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Notice to the Civilized Concerning Generalized Self-Management

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Never sacrifice present good for the good to come. Enjoy the moment. Avoid any matrimonial or other association that does not satisfy your passions from the very beginning. Why should you work for the good to come when it will exceed your desires anyway and you will have in the Combined Order only one displeasure, that of not being able to double the length of days in order to accommodate the immense range of enjoyments available to you?

— Charles Fourier, *Notice to the Civilized Concerning the Next Social Metamorphosis*

1

Though it failed to go all the way, the May 1968 occupations movement has given rise to a confused popular awareness of the necessity of a supersession. The imminence of a total upheaval, felt by everyone, must now discover its practice: the passage to generalized self-management through the establishment of workers councils. The point to which the revolutionary upsurge has brought people's consciousness is now going to become a point of departure.

2

History is answering the question Lloyd George posed to the workers, a question which has since been taken up in chorus by all the servants of the old world: "You want to destroy our social organization, but what will you put in its place?" We know the answer thanks

to the profusion of little Lloyd Georges who advocate the state dictatorship of a proletariat of their choice, counting on the working class to organize itself in councils in order to dissolve the existing dictatorship and elect another.

3

Each time the proletariat takes the risk of changing the world it rediscovers its historical memory. The project of establishing a society of councils — a project until now intermingled with the history of its crushing in different periods — reveals the reality of its past possibilities through the possibility of its immediate realization. This has been made evident to all the workers since May, when Stalinism and its Trotskyist residues showed by their aggressive weakness their inability to crush a council movement if one had appeared, and by their force of inertia their ability still to impede the emergence of one. Without really manifesting itself, a movement toward councils was implicitly present in the clash of two contradictory forces: the internal logic of the occupations and the repressive logic of the parties and labor unions. Those who still open their Lenin to find out what is to be done are only rummaging in the trash-can of history.

4

Many people intuitively rejected any organization not directly emanating from the proletariat negating itself as proletariat, and this feeling was inseparable from the feeling that an everyday life without dead time was possible at last.

In this sense the notion of workers councils is the first principle of generalized self-management.

5

May 1968 marked an essential phase in the long revolution: the individual history of millions of people, each day seeking an authentic life, linking up with the historical movement of the proletariat in struggle against the whole *system* of alienations. This spontaneous unity of action, which was the passionate motive power of the occupations movement, can only develop its theory and practice unitarily. What was in everyone's heart is going to be in everyone's head. Having felt that they "could no longer live like before, nor even a little better than before," many people are inclined to prolong the memory of this exemplary moment of life and the briefly experienced hope of a great possibility — to prolong them in a line of force which, to become revolutionary, lacks only a greater lucidity on generalized self-management, i.e. on the *historical construction of free individual relations*.

6

Only the proletariat by negating itself, gives clear shape to the project of generalized self-management, because it bears that project within itself objectively and subjectively. This is why the first specifics will come from the unity of its combat in everyday life and on the front of history; and from the consciousness that all demands are realizable right away, but only by the proletariat

itself. In this sense the importance of a revolutionary organization will henceforth be measured by its ability to hasten its own disappearance in the reality of the society of the councils.

7

Workers councils constitute a new type of social organization, through which the proletariat puts an end to the proletarianization of everyone. Generalized self-management is simply the general framework in accordance with which the councils unitarily inaugurate a style of life based on ongoing individual and collective liberation.

8

It is clear from all these theses that the project of generalized self-management requires as many specifics as there are desires in each revolutionary, and as many revolutionaries as there are people dissatisfied with their everyday life. The spectacle-commodity society produces both the conditions that repress subjectivity and — contradictorily, through the refusal it provokes — the positivity of subjectivity; just as the formation of the councils, similarly arising out of the struggle against overall oppression, produces the conditions for a permanent realization of subjectivity without any limits but its own impatience to make history. Thus generalized self-management is linked to the capacity of the councils to realize the imagination historically.

9

Outside generalized self-management, workers councils lose their sense. Anyone who speaks of the councils as separate economic or social organisms, anyone who does not place them at the center of the revolution of everyday life with the practice this entails, must be treated as a future bureaucrat and thus as a present enemy.

10

One of Fourier's great merits is to have shown the necessity of creating immediately — and for us this means from the inception of generalized insurrection — the objective conditions for individual liberation. For everyone the beginning of the revolutionary moment must mark an *immediate rise in the pleasure of*

living — a consciously experienced entry into the totality.

11

The accelerating rate at which reformism, with its tricontinental bellyache, is leaving behind ridiculous leftist droppings — all those little Maoist, Trotskyist and Guevaraist piles — proves by its smell what the Right, and especially the socialists and Stalinists, have long sensed: partial demands are essentially contrary to a total change. But trying to cut off the hydra heads of reformism one by one is futile. Better to overthrow the old ruse of history once and for all: this would seem to be the final solution to the problem of coopters. This implies a strategy that sparks the general conflagration by means of insurrectional moments at ever-closer intervals; and a tactic of qualitative progression in which inevitably partial actions each entail, as their necessary and sufficient condition, the liquidation of the world of the commodity. It is time to begin the *positive sabotage* of spectacle-commodity society. As long as our mass tactics stick to the law of immediate pleasure there will be no need to worry about the outcome.

