind of self-contradiction in liberal terms: freedom of speech, of opinion, and other such bric-a-brac. Since they tolerate each other, they would tolerate anything.

The predominant social system, which flatters itself on its modernization and its permanence, must now be confronted with a worthy enemy: the equally modern negative forces which it produces. Let the dead bury their dead, The advance of history has a practical demystifying effect--it helps exorcise the ghosts which haunt the revolutionary consciousness, Thus the revolution of everyday life comes face to face with the enormity of its task. The revolutionary project must be reinvented, as much as the life it announces. If the project is still essentially the abolition of class society, it is because the material conditions upon which revolution was based are still with us. But revolution must be conceived with a new coherence and a new radicalism, starting with a clear grasp of the failure of those who first began it. Otherwise its fragmentary realization will bring about only a new division of society.

The fight between the powers-that-be and the new proletariat can only be in terms of the totality. And for this reason the future revolutionary movement must be purged of any tendency to reproduce within itself the alienation produced by the commodity system; it must be the living critique of that system and the negation of it, carrying all the elements essential for its transcendence. As Lukacs correctly showed, revolutionary organization is this necessary mediation between theory and practice, between men and history, between the Dams of workers and the proletariat constituted as a class (Lukacs' mistake was to believe that the Bolsheviks fulfilled this role). If they are to be realized in practice "theoretical" tendencies or differences must be translated into organizational problems, It is by its present organization that a new revolutionary movement will stand or fall. The final criterion

As for student unionism, it is nothing but the travesty of a travesty, the useless burlesque of a trade unionism itself long totally degenerate.

The principal platitude of all future revolutionary organization must be the theoretical and practical denunciation of Stalinism in all its forms. In France at least, where economic backwardness has slowed down the consciousness of crisis, the only possible road is over the ruins of Stalinism. It must become the delenda est Carthago of the last revolution of prehistory.

Revolution must break with its past, and derive all its poetry from the future. Little groups of "militants" who claim to represent the authentic Bolshevik heritage are voices from beyond the grave. These angels come to avenge the "betrayal" of the October Revolution will always support the defense of the USSR--if only "in the last instance." The "underdeveloped" nations are their promised land. They can scarcely sustain their illusions outside this context, where their objective role is to buttress theoretical underdevelopment. They struggle for the dead body of "Trotsky," invent a thousand variations on the same ideological theme, and end up with the same brand of practical and theoretical impotence. Forty years of counter-revolution separate these groups from the Revolution; since this is not 1920 they can only be wrong (and they were already wrong in 1920).

Consider the fate of an ultra-Leftist group like Socialisme ou Barbarie, where after the departure of a "traditional Marxist" faction (the impotent Pouvoir Ouvrier) a core of revolutionary "modernists" under Cardan disintegrated and disappeared within 18 months. While the old categories are no longer revolutionary, a rejection of Marxism à la Cardan is no substitute for the reinvention of a total critique. The Scylla and Charybdis of present revolutionary action are the museum of revolutionary prehistory and the modernism of the system itself.

choose the fragmentary and end by accepting the totality.

To give themselves a base, the leaders have concocted the paltry ideology of the provotariat (a politico-artistic salad knocked up from the leftovers of a feast they had never known). The new provotariat is supposed to oppose the passive and "bourgeois" proletariat, still worshipped in obscure Leftist shrines. Because they despair of the fight for a total change in society, they despair of the only forces which can bring about that change. The proletariat is the motor of capitalist society, and thus its mortal enemy: everything is designed for its suppression (parties; trade union bureaucracies; the police; the colonization of all aspects of everyday life) because it is the only really menacing force. The Proves hardly try to understand any of this; and without a critique of the system of production, they remain its servants. In the end an anti-union workers demonstration sparked off the real conflict. The Prove base went back to direct violence, leaving their bewildered leaders to denounce "excesses" and appeal to pacifist sentiments. The Proves, who had talked of provoking authority to reveal its repressive character, finished by complaining that they had been provoked by the police. So much for their pallid anarchism.

