

Gilles Dauvé

The Story of Our Origins

1. From the German Left to Socialisme ou Barbarie

A communist movement, universal in nature, which had set out to conquer the world in capitalism's footsteps, had been led into not taking the offensive except in the centre of Europe. Now it was necessary for it to engage in drawing up an assessment, beginning with itself and with the contradictions of the counter-revolution.

The following revolutionary generation had the advantage of being able to cast a clearer critical gaze on this period, but were to run into an additional difficulty over being able to go back to the source of theories, echoes of which had ended up becoming louder than their initial sound.

The outbreak of the war in 1914 testified to the monstrous bankruptcy of the bourgeois world and the workers' movement. However, after bourgeois humanism and wage-labour reformism had collapsed side by side in the mud of the trenches, both of them acted as if this catastrophe hadn't rejected the basis upon which they had prospered and driven millions of beings into the abyss. Everybody applied themselves to recreating the same pre-1914 situation, but better, more

modern and more democratic, whereas the whole of capitalist civilization had proved its failure, confirming the apocalyptic forecasts of the revolutionaries and the warnings of the more lucid bourgeois.

We are the last [of the republican mystique]. Nearly the apras-derniers. Immediately after us begins another age, another world, the world of those who no longer believe in anything, or who have any pride and glory in it.
(Péguy, *Our youth*)

And, to still further increase the confusion, under a radical mask Russia, the Communist International and the Communist Parties were also supporting the reconstitution of a labour movement and a renovated democracy, which didn't take long before resembling their predecessors.

As distinct from those who vainly relied on activism, the communist left understood the depth of the counter-revolution and drew out its consequences. It affirmed itself as resistance to capital and, because of this, it proved incapable of leaving its entrenchment's in order to imagine the future outlines of a revolution different from those which had occurred after 1917, beginning with the new situation but above all with the invariance of the nature of the communist movement.

The ultra-left was born and grew in opposition to Social-Democracy and Leninism -- which had become Stalinism. Against them it affirmed the revolutionary spontaneity of the proletariat. The German communist left (in fact German-Dutch), and its derivatives, maintained that the only human solution lay in proletarians' own activity, without it being necessary to educate or to organize them; that when they acted by and for themselves the seeds of radically different social relations were present in workers actions; that the experience of taking their struggles into their own hands prepared them to take the whole of society into their hands when the revolution became possible; that proletarians today must refuse to allow themselves to be dispossessed of even the most negligible actions by the trade union and party bureaucracies, in order tomorrow to prevent any so-called workers' state from managing production in their place and instituting state capitalism, as the Russian revolution had done. Finally it affirmed that trade unions and parties had become elements of capitalism.

Before being reduced to the status of tiny groups, the German Left had been the most advanced (and numerous) component of the movement from 1917 to 1921. Later, whatever its weaknesses, it remained the only current to defend the exploited in all circumstances

and without concessions. In the same way, it refused to support any war, whether anti-fascist (unlike the Trotskyists and a great number of anarchists) or national (unlike the bordigists), with the exception of the Spanish War, during which, following in the footsteps of anarchism, it had gone so far as to support the CNT.

Affirming within its theory the autonomy of the proletariat against state intervention, it denounced everything that deprived the working class of its capacity for initiative: parliamentarianism, syndicalism, anti-fascist or national fronts, such as the French Resistance to German occupation, and any apparatus tending to constitute itself into a party above the working class.

The emancipation of proletarians will be the work of proletarians themselves, says the Manifesto. But what sort of emancipation? For the German Left communism was confused with workers' management. It did not see that autonomy must be exercised in all fields and not merely in production, that it is only by eradicating market exchange from all social relations, from everything which nourishes life, that proletarians will retain mastery of their revolution. To reorganise production once more, is to give birth to a new administrative apparatus. Anyone who puts management forward condemns themselves to creating a managerial apparatus.

