

## Programme Communiste - On Paul Mattick: Revolutionary Idealism and Enterprise Socialism

The recent edition in French of P. Mattick's work, *Intégration capitaliste et rupture ouvrière*<sup>1</sup>, is not the result of chance; the series of articles that compose it traces the respectable struggle of an authentic militant worker who has never ceased to reflect on the development, causes and effects of the Stalinist counter-revolution. It is an assessment which, in its own way, seeks to draw lessons from the ebb of the revolutionary wave of the 1920s and the subsequent degeneration of the international labour movement.

The interest of this compilation lies in the unity of the interpretative orientation that it proposes, entirely centred on the traditional themes of protean anarcho-syndicalism; the highly claimed perspective is indeed that of councilism, a deviation that our current has never ceased to criticize, relating it to the old current of Sorelian revolutionary syndicalism.

Mattick's originality, which is manifested notably in the first proposed article, *Luxemburg versus Lenin* results from the theoretical mediation of which he recommends himself in order to criticize what he calls "Leninism", namely Luxemburgism and Kaapedism. But, no more than, we said, the release of such a work does not astonish us, such a step could not surprise us; it is only the nth symptom of this sad period when, in the absence of effective revolutionary struggles, Marxist Communism can only brandish the weapon of criticism while waiting for the criticism of weapons.

And in the same way that the petit-bourgeois extracts from pre-marxist utopias to calm his existential despair and his political disenchantment, his revolutionary activity is nourished by the multiple expressions of the idealistic tradition whose common denominator is the negation of determinism, party and dictatorship, the invariance of the program and the final goal.

*Culturalism*, for which the "conscious awareness" of their exploitation is the precondition for the radicalisation of the masses enlightened by the "avant-garde".

*Anti-party spontaneity* according to which *the party form* must necessarily degenerate into bureaucratisation and dictatorship of the leaders over the masses.

*Grassroots workers democracy* guaranteeing equal "rights" for each and, by the same token, the possibility of reorganizing production within the framework of enterprise socialism: These are the recipes repeatedly criticized by the Marxist Left since the "Poverty of Philosophy", and repeatedly reaffirmed within the class by the same petty bourgeois current at each time of degeneration of the party, to which must be added, as far as we are concerned, the crushing obstacle of Stalinism which has arisen for half a century in the propaganda of opportunist parties as the legitimate expression, historically and theoretically, of "Marxism-Leninism", which explains the reticence and distrust towards the party of the few advanced elements who seek the way of the future resumption in a necessarily vain attempt of analysis of the proletarian defeat of the first post-war period. It is not a question here of undertaking a detailed critique of the work as a whole; we will simply note the most glaring points of disagreement between Mattick's interpretation of the counter-revolution and our own analysis. They concern essentially three points: the national and colonial question linked to the

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<sup>1</sup> A collection containing the essays: *Luxemburg versus Lenin* (1935), *Karl Kautsky: From Marx to Hitler* (1939), *Council Communism* (1939), *Spontaneity and Organisation* (1949), *The Limits of Integration: The One Dimensional Man in Class Society* (1969), *Workers Management* (1969) and *Division of Labour and Class Consciousness* (1971)

tactics of the dual revolution; the theory of the party as antithesis to the councilist perspective of "workers spontaneity", and finally the program; we will be led to make the departure between the "Sovietist" solutions to the crisis of bourgeois society and our dialectical materialist conception of the need for new relations of production freed from the grip of the market and freed from the law of value.

## WHAT MATTICK SAYS ON THE COUNCILIST "LESSONS" OF THE STALINIST COUNTER-REVOLUTION

Striving to learn the lessons of the counter-revolution, Mattick, as is the rule from the trade unionist perspective, sees them in a tactical error of Lenin. The alliance of workers and poor peasants having led to the seizure of power by the Bolsheviks in Russia, he would then have conceived the course of the world revolution as "the repetition on a certainly wider scale of this process".

Thus the Bolsheviks would have imposed authoritatively and mechanically the so-called Russian "model" of the revolutionary process based on the tactics of the alliance of the workers and the poor peasants on the various parties of the Comintern. Thus it is in the constitution of a "workers and peasants" International that Mattick discovers the origin of the disintegration of the "anti-capitalist revolutionary movements". And to draw this lapidary assertion doctrinally: "the world revolution cannot be an enlarged reproduction of the Russian revolution"!

We knew since Hegel that world history is the court of the world, we did not know that P. Mattick was its Advocate General. But let us take a closer look at his allegations.

