NEWS OF DISALIENATION

In a country as untouched as America, which has developed in a purely bourgeois fashion without any feudal past, but has unwittingly taken over from England a whole store of ideology from feudal times, such as the English common law, religion and sectarianism, and where the exigencies of practical labor and the concentrating of capital have produced a contempt for all theory which is only now disappearing in the educated circles of scholars—in such a country the people must become conscious of their own social interests by making blunder after blunder....But the main thing is that things have started moving, that things are going ahead generally, that the spell is broken. And they will go fast too, faster than anywhere else.

Frederick Engels, 1886

As the fragmentary representations of rebellion crumble away in their illusion, the authentic subjects of revolutionary change have begun to manifest their real historical existence as a class, even at first to their own unawareness. In America, diverse yet equally powerless strata have simultaneously opposed the same alienated conditions known to all modern society. Following the most fierce and at the same time the most mystified social antagonisms, all these strata at once have directly combated the colonization imposed on all their lives by the hierarchy of commodities. Such simultaneity provides the principle substance required for their unification in the near future as an indivisible whole: according to a new proletarian consciousness.

Beyond all the stagelights and cameras, what is the specter which haunts the hierarchy of Wall Street and Washington? This trifle reality which by official estimate consists of 80,000,000 people? This devoted citizenry which to the eyes of Nixonianism is already known to "threaten the legitimacy of the State?" What is this mute shadowy figure which panics its own official spokesmen with the winds of "rioting" "not only in the ghetto but throughout the city?" Who are these flaccid, fashionably clothed consumers who having encountered the false needs and alien pursuit of spectacular commodities now suddenly demand "to be treated as human beings?" Who are these ghosts of antiquity whose insubordination met on several occasions police and army detachments which were resisted in kind? Who are these anonymous men apt to wonder "which is worse," "the federal government or the unions" and daring in some cases even to call themselves "anarchist." Why it's the workers: nearly all of you!

After thirty years of isolation, silence and decay, the American workers are slowly beginning to recover their authentic historical work, the work of negation. Such subversive work does not rise at the level of economic struggle and reform. The rebelling workers have written their name in the tremors of production and hardly its adjustments as their own movement contains nothing less than life in the making: the end of wage-labor, merchandise and classes. At the very moment that overdeveloped capitalism has modernized its oppression, when the prolonged nullity of work is brimming with contemplation and alienations have multiplied in abundance, the workers themselves form an opposition more complete and more conscious than ever before in modern history. In the most advanced industrial country, ruling ideology prefers to represent the worker within an ever more marginal identity, in denial of that menacing estrangement at work which affects nearly everyone, from the classical sector of labor to white collar personnel and lower professional layers. From exactly this source, all the old forms of oppression and misery have derived their brutal diversification and refinement. Alienation has only become richer since man the worker has become man the consumer bound body and mind
to the endless pursuit of alien objects in exchange for his extended labor and mute passivity. For almost three years, the stereotyped image of conformist, unthinking workers has been shattered by the real workers as they put in question a way of life which has always separated them from themselves as much as from each other. Having allowed no quarter, the subordination of the workers to the exchange-value of commodities forcibly places them in the clear light of total self-emancipation. From exactly those conditions which simultaneously involve and repel them at the margins, the workers are drawing the genuine desire for *life* rather than *survival*. With them, radical effort no longer disintegrates inevitably in futility, defeat and fratricide.

Where, you ask, has all this furtive, unacknowledged movement begun? Well, it emerged on the least familiar battleground: the post offices. Between the 16th and 21st of March, 1970, the wildcat strikers of the post offices throughout the country acted for the first time of their own accord after having evicted, at least momentarily, all the trade union bureaucrats from their struggle. Their suppression of "business mail" formed an elementary rebuttal of both the private proprietors of Wall Street and the public administrators of the machinery of state power. At that time, we affirmed the genuine revolutionary capacity of the workers in view of the fact that such an initial trouble could already bear so many radical features. We wrote then..."As the postal workers launch an assault against that which assures the permanence of wage-labor (the trade union) the struggle against the total injustice of class society is itself introduced. The ruling order has responded forcefully not only to the temporary disruption of the capitalist economy and the momentary defiance of state power, but to the initial sign of an autonomous struggle of the workers for direct power." Indeed, theirs was the slightest and yet at the same time the most profound gesture of dissent—the refusal to work. In a matter of days, the State planted thousands of National Guardsmen in the main centers of New York in order to retrieve its desanctified property and bear down on the strikers. This disclosed both the military foundations of the working milieu, of commodity relations, as well as the proprietary interests submerged in the State. Who else but the very masters of politics and economics would know the hidden danger of major retentions in the process of commodity production, so much so that they threatened to impose direct military constraints before the slightest discontinuity falling within their jurisdiction, even against a possible walkout of railway workers when the most conservative grievances were at stake. In New York, the government suppressed an instance of revolt which having freed itself of authoritarian discipline was no longer predictable.

