

TENTATIVE THESES ON THE COMING CATASTROPHES AND THE DEPARTURE FROM THE COMMUNIST PERSPECTIVE



Capitalist catastrophes volcano: Google images

"We regret that we cannot give you very satisfactory news, and we have decided to tell you the plain truth, whether good or bad. Some will think it best to highlight the best aspects of the situation so that people will not be discouraged; others, like us, believe that everyone needs to know the enormous and manifold difficulties we face."¹

1° When our "association" came into being by chance, without preparation or "factional" ambition, we had no idea of the road ahead or of the importance of the theoretical work to be done. Like other associations, we knew what we no longer wanted in the sectarian buzz of small groups, in their annual rituals and their speeches of confirmation of better days to come. We also knew that we would have to revisit many of our "certainties" and question, for some of us, decades of "militancy" by default. So, with great humility we began to think again, to discuss, to reread, to meet our comrades... while some announced, from the height of their lamentable certainties, that we would disappear into the nothingness of sleep and the probability of a programmed death: "Hic Salta!". It seemed timely to try to better comprehend where we are in our unpredictable, incomplete, and, above all, non-existent trajectory, without the valuable, multiple, and contradicting assistance of many comrades from around the world.

2° Above all, we no longer wanted to reproduce the mechanisms of the chapels with their "rising stars", their "designated sick", their supposed or incited "traitors", their sycophants, their specialists in rewriting "history", with their disappearances, their omissions, their repetitive anecdotes, their folklore... and all the regrettable elements linked to the derisory survival of a "political" clique supposedly representative of the future of communism if not that of humanity. It is the very concept of "group" that we have managed, for the moment, to call into question (once again thanks to the comments of other comrades). In fact, in this period of almost complete disappearance of the working class "by itself", that is, of its social, political and organizational independence, it is not in absolute the number that defines these unhealthy and pathological excesses, but rather the isolation of the elements of the class

¹First quarterly report of the League's central authority: September 1847. The Communist League (1847) Constituent documents presented by B. Andreas, p. 153, Aubier, Paris, 1972.

that survive the defeat of the leftist catastrophe and try to learn the lessons of their fragmentary and/or movementist delusions. An unmistakable sign of this drift, in this period of disappearance of the "autonomous" struggles of the proletariat conscious of its social, political and organizational independence, is that once the "group" is created, with its rules, statutes and membership dues...., the essence of its activity is no longer the **political analysis** and relaying of proletarian experiences, for which it historically emerged, but the internal management of personnel and/or rivalry with other remnants of competing factions. Instead of being an instrument of the emancipatory political struggle, the "group" very soon becomes an end **in itself**, capable of being conceived only in its perpetuation ad infinitum, like a clan or a family, sometimes even under forms almost identical to those of its rivals (we can no longer count the numerous splits of the International Communist Party, nor the reasons for their separate existences). It is worth underlining the vicious effect of this perverse belief in the necessity of a **formal** "organization" (the party, the movement, the group, the fraction, the tendency, etc.), ultimate bulwark of the perenniality of the communist perspective and guarantor of its original purity.

Workers' history has shown us that very often it is the most conscious members who prefer organizational dissolution, even temporarily, to joining the enemy camp. Longevity is by no means a guarantee of good functioning or continuity, especially in the service of maintaining the initial label or loyalty to an individual. For us, there can be no greater error - nor greater disappointment - than to have believed - foreseen - that this period would lead to a new upward proletarian political cycle (1960, 70, 80) when it was nothing but the end and the defeat, despite brief moments of enthusiasm, a remnant of the previous cycle. The great dates of this period - 1956 in Hungary, the great strike of 1960/61 in Belgium, the struggles in the Fiat factory in Turin in '69, May '68 in France, the Cordobazo in Argentina in 1969, the confrontations in Italy and then in Spain, up to the irruption of the movements in China in 1989 - were all marked by **political defeats**, when they should have meant and confirmed the renewal of a period that was, at least significantly, "pre-revolutionary." "It was only a beginning"... but without follow-up, apart from the disappointment and the messianic expectation of "new years of truth".