It is true that the Provo base became revolutionary in practice. But to invent a revolutionary consciousness their first task is to destroy their leaders, to rally the objective revolutionary forces of the proletariat, and to drop the Constants and deVries of this world (one the favorite artist of the Dutch royal family, the other a failed M.P. and admirer of the English police). There is a modern revolution, and one of its bases could be the Proves--but only without their leaders and ideology. If they want to change the world, they must get rid of these who are content to paint it white.

Idle reader, your cry of "What about Berkeley?" escapes us not. True, American society needs its students; and by revolting against their studies they have automatically called that

society in question. From the start they have seen their revolt against the university hierarchy as a revolt against the whole hierarchical system, the dictatorship of the economy and the State. Their refusal to become an integrated part of the commodity economy, to put their specialized studies to their obvious and inevitable use, is a revolutionary gesture. It puts in doubt that whole system of production which alienates activity and its products from their creators. For all its confusion and hesitancy, the American student movement has discovered one truth of the new refusal: that a coherent revolutionary alternative can and must be found within the "affluent society." The movement is still fixated on two relatively accidental aspects of the American crisis--the Negroes and Vietnam--and the mini-groups of the New Left suffer from the fact. There is an authentic whiff of democracy in their chaotic organization, but what they lack is a genuine subversive content. Without it they continually fall into dangerous contradictions. They may be hostile to the traditional politics of the old parties; but the hostility is futile, and will be recuperated, so long as it is based on ignorance of the political system and naive illusions about the world situation. Abstract opposition to their own society produces facile sympathy with its apparent enemies-- the so-called Socialist bureaucracies of China and Cuba. A group like Resurgence Youth Movement can in the same breath condemn the State and praise the "Cultural Revolution"--that pseudo-revolt directed by the most elephantine bureaucracy of modern times.

At the same time, these organizations, with their blend of libertarian, political and religious tendencies, are always liable to the obsession with "group dynamics" which leads to the closed world of the sect. The mass consumption of drugs is the expression of a real poverty and a protest against it; but it remains a false search for "freedom" within a world dedicated to repression, a religious critique of a world that has no need for religion, least of all a new one. The beatniks--that right wing of the youth revolt--are the main purvey-

Opposition to the world offered from within--and in its own terms--by supposedly revolutionary organisations, can only be spurious. Such opposition, depending on the worst mystifications and calling on more or less reified ideologies, helps consolidate the social order. Trade unions and political parties created by the working class as tools of its emancipation are now no more than the "checks and balances" of the system. Their leaders have made these organizations their private property; their stepping stone to a role within the ruling class. The party program or the trade union statute may contain vestiges of revolutionary phraseology, but their practice is everywhere reformist--and doubly so now that official capitalist ideology mouths the same reformist slogans. Where the unions have seized power--in countries more backward than Russia in 1917--the Stalinist model of counterrevolutionary totalitarianism has been faithfully reproduced. Elsewhere, they have become a static complement to the self-regulation of managerial capitalism. The official organizations have become the best guarantee of repression--without this "opposition" the humanist-democratic facade of the system would collapse and its essential violence would be laid bare.

In the struggle with the militant proletariat, these organizations are the unfailing defenders of the bureaucratic counter-revolution, and the docile creatures of its foreign policy. They are the bearers of the most blatant falsehood in a world of lies, working diligently for the perennial and universal dictatorship of the State and the Economy. As the situationists put it, "a universally dominant social system, tending toward totalitarian self-regulation, is apparently being resisted--but only apparently-- by false forms of opposition which remain trapped on the battlefield ordained by the system itself. Such illusory resistance can only serve to reinforce what it pretends to attack. Bureaucratic pseudo-socialism is only the most grandiose of these guises of the old world of hierarchy and alienated labor."