*"While Lenin's position on the national question was on the one hand determined by the social-democratic standpoint of pre-war time, which he had not completely overcome (NDR: !!!), and on the other appeared to him as a means of setting up and consolidating Bolshevik mastery in Russia and its eventual extension on a world-wide scale, for Rosa Luxemburg it had no other meaning than that of a false policy which would be dearly paid for.*

*"In contradistinction to Lenin, for whom, quite in keeping with his general position, the construction of the party and the conquest of power was the necessary presupposition for the victory of socialism, Rosa Luxemburg's glance was directed to the class needs of the proletariat. Furthermore, while Lenin's theory and practice were tied up mainly with the backward conditions of Russia, Rosa Luxemburg constantly took as her starting point the more highly developed capitalist countries and hence was incapable of seeing in the 'historical mission' of the working class a party-and-leadership problem. She laid more weight upon the spontaneous mass movements and the self-initiative of the workers than upon the growth of the organisation and the quality of the leaders. Thus she differed fundamentally from Lenin in her appraisal of the factor of spontaneity in history and hence also as regards the role of organisation in the class struggle." (Intégration capitaliste et rupture ouvrière, pp. 18-19.)*

Let's go over this again. According to Mattick, the responsibility for the counter-revolution... must be attributed to Lenin's and the Bolshevik party's "Eastern" tactics, arbitrarily transposed without consideration of "the particular national and local conditions" in the highly industrialized capitalist countries.

Disregarding the classic distinction since the 1850 Address between pure revolution and permanent revolution, relying on Rosa Luxemburg's misunderstandings relating to the national and colonial question, to the alliance of workers and poor peasants in backward areas, as well as to the structure and function of proletarian organizations, he draws two conclusions, which come as one leitmotiv throughout his work: the principle of respect for the spontaneity of the working class, which must under no circumstances be restricted by a party directing, channelling and directing its revolutionary

energy - this in order to prevent the risk of the party's famous dictatorship on the masses; the principle of proletarian INDIFFERENTISM repudiating independently of geohistorical conditions, any alliance with revolutionary peasantry and any support for the struggles of nations oppressed by imperialist powers, the proletariat of advanced capitalist countries being considered as the only force capable of overcoming capitalist oppression.

To this "analysis" we answer that *with regard to the national and colonial question*, the Bolsheviks and, following them, the Comintern in its theses of the Second Congress, have only taken up, after having restored and freed them from the gang of Austro-Marxist and Kautskist opportunism, the traditional positions of Marxist communism.

What are they? They can be summarized in a few theses: the development of capitalism takes place in geohistorical areas whose social antagonisms differ according to the degree of penetration of bourgeois relations of production and mercantilism; this movement of penetration generates movements of resistance of peoples who try more or less successfully, according to the rigidity and stability of their own social relations of production, to maintain their mode of production and distribution, to preserve their customs and their ideological systems. To this struggle of resistance of the peoples of colour against capitalist penetration is associated the increase of the oppression of the metropolises and this is what makes necessary the convergence of the struggles to be waged against the common enemy: capital.

This is why communists have always emphasized the need to integrate the revolutionary potential of subversive movements triggered by the racial factor into the invariant program and strategy of the class party whose detachments evolve in different areas. This is why it is our duty as internationalist communists to throw in the face of the workerist and indifferentist opportunism of which Mattick claims to be and of the social-chauvinism of the "communist" parties of the metropolises whose collusion with imperialism we must denounce, the striking formula used by Marx to stigmatize the apathy of the English proletariat in front of the forced exploitation of its Irish class brothers: "a people which exploits another is not a free people!".

To complete and to avoid any risk of ambiguity, we will recall the wording of the Second Congress of the Communist International (Moscow 1920): against Kautskian opportunism and workers' indifferentism, they proclaim the binding of workers of all nations under the direction of a single center as the condition for victory over capitalism, it being understood that the interests of proletarian struggle in a country must be subordinated to the world perspective, "The nation having defeated capitalism must make the greatest sacrifices for the overthrow of international capital". On the other hand, they relate it to the final goal, namely "the realization of a universal economic plan whose regular application would be controlled by the proletariat of all countries, a tendency that manifested itself under the capitalist regime and must continue its development in order to arrive at perfection through the socialist regime".

Because the colonies constitute one of the principal resources of the forces of capitalism, and the origin, by the accumulated surplus value, of the concessions granted to the proletarians of the metropolises, the masses of the countries subjected outside Europe and the U.S.A. are indeed absolutely linked to the white Euro-American proletarian movement.

As for the tasks that concern the most backward countries where feudal or patriarchal rural institutions predominate, the theses of the Second Congress recall the imperative of the assistance of all communist parties to revolutionary emancipation movements in their struggle against reactionary religious ideologies; the support to peasant movements against landowners and feudal survivors, the only way to "create a very close link between the European communist proletariat and the peasant revolutionary movement of the East, the colonies and the backward countries in general".