3° This error, which we consider essential, is also the product of not having understood well the historical meaning of the **counter-revolution** in the phase of mature capitalism that began in the 20th century. Already in 1969, the review INVARIANCE n°6: La révolution communiste -thèses de travail- had had, among many other contributions, this intuition by highlighting Marx's sentence: *"²Perhaps the victory of the Revolution is only possible once the counter-revolution has been consummated."* K. Marx: Speech at the Cologne trial (February 1849). The "narrow" view of the counterrevolution reduced to the "simple" defeat of the revolution, with its strong democratic and petty-bourgeois component, does not encompass the totality of the political, economic, demographic and geographical

²And this despite the fact that for Camatte, as for almost all other currents, May 68 opened up a "new" "revolutionary" period CF. Benjamin Lalbat: Les bordiguistes sans Bordiga, Master Histoire et Humanités, <https://lorage.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Les-bordiguistes-sans-bordiga-Memoire-M2.pdf>

consequences of the counterrevolution. These defeats, which are still limited mainly to "Western" Europe, will either provoke an extraordinary shock in the development of capital itself through the gradual culmination of its process of real subsumption of labor under capital, a condition for a fully proletarian, world and communist victory, or they will unfortunately lead to ever worse catastrophes that the PCM genetically carries in its bosom.

4° The counterrevolution is by no means limited to impede and combat the revolution that is announced and prepared. It is rather the immediate work of **reaction**. In a much more general way, it is the **capitalist normality** that allows it to develop within the anarchic limits of its democratic survival, essentially guaranteeing general **social peace**. Contrary to the popular opinion that counter-revolution is only possible **when** revolution is imminent, neither strong workers' movements nor aborted revolts are necessary. Counter-revolution, especially when it is prolonged over several generations (due to generational, organizational or geographical ruptures), tends to become the most common *modus operandi* of capitalist survival, its most adequate and even **preventive** way of life, regardless of unexpected catastrophes. Democracy is thus the best way for capitalism to ensure its domination, with its relatively efficient intermediary organs, a parliamentary system, moderately conflictive, and representative of the interests of the main ruling classes and structures.³

Therefore, there can be long periods of **counter-revolution without revolution and even without its "specter"**. The very memory of the possibility of the revolution must be erased, denied. This is the reason why Stalinism and modernist revisionism have had to continue their negationist work, even though the concrete implications of the 1917 revolution have practically disappeared long ago. It is a question, once again, of wiping the slate clean of the critical totality represented by Marx and all those who strove to follow his method by perpetuating a "living Marxism". There are different times in this question: the time of the revolution, which is all the shorter for being intense and radical, and the time of the counterrevolution, with its tendency to present itself as boring and eternal. Arrigo Cervetto is responsible for having tackled this difficult question and, above all, the importance of not limiting political analysis to economic cycles but considering the **long times of the historical process**, as well as revisionism.

As Marx said, "Some days are worth two decades"⁴, but there are also decades that are not worth much from the point of view of the revolutionary perspective. It is not we who make history, nor our optimistic and above all "organizational" will. We have lived through the supposed imminence of revolution, the revolutions invented out of nothing, in China, Cuba, Venezuela, North Korea... have been powerful and enthusiastic allies to maintain the permanence of counterrevolution, anomie and the atomization of the working class. Indeed, why fight for it! By dint of exhausting the dwindling militant forces in vile immediatist, populist and demagogic activities (electoralism, trade unionism, "parties" or other "interventions" of spectacular uselessness, etc.) the essential transmission of the **totality** that

³On this topic: Contribution to the critique of democracy: May 2021, on **Matériaux Critiques**: [Revue N°3:https://materiauxcritiques.wixsite.com/monsite/textes](https://materiauxcritiques.wixsite.com/monsite/textes)

⁴Arrigo Cervetto: La difficile question des temps, p.36, éditions Science Marxiste, Paris, 1997.

constitutes the work of materialist critique and training in this critique has been abandoned or left in the hands of the stipendiary specialists of university academicism. The first and most basic question for any "intervention" is to know to whom it is addressed, how it is **audible** and how its relevance reinforces the process of self-organization and critique of the false consciousnesses that are constantly reconstituting themselves. However, these axes of materialist critique were quickly neglected, abandoned in favor of the ritualistic defense of the brand independently of ideological stakes and concrete analysis of the class relation.