The installation of the Bolshevik order coincides with the crushing of the Spartakists by the German "Social-Democrats." The joint victory of Bolshevism and reformism constitutes a unity masked by an apparent incompatibility, for the Bolshevik order too, as it transpired, was to be a variation on the old theme. The effects of the Russian counter-revolution were, internally, the institution and development of a new mode of exploitation, bureaucratic state capitalism, and externally, the growth of the "Communist" International, whose spreading branches served the unique purpose of defending and reproducing the rotten trunk. Capitalism, under its bourgeois and bureaucratic guises, won a new lease of life--over the dead bodies of the sailors of Kronstadt, the Ukrainian peasants, and the workers of Berlin, Kiel, Turin, Shanghai, and Barcelona.

The Third International, apparently created by the Bolsheviks to combat the degenerate reformism of its predecessor, and to unite the avant-garde of the proletariat in "revolutionary communist parties," was too closely linked to the interests of its founders ever to serve an authentic socialist revolution. Despite all its polemics, the third International was a chip off the old block. The Russian model was rapidly imposed on the Western workers' organizations, and the evolution of both was thenceforward one and the same thing. The totalitarian dictatorship of the bureaucratic class over the Russian proletariat found its echo in the subjection of the great mass of workers in other countries to castes of trade union and political functionaries, with their own private interests in repression. While the Stalinist monster haunted the working-class consciousness, old-fashioned capitalism was becoming bureaucratized and overdeveloped, resolving its famous internal contradictions and proudly claiming this victory to be decisive. Today, though the unity is obscured by apparent variations and oppositions, a single social form is coming to dominate the world--this modern world which it proposes to govern with the principles of a world long dead and gone. The tradition of the dead generations still weighs like a nightmare on the minds of the living.

ors of an ideological "refusal" combined with an acceptance of the most fantastic superstitions (Zen, spiritualism, "New Church" mysticism, and the stale porridge of Ghandi-ism and humanism). Worse still, in their search for a revolutionary program the American students fall into the same bad faith as the Provos, and proclaim themselves "the most exploited class in our society." They must understand one thing: there are no "special" student interests in revolution. Revolution will be made by all the victims of encroaching repression and the tyranny of the market.

An for the East, bureaucratic totalitarianism is beginning to produce its own forces of negation. Nowhere is the revolt of youth more violent and more savagely repressed--the rising tide of press denunciation and the new police measures against "hooliganism" are proof enough. A section of youth, so the right-minded "socialist" functionaries tell us, have no respect for moral and family order (which still flourishes there in its most detestable bourgeois forms). They prefer "debauchery," despise work and even disobey the party police. The USSR has set up a special ministry to fight the new delinquency.

Alongside this diffuse revolt a more specific opposition is emerging. Groups and clandestine reviews rise and fall with the barometer of police repression. So far the most important has been the publication of the "open letter to the Polish Workers Party" by the young Poles Kuron and Modzelewski, which affirmed the necessity of "abolishing the present system of production and social relations" and that to do this "revolution is unavoidable." The Eastern intellectuals have one great task--to make conscious the concrete critical action of the workers of East Berlin, Warsaw and Budapest: the proletarian critique of the dictatorship of the bureaucracy. In the East the problem is not to define the aims of revolution, but to learn how to fight for them. In the West struggle may be easy, but the goals are left obscure or ideological; in the Eastern bureaucracies there are no illusions about what is

being fought for: hence the bitterness of the struggle. What is difficult is to devise the forms revolution must take in the immediate future.

In Britain, the revolt of youth found its first expression in the peace movement. It was never a whole-hearted struggle, with the misty non-violence of the Committee of 100 as its most daring program. At its strongest the Committee could call 300,000 demonstrators on to the streets. It had its finest hour in Spring 1963 with the "Spies for Peace" scandal. But it had already entered on a definitive decline: for want of a theory the unilateralists fell among the traditional Left or were recuperated by the Pacifist conscience.

What is left is the enduring (quintessentially English) archaisms in the control of everyday life, and the accelerating decomposition of the old secular values. These could still produce a total critique of the new life; but the revolt of youth needs allies. The British working class remains one of the most militant in the world. Its struggles--the shop stewards movement and the growing tempo and bitterness of wildcat strikes--will be a permanent sore on an equally permanent capitalism until it regains its revolutionary perspective, and seeks common cause with the new opposition. The débâcle of Laborism makes that alliance all the more possible and all the more necessary. If it came about, the explosion could destroy the old society--the Amsterdam riots would be child's play in comparison. Without it, both sides of the revolution can only be stillborn: practical needs will find no genuine revolutionary form, and rebellious discharge will ignore the only forces that drive and can therefore destroy modern capitalism.

