

What is to be done in times of weakness?

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The following contribution is a prelude to a debate on the question of organisation within the social revolutionary milieu and beyond. The views presented here do not reflect a point of view shared by the Communaut editorial board and the groups and individuals represented in it, but are intended to map strategic controversies and thus make them comprehensible and stimulate further discussion.

In recent years, on the initiative of the magazine Kosmoprolet, some attempts were made to intensify the loose exchange within the milieu from which this blog also emerged. The declared aim was to bring together the scattered groups and individuals who feel they belong to an anti-authoritarian communist current and to initiate more consistent cooperation. For this purpose, we started to communicate in supra-regional meetings about fundamental questions and current developments in a larger circle. These meetings had the positive effect of getting to know each other and forming bonds. They kept, however, the relatively loose and informal form and have not taken on a consistent character until today. The social revolutionary "pole formation" (1) proposed by Kosmoprolet within the crisis protests and beyond did not come to pass. There were local initiatives here and there, but they were equally unable to develop any attraction beyond their own circle. A first supra-regional attempt to have a stronger public impact was the blog *Solidarisch gegen Corona* (Solidarity against Corona), which initially developed a considerable amount of activity under the influence of the Corona crisis. However, it soon became clear that the project would go as fast as it came, since like other initiatives before it, it could not build on consolidated structures.

The blog project Communaut is now the latest in a series of attempts to bring the milieu together more strongly. Not set up as a quick fix, but developed in a nearly year-long process that brought together a permanent editorial team with members from eight cities, it promises to have a more stable foundation. We consider the possibility of holding public debates on the blog a good starting point to communicate politically within and beyond the milieu on a more consistent basis.

Despite this welcome development, we have increasingly gained the impression that there is a great perplexity in our circles regarding a long-term political perspective that could orient the activities of the individual groups and initiatives towards a goal. As a result, the various participants are repeatedly thrown back on spontaneous, isolated actions that do not coalesce into a convincing whole and therefore cannot have the desired political effect. On the strategic questions of what role one should play as a communist in social struggles and political confrontations; what mediating steps are necessary between our ultimate goal of a communist society and the present struggles; and what the relationship is between theoretical debate in small theoretical circles and political events, our milieu, seen in the light of day, has little to say. It seems that we are not entirely alone in this assessment - as early as 2015, the editorial of Kosmoprolet #4 read: "The debates of the left are generally a little less world-weary and ghostly than before the crisis. But it continues to be stuck above all when it comes to what is traditionally called praxis. [...] There is no plan that is more than a mere declaration of intent."

With this text, we would like to use the new possibility of the blog to stimulate a fundamental debate on questions of political strategy and organisation. The starting point for our reflections is the aforementioned lack of a plan, the cause of which, in our opinion, is to be found primarily in the absence of a strategic perspective. In order to fill this gap, in the following we would like to challenge some basic assumptions of revolutionary theory that prevail in our milieu.

We encounter these frequently and most clearly formulated in the journals *Kosmoprolet* and *Endnotes*, which is why in our critique we devote ourselves above all to the analyses of class struggles and the role of communists represented there.

But first, let us look at the basic assumptions that are the subject of this text. In his introduction to council communism (2) Felix Klopotek characterised four principles which, in our view, aptly outline the coordinates of the social revolutionary milieu. These are: confidence in the spontaneity of the proletarian masses, the certainty of having to hibernate as a revolutionary minority in theory circles during periods of calm, the crisis of capitalism as a catalyst for a communist mass movement and, finally, the rejection of workers' parties and trade unions as counterrevolutionary institutions. Instead of building class organisations within the existing, the "struggle for the autonomy of the class" (Klopotek: 18) had to be waged, which would appear in particular in the formation of council-like grassroots structures. Only such structures, in turn, could serve as the basis of a social revolution.