Starting on April 1, 1970, the truck-drivers of Cleveland occupied the streets and main thoroughfares in and around the city for the duration of thirty days. This was the first mobile occupation of urban space of its kind. The truckers' promise "to shut the town down" spread from the roadblocked highways of Florida to an armed clash in Teamsters' headquarters in Pennsylvania. The local media witnessed a "workers' riot" which cost 67 million dollars to Cleveland alone while the drivers had the first glimpse of their own self-management. The means deployed in the course of their immediate battle represented at the same time their best goals, goals brought factually to immediate light without the slightest knowledge. In deciding to sustain the circulation of food and medicine, for example, the drivers were taking an initial part in regulating the affairs of an entire city. During thirty days, the in-
surgents succeeded in deploying direct methods of sabotage and physical violence without ideology. Not only had confrontations occurred on the roads as well as at the depots but there were numerous instances in which trucks had been dynamited. In using more violent methods, the rebels were playing with the possibility of their power and an end to compromise. As they withheld the main arteries of circulation from commercial passage, the drivers were freeing their environs of exchange-value.

After the trucks with their various shipments were cleared away, it was no longer the massive image of capital but rather the sudden gathering of workers throughout the city which commanded the cards of production, of everyday life. At this moment, the city opened to the producers—rather than the hierarchy—in streets long deprived of their opposition and thus the presence of almost everyone. The rebels of Cleveland moved about their streets as freely as the insurrectionaries of Watts once roamed them. The quality of their response was without doubt insurrectionary. "My son should see me now," said one driver holding up a V-sign, "marching down Euclid Avenue." Accordingly, all the banalities of the street, even the slashing of tires, suddenly carried universal significance. At the moment one hundred men could be summoned to any point in Cleveland within an hour by way of "prowl patrol cars" with radio transmitters and a system of "chain telephone calls," liberated communication and spontaneous organization had become concrete.

The revolutionary moment often finds its nature disclosed in the extreme hostility manifest in turn by all its adversaries. In Cleveland, tough mindedness bellowed from every quarter of power, from the press to the municipal government. In insisting that such antagonism was anomalous, the editors of the Plaindealer depicted the antagonists themselves as iconoclasts for whom the police represented "cossacks or pigs"; various manufacturing interests hollered vociferously about the grave chance of economic extinction involving all the Capital of the city; black liberal mayor, Carl Stokes, heeded their plea in requesting the same federal troops which once crushed the black revolt of Detroit, Los Angeles and Newark, which emerged on Kent State days later; and various militant groups could imagine nothing better than the nationalization of the trucking industry at the very moment the nation's troops were actually arriving in Cleveland. What else could happen? What else but a military alternative existed in face of an independent formation of workers which could burst out in laughter when learning that Teamster leader Presser attributed their radical activity, from the grave of McCarthyism and Stalinism, to "a hard core of 200 or more communists?" In the last days of March, the National Guard bivouacked itself on the outlaying highways of the area in order to recapture the lost arteries of the city. The first attempts to escort the passage of trucks in arms were themselves repulsed by groups of rebels, bricks in hand. The drivers were not risking their own lives merely in order to accumulate some additional commodities. They had won the terrain for their emancipation, if not that emancipation itself.