The management of our lives by bureaucrats is only one facet of our dispossession of ourselves. This alienation, the fact that our life is decided by others than ourselves, is not merely an administrative reality which another form of management could change. The monopolization of decisions by a privileged layer of decision makers is an effect of the social relations of the market and wage labour. In pre-capitalist societies, the self-employed craftsman also saw that his activity escaped him as it entered into the price mechanism. Little by little the logic of commerce tore away any choice from his actions. However there was no *bureaucrat* to dictate his conduct. Money and wage-labour already contain within themselves the possibility and the necessity of dispossession. There is only a difference in degree between the dispossession of the craftsman and that of the unskilled worker in BMW. Admittedly the difference is not slight, but in both cases their ... *work depends on causes set apart from them...* (Dézamy, Code de la communauté, 1842). As for managers, they embody this alienation. It is thus no more a matter of replacing them with workers' councils, than it is of replacing the bourgeoisie with bureaucrats from the trade unions and parties -- the result would resemble the Russian experience after 1917.

Caught in pincers between the SPD and the CIO -- the two forms of the counter-revolution born out of workers' struggles -- the German Left had to oppose itself to both of them. But it had difficulty in seeing that the IWW would have disappeared or become a reformist organisation. As an autonomous workers' organisation, the IWW retrospectively displayed all the virtues. But it is not enough for a structure to be workerist and anti-bureaucratic for it to be revolutionary. That depends on what it does. If it takes part in trade union activities it becomes what the trade unions are. Thus the German Left was also mistaken about the nature of the CNT. Nevertheless, overall it showed that it's too superficial to only take account of the trade unions, and that it is the reformist activity of workers themselves which maintains organised, openly counter-revolutionary, reformism.

The German Left understood that the bourgeois world before 1914 had given way to the capitalist world. It could recognise capital everywhere it existed, including the USSR, whereas it was not until 1945 that Bordiga put things so clearly. Council communism ended up by confining itself in councilism, but, immediately after the 1939-45 war, it saw the necessity of leaving behind the theoretical framework defined between the wars. In

1946 Pannekoek understood that the proletariat had undergone *a failure linked with aims which were too limited, and that the real struggle for emancipation hasn't started yet*. The purest expression of the revolutionary proletariat after 1917, the German Left also reproduced its limitations, which on its own it could not pass beyond.

Inheriting the mantle of the ultra-left after the war, the magazine 'Socialisme ou Barbarie' appeared in France between 1949 and 1965. Organisationally, the group which constituted itself around the journal was not descended from the German Left but from Trotskyism, before soon being joined by defectors from the Italian Left. Even if it never claimed this filial relation itself, SouB none the less belonged to councilism, which it had come to as a result of a reflection on bureaucracy, arising from a rejection of the Trotskyist positions on the USSR.

One of SouB's merits was that it looked for *the answer* in the proletariat. Without populism or any pretence of having rediscovered some kind of *workers' values*, it understood that workers' speech was indeed a condition of the communist movement. Thus it supported forms of expression such as Tribune Ouvriere, published by Renault workers. In this way it placed itself within the wider

movement which would culminate in May 68 and give birth to preliminary sketches of autonomous organisation such as Inter-Enterprises. That a minority of workers' come together and take up speech is truly a condition of communism.

Unions and workers' parties offer their services to wage workers in exchange for recognition and support, including financial support. Extreme-left groups pretend to offer the waged a better defence of their interests than the union and party bureaucrats who they consider to be too moderate. In exchange they demand even less: approval, however half-hearted, for their programme. Interventionists or libertarians, all see the same solution to the continuity between proletariat and communism -- they conceive the content of communism as being outside the proletariat. Not seeing the intrinsic relation between proletariat and revolution -- except that it is the former which makes the latter -- they are obliged to introduce a programme.

SouB showed that workers' actions contained more than a struggle against exploitation and that it carried within it the germ of new relations. But it only saw this in self-organisation, not in proletarian practise -- the monstrous

avatar of human life produced by capital which, in erupting, could engender another world.