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the League of Young Marxist Workers joined to form the backbone of the Communist Revolutionary League. The movement is already setting and solving the new problems of revolutionary organization. Without illusions, it fights both western capitalism and the bureaucracies of the so-called socialist states. Without hierarchies, it groups together several thousand students and workers on a democratic basis, and aims at the participation of every member in all the activities of the organization.

They are the first to carry the struggle on to the streets, holding fast to a real revolutionary program, and with a mass participation. Thousands of workers and students have waged a violent struggle with the Japanese police. In many ways the C.R.L. lacks a complete and concrete theory of the two systems it fights with such ferocity. It has not yet defined the precise nature of bureaucratic exploitation, and it has hardly formulated the character of modern capitalism, the critique of everyday life and the critique of the spectacle. The Communist Revolutionary League is still fundamentally an avant-garde political organization, the heir of the best features of the classic proletarian movement. But it is at present the most important group in the world--and should henceforth be one of the poles of discussion and a rallying point for the new proletarian critique.

“To be avant-garde means to keep abreast of reality” (Internationale Situationniste 8). A radical critique of the modern world must have the totality as its object and objective. Its searchlight must reveal the world's real past, its present existence and the prospects for its transformation as an indivisible whole. If we are to reach the whole truth about the modern world--and a fortiori if we are to formulate the project of its total subversion--we must be able to expose its hidden history; in concrete terms this means subjecting the history of the international revolutionary movement, as set in motion over a century ago by the western proletariat, to a demystified and critical scrutiny.

“This movement against the total organization of the old world came to a stop long ago” (Internationale Situationniste 1). It failed. Its last historical appearance was in the Spanish social revolution, crushed in the Barcelona “May Days” of 1937. Yet its so-called “victories” and “defeats,” if judged in the light of their historical consequences, tend to confirm Liebknecht’s remark, the day before his assassination, that “some defeats are really victories, while some victories are more shameful than any defeat.” Thus the first great “failure” of workers’ power, the Paris Commune, is in fact its first great success, whereby the primitive proletariat proclaimed its historical capacity to organize all aspects of social life freely. And the Bolshevik revolution, hailed as the proletariat’s first great triumph, turns out in the last analysis to be its most disastrous defeat. images of the ruling class. He is a bore who repairs the old jokes of an alienated culture. Even as an ideologist, he is always out of date. One and all, his latest enthusiasms were ridiculous thirty years ago.

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Youth is in revolt, but this is only the eternal revolt of youth; every generation espouses “good causes,” only to forget them when “the young man begins the serious business of production and is given concrete and real social aims,” After the social scientists come the journalists with their verbal inflation. The revolt is contained by overexposure: we are given it to contemplate so that we shall forget to participate. In the spectacle, a revolution becomes a social aberration--in other words a social safety valve--which has its part to play in the smooth working of the system. It reassures because it remains a marginal phenomenon, in the apartheid of the temporary problems of a healthy pluralism (compare and contrast the “woman question” and the “problem of racialism”). In reality, if there is a problem of youth in modern capitalism it is part of the total crisis of that society. It is just that youth feels the crisis most acutely.

Youth and its mock freedoms are the purest products of modern society. Their modernity consists in the choice they are offered and are already making: total integration to neo-capitalism, or the most radical refusal. What is surprising is not that youth is in revolt but that its elders are so soporific. But the reason is history, not biology-- the previous generation lived through the defeats and were sold the lies of the long, shameful disintegration of the revolutionary movement.