## THE PARTY QUESTION

*As for the question of the party*, we must recognize that no more in this field of doctrine than in others, the Bolsheviks and Lenin did not innovate, and that the demand for the proletariat to constitute itself as a class, that is to say as an autonomous political organization fighting in the countries of advanced capitalism for the abolition of wage labour and the market, has been a thousand times recalled since the political birth of the Communist Party that was the Manifesto.

Recalling the famous formula of "What is to be done?", where Lenin states that by its forces alone, the working class can only achieve trade-unionist consciousness, i.e. the conviction "that it is necessary to unite in a union, to fight against the bosses, to demand from the government such laws necessary for the workers", Mattick brings his classical Marxist position back to that of German social democracy "for which revolution ceases to be the work of the workers themselves" and notes that "Lenin agrees with Kautsky for whom revolutionary consciousness could only be injected from outside to the workers".

It is true that we have nothing to reproach the first Kautsky, that of the "Road to Power", who wrote in 1909: "It is the mission of the Socialist movement to bring all these various activities of the proletariat against its exploitation into one conscious and unified movement, that will find its climax in the great final battle for the conquest of political power. "

But behind the classical criticism that the workerist opportunism addresses to the reformist evolution of the German social-democracy, always looming is the petty-bourgeois horror of the PARTY FORM.

By contrast we, consistent Marxists, reproach him for the economic, gradualist and reformist orientation that led to the chauvinist social fiasco of 1914.

It was then the whole party that fell into the ranks of the counterrevolution, but it was pushed there by the corrosive action of the economic organizations of the proletariat which did not escape a betrayal no less ignominious than that of the party. The lesson that Mattick, like all those who claim themselves from near or far from anarchism, draws from these fatal events is that the historical experience of the rout of the Second International and of Stalinist degeneration has highlighted the need for the proletariat to guard against any organization that does not emanate spontaneously from the base: "the council communists, far from pretending to act for the workers, consider themselves as members of the working class who have become aware of the tendency of capitalism to decline and seek to coordinate in this perspective the activities of the workers..." .... (they are)... only propaganda groups capable of proposing ways and means of action, but not of undertaking these actions in the interest of the class, for it is up to the class itself to do so."

Our current has always presented the negation of the party and of the class organizations of the proletariat by immediatism - of a petty bourgeois and anarchistic nature - as false and confused positions which finally only propose the replacement of the party and the union by other organizations which are in reality no less likely than the first to be won by opportunist contagion, or even to become the direct agents of bourgeois state power. Since the birth of the Communist Party, our conception of the class has not varied: at the base, the social molecules, the mass of workers or if we want the class, but defined in a statistical way and that unfolds in the immediacy, unconscious ground. Then, on the upper floor, the economic organizations of the workers aiming at reducing the competition that the proletarians make between them on the market and which accentuates the pressure of capital on labour. Finally, at the top of the pyramid, the political party that gives life to the class, channels and directs its energy, irradiates it with its directives, selects the most determined and conscious elements.

To separate the elements of this structure is to inevitably give in the classical deviation that revolutionary Marxism has historically known: the trade unionist or sovietist error, which separates the immediate economic organizations from the party, by exalting workerism and economism.

But back to the "soviet". Like all opportunist idealists, Mattick makes it a true metaphysical category, the ahistorical "model" of class organization, without bothering otherwise to reflect on its material conditions of appearance, except by the striking amalgam that mixes the K.A.A.P.D., the Dutch tribunist and... Rosa Luxemburg. "However, from the pre-war *left* (which included Luxemburg, Liebknecht, Pannekoek and Gorter), coupled with the actual struggles of workers in mass strikes in the East as well as the West, there arose a movement during the war which continued for a few years as a truly anti-capitalistic trend and found its organisational expression in various anti-parliamentarian and anti-trade union groups in a number of countries.... this movement was from the outset strictly opposed to the whole of capitalism, as well as to the whole of the labour movement that was a part of the system. Recognising that the assumption of power by a party meant only a change of exploiters, it proclaimed that society must be controlled *directly* by the workers themselves. The old slogans of abolition of the classes, abolition of the wage system, abolition of capital production, ceased to be slogans and became the immediate ends of the new organisations. Not a new ruling group in society, willing to act 'for the workers' and, with this power, able to act against them, was their aim, but the direct control by the workers over the means of production through an organisation of production securing this control. These groups refused to distinguish between the different parties and trade unions, but saw in them remains of a past stage of struggles within the capitalist society. They were no longer interested in bringing new life to the old organisations, but in making known the need for organisations not only of entirely different character – *class organisation* capable of changing society, but capable also of organising the new society in such manner as to make exploitation impossible."