Providing that one doesn't become entangled in questions of organising and managing work, the observation of factory life makes it possible to illuminate the communist direction of proletarian struggle. Thus, the testimony of the American worker Ria Stone published in the early editions of the magazine went further than the theorising on the content of socialism done later on by Chaulieu (but publication of Stone's text wouldn't have been possible without Chaulieu's 'error').

SouB broke with workerism. Lefort's *The Proletarian Experience* is undoubtedly the most profound text published by SouB. But he indicates the group's limits and in so doing announced its impasse. In effect he continued to search for a mediation between the misery of the workers' condition and their open revolt against capital. However, it is within itself that the proletariat finds the elements of its revolt and the content of the revolution, not in any organisation posed as a precondition and which would either bring it consciousness or offer it a base for regroupment. Lefort saw the revolutionary mechanism in proletarians themselves, but in their organisation rather than in their contradictory nature.

So, he too ended up by reducing the content of socialism to workers' management.

Moreover, instead of the testimony of workers' which Lefort wanted, SouB threw itself into workers' sociology, ending up by making everything turn on the distinction between direction and execution. In this it differentiated itself from Information et Correspondence Ouvrieres (ICO) - which Lefort rejoined - a workerist and councilist bulletin and group, a more immediate expression of workers' autonomy, and from the Groupe de Liaison pour l'Action des Travailleurs (GLAT) equally workerist, but concerned with publishing minutely detailed analyses of capitalism's evolution. Each in its own way, ICO and GLAT would be present at the university centre at Censier, occupied by revolutionaries in May 68.

The Hungarian Revolution gave a new vigour to SouB, while reinforcing its councilism. In effect, they saw in it the confirmation of their theses at a time when the *council* form was coming to prove that it was capable of acting in a manner totally contrary to councilism, for example in giving support to a stalinist liberal. Before long, SouB abandoned its old Marxist reference points and threw itself into an intellectual wandering which was to end in 1965. This evolution brought about the

departure of the *Marxists* who founded Pouvoir Ouvrier (PO) in 1963. And it was one of PO's member's, Pierre Guillaume, who went on to found the bookshop la Vieille Taupe two years later, which later on we will see the role of.

Like the Situationist International, but in a different way, SouB *clung* to the modernisation of Western society. Its theses on bureaucratic capitalism and on bureaucratic society, born simultaneously from the spectre of a seizure of power by the Stalinists and from the overturning of French society which had been orchestrated by the State, expressed the crisis which gnawed into the dominant industrial model, particularly in France. By propagating slogans like *Workers' Power, Peasants' Power, Students' Power* (PSU tract in June 1968), by making *autonomous and democratic management* into the number one objective, the May 68 movement popularised themes of SouB's, while at the same time demonstrating the limits both of the group and of the entire movement.

In 1969 the journal *Invariance* concluded that: '*Socialisme ou Barbarie*' wasn't an accident. It clearly expressed a position diffused on a world scale: the interpretation of the absence of the proletariat and the

rise of the new middle classes...Socialisme ou Barberie fulfilled its role of surpassing the sects because it opened into the immediate, into the present, severing any attachment to the past... (Series I, no. 6. p29)

2. The Italian Left and Bordiga

Following the example of the other currents of the communist left, that known for simplicity as the Italian Left showed that the proletarian was more than just a producer who fights to end his poverty (the thesis of the left) or to end his exploitation (the thesis of leftism). It could recognise in Marx's work *a description of the character of communist society* (Bordiga). It affirmed the anti-market and anti-wage content of the revolution. And it got back in touch with utopia.

We are the only ones to base our action on the future.

Bordiga made an implicit critique of the division between science and utopia that Engels had established in the *Anti-Dühring*, which he said, rested on *a false basis*. He defined revolutionaries as *explorers of the future*. For him, utopia was not prediction but the perspective of the future. He restored to the revolution its human dimension and even approached what, twenty years later, would be called ecology. But he conceived of the

revolution as the application of a programme by *the party*, not as a dynamic uniting men as they communise the world.