In our view, the social revolutionary milieu, with these assumptions, is consciously or unconsciously in the council communist tradition. Council communism emerged in the 1920s on two fronts, on one side, against reformist and state-loyal social democracy, and, on the other, against Stalinism. It blamed the failure of both on the organisational forms of the old workers' movement in large parties and trade unions, which it consequently rejected on principle - paradigmatically summarised in Anton Pannekoek's statement that "in the name 'revolutionary party'" there was already "an inner contradiction" (3). The three basic problems associated with these organisations - bureaucracy, leadership, and proxy politics - would prevent, rather than promote, any attempt by the working class to emancipate *itself*. In contrast, council communism therefore advocated the self-organisation of the class, which had to emerge from spontaneous movements and in which alone the class could form the necessary self-activity. Against the background of the counterrevolutionary role of the social democratic parties and trade unions, and the development of the Leninist parties into dictatorial apparatuses, this position seems historically verified. Thus, according to its intent, council communism remains firmly on the ground of the revolution, and, in contrast to the "official" communists and social democrats, can justifiably reject any compromising.

In their general features these basic convictions of the council communist tradition are still deeply anchored in our minds today and to a large extent shape our interpretation of the history of the workers' movement. We think not only that we need to correct this interpretation, but also that the conclusions drawn from it obscure our view of the necessary tasks to which we should commit ourselves at present. Accordingly, we think it is insufficient to rely on the fact that a deep crisis of capital will produce spontaneous mass movements capable of developing an alternative to the ruling order on their own. Rather, communists should push for the building of an oppositional social base within the existing, as the various grassroots initiatives are already trying to do. However, in our opinion, we also need the construction of a political organisation with a programme as a point of reference, which can serve as an anchor for the various local and sectoral initiatives.

1. The Limits of the Struggles

The bourgeois order is inconceivable without class struggles, since the needs and interests of wage earners stand in indissoluble opposition to capital, which at the same time forms the foundations of their existence. The essential problem facing the working class is to overcome the isolation of the capitalist mode of production and appropriation by other classes, and to constitute itself politically autonomously as a class for itself. What is meant by this is the building of independent organisations through which wage-dependents can act as a class and fight for the realisation of their interests, but at the same time also develop an awareness that their interests cannot be fully or permanently realised within the bourgeois order. Following these basic assumptions, we have formulated in *Communaut's About Us* text: "If the proletariat does not want to be captured by a populistically

pimped-up social democracy, or one of its many modern copies, it must organise itself independently." The essential difference of council communism from the preceding Marxist orthodoxy, which always linked the formation of proletarian autonomy to the building of trade unions and workers' parties, is that the autonomy understood by council communism is sought beyond such organisations, in the institutionally unconsolidated "movements". Therefore, we also begin our discussion with a brief look at the social and political movements of recent times.

The movements of the last few years were first of all a sign that the working class had broken free to some extent from its paralysis of shock. Not only have large masses of proletarianised people repeatedly taken to the streets against the ruling system, they have also produced impressive means of struggle and forms of solidarity. Above all, the approaches of spontaneous self-organisation, which repeatedly flashed up, were hopeful, for example in the square occupations in Cairo and Paris, the neighbourhood assemblies in Chile or the democratic forms of voting via messenger services in the movement in Hong Kong. These testimonies of proletarian self-activity not only prove that the wage-dependent class has the capacity to go beyond the passive and externally determined forms of its existence, but also that the promise of prosperity of capitalism has become fragile in the course of the development of the crisis even in the capitalist centres. The fact that these struggles flare up again and again also confirms the simple observation that wage-dependents, because of their separation from the means of production and their atomisation in the process of production and circulation, are forced to unite in order to improve their working and living conditions. In doing so, they produce spontaneous and autonomous forms of organisation that need to be reflected and pushed forward as innovations in the class struggle.

As hopeful as the struggles and the self-activity of those involved in them may be, their limits are obvious where they are thrown back on pure spontaneity. The movements were heterogeneous in their class composition. In them, proletarian and sub-proletarian forces often came together with petty-bourgeois forces. Politically, the protests remained under the hegemony of those tendencies that seek reconciliation with the ruling economic and political system by mitigating the grossest "injustices". The excesses of the political and economic elites are criticised, not the bourgeois order itself. The ruling personnel is to be replaced or expanded - but exploitation and domination are not to be overcome. As long as the proletarianised do not gain consciousness of the actual economic and political conditions they are running against, their hopes will be disappointed, their energy and courage will fizzle out or be taken over by the forces loyal to the state.