Mattick's thesis presents the Soviet as the privileged organ of the emancipation of the proletariat which, even before the fall of the bourgeois power, constitutes an organ of political struggle preparing from the economic and technical point of view the integral communism!

Mattick's "sovietist" perspective denying the party any organizational role of the class, an old anarchist song, also joins the reformist perspective that it claims however to fight by fighting the dictatorship of the party on the masses, in that both postulate the possibility of proletarian emancipation at the economic level even though capitalism would hold political power with the State.

In both cases, we find the same gradual-economic vision of a peaceful transition or, what is ultimately identical, punctual, to socialism (cf. the famous general strike and the delirium of "crossed arms" as substitutes for armed insurrection). But if one makes the effort to analyse what the Soviet really was in the USSR *after* October, one must say with Zinoviev: "the soviets are the state organizations of the working class and poor peasants exercising the dictatorship of the proletariat during the phase when all the old forms of the state gradually disappear" (*Il Soviet*, 11/1920)

The soviets were thus historically the system of representation of the working class and the poor peasants who came to power and they constituted the territorial political organization of the proletarian dictatorship.

The councilist illusion, is therefore not to worry about political power relations but to overestimate a FORM. It rediscovers by this way the ordinovist deviation of Gramsci and his companions for whom the soviets appeared like the organs of the proletarian liberation and the construction of the communist economy... in bourgeois regime. (cf. on this point, *Programme communiste* No. 58, *The Marxist Left of Italy and the International Communist Movement*)

## THE COUNCILIST PROGRAM

We have seen workers' indifference ignore the classic distinction between the two tactics of revolutionary communism and deny the principle of bourgeois democratic revolution, which it equates with an Eastern and Leninist "deviation" from orthodox Marxism.

We followed him through the tortuous meanderings of his anarchist perspective of negation of the materialist principles of party form and the dictatorship of the proletariat. We have finally seen it elevate the "workers council" to the dignity of a miraculous political-economic form whose dual function allows the (peaceful?) transition to socialism.

All that remained for the revolutionary idealistic vision was to complete this marvellous work of undermining Marxism by describing the new social order resulting from its fantastic elucubrations. Indeed, where knowledge ceases to govern itself over the object, it escapes from the limits prescribed by materialistic determinism to reach the heights of fiction and the clouds of the imagination:

"As an organisational frame for the new society is proposed a council organisation based on industry and the productive process, and the adoption of the social average labour time as a measurement for production, reproduction and distribution in so far as measurements are necessary to secure economic equality despite the existing division of labour. This society, it is believed, will be able to plan its production according to the needs and the enjoyment desired by the people."

It emerges from this very elliptical formulation and, to say the least, confused, that the social organization of production presented here by Mattick does not rise outside the limits of bourgeois relations, but is content to harmonize the current division of labor (city/country opposition; manual and intellectual labor) inherent in capitalist development; to plan the needs and their satisfaction on the basis, as we have seen, of the workers democracy practiced within each productive unit, in short to emancipate the proletariat by preserving the mercantile exchange, but amended in the sense of economic "equality" by the introduction of a rather enigmatic "average working time".

It is clear that Mattick's "program" is only a barely modernized version of the Prodhonian motive which saw in the harmonization of the value of exchange reduced to the quantity of work contained in it the infallible means of eliminating "social injustice". Marx, of whom Mattick claims to be, had yet shown in "Poverty of Philosophy" against Proudhon that "In a future society, in which class antagonism will have ceased, in which there will no longer be any classes, use will no longer be determined by the minimum time of production; but the time of production devoted to different articles will be determined by the degree of their social utility".

Eager to combat "Leninist" statism which, as Lenin himself often acknowledges, is not socialism but "state capitalism"<sup>2</sup>, he is capable of opposing it only to the trivial Prodhonian doctrine of self-management which, in his imagination fevered by petty-bourgeois aspiration to "freedom", appears to him as a social form of "anti-authoritarian" production. The unfortunate councilist, like the father of "bourgeois socialism", forgets two things. First, even if it had been able to sustain itself beyond the effervescent first months of the October Revolution, this "free association economy" modelled on that