However, one can foresee that a movement of communisation, that destroys the State, undermines the social base of the enemy, and spreads under the effect of the irresistible appeal arousing the birth of new social relations between men, will bond together the revolutionary camp far better than any power which, while waiting to conquer the world before communising it, would behave no differently than... a State. A series of basic measures and backlashes will permit an enormous saving of material means, and will multiply resourcefulness tenfold. Communism will bring about the abandonment of many sorts of production, which result from *economies of scale* imposed by the needs of profitability. Valorisation, which imposes concentration, pushes capitalism towards gigantism, (megalopolises, a bulimia of energy) and obliges it to disregard all non-profitable forces of production. Communism by contrast will be able to decentralise, to use local resources, and not because humanity centralised in a party will have decided on this, but because the needs which arise from people's activity will impel them to live differently on this

earth. Then the conflict of *space against concrete* which Bordiga spoke about will cease.

The Italian left, especially after 1945, put forward communism without grasping it as a movement of human activity with the tendency to liberate itself. After 1917, the proletariat had struggled without attacking the foundations of society, and as a result radical groups had the greatest difficulty in intellectually grasping the foundations of social life and hence of the revolution.

Moreover, Bordiga did not draw out all the implications of his vision of communism. Instead of defining the *dictatorship of the proletariat* beginning from communisation, he confined it to a political dictatorship, which from the start made it a question of power. The German left had had the intuition that communism dwells in the nature of being proletarian, without grasping the true nature of communism. By contrast the Italian left understood the nature of communism but deprived the proletariat of a role in implementing it in order to entrust this to a party, guardian of principle, charged with imposing it by force.

Certainly, Bordiga made a justifiably strong critique of democracy. People often reproached democracy for

separating proletarians, who were united in action, through the vote, and instead they recommended *true democracy* or *workers democracy*, where decisions would be taken by everyone in general assemblies, etc. However Bordiga showed that democracy brings about this separation in decision making because it separates out the moment of decision itself. To make believe that one can suspend everything for a privileged moment in order to know what one will decide and who will carry it out, and to create for this purpose a process of deliberation and decision making: here is the democratic illusion! Human activity is only driven to isolate the moment of decision making if this activity is itself contradictory, if it is already traversed by conflicts and if antagonistic powers are already established. The structure for the encounter of different opinions is nothing but a facade masking the real decision, imposed by the prior play of forces.

Democracy establishes a break in time, makes it as if one were setting out again from scratch. One could apply to the democratic ritual the analysis which Mircea Eliade makes of religion, where periodically one replays the passage from chaos to order, placing oneself out of time for a brief instant as if everything had again become possible. Democracy has been erected in principle in

societies where the masters have to meet to share out power by complying with the rules of a game, even if it means resorting to dictatorship (a permissible form of government in ancient Greece) as soon as play is obstructed.

While demonstrating very well that the democratic principle is alien to the bases of revolutionary action and of human life, Bordiga was incapable of imagining the interaction of the subversive activities of proletarians, and he could conceive no other solution than dictatorship (of the party). The German left had fallen into the democratic error through fetishism of the workers councils. Having failed to seize the subversive capacities of the proletariat and their ability to centralise their actions, the Italian left ran up against the false alternative which it had itself denounced, and pronounced itself in favour of dictatorship, even of implementing a monolithic discipline when necessary.

Deeply contradictory, Bordiga implicitly criticised Lenin, social democracy and marxism -- but only halfway. Returning to Lenin's theses he went so far as to write a long eulogy to *Left Wing Communism - an infantile disorder*, which misled a large part of the generation of revolutionaries that appeared after 1968, who would only see bordigism as a variant of leninism.