These barriers of inadequate political and organisational perspective became clear most recently in the movement of the *Gilets Jaunes* (yellow vests) in France. Despite the tenacity of the movement, there was neither an organisational consolidation nor the development of proletarian autonomy, which would have been a prerequisite for a truly antagonistic character and a long-term perspective to develop in these conflicts. The isolation of the rural wage earners and small entrepreneurs in particular was only interrupted for a very short time by the occupation of the roundabouts. Some groups did try to initiate a process of political understanding through local and national assemblies. However, these attempts remained marginal and did not succeed in building more solid structures of counter-power.

Although the participants sharply demarcated themselves from the professional political establishment and institutionalised organisations, they did not manage, apart from a few riots, to oppose the bourgeois forms of politics, because the desire for immediate democratic forms remained without content and goal. The movement did not reach the point where it could have developed a conception of the relationship of its thoroughly heterogeneous interests to each other and to the social order as a whole, and what economic and political changes would be necessary to implement these interests. Instead, they remained stuck in the ideology of the struggle between the people and the elite: "Across classes, the referendum is supposed to stop the de-democratisation,

which is attributed to the arrogance of an elite. "(4) In this opposition between the people and the elite, it becomes clear that an independent politics, which has the class antagonism itself as its object, was nowhere near within reach.

The weakness of the yellow vest movement is exemplary of the barriers that movements repeatedly come up against: Forms of proletarian self-organisation are only beginning to form, and a proletarian hegemony within these heterogeneous social movements does not develop by itself. How could it develop if the wage earners are not a class in their own right, a political subject that could act with a clear objective within these confused conflicts? Analyses of the recent movements in *Kosmoprolet* and *Endnotes* come to similar conclusions. The latter, for example, characterise the movements since 2008 as "non-movements" in their text *Onward Barbarians*, because although they are directed against the existing, they hardly have a positive idea of what they are fighting for. In this sense, they are passive uprisings and as such the subjective expression of the objective disorder of our time. Similarly, the Friends of the Classless Society wrote in 2012: "If you look at the struggles, riots, even outright uprisings of the last few years, you discover spontaneity, very often the absence of parties and trade union organisations, a strong readiness for violence. But one also sees a complete helplessness when it comes to going beyond the targeted blockade of the economy; a practical idea of overcoming the old world is missing. " (5) Also with regard to the defeat of the movement in Egypt, they stated that "the lull of reformism and the end of state socialism have by no means paved the way for a real break with social relations. [...] The power to overthrow rulers was consistently matched by a complete powerlessness to envisage a new social order. " (6)

The experiences of the proletarian struggles of the last decades speak a clear language: they showed that the wage-dependent class can mobilise astonishing forces again and again without achieving anything at all. Despite participation in protests on a scale that the world has probably never seen and cycles of struggle that have lasted longer than usual, the rule of the bourgeoisie is less threatened than ever. The question now is what conclusion to draw from this assessment about the limitedness of the struggles. In the same text of *Kosmoprolet*, it says at the end: from the spontaneity of the proletarian class "alone no miracles can be expected". The text *Contours of the World Commune* also distances itself from a "revolutionary spontaneism" whose adherents hoped "for the growth of the world working class" and "the automatic unfolding of struggles". We share this insight into the limitations of the classes' ability to spontaneously develop the necessary forces to overturn capitalist relations. But the question then is what to do to overcome these limited forces of spontaneity? What ingredients are needed to turn disorientation into orientation and for the working class to develop political autonomy? What role can communists play in this? As we will show, *Kosmoprolet* and *Endnotes* largely fail to answer these questions. Although they do not see autonomous class formation in spontaneous processes advancing at all in their analysis, the question of how proletarian autonomy can emerge is not addressed as a question of organisation.

2. Self-inflicted Perspectivelessness

The role that communists can play in advancing current struggles is seen relatively modestly in the social revolutionary milieu. The editors of *Kosmoprolet* see the task of communists as "supporting and publicising the few struggles along the front line of the classes" (7) and "separating in these struggles the paralysing from the forward-looking moments, those that are egoistic-localistic and classist, from those that aim at extension and communisation" (8). As far as concrete demands and ideas of a different society were concerned, a negative practice was preferred here for a long time, which made it its task to criticise the limited demands for reform of social movements and instead, through the "emphasis on self-activity and self-responsibility, [to] make communism conceivable for the first time for those struggling" (9). A certain distancing from the purely negative practice was most recently represented by the already mentioned text *Contours of the World Commune*, in which the attempt is made to develop, at least in rudimentary form, an idea of what should take the place

of the existing order. For "if one does not imagine the revolution as a complete miracle, as something that the proletarians achieve in the heat of the moment, almost accidentally, spontaneously, and without any preconceived goal, [...] then it would appear reasonable to try and reach some sort of understanding about the basic features of a classless society." It goes on to say: "[N]o continuous movement has ever resolutely revolted against the existing without having at least a vague idea of what could take its place. The purely negative critique of the existing that some left radicals invoke is ultimately impossible."