The following August, the toll booth operators of New York abandoned their positions on the bridges at the peak of the rush hour. Their own resistance immediately harmonized with the masses of working traffic which were thereby permitted to move gratuitously at will for more than a day. During the winter, the fuel deliverers in New York gave the key bureaucrat of their union a ruthless thrashing. At the same time, the street car drivers in San Francisco formed an
immediate wildcat strike as soon as several drivers harassed by police had battled with them in the street. In March at 1971, the yellow taxi drivers ravaged a meeting hall in Manhattan in direct response to an impenetrable monologue fixed by their appointed bureaucrats with the support of vigilant goons. In June, the drawbridge mechanics, in spite of their official passivity, paralyzed the five boroughs of New York. They accomplished this by robbing one vital part from all the bridges to the horror and dismay of oncoming corps of army engineers whose clumsy searches were of no avail. The workers surrounded the bridges. In Brooklyn, the Verrazano site remained under their control according to the force of an extreme ultimatum. In August, the telephone workers, known to bear a significant number of young dissidents that have started to band together in independent groups, effectively compelled their official delegates to initiate an unusually long work stoppage, lasting almost eight months. By virtue of the duration of the antagonism and at the same time a disastrous conclusion (an increase of 1 percent over the initial settlement), American Capital showed the incapacity to yield unlimited concessions at the very moment that the workers manifest the equal possibility of taking the whole of the economy into their own hands.

From December 1971 to March 1972, the assembly line producers of Lordstown, Ohio, manufacturers of the Vega, ruthlessly disrupted the rhythm as well as the goal of the profit system. Noted for an average age of 24, these neo-luddites consciously sabotaged well over a half million cars. Their own act of immediate destruction repudiated at once the well known defects, hazards, and mortality built in to the company's schedule. Before the exasperations of economists and social psychologists alike, their uncompromising response disclosed “the wider issue of how management can deal with a young worker who is determined to have a say,” where “wages are good” and moreover where the “pressure of unemployment had little effect” (N.Y. Times). From within the factories, the auto producers uncovered an initial unity between subversion and everyday life. In holding their machines hostage, they invoked the strict mandate of their delegates. This was done forcibly in their disruption of labor-management negotiations at will. Nothing less than a Council in embryo was developing in Lordstown. The workers of Lordstown succeeded again in transferring the objective time of production to the subjective time of the producers. The response to Lordstown spread as far as Burbank, California. Between April and September, 1972, the workers of Norwood, Ohio sustained the longest controversy ever with G.M. Starting on November 3, 1972, the television technicians, cameramen, lightmen and engineers subverted the C.B.S. network. In six cities, they challenged monopolized media for the first time. At Shea Stadium, as in Milwaukee and San Francisco, the television hands stopped the spectacle. Amidst skirmishes with police, main cables were severed by the strikers and the station was blacked out. There were at least three arrests in New York alone. To the surprise of millions of spectators, the passive entertainment of a football event met with sabotage, or better yet, sabotage had become an entertainment which here and there found the support of commentators and reporters. The spell of the most incessant machinery of commercial conditioning and monologue had been broken. As recently as February 13, 1973, some of the transit workers in New York broke up a meeting of the mayor's "Watchdog Committee" where they prevented an exhibition of surveillance films.

In the same period, it's equally important to note, in the slow withdrawal of American troops from Vietnam, the parallel movement of anti-military resistance which compelled the government to disband the civilian army and draft system. The critical awareness of the military hierarchy and the imperialism of the commodity reached its apex in the Navy last summer. The S.O.S. Movement (Save Our Ships) formed an elementary point of reference for diverse hostilities which multiplied spontaneously. On July 10, 1972, the carrier ship Forrestal was lit up by clandestine arson. In other efforts to suppress ship movements to Vietnam, the insertion of one paint scraper and two metal thugs in a main gear of the Ranger prevented the carrier from functioning. In September, the Enterprise failed to depart from San Diego without extreme trouble. In November, violent, anti-racist skirmishes broke out on two other ships, the Kitty Hawk and the Hassayampa. At that moment, both the Saratoga and the Cruiser were attacked by arsonists. The outrage conveyed by those in arms has
truly enunciated the advanced nature of the modern class struggle which is developing.