For the German left the unitary rank and file organisations of the workers represented the class. For the Italian left unions represented the class. The fact that workers found themselves in unions seemed more important than what they did there. *The union even when it is corrupted, is always a workers centre* (Bordiga 1921). From this point of view the union always contained the potential for revolutionary action. In both cases, the form -- the organisation of workers -- was put before its content -- the function of this organisation. Bordiga's fundamental error was to maintain the division between politics and the economy inherited from the Second International, and which the Third International did not call into question. The revolutionary offensive of 1917-21 had rejected this separation in practise but it had not gone far enough to impose it within the thought of the whole of the communist left.

Proletarian consciousness can reappear insofar as the partial economic struggles develop themselves until they reach the higher political phase which poses the question of power (Communisme, No. 1, april 1937).

No. It is necessary that the seeds of a social critique already exists, as much in the initial phases of a movement as in the later, (how to discover it, to help it

mature, everything depends on this...), a critique which calls into question both economy and politics through a refusal of realism (of demands compatible with the life of the business enterprise), and of mediation (sharing power, placing any confidence in organisations between labour and capital).

Bordiga's weakness arose from his inability to comprehend that communism emerges from the needs and practises created by the concrete condition of the proletariat. Bordiga posed the question of the TRANSITION from workers economic struggles to politics. He inadequately distinguished the revolutionary process. He knew that communism is not built, that the revolution is satisfied to leap over the obstacles to a life for which most of the elements already exist *in the entrails* (Marx) of capitalism. But for him the revolution remained the action of a political power which modified the economy. He did not see that communisation and the struggle against the State are necessarily simultaneous. Speculation over the different forms of organisation (council, party, workers mass organisations) and the separation in theory between politics and economy testified that the proletariat, which before 1914 had lost the sense of its unity, had hardly recovered it after 1917.

The organisation came to fill the vacuum left by the absence of revolutionary action by proletarians. When social contradictions don't bring about a subversive movement, a theoretical master-key is sought. Bordiga found it in the economic movement of the workers, which was supposed to generate revolutionary action thanks to the assistance of the party. This initial assumption replaced the vision of the totality.

Invariance, which took up Bordiga's theses, had begun to appear before 1968. At the bookshop La Vieille Taupe, Pierre Guillaume had insisted on the importance of this review to friends and customers. The principle merit of Invariance was to have attracted attention to the richest aspects of Bordiga's theories, at a time when the International Communist Party, which particularly undertook the management of the bordigist heritage, said little about them, even concealing the identity of Bordiga in the name of party anonymity, and preferring to stress the refusals of the Italian left: the fight against antifascism, or against educationism, etc.

Bordiga had seen in Marx's work a description of communism. From its first issue, written by Camatte and Dangeville, Invariance affirmed that *Marx and Engels derived the characteristics of the party form from the*

description of communist society. But Invariance remained a prisoner of the metaphysics of the party. During the period 1917-1937 -- and even less with the apogee of the counter-revolution that marked the war and the post-war reconstruction -- the proletariat had not imposed itself for what it is -- the result of the practices and needs arising from its fundamental condition. To resist the counter-revolution, the Italian Left constructed a metaphysics of the proletariat, an entity which took the place of the absent real movement, and its reference to the party was used to preserve a revolutionary perspective, just as its distrust of *anarchism* (a term which was used to include the councilism of the German Left) served as a defence against the risk of deviation towards democracy.

3. The Situationist International

The capitalist invasion of the totality of life, accelerated by the cycle of prosperity which began in the 1950s, had produced its liberal critique: works by Vance Packard on planned obsolescence, of Riesman on the solitary crowd, of Henri Lefebvre on everyday life, etc. The more slowly commodified industrial countries, like France, had for a long time maintained a chilly attitude to *americanism* (see in particular *Le Monde*). About 1960, at

a time when a practical critique by proletarians coincided with an initial concern about the limit and direction of this growth, the whole mode and even style of modern capitalist life was in the hot seat. In this context, the Situationist International (1957-1971), the meeting point of the New World proud of its modernity, and of the Old World undermined by mass consumption, uniting Germans, Scandinavians and Americans on the one hand, and French and Italians on the other, would make a decisive contribution to the critique of the generalised colonisation by the market.