What's left unanswered in these reflections is the question of the mediation between the struggles on the one hand and the goal of a communist society on the other: "Between the present state and the possible commune, a huge abyss opens up, and the leap across that abyss sketched here undeniably has certain adventurous features." The hint at the end of the text, that the overcoming of capitalism can only be imagined as "a wild movement of occupations that seizes everything that is of use to them", does not point a way across the abyss either.

In their analysis of the current class struggles, Endnotes also fail to provide a positive answer to this problem of mediation. In the already mentioned text *Onward Barbarians*, they do not even see the lack of a decidedly socialist perspective and independent proletarian organisations as the current problem, but absurdly declare that to be a new revolutionary potential. The emergence of the old workers' movement on the basis of mass organisations and a shared identity was based on a certain phase of the development of capitalism and was in particular an expression of the rise of the industrial proletariat. In contrast, the working class today, due to its increasing fragmentation and atomisation, can no longer produce such forms, but can only form its commonalities in revolts and without positive reference to any workers' consciousness. The "non-movements" are the place where the atomised wage-dependents experience the world as changeable through collective revolts and where a less domesticated "new type of human" emerges. Although Endnotes concede the necessity of some form of organisation, they believe that it must form organically and spontaneously out of the movement and remain an "invisible party" without a formal structure. The bearer of hope for them, in this case entirely in the council-communist tradition, is the capitalist death crisis: "given that the non-movements are [...] the subjective signs of the stagnation of capitalism, perhaps their most important task is to become conscious of this latent condition and orient themselves to the potential end of a system that is already in chronic decline." (10)

What remains completely unexplained in this perspective is why, of all things, in a spontaneous, chaotic process the proletarian masses should form a revolutionary consciousness and clarity about their political interests, which then enables them to revolutionise society. This position fails to answer the crucial question of the conditions under which the working class becomes revolutionary, or more concretely, under which conditions it can acquire consciousness of its own interests as a class and form capacities to overturn society on its own terms. Instead of making a virtue out of necessity, we should first admit the weakness that follows from increasing atomisation.

Deindustrialisation and the emergence of new forms of work beyond the concentrated industrial sectors led to the decline of the workplace as the culmination of social struggles. The absence of these collective places hampers the possibilities of finding common political forms and organisations of struggle and of forming a collective identity and class consciousness. Accordingly, spontaneous struggles remain fragmented and disoriented.

Wrong Coordinates

In our view this lack results from the - historically justified - council-communist system of coordinates, in which organisations such as trade unions and workers' parties could only play a counterrevolutionary role in the workers' movement. The claim to leadership represented by these organisations vis-à-vis the proletariat is seen to have been discredited by their conservative to

dictatorial role vis-à-vis the class movements. Revolutionary organisations, on the other hand, could only emerge spontaneously from mass struggles and therefore, for the time being, the communist minority had no choice but to hibernate in theory circles and carry a radicalising critique into the spontaneous movements. As we have seen above, this intervention essentially amounts to highlighting the limitations of the struggles and nudging them in the direction of a radical overturning of existing conditions. However, as Robert Schlosser has already stated in the direction of the Friends [of the Classless Society], by this fundamental anti-politics one deprives oneself of the possibility of achieving more "than commenting on struggles or theoretical analysis. Those who have nothing else to offer than 'communism' will always remain separated from the social movements".