The revolt of the American workers arises out of the contemporary period as the location for revolutionary opposition after the release of its time. As early as 1965, this merger of forces and places was already present in embryo in America. In “The Rise and Fall of the Spectacular Commodity Society” in Watts, the class context in which the insurgents had battled the logic of merchandise and defied the power of the State was already depicted by the situationists when they wrote: “The blacks are not isolated in their struggle because a new proletarian consciousness—the consciousness of not being the master of one’s life in the slightest degree—is taking form in America among strata whose refusal of modern capitalism resembles that of the blacks.” Indeed, there are many within the present rebellion at work that passed through several other struggles to arrive at their own. The fresh level of resistance is not contrary to that of the recent past but its very center. Their similarity is manifested in the deficiencies as much as in the strengths of the present. From those who pillaged merchandise come those who suppress the machinery of alienation. Who could ignore the genuine likeness between the contempt of the Berkeley students for the cultural hierarchy and the scorn of the wildcat strikers for the trade union bureaucracy? No, there is hardly a lapse in the progression of practical radical activity from the young rioters hurling the fences at the Newport Festival and the masses of spectators vandalizing Pittsburgh after the World Series to the workers defending their highways in arms. Among the potentially advanced strata of modern capitalism, the thousands of young who circumvented the poverty of the student milieu expressed in their search for new relations, sexual and otherwise, the first great refusal of the necessity of labor. Inevitably youth rediscovered an ugly necessity. At the same moment, the struggle at work encountered its youth and accordingly its responsibility toward the free reconstruction of all values and behavior imposed by an alien present. Neither the resistance to working on the part of the “new lumpenproletariat” nor the revolt at work can ever come to anything apart from one another. The one could never find the way to realize its desires, to make its criticisms work; the other would reveal in its failure to live differently that it had never really rebelled.

The radical combatants of the spectacular commodity and alienated labor have recently conveyed their mutual reciprocity. In this, the bitter winds of racial separation are slowly dying away. Those construction workers who pummeled the war resisters at City Hall in New York under the coordinated instructions of their managers, owners and shop stewards represent the same minority which had the mercenary esteem of opposing the workers’ battle against Standard Oil as scabs and provocateurs. They constitute the most backward of sectors insofar as they are most dependent on the State as well as the integrated trade union and therefore acclaim their ideology with enthusiasm. They acquire all the legal security which can assure them of their wage-labor, threatened by advancing technology, as exclusive hereditary property. Rather than opposing the specific relations of production, they support the retardation of productive forces in the most archaic language of bourgeois ideology: religion, race and nation. To the contrary, the majority of worker-consumers face the same predicament as all those separated entirely from the marketplace. For them, their very employment within modern capitalism—an employment increasingly devoted to manipulative ends—encompasses as much degradation as social security. The lumpenproletarian and the modern worker face similar problems, problems of life rather than survival. Their action transforms their problems into burning ones. While the worker has opposed the active nature of his scarce time, merely producing his own confinement, the lumpenproletarian has revolted against the passive nature of his abundant time, of just killing his time.

The unity between the two became visible within the very prison walls of Attica. There, the well known rebellion of September 9, 1971, organized itself internally according to Workers Coalitions. And there in the very words of the New York Times, “racial animosity had been submerged in class solidarity.” This was the first occasion in history that the clandestine discussion of sociology led to insurrection from which rebelling convicts manifest not the most backward but the most advanced awareness of present conditions and the prospects for
Intransigent inmates at Attica meet for the last time with negotiators.

Only where the State ends, there begins the individual who is not superfluous; there begins the song of necessity, the unique and inimitable tune. Where the State ends, look there, my brothers! Do you not see it, the rainbow and the bridges of the superman.

Nietzsche, Thus Spoke Zarathustra

And here these men are languishing in jail, being treated abominably, while the “great men of the future” are coining thousands in the name of revolution, and are already dividing up their future governmental posts.

Jenny Marx, A Letter to Weydemeyer, Jan. 10, 1852

changing them. Despite the least favorable circumstances, namely, a handful of police hostages utterly dispensable to the State, the prisoners brought into the open a great lesson in direct democracy, so much so that on the very morning of the 14th, hours before the police invasion, they cared to revoke their old delegates and appoint more radical ones. Among prisoners varying from former chemical engineers, university students and high school dropouts to industrial workers and unemployed, Blease Montgomery, a poor white from North Carolina, announced to the world the collective possibility of the majority of Americans: “I want everyone to know we gon’ stick together, we gon’ get what we want or we gon’ die together.”