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<sup>2</sup> This is not the place to dwell here on the variations found in Lenin's Complete Works on this subject, nor on the reasons for these variations, even if Lenin's formulations of the economic work of the Bolsheviks in a country recognized as not ripe for socialist transformation may have contributed to further confusing the smoky ideas of the councilists. Whatever the case, it is certain that socialism differs from state capitalism of any kind (i.e. whatever the political superstructure) in that it is not a state economy, the state being destined to decline, and not to become the universal entrepreneur, as the social transformation took place, thanks to the - Despotic Interventions - of the proletarian dictatorship, which implied a developed capitalist economy that did not exist in Russia after 1917

of the liberal era of capitalism would have been even further from socialism than "Leninist" state capitalism *in its ability to develop productive forces* (at the forefront of which must be the producers themselves): without the development of productive forces (and producers), *there can be no abolition of wage labour and the bourgeois division of labour*, the only liberation that is not illusory and that Marxism claims. Second, even in Mattick's "workers'" version, such an economy would inevitably have followed the same course as his bourgeois model (the only historically viable one) of competition to the monopoly, that is, to the so honest "authority", betraying even the *petty-bourgeois* hopes that our adviser puts in it. Marx had already told Proudhon all this, too, but our councilist ignores.

In the councilist perspective, as it appears at least in Mattick, the ruin of the *socialist* hopes of the October Revolution, since the state management of industry established by the Bolsheviks did not lead to socialism, but to the constitution of a centre of national capitalist accumulation freed from its semi-colonial subjection to Western capitalism by... the Iron Curtain, would constitute the historical proof of the legitimacy of anarchist theses. We should therefore draw the consequences, deny the role of the proletarian party and power in the economic transformation of society, which should be abandoned to the initiatives of the different groups of the working class managing the productive units autonomously in a "free association" economy. In this vision, the whole achievement of the communist revolution can be summed up in the overthrow of the employers' class and the hand-over of the workers over the enterprises inherited from capitalism. These companies would retain their management autonomy, would not be subject to any general regulation or central authority: they would obey the "will" of the staff, the local democratic authority of the management committee.

This libertarian presentation of communism raises two questions: how, if all production escapes any central control, can it adapt to social needs? And through what mediation will the different companies come into contact? The capitalist solution is the market (more or less subject to central regulation, moreover: by maintaining the business economy, the advisory solution condemns itself not to go beyond the mediation of the market, this connective tissue inherent in the mercantile and capitalist economy. But if market relations persist between companies and between the two main sectors of the economy - industry and agriculture - we do not see how they could be abolished inside the productive unit. Mercantilism is the basis of capitalist exploitation: it is to the extent that products are *commodities*, i.e. *exchange values* that must be realized on the market that labor is itself a commodity and that the proletarian is a wage worker. We can therefore see the absurdity of a "Sovietist" economy which claims to abolish wage labour while defending *the autonomy of companies*. The fact that these are conceived as so many workers' cooperatives does not in fact change the essentials, because it is precisely this autonomy which imposes the mediation of the market and thus wage labour and even the despotism of factory. We therefore have to note that the substitution of the classic capitalist enterprise by a councilist type enterprise does not advance the necessary transformation of the social economy by one step.

If the "state capitalism" so honoured by Mattick is never more than a moment in the historical development of property relations within the market production that follows the parcelled property, to private capitalism, to trusts (and moreover coexists with them) and if, in the correct Marxist sense, it does not leave the capitalist cycle, what can be said of the workers' cooperative of Mattick, which is simply the other side of the private capitalist enterprise?

Autonomous, these cooperatives should operate exactly on the model of capitalist enterprises because they would suffer just as much as they would under market pressure. Competition not being abolished, the law, the system of contracts and the State which is the secular arm would remain in force. As a result, the workers of these enterprises would in no way be "freer" than those of the bourgeois productive units!

In short, what the idealistic and petty-bourgeois councilism does not understand is quite simply the logic that presides over the development of capitalism, which has already "socialized" the entire economy under its jurisdiction precisely through... the path of "free association". The revolution it proposes is not a revolution in the mercantile relations of capitalist production, but a regression to an earlier stage of bourgeois property relations under the colour of handing over the means of production "to the workers themselves".

What we Marxist communists affirm, on the contrary, is the historical need to dialectically overcome the current *productivist* barbarity inscribed in the very contradictions of the capitalist mode of production. It is the necessity of proletarian political revolution alone capable of freeing from the shackles of bourgeois relations the productive forces that this system has engendered, and in the first rank of which must be put the producers themselves, who suffocate under the yoke of its tyranny. It is the development of a harmonious *planetary planning* of production and distribution of use values according to real social needs. But the reappropriation by the species of social production supposes the destruction of mercantile relations and categories, of exchange, of the market, of the law of value. It therefore assumes that the proletariat turns its back on the petty recipes of revolutionary idealism.

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