This approach is based on a theory of crisis, according to which the limited struggles of the wage-dependent already point beyond the existing, insofar as they can no longer be pacified within capitalism due to an unsolvable crisis of valorisation. In this sense, the group Eiszeit writes in its critique of the trade unions that wage-dependents actually have no other way out than to put the "overthrow of relations" on the agenda, since the "demands of those in struggle" are often "in contradiction to the conditions of utilisation of capital that have come into crisis". And with regard to the crisis protests of 2008 the third editorial of Kosmoprolet states: the wage-dependents "are faced with the choice of swallowing everything or rejecting everything." The task of communists then seems to be to raise the consciousness of the masses to this fact. The idea that communists could present themselves with their own programme, which could serve as a rallying point for resistance against capital, is rejected as an offering to that consciousness (11). In this way, they remain in an external relationship to the ongoing movements, which they can only ever critically autopsy in their unfolding or after their defeat. Not because of a naive optimism about the crisis, but as a result of the theoretically conditioned inability to develop a political mediation between the spontaneous struggles of the class and the communist ultimate goal, the hope for an automatic growth and a radicalisation of the struggles still reigns in the last instance: "The development of the stock exchange prices can help create a situation in which opposition to the conditions is no longer a consequence-less affair of a few, but a practical activity of many " (12).

We do not think that this position has a solid historical foundation and can open up a convincing strategic perspective for our present. In the following we will develop this along three theses:

- 1.) The revolutionary mass movements of the early 20th century would not have been at all possible without the organisational groundwork of the social democratic parties.
- 2.) Workers can only act as a class through their organisations. If one does not want to leave the field to the reformist and reactionary forces, one must fight for these existing organisations or develop an effective alternative to them.
- 3.) The constitution of the wage-dependent into a politically independent class is inevitably linked to the party as a form of political organisation.

In a final part, based on the previously developed critique, we will argue for linking the development of a political alternative to the day-to-day struggles of the proletarianised. We therefore also need a minimal programme aimed at reforms under capitalism that would strengthen the defensive and offensive forces of the working class vis-à-vis capital to such an extent that it would be able to implement the maximal programme of overcoming capital and the bourgeois state.

The Positive Role of Social Democracy

A look at the history of class struggles shows us that the possibility of successful proletarian revolutions was never based solely on the spontaneity of unorganised masses, but flashed up precisely where at least part of the proletariat had developed a class consciousness on the basis of independent class organisations. The revolutionary movements of 1905-1921 in Russia, Hungary, Germany, Italy and other countries can be cited as examples. None of these movements were ordered by a party headquarters, but were the product of spontaneous uprisings of the masses.

However, these were social democratic masses, workers whose consciousness of their own power had developed through the work of the organised workers' movement. The vanguard of the council movements was not the unorganised masses but workers who had been organised for years in the social democratic centres. The class-conscious members of the workers', soldiers' and sailors' councils in Petrograd and Moscow, who played a decisive role in promoting the October Revolution, had acquired their political consciousness in the Social Democratic Party and the trade unions. And it was their programme, as simple as it was revolutionary, under the slogan "Peace, Land, Bread, Freedom" that secured the Bolsheviks the approval of the masses and a majority in the councils. Something similar can be said for the November Revolution in Germany: It was the active base of the SPD and USPD in the industrial centres that pushed the November Revolution beyond its initially restrained republican character, forming council structures in cities and factories and demanding the transfer of political power to the councils. Without the years of building up the workers' movement through their organisations, neither the November Revolution nor the radicalising councils movement would have come about. That's because these more radical sections of the workers' movement also had their origins in precisely those mass organisations - regardless of the integrating role they were able to exercise at the same time. It was they who, from the second half of the 19th century onwards, imparted a growing class consciousness and a rudimentary Marxist worldview to large sections of the proletariat. This included an awareness of collective strength and the ability to arrange the world quite differently as a class.

If we want to learn from the history of the early workers' movement, we should not only name the weaknesses and mistakes of their organisations, but also understand that at the same time they produced the subjective conditions for the possibility of a successful proletarian revolution. This positive contribution is largely denied in the council communist tradition and the political failure of the revolutionary tendency in social democracy is not reflected as such, but reified into something inevitable resulting from the form of the mass organisation itself. There is undoubtedly a tendency towards bureaucratic rule in mass organisations. As the organisation grows, the complexity and scope of tasks and decisions increases to such an extent that it becomes impossible to manage without division of labour, delegation and ultimately a full-time apparatus. The latter threatens to become independent from the grassroots, to develop its own interests and at the same time to put the grassroots in a passive role and make them dependent on it. Instead of leaving the existing organisations to the right because of the dominance of such forces committed to class peace and bureaucratic procedures, it would be more appropriate to discuss which organisational measures would be suitable to prevent such a development and to fight for them to become bases for an emancipatory movement of the wage-dependent. From our point of view, what is needed are effective mechanisms of democratic control from below, which would allow the rank and file to take action against decisions of the leadership, a limitation of the salaries of full-time workers to an average wage, and forums for free discussion among the members of the organisation. This would not, of course, guarantee the direction in which these organisations would develop politically. But it would be the condition for an open struggle for direction and for the possibility of the wage-dependents to act as a class through their organisations.