If the demands of the 1,200 convicts altered in the course of six days, it was
because the prisoners themselves had changed with the act of revolt. Under the transparent truth which grew from their liberated collaboration, all stereotyped dogma shattered and dissolved: the compulsive lie publicized before the cameras by attorney Kunstler, to which he confessed much later, concerning "amnesty" guaranteed to the inmates by "Third World Countries just around the corner"; the opportune reticence and withdrawn support of Black Panther officials from an independent minded, undogmatic rebellion, etc. From the opposite side, the equal disillusionment of many relatives of slain guards followed in turn. "Somehow we felt that the name Rockefeller was written on every bullet," said one woman. Irrevocably, the arms of free speech and the free speech in arms had spread. Without doubt, the Popular Manifesto which appeared at the outset of the seizure constituted the first revolutionary declaration of the new proletariat written in its own hand against the modern State: "We, the inmates of Attica prison, say to you, the sincere people of society, the prison system of which your courts have rendered unto, is without question the authoritative fangs of a coward in power."

Evidently, the American workers can do no less in responding to the reified terms of their own dispossession than those social layers that are confined from everything, even the urban milieu of consumption, the very milieu which isolated them under the lie of cultural superiority. The American Indian Movement, after the riot in Custer, North Dakota, on February 8, 1973, reached the significance at Wounded Knee of an armed struggle for territorial emancipation. For twenty days, the Indians have forcibly occupied the area of Pine Ridge after looting the trading post there of as much food and arms as they could find. Indians from all over the U.S. and some white supporters furiously entered Wounded Knee under the eyes of the F.B.I. and federal marshals by way of back paths and amidst diversionary tactics. In holding the area, armed skirmishes have ensued. Helicopters carrying newsmen and oncoming video trucks have been fired upon. The Indians' disgust with the passive spirit of their own Council and its leaders equals their contempt for the bureaucracy in Washington. In speaking to reporters, one Indian spat on the ground and muttered: "Governments, I'm sick of governments." No matter how symbolic the "last stand" may seem to be at Wounded Knee—and in spite of the ambiguity of its expectations and its organization—the direct appropriation of one valley by three hundred rebels forms an insurrectionary penetration of a space monopolized by bureaucratic centralization.

The recent actions of the workers have illuminated the revolutionary theory of our times. In advancing their own protest against prevailing conditions beyond legal limits, the workers show that they are no longer integrated into modern capitalism and its logic of reification. Their own resistance injects the raw rebuttal of everything others have said about them, from professors and journalists to movie stars and militants. The mute nature of their past has vanished. In the present moment of
insubordination, the stars to which the workers once paid homage, baseball players and television personalities alike, now follow at their heel imitating their own dissident behavior, their own reality, which pits itself directly against the fictitious power of commodities. Not long after the summer of 1969, when the ambiguous radicalism of the Movement, sought and reified in hierarchical division, withered away in the sheer repetition of its boredom, these more profound enemies of the spectacular society started to rally against the most significant of obstacles: the blackmail of survival. Insofar as the workers will no longer remain an innocent gear within the machinery of affluence, their action has rejected the given terms of that survival, namely, an increasingly reified labor and a leisure time consumed in passivity. As they try to pose their own dissent apart from external controls, the American producers are again mounting their own passive relation to the commodity, the commodity which is nothing, after all, but the abstract embodiment of their stolen labor.

Modern technology and its products have appeared to do everything independently only so far as man, their producer, has been able to control virtually nothing. As the necessity of wage-labor fades from our furtive history, the hierarchy struggles to multiply the fetishism of commodities in the partial time of its present. The slightest contempt conveyed by the workers toward the reigning spectacle whose job is to fetishize commodities leaves nothing as it was... The most visceral gestures, as the queues of Queens subway riders and hordes of Long Island commuters who suddenly refused to pay their fare or the disappointed lines of patrons which attacked the owner of the Lugoff theatres, acknowledge such an irresistible contempt. In such ways, the workers have shown that it is they who can live without the commodity system while it is the commodity system which cannot survive without them. For no other force exists within the restraints of modern society which can ever unite the means of production with the goal of life. It is the wage and commodity forms which have grown old. Others have become useless. The fresh hostility toward the dehumanization of merchandise, toward activity, toward life as merchandise, emerges not from classical conditions of economic poverty but conditions of uncontrolled, alien abundance. Far beyond the mere redistribution of material wealth, such hostility expresses the search for the complete reinvention of abundance in each and every one of its aspects (profound and trivial alike). Modern capitalism accidently grants the workers one concession in this direction which is "the luxury to consider their time." It is our hope that the workers' actions will one day be influenced by revolutionary criticism, insofar as it is criticism appropriated as their own.

