Forms of Radical Subjectivity

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MARX insisted against Hegel that new ideas first arise as forms of activity, before being reflected in the mind of the theorist as an idea.[1] When a new form of activity becomes self-conscious, becoming its own theorist, then we have a social movement.

Marx saw communism as the striving of the working class[2], no longer blind, becoming self-conscious, and ultimately able to shape its own destiny. So one of his central concerns was how social movements arise under conditions of bourgeois society.

Broadly speaking, social movements, or subjects, form when people collaborate together in a project of some kind. The mode of association through which people cooperate towards the common end supplies the concrete material on which we reflect in trying to gain an understanding of the real direction of striving. Such reflections include formulation of utopian images expressing in an abstract fashion, the common end. These utopian abstractions are generally mistaken for an objectively valid better world waiting to be realised[3], the end itself being taken as the explanation for the means adopted for its achievement. The experience of struggle produces more and more concrete forms of association and allows more and more concrete forms of the socialist ideal to be formulated, guiding the struggle against injustice.

As Hegel[4] showed, there is however no absolute opposition, and no absolute priority between means and ends. In tracing the history of the forms of association through which critique of capitalism has been manifested, we trace also the history of the idea of socialism. As a social group becomes self-conscious, the form of association is not only the object, but also the subject of cognition.

The sense of injustice which stimulates people to struggle, reflects a contradiction between norms which have become rational at a given stage of development of production relations and the actuality of those relations. But this contradiction may be sensed in different ways, either in terms of new opportunities for exploitation or for new ways of struggling against exploitation.

Forms of subjectivity succeed one another throughout history, reflecting changes in the labour process itself, changes which are reflected both in forms of radical subjectivity and in modes of capital accumulation, critiquing the existing relations with equal and opposite force.

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The workers of the industrial revolution inherited from Late Mediaeval times the "company" or "society" which would gradually transmute into the trade union branch. These close-knit, local associations bound together men in a certain trade for the purposes of defending their livelihood. Bonds were ritualised and resembled in many respects those of the heretical or unorthodox religious sects of the time – the elementary archetypal voluntary group. The bond of sharing *particular* conditions of life were cemented by onerous demands for loyalty. Something akin to these societies continue in existence right up to the present day, despite ever-changing forms, and these constitute the "microstructure" of subjectivity. The microstructure always exists within a larger project which may or

may not challenge the ruling elite. Indeed, societies may take themselves to be loyal units of the larger whole, while all the time pursuing their own ends. But on their own, such societies do not constitute themselves as an oppositional subject in relation to the ruling power.

Much of what is to follow focuses on the means by which small groups of the subaltern population group themselves into projects having *universal* scope and vision, and capable of constituting a counter-power to the state.

IN 1830 France was hit by a recession, causing widespread unemployment and hunger; an invasion of Algeria organized to divert attention failed and on May 29 masses of angry workers came into the streets, and to their own surprise, took control of Paris. Their spokesmen were liberal-democrats, and a deal was done. But when the king dissolved parliament on July 26, the proletariat of Paris set up barricades again, the soldiers refused move against them, and the King was forced to abdicate. These were the first mass actions of the working class of France *in its own right*, without having been summoned to arms by any faction of the elite, and including the poor and unorganised as well as those belonging to societies. Having no leadership, the workers were as much surprised as anyone else by their success in seizing control of the capital. In a pattern that would be repeated over and again for the following 40 years, the result of these **spontaneous uprisings** was not a workers' government, but only a shift in power among the ruling elite, now tipping power from the landowners to the bourgeoisie, who were better placed to suppress the revolution.

Amongst the throng on the streets of Paris in those Glorious Days was the young law student, Auguste Blanqui. Blanqui circulated a "Call to Arms,"[5] basically a proclamation conscripting the working population of Paris into the ranks of a revolutionary army with a plan for the seizure of state power. Later, he described the ethos of the spontaneous workers' uprising in the following terms[6]:

> "The army has over the people only two great advantages: the breech-loading rifle and organisation. This last especially is immense, irresistible. Fortunately one can deprive him of this advantage, and in this case ascendancy passes to the side of the insurrection.

> "... Superior to the adversary in devotion, they are much more still in intelligence. They have the upper hand over him morally and even physically, by conviction, strength, fertility of resources, promptness of body and spirit, they have both the head and the heart. No trooper in the world is the equal of these elite men.

> "So why do they fail to vanquish? They lack the unity and coherence which, by them all contributing to the same goal, fosters all those qualities which isolation renders impotent. They lack organisation. Without it, they haven't got a chance. Organisation is victory; dispersion is death. ...

> "Each barricade has its particular group, more or less numerous, but always isolated. Whether it numbers ten or one hundred men, it does not maintain any communication with the other positions. Often there is not even a leader to direct the defence, and if there is, his influence is next to nil. The fighters can do whatever comes into their head" (Blanqui 1866).