As a result, we saw more and more publications that looked like a "backpacker's guide" on "interclassist and democratic social movements", in which the same text appeared, only the country, the company and the dates changed, and which ended up positivizing the necessary rebirth of the party, the union or workers' autonomy to satisfy themselves and bask in the mirage of a group survival. Critical reflection and self-criticism have been replaced by an uncritical catechesis and a generalized individualistic discouragement. The group is no more than a place of passage in which the "militant" is consumed rapidly in proportion to his inanition, his degree of guilt and his position in the reconstituted family. For there to be counter-revolution, the very idea and **possibility** of a revolution must disappear, replaced by a succession of catastrophes that make capitalist barbarism "tolerable," if not manageable. This is the "lesser evil" of all activism.

5° Another concomitant process has insidiously developed in the absence and gaps of class independence and the loss of sight of its historical interests, namely the tendency to replace the insufficiency of meaningful "autonomous" struggles by ersatz struggles which become more **simulacra** of a revolution dreamed and/or fantasized both by the proletariat and its pseudo-avant-gardes and by the bourgeoisie itself. After the more "exotic" periods from Vietnam to Nicaragua, we have witnessed the inevitable "Palestinian struggle", first secular and then Islamist, but also the Iranian and Libyan "revolutions", the "Arab" springs, the orange, green and indigenous revolutions... up to the "LGBTQIA+". The very concept of revolution largely anticipated the inflation we are experiencing today. It became the inverted expression of everything the revolution was intended to combat and abolish. This is the very process of hijacking. The representation of the spectacle of revolution, from T-shirts and posters to films and advertisements, as an expression of the alienation and boredom that these hijacked "revolutions" impose as an inverted and grotesque shadow of revolutionary emancipation. The time of capital is the time of counterrevolution. That is why the communist revolution must immediately destroy **the time of capital and spectacle, which is the time of the quantification of labor and of boredom.** *"This irreversible time is the time of those who rule, and the dynasty is its first unit of measurement."* G. Debord.⁵

But behind the exotic deviations, each day paler, hides an even worse opportunist deviation : that of fainting over everything that moves and pretending that all movements, whatever their class composition and their political projects, are "libertarian", democratic and bearers of a possible cross growth or "convergence" with phantom or directly invented workers' struggles,

⁵G. Debord: *The Society of the Spectacle*, thesis 131, p.130, Gallimard, Paris, 1996.

to maintain the illusion that we are at the end of this desperate and hopeless waiting. In the face of this expectation, anything goes, be it the fragmented struggles of the left of the 70s and 80s or the exaltation of "movements" that only correspond to the necessary cyclical restructuring of a worn-out power, forced to keep on playing strongly with the crisis of the regime camouflaging it as an endemic crisis.

This has been the case of the so-called Arab "revolutions", which have seen other factions of the same power come and go, always with the army and/or the Islamists as arbiters of the return to capitalist normality. But with the weakening of the intermediate bodies, the strong de-unionization and the almost disappearance of the old political formations... the spectacle also needs to be reinforced and reformed in depth. The succession of dreadful crises - financial, climatic, demographic, sanitary, incendiary... and now warlike - are thus both causes of these catastrophes and opportune consequences for a warlike restructuring (local or general) of capitalism in desperate straits. It is also possible that these increasingly disastrous situations provoke reactions in the form of protest movements, even very violent, but unfortunately with no other perspective than the departure of the excessively corrupt leader or his replacement by what might appear to be a "new redeemer". This absence of perspective, of a truly emancipatory program, corresponds ultimately to the absence of historical conditions for the emergence of a class party.