A product of the prosperity of the 1960s, the S.I. could undertake a critique of the world without shutting itself into the economy/production/factory/workers, while at the same moment workers, as at FIAT in 1969, made the space outside work (housing and transport) a starting point for their action. The S.I. reconnected with the critique of political economy of the period preceding 1848.

Historical evolution forces us to see that waged life doesn't just take place in the workplace. The old workers movement, which disappeared as a social network to give way to negotiating bodies, had extended its ramifications to all aspects of the life of the proletarian.

Today parties and trade unions are salesmen who play the role of social services and largely function like state administrators.

The S.I. criticised *urbanism*, science and the techniques of recreating social relations where the roots of previous collective bonds had been torn up. Capital had destroyed both city and countryside, producing a hybrid space, a town without a centre. (In this way capital created a space in its own image, that of a society without a centre, but whose centre was everywhere.) The many attempts at experimental model cities (like Pullman near Chicago, at the end of the 19th century) prevented neither social problems nor workers riots. The worker-employer's city, like the project of Nicolas Ledoux at Arc-et-Senans at the end of the 18th century, failed because waged life cannot have the workplace as its only centre.

The *normal* modern city integrates workers better because they need a capitalist environment, rather than an employers'. This capitalist environment maintains a community even if it is to a large extent (but not completely, far from it) a market community constituted by the television and the supermarket, with the car as a means of connection between disconnected places. TV, supermarket and car still presuppose the existence of

human beings to watch, to go and to make them function more or less together.

Faced with the modern city the S.I. sought new uses for certain places. It gave new life to utopia, to positive as well as negative utopian visions. At first it believed that it was possible to experiment with new ways of living but it ended up by showing that this reappropriation of the conditions of existence presupposed nothing less than the collective reappropriation of all aspects of life. It gave new meaning to the requirement to create new social relations. Where most revolutionaries debated *power*, or the *withering away of the state*, it put forward revolution not as a political affair but as changing the whole of life. *Abanality* you say? But a banality that was only reintroduced into the revolutionary movement in the 1960's, and thanks to the activity of the S.I. among others.

A product both of the councilist left, (Guy Debord was a member of Socialisme ou Barbarie for some months), and of its rejection, the S.I. started from a critique of the spectacle as passivity, and the transformation of all activity into contemplation, and this led it to affirm communism as activity.

Iconoclastic, freed from the problematic of workers' organisation (unlike groups such as Pouvoir Ouvrier or ICO), the S.I. shook up the ultra-left. But its theory of the spectacle drove it into an impasse: that of councillism. More the expression of attacks on the commodity than of an (absent) general movement against capital, it didn't produce an analysis of the whole of the capitalist process. Like Socialisme ou Barbarie, it saw in capital a form of management depriving proletarians of any power over their lives, and concluded that it was necessary to find a mechanism permitting the involvement of all. To this it added the opposition passive/active. Having conceived capitalism theoretically more as spectacle than as capital, it believed that in order to break the passivity it had found a means (democracy), a place (the council) and a form of life (generalised self-management).

The idea of the spectacle swallowed up the idea of capital and effected a reversal of reality. Indeed the S.I. forgot that *the most significant characteristic of the capitalist division of labor is the transformation of the worker from an active producer to a spectator of his own labor* (Root and Branch: The Rise of the Workers' Movements, Greenwich, Conn. 1975. From a Break with the Past by Stanley Aronowitz). The *spectacle* has its

roots in the relations of production and of work, in that which constitutes capital. One can only understand the spectacle starting from capitalism, not the other way round. Spectacle and passive contemplation are the effects of a more fundamental phenomenon. It is the relative satisfaction of the *needs* created by capital over the last 150 years (bread, employment, lodging) that causes passivity in behaviour. The theoretical conception of the spectacle as the motor or essence of society was idealistic.