12

It is easy to mention here, merely as suggestive examples, a few possibilities which will quickly be surpassed by the practice of liberated workers: On every occasion — openly during strikes, more or less clandestinely during work — *initiate the reign of freeness* by giving away factory and warehouse goods to friends and revolutionaries, by making gift objects (radio transmitters, toys, weapons, clothes, ornaments, machines for various purposes) and by organizing “give-away” strikes in department stores; *break the laws of exchange and begin the end of wage labor* by collectively appropriating products of work and collectively using machines for personal and revolutionary purposes; *depreciate the function of money* by spreading payment strikes (rent, taxes, installment payments, transportation fares, etc.); *encourage everyone's creativity* by starting up provisioning and production sectors exclusively under workers' control, even if this can only be done intermittently, while regarding this experimentation as necessarily groping and sub-

ject to improvement; *wipe out hierarchies and the spirit of sacrifice* by treating bosses and union bureaucrats as they deserve and by rejecting militancy; *act unitarily everywhere against all separations; draw theory from every type of practice and vice versa* by composing leaflets, posters, songs, etc.

13

The proletariat has already shown that it knows how to respond to the oppressive complexity of capitalist and “socialist” states by the simplicity of organization carried out *directly* by and for everyone. In our time questions of survival are posed only on the condition that they never be solved; in contrast, the problems of the history to be lived are clearly posed through the project of the workers councils — positively in that the councils are the basis of a unitary passional and industrial society, negatively in that they imply total opposition to the state.

14

Because they exercise no power separate from the decisions of their members, the councils tolerate no power other than their own. Encouraging antistate actions everywhere should thus not be understood to imply a premature creation of councils which would lack absolute power over their own areas, would be separated from generalized self-management, and would be inevitably emptied of content and susceptible to every kind of ideology. The only lucid forces that can presently respond to the history that *has* been made with the history *to be made* will be the revolutionary organizations that are developing, in the project of the councils, an equal awareness of the adversary to be combated and the allies to be supported. An important aspect of such a struggle is manifesting itself before our eyes with the appearance of a *dual power*. In factories, offices, streets, houses, barracks and schools a new reality is taking shape: contempt for bosses, regardless of their labels or their rhetoric. From now on this contempt must be pushed to its logical conclusion by demonstrating, through the concerted action of workers, that the bosses are not only contemptible but also useless, and that even from their own utilitarian point of view they can be eliminated with impu-

nity.

15

Recent history will soon come to be seen, by rulers as well as revolutionaries, in terms of an alternative that concerns them both: generalized self-management or insurrectional chaos; new society of abundance or social disintegration, pillage, terrorism and repression. The struggle within dual power is already inseparable from such a choice. Our coherence requires that the paralysis and destruction of all forms of government not be distinct from the construction of councils. If our adversary has even the slightest prudence it should realize that only an organization of new everyday relationships can prevent the spread of what an American police specialist has already called “our nightmare”: small insurgent commandos bursting out of subway entrances, shooting from rooftops, taking advantage of the mobility and limitless resources of urban guerrilla warfare to fell the police, liquidate the servants of authority, stir up riots and destroy the economy. But we don’t have to save the rulers in spite of themselves. It will be enough to prepare the councils and ensure their self-defense by every means. In one of Lope de Vega’s plays some villagers, driven beyond endurance by the exactions of a royal functionary, put him to death. When they are brought before the magistrate and charged to name the guilty party, all respond with the name of their village, “Fuenteovejuna.” This tactic, used by many Asturian miners against pro-company engineers, has the drawback of smacking too much of terrorism and the *watrinage* tradition. Generalized self-management will be our “Fuenteovejuna.” It is no longer enough for collective action to discourage repression (imagine the powerlessness of the forces of order if during an occupations movement bank employees seized the funds); it must at the same time encourage progression toward a greater revolutionary coherence. The councils represent order in the face of the decomposition of the state, whose form is being contested by the rise of regional nationalisms and whose basic principle is being contested by social demands. To the pseudo-problems they see posed by this decomposition, the police can respond only by

estimating the number of deaths. Only the councils offer a definitive solution. What prevents looting? The organization of distribution and the end of the commodity system. What prevents sabotage of production? The appropriation of the machines by collective creativity. What prevents explosions of anger and violence? The end of the proletariat through the collective construction of everyday life. There is no other justification for our struggle than the immediate satisfaction of this project — than what satisfies us immediately.