6° The political confusion is meticulously organized, and "national populism" is its most visible expression. The changes of sides multiply, the disorders, the betrayals and the rallies merge in the face of the interclass movements which express in the same way the left/right confusion, with a predominance of political hegemony in the direction of latent fascism. Everything that moves, from the "Bonnets rouges" to the "gilets jaunes" passing through the "Indignés", "Podemos", "Vox" or even "Reconquête!" mixed with a survivalist and anti-vax conspiracy, participate in this new recomposition of fronts that completely block the very "sociological" existence of social classes. The places where these "spectacular confrontations" take place are the geographically displaced expression of the real places of the capitalist production of value, relentlessly forced to maintain itself. What is blocked is the circulation of commodities for their "better distribution." There is no connection with the central issues, apart from the persistent repetitions and exultations of the demonstrations, which anticipate the electoral recovery and discouragement.

What prevails, as in the "Nuits debout" demonstrations, is the mediatized scenography of the integrated spectacle: squares, streets, crossroads, traffic circles, the Champs Elysées, Saturdays, etc., rather than the unifying demands of the places where people produce and survive, concerning working conditions, wages, inflation, housing or war tensions. Everything is mixed and added together to prevent the emergence of a will to organize on the fringe and against all these old structures, unions, associations, etc., which are constantly being renewed. This displayed confusion is reinforced by the belief that these agglomerates could orient themselves in another direction or could, thanks to a "judicious" intervention, connect with a working class which would suddenly awaken from its individual atomization and from its "relative participation" in the new ideological, communitarian or fraternal games. Could the

"burkini" be a new class frontier? Thus, for political opportunism, instead of defending the uncompromising critique of all forms of democracy and "libertarian" and religious illusions, the "friends of the peoples and of the oppressed individuals", with their "critical and ambiguous support", allow the modernized bourgeoisie, its supposedly less corrupt petty-bourgeois allies and its lifelong cronies, the lumpen, to put once and for all at the head of these confusionist and interclassist movements.

"The "dangerous class", [lumpenproletariat] the social scum, that passively rotting mass thrown off by the lowest layers of the old society, may, here and there, be swept into the movement by a proletarian revolution; its conditions of life, however, prepare it far more for the part of a bribed tool of reactionary intrigue." K. Marx and F. Engels: The Communist Manifesto, (1847): https://www.marxists.org/francais/marx/works/1847/00/k_mfe18470000a.htm

To better control it, the ruling classes have always needed to instrumentalize the proletariat by making it believe each time that it fights for its own interests through elections or other manifestations, even violent ones, in order to change and restructure the capitalist regime continuously.

7° There was a time when critical analysis was based on biting and divisive political assertions, much to the chagrin of the specialists who represented gradualism "in spite of everything" and the "raison gardée". This analysis was based on a precise dissection of the technical composition of classes and class fractions, on their contradictory and heterogeneous interests, and on not allowing Marx's "workers' survey" of 1880 to be swept under the carpet of democratic and civic ideology. It was a weapon of political organization that knew who to target. It was not yet reduced to a method, sometimes even an interesting one, of contemporary sociology, but was determined above all by explicit political **objectives** capable of presenting the unifying objective elements of workers' struggles independently of all those who claimed to represent them. Consequently, this method only made sense in the context of a process of class self-organization, and not in its dissolution into the people and their simulacra of struggle. What characterizes our period is, on the contrary, the fact that capital is experiencing and has experienced a succession of catastrophes of all kinds, be they financial, ecological, sanitary or warlike, all feeding each other and prolonging the situation of apathy, individualism and counter-revolution already described. Each time, the "solutions" are marked by more of the same: **tweaks that provoke anxiety**. This can alternate with individualistic denial, populist and chaotic "social" reactions mixed with exacerbated communitarianism. **What is certain is the uncertainty of the times ahead**. The deterioration continues towards new disasters.

"For the "state of need" and the scarcity that will accumulate will first of all push people to accept or demand new forms of slavery, to save what can be saved from a guaranteed survival where it is still somewhat guaranteed." R. Riesel & J. Semprun : Catastrophisme, administration du désastre et soumission, Éditions de l'encyclopédie des nuisances, p.98, Paris, 2008.