We consider this discussion crucial, because even in the present there is no way around mass organisations of the class, not even for a mass movement from below.

The Negative Power of Workers' Organisations

Although trade unions have been put on the defensive in recent decades and the classical mass parties of the working class have given way to barely distinguishable catch-all parties, even revolutionaries who reject mass organisation because of the integrative tendencies described above still have to reckon with them today. For the workers are not only driven by the relations of production to resist and to create forms of self-organisation in the struggles for this purpose, but also

to put these organisations on a stable basis in order to be able to lead the struggle for their interests permanently. This is why class organisations like trade unions do not disappear and why left parties are often strengthened with the revival of class struggles.

The idea that a spontaneous movement can simply bypass these organisations seems illusory to us. Far more likely is the scenario, confirmed again and again, that in such a situation the established mass organisations themselves would triumph over significant radical minorities within and outside these organisations. Be it in Germany in 1918/19, in France in 1968 or in Portugal in 1974/75 - despite huge mass movements, wildcat strikes and occupations, the established organisations managed to keep the upper hand and steer the movement into controlled channels. In a moment of uprising, the mobilised masses are indeed capable of independent actions and develop a creativity that is capable of breaking the narrow framework of bourgeois legality and forming new forms of class power. However, in a revolutionary crisis, the existing class organisations are also strengthened, since they have already previously bound the struggling sections of the class to themselves and are able as organisations to exercise political power.

This can be observed in a weakened form in phases of social turmoil, when after weeks of mass protests a left party is hoisted into government. The hope, on the other hand, that the previously unorganised masses will become the driving force of the revolution seems questionable, at least on the assumption that those in pre-revolutionary times have not yet developed even rudimentary forms of class consciousness. The hope that the bureaucracy, which tends towards counterrevolution, can simply be outmanoeuvred by the masses, which is associated with confidence in spontaneity, does not lead very far. Its role in the class struggle and especially in a revolutionary situation must therefore be taken into account, and revolutionaries would do well to develop a strategy that does not simply leave these organisations to forces loyal to the state. "The flight into spontaneity, on the other hand, is characterised by the real or imagined inability to form effective forms of organisation and to deal 'realistically' with existing organisations" (13).

But, of course, one must not only reckon with the integrative forces from within, but above all with the counter-revolutionary forces from without. For example, most recently in Egypt, where after the fall of the regime in the course of the Arab Spring the Muslim Brotherhood came to power because, unlike the democratic forces, they were an organised political force with a social base. When the end of *Contours of the World Commune* states that the overcoming of capitalism is only conceivable as "a wild movement of occupations that seizes everything that is of use to it", the problem of the political alternative and counterrevolution is simply passed over. Yet the historical experience of revolutionary crises shows us that rulers are rarely already so weak that they would not fight for power. It does not seem plausible to believe that a new revolutionary attempt by the wage-dependent class would take place simultaneously across the entire planet and without resistance. Rather, one has to reckon with the uneven advance, with victories and defeats, within a longer revolutionary phase. It would be naive to believe that in such a situation one could do without one's own mass organisations, which would be able to coordinate one's own forces and act as an alternative political authority. Even a possible future commune would first have to use "means of government" (14). Instead of the bourgeois state with its bureaucracy, its armed forces, its courts, it would need "its own violence, opposed to the oppressors and organised against them" (15). Denying the necessity of a central political decision-making power will only prevent this circumstance from being adequately theorised and the possible independence of this violence from being pre-emptively counteracted.