Blanqui's response to this lack of organisation and leadership (self-consciousness) was the creation of a **secret society**, in this case the "Society of the Seasons," which assumed

the role of a general staff for a reserve army waiting only to be mobilised. The aims of the movement left no room for discussion: "... it goes without saying, that the revolution must effectively work against the tyranny of the capital, and reconstitute society on the basis of justice." (*ibid.*) Blanqui was a living icon of workers' revolution, but spent most of his life in jail!

The "Society of the Seasons" was based on the same model of the trade society, but with a universal self-consciousness whose whole reason for being was to transcend the particularism of the early modern workers society. Nowadays we call secret societies "affinity groups": small groups of like-minded people who trust one another and are able to act as autonomous subjects within a larger movement. They are essential to the life of any social movement.

Meanwhile, workers' societies and trade unions had grown directly out of the "companies" of the late mediaeval period, with a gradual change in their character corresponding to the changes in the labour process accompanying the subsumption of their labour under capital, and Combination Laws in France and Britain dating back into the 18th century testified to the militant character of these associations. Facing repression on one side and the introduction of machinery on the other, these groups were no longer defenders of privileged trade monopolies, but militant secret societies, drawing upon the practices of the religious sects of the Middle Ages. But when these organisations were thrown into battle, the results were much as described by Blanqui.

Drawing from these sources, the Chartist Movement emerged in Britain during the 1830s, with demands focussed on political democracy. The Chartist Movement was similar to the movement in France, being made up of secret societies, more or less formal and generally locally based, within a larger population sharing the same inchoate feeling of injustice. It was one of these Secret Societies, the Communist League, which recruited Marx and Engels to communism, and commissioned them to write their program in June 1847.

Engels' first draft, "The Communist Confession of Faith"[7] was constructed on the model of the catechism used by the old secret societies. Engels had a glimmer of this genre being outmoded, and drafted "The Principles of Communism,"[8] which however, still read much as declaration of faith, which a new member would recite to prove themself fit to defend and propagate the esoteric knowledge of the sect.

After working alone in Paris for a month, Marx produced the "Manifesto of the Communist Party"[9], which made a complete break with the consciousness of a communist sect. Twice the *Manifesto* declares, in the opening lines: that the "Communists should openly, in the face of the whole world, publish their views" and in the concluding lines: "disdain to conceal their views and aims." The whole tone of the *Manifesto* is new: it is the voice of a **mass movement**, proudly announcing its existence and declaring its aims to the world.

Marx also published the following month: "The Demands of the Communists in Germany,"[10] a democratic program which precisely captured the aims of the Opposition in Germany at the time, and was repeatedly reproduced in newspapers and leaflets across Europe throughout 1848 Revolution. But the *Manifesto* was not this kind of agitational document. It was a program addressed to a class coming to consciousness of itself, containing a number of ambiguous, even contradictory formulations capturing the

conundrums which the movement would have to resolve over generations to come as it fulfilled its historic mission.

Although entitled "Manifesto of the Communist Party," there was no Party in the modern sense. "Party" referred to a mass movement, and would have been understood in that way at the time. Lenin later adopted this name for the sections of the Comintern, but the "Communist Party" which spoke to the world through the *Manifesto*, was a social movement in the embryonic stage of its development. The aim of the *Manifesto* was to create, in the symbolic register, a sign under which that movement could organise and come to consciousness of itself in its entire international and historic dimensions. But it was not yet an actuality.

By 1848, the Chartists had made real economic and democratic gains in Britain and the masses were expecting to be able to organise publicly. On the Continent, communism had gained in numbers and experience, but in terms of political rights, had hardly advanced since the 1830s, and the defeat of the uprisings of 1848 would plunge Europe into a period of reaction. Nonetheless, through his work as a publicist, Marx gave definite expression to aspirations and a worldview which the workers of the previous decades had lacked.

The *Manifesto* had created a vision which was to be fulfilled only in 1864 with the formation of the First International in London. The General Council of the International was a mixture of English Trades Council organisers, many of them former Chartists, and exiled members of the various European revolutionary sects.[11] Marx was living in London, and was invited to join its General Council as the representative of Germany.

The International was a vast international workers' **mutual aid association**. Membership was by affiliation of your organisation (an exception was made for Marx), which might be a British trade union with 60,000 members, a workers' educational society or the striking workers at a Belgian factory, who joined when the International delivered support and drifted away after returning to work. The International was created on the basis of a development, at least in Britain, of the workers societies which united workers in a common trade in vast numbers, far transcending the scope of the early societies, but still limited in their vision to loyal pursuit of particularist aims.

The International was neither, or perhaps both a political party agitating around policy questions on every aspect of social life, and a trades council, organising strikes and supporting members irrespective of their political views. Its membership was always indeterminate, but undoubtedly included the entire range of political views from conservatism to anarchism! Even the politics of General Council members was often at odds with the International's stated policies.