The war could spread to northern Europe (Sweden/Finland, Moldova) and Asia; we could witness the return of new waves of pandemics with their confinements, their authoritarian and disorderly measures (China). Add to this the "non-management" of the climate crisis and its

demographic implications, inflation and the foreseeable return of unemployment ("stagflation"), the further erosion of nominal, real and relative wages, the conversion of environmentalists to nuclear energy, the populist "every man for himself" approach... in short, the march towards a catastrophic future and the move away from the communist perspective are the order of the day for us. We had to say it. It is what Gramsci called, "*The pessimism of intelligence*." A. Gramsci December 19, 1929: Cahiers de prison, Gallimard, Paris, 1978-92. May 2022.

8° This realistic and alarmist observation corresponds to a long-term vision, which can be interrupted circumstantially by social or other explosions that serve above all as an escape valve to preemptively release pressure on this or that foreseen event and/or to carry out a "new" ideological, ecological, "gender" or "racial" reshaping. This is why we believe that we must continue and amplify our critical and anti-activist activity. After recalling a certain number of basic generalities, maintaining a certain regularity and trying to touch on questions that "normally" interest less the so-called political milieu, we intend to continue our efforts in languages other than French and towards other areas and comrades who are ready to engage in serious debates and, who knows, other types of collaboration. We do not believe that the situation is likely to change in the short term, except for the worse. The class struggle has not disappeared as the bourgeoisie and certain pseudo-critics hope, but it has reached a level of atomization and false consciousness close to a politically flat encephalogram.

This translates into the uselessness of any political regroupment without a class base and in the absence of struggles, even defensive, but independent of all the structures of the capitalist framework. Well-thought-out forms of spectacular protest and their simulacra, even violent, only serve as a smokescreen for a real critique and contribute directly to the renewal of old ideologies, cooperativisms, managerialisms, "liberated zones" (of what?), "fulfilled" consumers (even more so in times of diverse misery), sympathizers, voters.... Do not count on us to give you false hopes or new theoretical illusions, but on the contrary to maintain, with others, the weapon of criticism that we have set as our main activity in these more unfavorable times. The Ukrainian war anticipates and prepares the next confrontations, mainly in Asia; it also highlights the necessity for the bourgeoisie to prepare the proletariat for new wars. However, in the present Russo-Ukrainian war this basic condition of capitalist wars seems to have been neglected; the motivations for fighting against one or the other of the present fascisms, such as dying "nationalistically" for Kiev or for Moscow, seem to mobilize the masses less, especially since the stagnation of the conflict seems as evident as the changes in the objectives of the war.

The myth of the great patriotic and/or communal war is still struggling to replace the denial of structural egoism and immediate individualism. This war is in fact an opportunity for governments, as it allows them to return to their policy of austerity and nationalist-populist protectionism. The inflated prices of certain necessities anticipate the return of state interventionism coupled with pseudo-protection of the most disadvantaged. The State has clearly seen the advantage of reinforcing itself and diverting, even preventively, any hint of revolt towards old or new dead ends, up to, if necessary, the establishment of fascist-type

regimes. The long-awaited return to capitalist normality after the waves of pandemics (not to mention those to come) does not seem to be taking place with enthusiasm as far as the proletarians and the suburbs are concerned. On the contrary, there is a wait-and-see attitude, capable of turning into a Hobbesian war of all against all, justifying in the process the existence of heavy-handed regimes and the multiple communitarianisms that seem to be the order of the day. The cannibalism of counter-revolution in its most diverse forms has not finished transforming the world into a filthy cesspool where more noxious things reign.

"To ask for help and protection from the State is tantamount to admitting in advance all the disadvantages that the State will find it necessary to inflict, and that dispossession is already the greatest nuisance, the one that makes all the others tolerable." Encyclopédie des nuisances : Discours Préliminaire, November 1984, Paris 2009.

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