16

Generalized self-management has only one basis, one motive force: the exhilaration of universal freedom. This is quite enough to enable us right now to infer the rigor that will be necessary for its elaboration. Such rigor must henceforth characterize revolutionary councilist organizations; conversely, their practice will already contain the experience of direct democracy. This will enable us to concretize certain formulas more rigorously. A principle like “All power to the general assembly,” for example, also implies that whatever escapes the direct control of the autonomous assembly will recreate, in mediated forms, all the autonomous varieties of oppression. Through its representatives, the whole assembly with all its tendencies must be present at the moment of decision. Even though the destruction of the state rules out a repetition of the “Supreme Soviet” farce, it is still necessary to take care that organization is simple enough to preclude the possibility of any neobureaucracy arising. But the abundance of telecommunications techniques — which might at first sight appear as a pretext for the continuation or return of specialists — is precisely what makes possible the constant control of delegates by the base, the immediate confirmation, correction or repudiation of their decisions at all levels. Telex, computers, television, etc., are thus the inalienable possession of the primary assemblies, making it possible for those assemblies to be aware of and affect events everywhere. In the composition of a council (there will no doubt be neighborhood, city, regional and international councils) it will be a good idea for the assembly to elect and control: an *equipping sec-*

tion for the purpose of collecting requests for supplies, determining the possibilities of production, and coordinating these two sectors; an *information section* charged with keeping in constant touch with the experiences of other councils; a *coordination section* whose task it will be (to the extent permitted by the necessities of the struggle) to enrichen personal relationships, to radicalize the Fourierist project, to take care of requirements of passionate satisfaction, to equip individual desires, to furnish whatever is necessary for experiments and adventures, to harmonize playful possibilities of organizing necessary tasks (cleaning, babysitting, education, cooking contests, etc.); and a *self-defense section*. Each section is responsible to the full assembly; delegates regularly meet and report on their activities and are revocable and subject to vertical and horizontal rotation.

17

The logic of the commodity system, sustained by alienated practice, must be answered with the practice immediately implied by the social logic of desires. The first revolutionary measures will necessarily relate to reducing labor time and to the greatest possible reduction of forced labor. The councils will naturally distinguish between *priority sectors* (food, transportation, telecommunications, metallurgy, construction, clothing, electronics, printing, armament, medicine, comfort, and in general whatever material equipment is necessary for the permanent transformation of historical conditions); *reconversion sectors*, whose workers consider that they can detourn them to revolutionary uses; and *parasitical sectors*, whose assemblies decide purely and simply to suppress them. The workers of the eliminated sectors (administration, bureaucratic agencies, spectacle production, purely commercial industries) will obviously prefer to put in three or four hours a week at some work they have freely chosen from among the priority sectors rather than eight hours a day at their old workplace. The councils will experiment with attractive forms of carrying out necessary tasks, not in order to hide their unpleasant aspects, but in order to compensate for such unpleasantness with a playful organization of it, and as far as possible to eliminate such tasks

in favor of creativity (in accordance with the principle: “Work no, pleasure yes”). As the transformation of the world comes to be identical with the construction of life, necessary labor will disappear in the pleasure of history for itself.

18

To state that the councilist organization of distribution and production prevents looting and the destruction of machinery and goods is still to remain within a purely negative, antistate perspective. The councils, as organization of the new society, will eliminate the element of separation still present in this negativity by means of a *collective politics of desires*. Wage labor can be ended the moment the councils are set up, the moment the “equipment and provisions” section of each council organizes production and distribution in accordance with the desires of the plenary assembly. At that point, in tribute to the best Bolshevik prediction, urinals can be made out of gold and sterling silver, and dubbed “lenins.”

19

Generalized self-management implies the extension of the councils. At first, work areas will be taken over by the

workers concerned, grouped in councils. In order to rid these first councils of their corporative, guildlike aspect, the workers will as soon as possible open them to their friends, to people living in the same neighborhood, and to volunteers coming in from the parasitical sectors, so that they rapidly take the form of local councils — which might themselves be grouped together in “Communes” of more or less equal size (perhaps 8000 to 10,000 people?).

20

The internal extension of the councils must be matched by their geographical extension. It will be necessary to vigilantly maintain the most complete radicality of the liberated zones, without Fourier’s illusion as to the contagiousness of the first communes, but also without underestimating the seductiveness of any authentic experience of liberation once the intervening veils of falsification have been swept aside. The councils’ self-defense thus illustrates the formula: “Armed truth is revolutionary.”

21

Generalized self-management will soon have its own *code of possibilities*, designed to liquidate repressive legisla-

tion and its millennial domination. Perhaps it will appear during a period of dual power, before the judicial machinery and the penal system scum have been annihilated. The new “rights of man” — everyone’s right to live as they please, to build their own house, to participate in all assemblies, to arm themselves, to live as nomads, to publish what they think (to each her own wall-newspaper), to love without restraints; the right to meet, the right to the material equipment necessary for the realization of desires, the right to creativity, the right to the conquest of nature, the end of commodity time, the end of history in itself, the realization of art and the imagination, etc. — await their antilegislaters.

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