The International was the ideal vehicle for the *formation* of a self-conscious international working class. A *mutual aid* organisation, oriented around the practical needs of the workers, hostile to divisions within the class, whilst a hotbed of ideological disputation within its own ranks. The International created the actual, tangible vehicle for class consciousness, doing in the practical register what the *Manifesto* had done in the symbolic register. The very word "solidarity" was a creation of the International (imported from the French *solidarité*) as was "socialisation," and "collectivism" and "internationalism." The International regularly held meetings in public and published letters and notices in the daily newspapers. The International was both an outrage to the bourgeoisie and a part

of the daily life of workers supporting each other across continents. When members of the International were hauled before the courts charged with membership of a secret society, they could honestly declare their innocence on the basis that the International was not secret! and were generally acquitted on this charge. The internal operations of the International were worked out earlier by the Democratic Association and the Universal League basically mimicking those of the British Trades Councils, adopted from the trade unions, in turn modelled on the late-Mediaeval companies, with highly formalised meeting procedures, delegation and majority voting.

Italian revolutionaries, Spanish republicans, English trade unionists with no political agenda at all, Polish nationalists, Blanquists and Bakuninist anarchists, millennialist sects all had their own idea of what the International was. But no longer were they isolated; radical literature of every imaginable creed and language circulated around the slums and factories in every part of Europe, all bearing the name of the International.

In 1871, with Paris surrounded by the Prussian Army, workers of Paris seized power through their municipal government, the **Paris Commune**. For two months the organised workers of Paris exercised state power. The division between executive and legislative power was abolished, all officers of the Commune at whatever grade were subject to recall by popular will at any time. The world was to witness the first ever example of a social movement in power: the most thorough-going democracy ever, before it was drowned in blood by reactionary forces acting under protection of the Prussian Army. Isolated from the rest of France, the Commune had no opportunity to 'scale up' its program beyond the limits of Paris, but their vision was for every urban centre to follow the lead of Paris by establishing itself as a self-governing, working class power supported by the people of the surrounding countryside. Marx took this as an indication of the form the workers' movement could take in exercising political power at national and international level.[12] The press accused the International of having fomented the Commune; members of the International *did* participate, but the leadership of the Commune generally came from followers of Proudhon, Bakunin and Blanqui (Blanqui himself was in prison at the time).

The Commune was an outstanding form of a formation of working class organisation which was to manifest itself later in the form of Soviets, in the First Russian Revolution of 1905, and later again in 1917, and in the Spanish Revolution and other uprisings mainly taking their inspiration from the Soviet example. At the local level, there was a blossoming of "clubs," akin to the secret societies of earlier times, and together with the various trade-based societies and other local or municipal groups, all these gathered themselves together to take effective state power over a city. But the Communards did not aspire to extend their power across France; rather they called upon the workers in other cities to follow their example.

As it happened, following the defeat of the Commune, reaction set in and the influx into the International of refugees from the Commune and from countries newly drawn into the orbit of capitalism, alongside the gentrification of some of the British delegates, created political problems which the amorphous ranks of the International could not absorb. The International fell into crisis and was for all intents and purposes dissolved. The health of the International was directly dependent on the maturity, experience and homogeneity of the component sections. It was not equipped to remedy these ills.

But once the economy and worker militancy revived in the 1880s, the way was open for a Second International to emerge. Initiated by Marx's supporters to continue the work of the First International, the Second International was based *national* Social-Democratic **political parties** organised around programs as governments-in-waiting, able to contest Parliamentary elections (when possible) as well as organise economic and political struggles of the working masses. If the workers' movement was to assume leadership of the whole people, as Marx had prefigured, then it would have to be organised on a national basis, however internationalist its policy.

The rapid success of Social Democracy soon pushed the various liberal and conservative, protectionist and free-trade parties of the bourgeoisie into the same corner, as social-democracy emerged on to the official political scene as the authentic opposition. It was an era of "*class against class*."

This sharp class division, which is implicit in the structure of Marx's *Capital*, only reflected how things were done in the industry of the time, which we would today associate with the sweatshops in enterprise zones in Asia - workers are literally locked inside the factory for long hours, paid barely enough to live, and fined for underproduction or minor infractions. The definition of productivity under these conditions was to have as few "unproductive" supervisors and overseers as possible and make the workers work as long and as hard as possible.

Naturally, under such conditions, leaders of the workers' movement, such as Karl Kautsky, anticipated the ever-increasing size of the proletariat, its ever-growing militancy and organisation, alongside the continued concentration of capital in the hands of great corporations and the eradication of petty-capital, inevitably leading to a polarisation which would place the social democrats in a position to form a government and implement the socialist program with overwhelming numbers on their side.[13]

> "We consider the breakdown of the present social system to be unavoidable, because we know that the economic evolution inevitably brings on conditions that will *compel* the exploited classes to rise against this system of private ownership. We know that this system multiplies the number and the strength of the exploited, and diminishes the number and strength of the exploiting, classes, and that it will finally lead to such unbearable conditions for the mass of the population that they will have no choice but to go down into degradation or to overthrow the system of private property" (Kautsky 1892).

When Engels was interviewed by *Le Figaro* in 1893[14], he expressed the same sentiment.