If the workers still have not spoken in their own voice, they have already rejected the voices of others. Since the bitter lesson of the thirties, the American workers most noticeably have avoided subscribing to any of the possible ideologies of their superiors. Why has that happened? It is because the most advanced of the old capitalisms can best realize in itself the more and more bureaucratically rational survival which the classical ideologies, Stalinist and Trotskyist alike, have always withheld as their unique goal. In light of the fact that the past workers movement was defeated by various hierarchies which had advocated intermediary economic objectives, any reservoir of such authoritarian reformism today hardly interests those beyond the pale of economic poverty who know and refuse its source.

The workers' disinterest in the "student revolution" contained, even in the moment of their own resignation, the most understandable reasons. The swaggering anarchist or marxist militants who glibly reproached the American workers for being "fascist" or "petit-bourgeois" were willing almost monosyllabically to trade in one advocacy of imperialism for another. Feverishly, they ran to support the external terrain of an ideology which the workers directly encountered and rejected more than thirty years ago. After proclaiming the virtues of the enemies of their enemy, the totalitarian bureaucratic States, they were surprised to find themselves alone. The popular trend of black nationalism existing at the university, among other ghettos, resembles the bureaucratic reformism once imposed upon the workers by their own ascending elites. In the American university, it is not so much the social origins as the goals of the students which are so often petit-bourgeois. It was in view of their duplicity, as prospective
cadres of advanced capitalism, that their bureaucratic revolutionary dreams could fall just as they had swelled: perfunctorily. Naturally, as they were convinced that the workers could never independently attain the stature of their vast intellectual awareness, the most eloquent ideologists among them (casting faithfully from their Leninist scripts) are more than ready to think for the workers. The students are at the rear of proletarian revolution. They have disappeared and the workers are here.

An utter parody seems to confront the workers (Stalinists posing as a black workers council, Trotskyists attempting to make others construction workers, academic theorists parading as radical America, socialist revolution and the black and red...) and yet at the same time such nonsense places a real barrier in their path: the actual decompression of revolutionary popularization by parody and mimetism. Of course, there are more graver hazards, in which the force of habit, exceeding that of the state union bureaucracy and even the armed detachments of the State, is perhaps the deadlest hazard of all. The tradition of dead generations weighs heavy on the minds of the living. The wildcat strikers of the post offices succumbed at last to the voting machines, the very "closed ballot" which they reviled, and their own attraction to customary convenience—the provisions of a meeting hall or free cups of coffee—allowed the political return of the state union bureaucrats. The insurgents of Cleveland elected "strike leaders" who continued in their individual names to speak for them... The radical students of Santa Barbara and Ohio went so far as to destroy banks and university buildings but without ever bothering to make any general goal explicit, even the "end of an university"...the black youths who bravely held the sporting goods store in Williamsburg, Brooklyn still combated the menace of authority in the shadow of religion... Old shadows of economy and culture linger beside fresh forms of action, actions which for all they have not said, are nevertheless radical of themselves. At such a time, the workers do not speak for themselves because they have borrowed at first the language of the past, its terms and its battle cries, a past that starts from and leads directly back to the immediate present. Today such inchoate rebels have nothing to derive from the past but a feast of stale crumbs as their talent for emancipation carries all its stakes in the future. The earlier revolt of the workers required an amnesia in regard to the future in order to drug itself in its immediate survivalist demands. In order to arrive at their own content, the modern workers must define both their past and future in order to let the dead bury the dead. They will not begin themselves until they have stripped away all the habitual costumes of the past. But the workers, here and elsewhere, have not intended to disguise their real feelings. Their intentions themselves are to be concrete as always. At the level of an unspoken praxis the workers waver intensely between the intervals of insubordination and acceptance in which their rebellion is their only real, ephemeral vacation from atrocious routine. Whereas they appear to fall back behind their point of departure, they are in truth only just beginning to locate the revolutionary point of departure, the situation, the relations and the methods under which their own social activity can become significant. While the workers hardly know as yet the prodigiousness of their goal, the creation of history to be lived as their own, it is the consequences of their own actions which drive them on.