The Problem of Political Authority

The council communists then and their successors today find themselves in a contradictory role vis-à-vis the struggles of the working class. On one side, outside the mass movements and class organisations - then in the shape of an "elite party" (16), today in small circles - on the other, on the

verge of dissolving as a "historical party in the class-conscious proletariat ... which is already fighting for its self-overcoming worldwide" (17). This is an unsuccessful attempt to make the problem of political leadership disappear again, which is initially recognised in the necessity of communist circles. It implies a linear conception of the development of class struggle and class consciousness, according to which the proletariat, once it has moulted into a "class-conscious proletariat", would neither know internal struggle over direction nor be subject to opposing political interventions by other classes. This is similar to the view of the early council communists, who advocated not the building of a mass party but the formation of workers' councils as an alternative to these parties. According to this view, there was no need for a revolutionary party, but for a revolutionary class that had to create the corresponding organs of class power beyond the party - the councils. This does not solve the problem of political authority, but only postpones it, because it does not say what the councils stand for. The members of the councils are presented here as a mass with a homogeneous, revolutionary class consciousness.

A look at the council movement of the November Revolution, on the other hand, shows that it was precisely in the councils that it was important to stand up for one's own political position. The vast majority of delegates in the councils were active party members of the SPD, USPD and KPD, who argued with each other about the further course of the revolution and the organisation of the political structures. The hegemony of mainstream social democracy in the councils ultimately contributed to the fact that they did not expand their power, but subordinated themselves to bourgeois organs. Council structures are therefore not revolutionary by their very nature, but can only have a revolutionary effect if they also pursue a revolutionary goal, which must be shared by a majority within them. In an attempt to circumvent this problem Pannekoek ends up with a telling solution, according to which "the council system is exclusively suitable for a revolutionary working class" (18). With this, he too has to fall back on a linear and homogenising conception of class formation.

Party and class do not come into harmonious agreement even in a revolutionary crisis. The working class itself is heterogeneous not only in terms of its working and living conditions, but also in terms of its views and convictions. Within the workers' movement there will always be different ideas about its own interests and goals, which will not disappear even in spontaneous revolts and revolutionary moments. The idea that parties must dissolve within the struggling class does not lead anywhere because it obscures the internal struggle for direction that is being and must be fought out between the different tendencies within the workers' movement. Whether constituted as a formal party, as a landscape of fragmented circles or only as a loose association, communists, by virtue of their political aims, form one of several currents within this workers' movement. If they want to achieve hegemony, they have to win the majority of wage earners for a communist programme as an organised force. If a revolutionary movement with councils or similar organs of power of the class is formed, it depends on which political programme - and that ultimately means: which party - prevails in the workers' movement and thus in the councils and finally in society as a whole, and thus can hope for the active support of the masses.

The question posed at the beginning, how the working class can actually assert its autonomy as a class in a revolutionary crisis and replace the bourgeois order with its self-government and thus a new political authority, is inevitably linked to the party as a form of political organisation. For only a party, in a revolutionary crisis and the intensification of the class struggle, can form on the basis of its programme the necessary organisational and political coherence needed to replace the old order with the constitution of the new commune.

3. Perspective

The council-communist tradition was and is a response to the disastrous failure of the social-democratic and communist parties. Against the self-destructive class alliance of the social democrats with the national bourgeois forces, and the party and state bureaucracy of the Soviet Union, the council-communist position for the free self-activity of the masses almost seems a moral imperative. While we can hold the organised forces responsible for disastrous political decisions which still haunt us today like a nightmare, it is difficult to make such accusations against the spontaneous movements of the masses and their council-communist defenders. And yet they too have failed everywhere they have appeared. As understandable and consistent as the criticism of the parties by council communism is - it too has so far been unable to resolve the contradiction between organisation and spontaneity, between bureaucracy and democracy, between leadership and the masses, and has thus ended up in a dead end. By rejecting proletarian organisations, it resolves the contradiction on just one side and can only hope that the necessary class consciousness will arise from the spontaneous mass movements themselves. In this, it falls into a mysticism of the masses, which has always adhered to this current. In this way, it represents an apolitical standpoint towards the class, because it is unable to participate in a process of the development of consciousness that would enable the class to develop a realistic revolutionary perspective.

But it would be precisely the task of communists to answer the question of on what organisational and political basis the class of wage earners is enabled to conquer political power, to put democratic self-government in the place of the bourgeois state, and to set a social revolution in motion.