Not only would economic forces fashion the modern working class and *compel* it to make revolution, there was no need for the working class to seek alliances with other non-proletarian parties or classes.[15]

> "If there is one thing that will rob us of the confidence of all the honest elements among the masses and that will gain us the contempt of all strata of the proletariat ready and willing to fight, that will bar the road to our progress, then it is participation by Social Democracy in any bloc policy" (Kautsky 1909).

At this point, it is fair to say that social democracy was a social movement which *included* a government-in-waiting, rather than seeing the social movement as somehow

subordinated or secondary to the Party. The most successful social democratic parties, like the German SPD, were the head and heart of a vast social movement which provided education, entertainment, social security, police and legal services to their members and produced great art and literature. It would be wrong to see them as ruling over, dictating to or parasitic off the social movement, because they were the most perfect expression of the social movement. To use a Hegelian expression, the Party was the *concept* of the movement.

BUT IN 1883, the same year that Marx died, Frederick Taylor had carried out his first exercise in "scientific management" at Bethlehem Steel.[16] Taylor redefined what could be meant by "productive labour". Taylor taught that about 25% of employees in large-scale industry ought to be engaged in the "science" of work: observing, measuring, supervising and directing the work of others. Taylor turned on its head the idea universally held by capitalists at the time that only those who actually work with their hands can be counted as productive workers. Taylor enumerated seventeen different roles in a manufacturing workshop that were formerly performed by a single "gang-boss" or the "productive" workers themselves. He proposed that a specific department be established for each of these functions, employing one or a number of functional bosses. Most of these new positions were filled by promotion from the shop-floor, and participation in the new form of management brought wage increases of at least 30%, financed by productivity levels up to ten times what they had been previously. The pay of every worker would be set individually according to their level of productivity and responsibility.

The result of this revolution in real political economy was fragmentation of the working class which spelt the death knell for Kautsky's program of passivity. It wasn't a question of the anticipated disappearance of petit-bourgeois layers between the proletariat and big bourgeoisie (though this was a problem too) but the fragmentation of the working class itself into numerous, relatively distinct, strata, particularly as these new strata often shared to some degree their boss's social standpoint.

A further change was also overtaking the composition of the working class towards the end of the 19th century, this time on the international plane. The introduction of modern manufacturing plant into countries, such as Russia, where there had not already grown up an indigenous bourgeoisie and proletariat, and where the peasantry remained the majority of the people. Also, in countries like Italy where capitalism was endemic, but with large, backward agricultural sectors, leaving the working class in a permanent structural minority. So the other aspect of Kautsky's program - refusing all blocs, and relying solely on the proletariat - also became untenable. The proletariat would *not* be pushed into leading the nation to socialism by the action of economic forces alone and could *not* do so solely by relying on their own ranks.

Matters were further complicated with the rise of Fordism in the United States. The truism that the lower the wages you paid, the longer the hours your workers worked and the higher the price you charged for your product, the bigger would be your profits, was turned inside out by Ford who deliberately paid his workers more, gave them shorter hours and sold his cars for less. His highly profitable revolution transformed the world, and also transformed the character and composition of the working class. Fordism created a solid core of the organised working class which enjoyed access to cheap commodities and were not interested in political change.

These changes meant the end of *uncritical majoritarianism*. No longer could it be taken for granted that the majority constituted the oppressed masses, all sharing the same interests as against a minority of exploiters. Women, or the labouring masses of the East, for example, had presented problems of outreach, but not programmatic challenges. Now, the social basis of this outlook, and the forms of organisation that went with them, was gone.

These changes in the labour process and social conditions transformed social democracy itself. The Party of Kautsky ceased to be part of a social movement, and was institutionalised in the bourgeois democratic government of Germany, a fate which had already befallen many leaders of the First International in Britain, and would characterise later 20th century Social Democracy generally.

The Russian Social Democratic Labour Party differed somewhat from its partners, as a result of working under conditions of illegality, within a young working class surrounded by a mass of peasantry. But when, on the eve of the Revolution, Lenin proclaimed the "April Theses,"[17] we see a classical social democratic vision, a direct expression of the ideals which inspired the Paris Commune. But unlike the Paris Commune, the Soviet Republic was not overthrown after two months. But right or wrong, from fairly early on, it ceased to be a social movement as its leaders took up administrative positions in the **Soviet Government**. The Soviet Government rested on the Soviets, or workers' councils, and the echoes of them in Soldiers Soviets and Peasant Soviets. A Supreme Soviet had been set up in the wake of the February 1917 Revolution, and despite being in a minority in the Soviets, the Bolsheviks (majority section of the RSDLP) agitated for the Soviets to form a government and overthrow the Provisional Government of Kerensky. Thanks chiefly to the leadership of the Bolsheviks, this came to pass.

Meanwhile, alongside the Soviets there remained also the trade unions uniting workers in a given trade, and the Workers Committees uniting all the trades in a workplace. The Soviets transcended the scope of both these forms, more closely resembling the Commune, because they extended beyond the factory gates and engaged in social and political activity beyond the extent of workplace issues.