The existing world of the spectacle is nothing but a re-proletarianized world. It is this industrial world which founds itself contradictorily on masses of workers initially related together on an international scale by the division of labor only to be separated again in the very production of their own dispossession. The modern workers remain producers not of the community but commodities as they become not men in the concrete but spectators consuming themselves in its alienated images. At the same time, the very contradiction between their own social power and the private property of the global hierarchy, furnishes them with the real, living capacity which can reverse inverted material organization at its roots. The authentic importance of the workers, against the parasite merchandise, lies uniquely in their ability to destroy their own class themselves, their momentary presence in an alien world, their old selves as workers. Insofar as the capitalist world has reified the social product in separation from the workers, the workers themselves cannot aim for the mere appropriation of existing conditions, that is to say, the products, the means or positions abandoned by
separate power but rather for their uninterrupted transformation. Today, proletarian life is extended to the banal consumer, the innocuous citizen, the part-time gentleman. An extension of such life separates men even from their own alienation in the name of the most absurd values, the most artificial sacrifices. The new proletariat must finally annihilate itself, its false consciousness, in order to become itself. It must at once destroy and realize the hoarded riches of the bourgeois world in consciously reconstructing all aspects of everyday life.

power is now sealed up within the pure present imposed by the spectacular commodity. It is at first forgotten history in exile. Today, specialists of revolt hope to spread the bureaucratic relics of the past, even by resurrecting them through its living, un conquerable aspect which is the Workers Councils, an aspect that acknowledges no power other than its own. It is exactly this revolutionary aspect which found its own thread of development in America, in spite of the most brutally mystified conditions from which the contemporary workers emerge as direct heirs. The American workers

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Sacco and Vanzetti

If it had not been for this thing, I might have lived out my life talking at street corners to scurvy men. I might have died, unmarked, unknown, a failure. Now we are not a failure. This is our career and our triumph.

Bartolomeo Vanzetti

The long reign of capitalist domination, whose legacy is the bureaucracy and its triumphant counter-revolution, is rooted in the ultimate failure of the traditional workers movement. This movement stopped long ago, vanquished by its own alienated forms of struggle. As opposed to the former hierarchal parties and industrial unions, the authentic aspect of the revolutionary past as an unmediated

inherit an unfinished history which begins with the occupation of the Cincinnati breweries, the armed seizure of the mines in Telluride, the Workers and Soldiers Councils of Seattle... This history of the revolutionary proletariat and its form, the Councils, has found realization nowhere as yet, from Peking to Paris and from Moscow to Washington. Yet the modern class struggle returns everywhere, ever since
the revolutionary occupations of France and the anti-bureaucratic crisis of Czechoslovakia in 1968, a struggle which, through trial and error, gradually approaches an international revolutionary perspective again.

From the shores of England, wildcat strikes are in vast majority ever since the confrontation at Port Talbot, Wales, in the summer of 1969, when the rules of direct democracy were genuinely applied by the insurgents. After the long strike of the coal miners two winters ago, the fury of the longshoremen last July reached violent proportions against both the State and the General Transport Union with an intensity resembling that of the populace of Derry, Northern Ireland. This February, the gas workers, as part of the nationally timed one-day strikes organized by the unions, left their workplaces. But having struck their work, they continued by striking against union authorities and refused to return after a day.

An insurrectionary general strike broke out in the province of Quebec, Canada last May. It was the first of its kind in North America. Street battles developed in many of the thirteen cities involved. A minister’s home in Hauterville had been firebombed. During four hours, the city of Sept-Iles remained in the hands of the popular masses. And in several cities, the workers captured key radio stations.

In Australia, the workers of South Clifton occupied the mines last spring after their closing by the owners. They demanded nothing less than “recognition of our ownership of the South Clifton Colliery.”