In itself Youth is a publicity myth, and as part of the new “social dynamism” it is the potential ally of the capitalist mode of production. The illusory primacy of youth began with the economic recovery after the second world war. Capital was able to strike a new bargain with labor: in return for the mass production of a new class of manipulable consumers, the worker was offered a role which gave him full membership of the spectacular society. This at least was the ideal social model, though as usual it bore little relation to socio-economic reality (which lagged behind the consumer ideology). The revolt of youth was the first burst of anger at the persistent realities of the new world--the boredom of everyday existence,

tion will be made by all the victims of encroaching repression and the tyranny of the market.

An for the East, bureaucratic totalitarianism is beginning to produce its own forces of negation. Nowhere is the revolt of youth more violent and more savagely repressed--the rising tide of press denunciation and the new police measures against “hooliganism” are proof enough. A section of youth, so the right-minded “socialist” functionaries tell us, have no respect for moral and family order (which still flourishes there in its most detestable bourgeois forms). They prefer “debauchery,” despise work and even disobey the party police. The USSR has set up a special ministry to fight the new delinquency.

Alongside this diffuse revolt a more specific opposition is emerging. Groups and clandestine reviews rise and fall with the barometer of police repression. So far the most important has been the publication of the “open letter to the Polish Workers Party” by the young Poles Kuron and Modzelewski, which affirmed the necessity of “abolishing the present system of production and social relations” and that to do this “revolution is unavoidable.” The Eastern intellectuals have one great task--to make conscious the concrete critical action of the workers of East Berlin, Warsaw and Budapest: the proletarian critique of the dictatorship of the bureaucracy. In the East the problem is not to define the aims of revolution, but to learn how to fight for them. In the West struggle may be easy, but the goals are left obscure or ideological; in the Eastern bureaucracies there are no illusions about what is being fought for: hence the bitterness of the struggle. What is difficult is to devise the forms revolution must take in the immediate future.

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confusion and hesitancy, the American student movement has discovered one truth of the new refusal: that a coherent revolutionary alternative can and must be found within the "affluent society." The movement is still fixated on two relatively accidental aspects of the American crisis--the Negroes and Vietnam--and the mini-groups of the New Left suffer from the fact. There is an authentic whiff of democracy in their chaotic organization, but what they lack is a genuine subversive content. Without it they continually fall into dangerous contradictions. They may be hostile to the traditional politics of the old parties; but the hostility is futile, and will be recuperated, so long as it is based on ignorance of the political system and naive illusions about the world situation. Abstract opposition to their own society produces facile sympathy with its apparent enemies-- the so-called Socialist bureaucracies of China and Cuba. A group like Resurgence Youth Movement can in the same breath condemn the State and praise the "Cultural Revolution"--that pseudo-revolt directed by the most elephantine bureaucracy of modern times.

At the same time, these organizations, with their blend of libertarian, political and religious tendencies, are always liable to the obsession with "group dynamics" which leads to the closed world of the sect. The mass consumption of drugs is the expression of a real poverty and a protest against it; but it remains a false search for "freedom" within a world dedicated to repression, a religious critique of a world that has no need for religion, least of all a new one. The beatniks--that right wing of the youth revolt--are the main purveyors of an ideological "refusal" combined with an acceptance of the most fantastic superstitions (Zen, spiritualism, "New Church" mysticism, and the stale porridge of Ghandi-ism and humanism). Worse still, in their search for a revolutionary program the American students fall into the same bad faith as the Provos, and proclaim themselves "the most exploited class in our society." They must understand one thing: there are no "special" student interests in revolution. Revolu-

the dead life which is still the essential product of modern capitalism, in spite of all its modernizations. A small section of youth is able to refuse that society and its products, but without any idea that this society can be superseded. They opt for a nihilist present. Yet the destruction of capitalism is once again a real issue, an event in history, a process which has already begun. Dissident youth must achieve the coherence of a critical theory, and the practical organization of that coherence.

At the most primitive level, the "delinquents" (blousons noirs) of the world use violence to express their rejection of society and its sterile options, But their refusal is an abstract one: it gives them no chance of actually escaping the contradictions of the system. They are its products--negative, spontaneous, but none the less exploitable, All the experiments of the new social order produce them: they are the first side-effects of the new urbanism; of the disintegration of all values; of the extension of an increasingly boring consumer leisure; of the growing control of every aspect of everyday life by the psycho-humanist police force; and of the economic survival of a family unit which has lost all significance.