The socialist ideal had been awoken in a proletariat reduced to a common low level and disciplined in the factory system, confident that capitalism would only swell the ranks of the exploited, confident that only solidarity could secure a better future. But the world had changed. We will mention three Marxists who between them identified three important changes in the form of subjectivity being imposed on the communist movement, as a result of these changes in the labour process.

Lenin had a somewhat "algebraic" formula, throughout the years leading up to the October 1917 Revolution, for the relationship between the future dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry, loosely talking about a "the revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry,"[18] or "an alliance between the workers and the working and exploited peasants"[19] or but once the Revolution happened, he described it as a "dictatorship of the proletariat which *led* the peasantry behind it."[20] By expropriating the landlords, bearing the greatest sacrifices in the Civil War and providing industrial products which the peasants needed, the workers made it worthwhile for the peasantry to support the Revolution. That is, Lenin proposed that the revolution be based on a *class alliance* in which one class played the leading role due to its unique position in being able to

resolve the problems of the entire nation. This was in line with the general formula which Marx had outlined as early as 1844[21] but posed in conditions not anticipated by Marx.

Rosa Luxemburg was the first to warn of Kautsky's error in waiting for economic forces to prepare the conditions for socialism. Proletarian self-consciousness was not fully formed in the economic or sectoral struggle, but required political-ideological *formation* and that this had to be a specific element of the socialist programme. Luxemburg shared Kautsky's conviction that the working class would make the revolution alone, but challenged Lenin's conception of a party able to represent and *direct* the class struggle on its behalf, constantly emphasising the self-organising capacity of the working class on the one hand and political and ideological direction of the social democratic party on the other.[22]

> "... the task of social democracy does not consist in the technical preparation and direction of mass strikes, but, first and foremost, in the *political leadership* of the whole movement.
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> "The social democrats are the most enlightened, most class-conscious vanguard of the proletariat. They cannot and dare not wait, in a fatalist fashion, with folded arms for the advent of the 'revolutionary situation', to wait for that which in every spontaneous peoples' movement, falls from the clouds. On the contrary, they must now, as always, hasten the development of things and endeavour to accelerate events." (Luxemburg 1906)

Antonio Gramsci was the first to theorise the new political landscape, adapting the concept of *hegemony* to grasp the way in which politics was structured in this epoch. Like Luxemburg, Gramsci rejected Kautsky's politics of class *representation* for a politics of *class formation*. Gramsci welcomed the Russian Revolution in 1917 as a break from the determinist conception of history which meant waiting for the pre-conditions for socialism to mature within the framework of capitalism. At the same time Gramsci criticised Luxemburg for underestimating the depth of the defences of bourgeois society, likening it to the trenches of contemporary warfare, against which a frontal assault was foolhardy. Engels had made this same point in the above-mentioned 1893 interview.

In his understanding of the concept of *hegemony*, Gramsci recognised that the entry of the broad masses into political life of the nation required specifically political and ideological struggle to win them over and integrate them. Specific mechanisms were required to extend and concretise the class alliances first elaborated in Lenin's policy of a class alliance between the working class and the peasantry.

> "The proletariat can become the leading and the dominant class to the extent that it succeeds in creating a system of class alliances which allows it to mobilize the majority of the working population against capitalism and the bourgeois state. ...
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> "The metalworker, the joiner, the building-worker, etc., must not only think as proletarians, and no longer as metal-worker, joiner, building-worker, etc.; they must also take a further step. They must think as workers who are members of a class which aims to lead the peasants and intellectuals. Of a class which can win and build socialism only if it is aided and followed by the great majority of these social strata. If this is not achieved, the proletariat does not become the leading class; and these strata (which in Italy rep-

resent the majority of the population), remaining under bourgeois leadership, enable the State to resist the proletarian assault and wear it down."[23] (Gramsci 1926)

The concept of hegemony is essentially as proposed by Lenin and indeed just what it meant in ancient Greece: one class plays the role of hegemon, wielding overall power, in exchange for the absolute support of other powers, and achieves this by delivering to the other powers a share of the proceeds of power. What Gramsci proposed was a *counter-hegemony* led by a proletariat which addressed itself to the problems of sections of the population currently in the camp of the bourgeoisie.

Thus the 1930s saw the prominence of a new type of social movement, corresponding to a new definition of 'we' and a new mode of association, the **Front**. The Front took for granted that one or two or more political parties were actively promoting and directing the activity of the social movement, and competing for allegiance, but cooperating on the basis of agreements made *between the party leaders*.