The blacks of South Africa are in revolt, since the radical insubordination manifest by the dock workers in 1972. Despite a stiff penal code as well as possible deportation from urban areas, the black workers of Durban introduced the first wildcat general strike of its kind in February, 1973. Police reinforcements were flown in with the subsequent arrest of one hundred striking municipal workers. A spontaneous rally of three thousand workers around the factories of Hammersdale—outside Durban—led to a clash with police which was dispersed in the end by tear gas and dogs.

In Bolivia, the workers of La Paz barricaded themselves last winter in the textile factories, in spite of declared martial law, “until the ultimate consequences.”

In Israel and Lebanon, long after the fighting of 1967, the Civil War has begun. Similarly, the student movement in Cairo entered into a violent phase of confrontations with its own regime, although it was mixed with reformist nationalist overtones. In November, the rebel workers of a chocolate factory in Beirut clashed with their local police. In Israel, there are rashes of wildcat strikes. Despite the almighty Histadrut, fifty-two per cent of all work stoppages are unofficial in Israel. The categories of labor involved have ranged from truck drivers to doctors. Last Autumn, the port of Haifa remained crippled for several weeks. On January 1st, the flickerings of a general strike gripped Tel Aviv. At the same time, the revolt of Israeli youth from school and the military (in which at least 20,000 youths cannot be accounted for) has stirred official alarm. For this, the Israeli government imports 150 soldiers at a time from the Gaza Strip, after their experience against the Arabs, in order to patrol the tense streets of Tel Aviv. The Inspector General of police has revealed the historical dialectic emerging in Israel. “There are more guns around and more people who have experience in using them.”

In Italy, general revolutionary crisis has continually evolved. For nearly four years, no social equilibrium has existed there. “A country on the outskirts of reason” cries out the bourgeois Italian press. Italy is known to be the “creeping May” since the regional insurrectionary upheavals in the South, in Battipaglia and Reggio, with their democratic assemblies and their armed territorial occupation. The wildcat strike movement of the industrial north continues to grow with the workers of Pirelli and Fiat in the lead. In Milan, Turin and elsewhere, the workers have at times invaded their deserted workplaces as they have been known to destroy the cars of management. The government bomb provocations of December 14, 1969 seemed at first to pacify the Italian proletariat. Three years later, however, the means of production remain filled with agitation and disruption according to national strikes by industry and general strikes by the day. The unions and inseparably the Stalinist and Socialist parties have sponsored the fragmentation of resistance. But they have not sponsored
Its uninterrupted frequency. At the same
time, the Italian students have reached
an extremism of action although the
usual Maoist-Stalinist ideologies still
linger. Now, every few hours, riot squads
in Milan roar out to an embattled college
or high school. At the university of Milan,
red flags fly indefinitely.

In Poland, the famous "December
Revolt" which rose three years ago left
nothing as it was before. After having
combed their own natural enemy,
Gomulkaism, which was simply the
liberal bureaucratic lie in power, nothing
any longer mediates the ongoing in
surrectionary tide of the workers and
intellectuals. In the northern ports, the
workers have begun to renew their own

Something has changed in the world
since 1968 from which there will be no
turning back. Of course, much more is
needed in order to realize a different
world. Very early in the game, we
warned of the inevitable "dismember-
ment of revolt which does not
recognize itself for what it is" among the
workers as well as the students. Cer-
tainly, we were correct then to
acknowledge the future futility of the
American workers revolt "outside the
appropriation of all power by the
Workers Councils." And this clarification
arrived rightly before the workers had
even acted. Three years later, after the
workers have actually returned, it is
equally obvious that nothing is any
longer the same, that the workers, once

revolutionary stance in organizational
terms. They battle the Trade Union
Congress, the prisons which withhold
many of their comrades of "December"
and various measures of the
bureaucracy. After encountering forty
years of totalitarian ideologies, from
Stalinism and Nazism to Gomulkaism,
the popular masses have already seen
the bureaucratic exclusion of Gomulka
for what it really was: the fall of an elite,
not a power.

having appeared to be this or that, now
only need to know what they have
already done. The fate of America is
again subject to the course of action
chosen by the workers. The opponents of
the spectacular society are slowly
coming to realize that they are finished
with the spectacle.

March 19, 1973