The "young thug" despises work but accepts the goods. He wants what the spectacle offers him-- but now, with no down payment. This is the essential contradiction of the delinquent's existence. He may try for a real freedom in the use of his time, in an individual assertiveness, even in the construction of a kind of community. But the contradiction remains, and kills. (On the fringe of society, where poverty reigns, the gang develops its own hierarchy, which can only fulfill itself in a war with other gangs, isolating each group and each individual within the group.) In the end the contradiction proves unbearable. Either the lure of the product world proves too strong, and the hooligan decides to do his honest day's work: to this end a whole sector of production is devoted specifically to his recuperation. Clothes, records, guitars, scooters, transistors, purple hearts beckon him to the

land of the consumer. Or else he is forced to attack the laws of the market itself--either in the primary sense, by stealing, or by a move towards a conscious revolutionary critique of commodity society. For the delinquent only two futures are possible: revolutionary consciousness, or blind obedience on the shop floor.

The Provos are the first organization of delinquency--they have given the delinquent experience its first political form. They are an alliance of two distinct elements: a handful of careerists from the degenerate world of "art," and a mass of beatniks looking for a new activity. The artists contributed the idea of the game, though still dressed up in various threadbare ideological garments. The delinquents had nothing to offer but the violence of their rebellion. From the start the two tendencies hardly mixed: the pre-ideological mass found itself under the Bolshevik "guidance" of the artistic ruling class, who justified and maintained their power by an ideology of provo-democracy. At the moment when the sheer violence of the delinquent had become an idea--an attempt to destroy art and go beyond it--the violence was channeled into the crassest neo-artistic reformism. The Proves are an aspect of the last reformism produced by modern capitalism: the reformism of everyday life. Like Bernstein, with his vision of socialism built by tinkering with capitalism, the Provo hierarchy think they can change everyday life by a few well-chosen improvements. What they fail to realize is that the banality of everyday life is not incidental, but the central mechanism and product of modern capitalism. To destroy it, nothing less is needed than all-out revolution. The Proves choose the fragmentary and end by accepting the totality.

To give themselves a base, the leaders have concocted the paltry ideology of the provotariat (a politico-artistic salad knocked up from the leftovers of a feast they had never known). The new provotariat is supposed to oppose the passive and "bourgeois" proletariat, still worshipped in obscure Leftist shrines. Because they despair of the fight for a to-

tal change in society, they despair of the only forces which can bring about that change. The proletariat is the motor of capitalist society, and thus its mortal enemy: everything is designed for its suppression (parties; trade union bureaucracies; the police; the colonization of all aspects of everyday life) because it is the only really menacing force. The Proves hardly try to understand any of this; and without a critique of the system of production, they remain its servants. In the end an' anti-union workers demonstration sparked off the real conflict. The Prove base went back to direct violence, leaving their bewildered leaders to denounce "excesses" and appeal to pacifist sentiments. The Proves, who had talked of provoking authority to reveal its repressive character, finished by complaining that they had been provoked by the police. So much for their pallid anarchism.

It is true that the Provo base became revolutionary in practice. But to invent a revolutionary consciousness their first task is to destroy their leaders, to rally the objective revolutionary forces of the proletariat, and to drop the Constants and deVries of this world (one the favorite artist of the Dutch royal family, the other a failed M.P. and admirer of the English police). There is a modern revolution, and one of its bases could be the Proves--but only without their leaders and ideology. If they want to change the world, they must get rid of these who are content to paint it white.

Idle reader, your cry of "What about Berkeley?" escapes us not. True, American society needs its students; and by revolting against their studies they have automatically called that society in question. From the start they have seen their revolt against the university hierarchy as a revolt against the whole hierarchical system, the dictatorship of the economy and the State. Their refusal to become an integrated part of the commodity economy, to put their specialized studies to their obvious and inevitable use, is a revolutionary gesture. It puts in doubt that whole system of production which alienates activity and its products from their creators. For all its