There were competing concepts of the Front, but let us take Trotsky's definition of the "United Front" which is based on a *public* agreement between the leaders[24]:

> "No common platform with the Social Democracy, or with the leaders of the German trade unions, no common publications, banners, placards! *March separately, but strike together!* Agree only how to strike, whom to strike, and when to strike! Such an agreement can be concluded even with the devil himself, with his grandmother, and even with Noske and Grezesinsky. On one condition, not to bind one's hands." (Trotsky, 1931)

But this ideal was very rarely achieved. By contrast, the Comintern's later Popular Front policy was aimed at uniting everyone to the right of the Communist Party but to the Left of Fascism, based on a *secret* pact between the leaders. Trotsky criticised this policy in the following terms[25]:

> "The political alliance between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, whose interests on basic questions in the present epoch diverge at an angle of 180 degrees, as a general rule is capable only of paralyzing the revolutionary force of the proletariat." (*Trotsky*, 1938)

As a result of anti-communist repression, it later became common practice for the Party to submerge its identity altogether in the Front. The Front was then not so much a means for broadening the social movement but of gathering a periphery around the Party. The Front was a failed attempt to respond to the problems of social movements following the changes that had taken place in the labour process and the resulting social composition of the working masses, a failure which flowed directly from the degeneration of the Soviet Union which spread to every country through its impact on the parties of the Comintern.

A SECOND PHASE of development of social movements began with the Post World War Two settlement. The USSR had suffered immeasurably, but the Red Army was in occupation of half of Europe and pro-Moscow partisan groups threatening revolution in other countries. The US on the other hand had overwhelming military, industrial and financial power, but the prospect of the troops coming home posed real problems and Western Europe was on the brink. Both sides were anxious for a deal. Roosevelt and Stalin divided up the world between them and Marshall Aid money and the Bretton Woods

arrangements were used to underwrite Keynesian policies of public enterprise, low unemployment and comprehensive state Welfare. This settlement had the effect of enlisting the Communist Parties in the cause of peace, of destroying working class mutualism by mediating welfare through the state, institutionalising the social democratic parties as part of the system and broadly speaking satisfying the most pressing demands of the organised working class in Europe and America. Although the process was far from seamless, the result was a demobilisation of the workers movement. This was an historic compromise.

But what took place next was *the revolt of those excluded* from this compromise: the people of the former colonies, African Americans and women.

The post-war conjunction put the USSR in the leadership of many national liberation movements striving for modernisation and national self-determination. National "Popular Fronts" embracing all those who were being excluded from the spoils of empire, whole peoples, *all the classes* of a given nation, together, albeit led by the *international* party of the proletariat. As the Red Army had occupied Eastern Europe, they set up bogus parties to represent the interests of non-proletarian classes, and then formed "Popular Front" governments with them, in line with doctrine. But now they no longer bothered with the charade. These national liberation movements prefigured the "new" social movements - cross-class, popular movements in pursuit of an *idea*, an idea of self-determination and recognition. The leadership were mostly trained in Moscow, but these movements were not "puppets" and as soon as the opportunity arose, **National Liberation Fronts** pursued the interests of their own national base, not necessarily the foreign policy priorities of Moscow.

In China, efforts towards a united National Front to fight the Japanese had failed, but after the war, national liberation took the form of a war against the Kuo Min Tang in which the Chinese Communist Party, whose cadre were drawn from the urban intelligentsia and working class, led a peasant army. Elsewhere the Communist Party played the "leading role" in National Liberation Fronts, with much the same composition. In some countries however, such as Indonesia, the Communist Party did *not initially* play this role, but the basic social formation was the same, that of a "Front" uniting all social classes in pursuit of national liberation. Especially after the Cuban Revolution in 1959, the military leadership in the countryside played the dominant role, whatever its class affiliation. India was a prophetic exception, gaining its independence without a Party-led Front.

The Front is a hybrid formation, the effort to encompass the idea of divergent aspirations within a Party-like framework, but the Front also served to *wall off* the leadership from the movement, rather than to embrace it. Government is a different task from leading a social movement, which involves balancing the interests of conflicting and even hostile forces; the task of leadership towards a shared end turns into the task of administering compromise arrangements. Almost invariably, once the Party or Front is institutionalised as the government, the social movement is demobilised.

These movements had a powerful influence in the West, especially in the US, witnessing a revolution in its former colony a mere 150 km from the Florida Keys. The immortal words of Martin Luther King cannot be surpassed in expressing the impact of this movement on Blacks in the US:

> "We know through painful experience that freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed ... We have waited for more than 300 years for our constitutional and God-given rights. The nations of Asia and Africa are moving with jet-like speed toward gaining political independence, but we still creep at horse-and-buggy pace towards gaining a cup of coffee at a lunch counter. Perhaps it is easy for those who have never felt the stinging darts of segregation to say, 'Wait'. But when you have seen vicious mobs lynch your mothers and fathers at will and drown your sisters and brothers at whim; when you have seen hate-filled policemen curse, kick and even kill your black brothers and sisters; when you see the vast majority of your twenty million Negro brothers smothering in an airtight cage of poverty in the midst of an affluent society; when you suddenly find your tongue twisted and your speech stammering as you seek to explain to your six-year-old daughter why she can't go to the public amusement park ... There comes a time when the cup of endurance runs over, and men are no longer willing to be plunged into the abyss of despair ...