Thus the S.I., following the German left, recognised revolutionary spontaneity, but without showing the nature of this spontaneous activity. It glorified general assemblies and workers' councils, instead of specifying the content of what these forms were supposed to achieve. Finally, it gave in to the same formalism as the ultra-left which it mocked, not seeing the beam in its own eye.

The S.I. showed the religious aspects of militancy -- dissociated practise in which the individual acts for a cause, while making an abstraction of his personal life, represses his desires and sacrifices himself for an objective outside himself. Even without talking about participation in the classical political organisations

(Communist Party, Extreme Left. . . .), permanent revolutionary action certainly sometimes turns into militancy : entirely devoted to a group, obsessed by a particular vision of the world, the individual becomes unavailable for revolutionary acts on the day that they actually become possible.

But this refusal of militancy, instead of anchoring itself within a practise, and within an understanding of the real relations which can prevent the development of militant behaviour, contributed to the requirement inside the S.I. for a radical attitude in all things. For one militant morality it substituted another, radicality, just as unworkable and just as intolerable.

Not satisfied with denouncing the spectacle, the S.I. undertook to turn it back against the society that lived it. The Strasbourg university scandal which heralded May 68 was a success. But the S.I. erected the process into a system and misused it so much that it rebounded back against itself. The repetition of the techniques of advertising and scandal turned into systematic counter-manipulation. There is no such thing as an anti-advertising advertisement. There is no good usage of media to get across revolutionary ideas.

In opposition to militant false modesty the S.I. put itself centre-stage and enormously exaggerated its impact on the world situation. Its repeated references to Machiavelli, Clausewitz and other strategists were more than just teasing. It was persuaded that an appropriate strategy would allow a clever enough group to manipulate the media and influence public opinion in a revolutionary direction. This is certainly proof of its confinement in the concept of the spectacle, and ultimately, of its incomprehension, through idealism, of the spectacular phenomenon. When it presented itself as the centre of the universe, and as the agent of revolutionary maturation, etc., one first thought that it was being ironical. When it made a constant theme of it, one ended up wondering if it didn't believe the enormities which it spread about itself.

The S.I. provided the best approximation of communism among the theories which had a genuine social diffusion before 1968. But it remained the prisoner of old councillist illusions to which it added its own illusions about the establishment of a revolutionary *savoir vivre* ['art of living']. It created an ethics in which pleasure took the place of human activity. In doing so it didn't get beyond the capitalist framework of the abundance permitted by automation, and was content to

describe the end of work as an immense passionate leisure.

The Italian left had put forward communism as the abolition of the market and had broken with the cult of the productive forces, but it was unaware of the enormous subversive power of concrete communist measures. Bordiga put communisation back to the day after the seizure of power. The S.I. presented the revolution as an immediate and progressive de-commodification. It saw the revolutionary process within human relations. Indeed, the State cannot just be destroyed on the military level. As the mediation of society it must also be annihilated by undermining the capitalist relations which sustain it.

The S.I. finished up in an error symmetrical to Bordiga's. The latter had reduced the revolution to the application of a programme. The S.I. were to limit it to overturning immediate relations. Neither Bordiga nor the S.I. saw the totality. The first conceived a whole abstracted from real relations and practical measures, the second a whole without unity or determination, the sum of partial points spreading little by little. Incapable of theoretically dominating the whole of the revolutionary process, they

both resorted to organisational palliatives: the party for one, councils for the other.

In his practise Bordiga depersonalised the movement to excess, going so far as to deny and efface himself behind a self-mutilating anonymity which permitted all the manipulations of the (bordigist) PCI. By contrast the S.I. affirmed the individual to the point of elitism, going so far as to take themselves as the centre of the universe.

Although they were largely unaware of Bordiga the S.I. contributed as much as him to the revolutionary synthesis that was outlined around 1968.

Gilles Dauve - le roman de nos origines - La Banquise No. 2, 1983