> "Oppressed people cannot remain oppressed forever. The yearning for freedom eventually manifests itself and that is what has happened to the American Negro. Something within has reminded him of his birthright and freedom, and something without has reminded him that it can be gained. Consciously or unconsciously, he has been caught up by the *Zeitgeist*, and with his black brothers of Africa and his brown and yellow brothers of the Asia, South America and Caribbean, the United States Negro is moving with a sense of great urgency toward the promised land of racial justice." (King 1963)[26]

US Blacks were responding to many of the same factors which had fuelled the National Liberation Movements, but also, the National Liberation Movements were a direct inspiration. Tactically, the **Civil Rights Movement** emulated Gandhi. The leadership of the Civil Rights Movement was similar to a Front but differed in important respects: the leadership had no aspirations to government and were an integral *part* of the mass movement.

Thousands of young Americans, white students, were politicized in the Civil Rights struggle, and carried this over to the **Student Protest, Peace** and **Anti-Nuclear** and **Anti-War Movements**, with open and fluid, informal organisational structures. But the impact of the Civil Rights Movement on *women* was succinctly expressed by Kate Millett:

> "The study of racism has convinced us that a truly political state of affairs operates between the races to perpetuate a series of oppressive circumstances. The subordinated group has inadequate redress through existing political institutions, and is deterred thereby from organising into conventional political struggle and opposition.

> "Quite in the same manner, a disinterested examination of our system of sexual relationship must point out that the situation between the sexes now, and throughout history, is a case of that phenomenon .... Through this system a most ingenious form of 'interior colonisation' has been achieved. It

is one which tends moreover to be sturdier than any form of segregation, and more rigorous than class stratification, more uniform, certainly more enduring. However muted its present appearance may be, sexual dominion obtains nevertheless as perhaps the most pervasive ideology of our culture and provides its most fundamental concept of power." (Millett 1969)[27]

The failure of the Left to respond to these questions when they were raised by women led to a rupture. Almost all the founders of the **Women's Liberation Movement** had been Marxists; the break did not set up a new party, but a social movement which was outside the control of any political party. The political parties competed with one another to influence it and to gain sustenance from it. And having no aspirations to government, the women's movement did not generate political parties. The women's movement was motivated by the same sense of justice denied that had motivated male and female workers in the 19th century, but an important transformation had been effected in the conception of "we," the form of identity out of which the collective is fashioned.

From the workers districts in 1830 up to the national liberation struggles, the agent was a whole community of oppressed people; "we" were the overwhelming majority, and we lived and worked together in common conditions of oppression. The enemy was the privileged elite who lived in leafy suburbs across town, perhaps supported by foreign powers.

US Blacks rightly saw that they were in the same position: they suffered from "interior colonisation," to use Kate Millett's phrase. Their circumstances were such however that the transformation of society that was needed for emancipation was the removal of an unwarranted and unfair *discrimination*. US Blacks shared community, but their community was a construct of US racism; they were a minority and their aims was not government but normalisation. There was a huge overlap with labour movement issues, because African Americans were a core section of the organised working class in America.

Women are 51% of the population, evenly spread across all classes. Women are not a minority, but they were a minority in the sense of being left out. The women's movement created a sense of camaraderie amongst women who shared only common experiences of injustice and their femininity. And it drew the line between exploiter and exploited right through communities and even through the intimate relations between men and women.

The women's movement was in every sense a *mass movement*, but identification with the movement meant asserting an identity based on a personal attribute, femininity. Gender discrimination is a vestige of a long-gone natural division of labour which was now an anomaly. Reflecting the abstract character of the reality of modern life, such a form of identity amounts to a fragmentation of the self into inessential attributes beneath which is a nobody. This form of identity undermines uncritical majoritarianism because emancipation entails the recognition of *difference*, whereas majoritarianism hinges on an uncritical assertion of commonality, as against a minority of exploiters or deserters.

The powerful moral force attached to being part of the majority had been inverted. The idea that the interests of the majority were always catered for, and that the natural claimants to injustice were the minority was hitherto inconceivable. However, the post World War Two settlement was seen to deal with the grievances of the majority, and passed over other groups who now stepped forward and demanded justice. No longer would it be possible to put a question to the vote and determine the majority will. This quintessen-

tially *emancipatory* practice was now the quintessentially *oppressive* practice, the purest expression of oppression, oppression of the minority by the majority.

The trajectory set in motion by, in a sense, counter-claims to feminism, took us from the sense of female identity and community to minority rights and the politics of difference. And once an individual counts themselves as part of something according to the possession of an admittedly inessential attribute, then the logic of **Identity Politics** is in place. On the one hand, an individual is subjected to forms of discrimination according to a socially constructed stigma based on an inessential attribute, and on the other hand, granted recognition and inclusion by virtue of this or that attribute. There is no end to the inessential attributes of a person which can be the basis of a claim for justice and recognition. Once the Women's Liberation Movement passed its first phase of growth, black women, working class women, gay women, women in the Third World, etc., raised the accusation that the women's movement itself was oppressively subsuming them into a majoritarian movement which overlooked their particular interests as being this or that kind of women. Every new claim for recognition of difference divided the movement at the same time as it expanded the domain of mutual tolerance and respect.

The perception of identity by attributes leads to a fragmented world view: social classes are reduced to attributes (wealth, occupation, etc.), the union movement is seen as the identity claims of male blue-collar employees.

This world view is also expressed in the management practices of the Toyota-ist corporate restructures of the 1990s and beyond: the corporation is broken down into its smallest components, each managed by teams of shopfloor employees, meeting the demands of an exhaustively researched market, every niche individually catered for with the emphasis everywhere on difference, distinctiveness, uniqueness, recoiling in horror from Fordist conformity.

Since the source of the oppressive relation was a socially constructed stigma, there was no "general stumbling block" (*allgemeinen Anstoßes*)[28], power and oppression was everywhere in everyday life:

> "The analysis made in terms of power must not assume that the sovereignty of the state, the form of the law, or the overall unity of a domination are given at the outset; rather, these are only the terminal forms power takes ... power must be understood in the first instance as the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organisation. ... Power relations are both intentional and non-subjective. There is no power that is exercised without a series of aims and objectives. But this does not mean that it results from the choice or decision of an individual subject. ... Where there is power, there is resistance and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance s never in a position of exteriority in relation to power. ... the strictly relational character of power relationships ... resistance depends upon a multiplicity of points of resistance ... present everywhere in the power network. Hence there is no locus of great Refusal, no soul of revolt, source of all rebellions, or pure law of the revolutionary. Instead there is a plurality of resistances"[29] (Foucault 1976).

This is insightful. But with this view of power, combined with the unlimited possibilities for the constitution of identity, identity politics gradually *negated* itself and effected a more or less complete demobilisation of the social movements by the 1990s. The only

kinds of organising which could cope with this level of disintegration were subscription-based professional lobby groups and internet-based chat groups.

The politics of difference eventually led to the politics of indifference.

None of this negates the fact that Identity Politics made changes in the social understanding of power, identity and individual freedom, inscribed in law and custom, without which human emancipation would be impossible. That it also generated serious problems for collective action is a fact, but the gains of identity politics, and those of the labour movement, have to be mutually sublated and preserved.

At the very end of the millennium, the protests at Seattle saw the emergence of a new kind of social movement which began to point to a way out of the mess: **Alliance Politics**.

In Alliance politics, a number of groups, constituted in essentially disparate ways according to employment, identity, political persuasion or whatever, come together to carry out a single, sharply delineated action, usually against a symbolic target. Trotsky's maxim quoted above is the rule: "No common publications, banners, placards! *March separately, but strike together!* Agree only how to strike, whom to strike, and when to strike!" Every decision is agreed on a strictly consensus basis between the participating groups. Consensus decision-making is obligatory, because the alliance has nothing to offer its participating groups except each other, so a group which doesn't agree will simply withdraw. The scope of matters to be decided jointly is strictly limited to the technical details necessary to execute the action. There is absolutely no common vision and no on-going program. Everyone is against the IMF (or whatever) for different reasons and their interest is furthered by the action for different reasons.

There are obvious limitations on a social movement which lacks any common ideal, but like the International Workingmen's Association, what it does have is a shared ethic of decision-making, mutual aid, respect for the opinions of others and a few "general stumbling blocks."

A *shared practical ideal* goes a long way in substituting for an abstract image of an imagined better world in the future.

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I HAVE presented this narrative as if it were a single thread so that the logical connection between each successive form of subjectivity can be grasped, the way each form of subjectivity at a certain point runs into internal contradictions which it cannot overcome. A new form of subjectivity comes along, sooner or later, which is able to overcome the difficulty which brought down the previous form of subjectivity, while in some way carrying forward the project of the previous form. But in reading this narrative, several things need to be kept in mind.

The process is constantly re-started and recapitulated as new populations are drawn into modernity, or new issues arise or in the event of a movement being thrown back. As each form of subjectivity is transcended, it is sublated and retained within the dominant mode. Thus above narrative represents an *eternal present* (to use Hegel's phrase[30]). The *anatomy* of the current configuration of social movements manifests the subsumption of all the forms of radical subjectivity characterising this history, one into another. Alliances

are made up of communities, secret societies ("affinity groups"), mutual aid associations and trade unions, political parties, Fronts, "new" social movements and participants in identity politics. Most movements now take action to *create* affinity groups where they do not already exist, they organise projects for people to engage in mutual aid and develop concrete bonds. Parties actively seek to engage opposing parties in joint ventures. All these forms of subjectivity interact and transform one into another in the life of the various alliances concatenated together in the political life of modernity, alongside the professional lobby groups, parliamentary parties and spin doctors of the establishment.

Contemporary social movements must square the circle, bringing into harmony majority rule and minority rights. If and when they do so on a mass scale, they will have reached their goal: the formation of a counter-hegemony for social justice.

Andy Blunden.

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