The working class will only be capable of such a revolutionary upheaval if large sections of it constitute themselves as a conscious, collective subject. If spontaneous discontent over individual grievances or even a diffuse unease with present society is to develop into a socialist consciousness of the necessity of its transformation, independent class organisations are needed to promote these educational processes on a broad front, to represent the interests of the class and to build up a counter-power to the ruling reactionary forces. Without an alternative to the current order developing in these educational processes and becoming organisationally-politically present in the class struggles, the suffering of the many will remain voiceless or seek a path in aimless outbursts that ultimately end in frustration or the orderly channels of ruling politics.

The Angry Workers of the World have recently noted, contrary to Endnotes, the need for a programmatic orientation: "Times are getting harder, there is a necessity to develop a more concrete strategy" (19). Their proposal is to establish a communist party and develop a revolutionary programme "that pragmatically captures what the appropriation of the means of production means" (20). For this to happen, communists would have to be rooted in the everyday struggles of wage earners, in the workplace and in neighbourhoods.

As important as support for and participation in these struggles certainly is, the perspective remains limited because the Angry Workers adhere to a resolute maximalism. Like the Friends [of the Classless Society], they refuse to formulate any political demands in the form of "supplications to the state" (21) that are not directly aimed at revolution.

The Angry Workers are quite right to criticise the widespread notion of the potential of reformist demands as "tricks of transitional demands" (22). This perspective of transitional demands, which has its origins in Trotskyism, consists in formulating popular demands that are at the same time unrealisable under the given conditions. It is precisely in this unfulfillability that the potential is seen to radicalise the struggles and push them beyond capitalism. The problem with this approach is that it is not at all clear how a perspective for a socialist society is supposed to grow out of the unfulfillability of the demands (23).

The Angry Workers, however, with their anti-political maximalism, do not escape the problem that communists must formulate and make visible not only an economic but also a political alternative to

capitalism. They should not only formulate a maximum programme, but also a minimum programme aimed at reforms within capitalism. Apart from demands that mitigate economic competition within the working: class, this minimum programme must above all contain political demands for democratisation and communalisation, the implementation of which would allow the wage-dependent majority to actually exercise political power and prevent counterrevolutionary efforts (24). For this, however, it needs an organisational framework in which the consciousness necessary for this and an alternative form of political authority can grow. Such a party would not be an electoral association loyal to the state, but would have to act in fundamental opposition to the ruling parties and would use the parliamentary circus - if at all - as a stage to make the fundamental critique of the bourgeois constitution of society audible and to combine it with the struggle for concrete reforms.

Therefore, we advocate that revolutionary forces concerned with the formation of a socialist consciousness beyond their own circle work in the long term to form a perceptible Marxist-socialist pole within the workers movement. To this end, they must begin to unite organisationally on the basis of a common programme. The political sectarianism that prevails especially within the radical and Marxist left must be overcome in favour of a cross-current organisation that discusses and tolerates political and theoretical differences under a common objective. The differences do not have to disappear, but could remain visible in the form of factions.

Only such an organisational unification would create a political subject, a "we", which could seriously discuss questions of revolutionary strategy, as it would also be able to put them into practice. There would certainly be no breathless activism on the agenda, but first of all the stabilisation and focussing of theoretical work as part of a continuous (self-)clarification and research process, which would be necessary in order to contribute to the independent political organisation of wage workers.

In this context, any discussion on the question of a successful organisational practice under the given circumstances would undoubtedly do well to incorporate the anti-authoritarian communist tradition's critique of the past organisational attempts of the workers' parties. However, this would have to be done more productively: So far, the answer of this tradition to the problems of organisation - bureaucracy and independence of the apparatus, passivity of the members and lack of democracy - has been to organise in the political exteriority of political circles. This, however, perpetuates its own sectarian system for all eternity. The alternative position would be to work out how a communist organisation can deal with all these pitfalls and actively face the problems of organising in its own practice. To this end, there are many questions to be discussed, such as how to promote the active participation of members and the broadest possible autonomy of local structures without negating the importance of the common political perspective, or what democratic mechanisms are necessary to counteract tendencies towards bureaucratisation and the making of individual interests independent.

It is clear that the wage-dependent have not waited for another sect that imagines itself as the "general staff" of the revolution and thinks that it can bring about and carry out such a revolution through its agitation. A revolutionary mass party cannot simply be conjured up voluntaristically from one day to the next. Our contribution is therefore not an immediate practical proposal, but aims to justify the necessity of such a party and to establish it as a strategic horizon of our current practice. At the same time, our perspective is not an alternative to small-scale work and agitation in the struggles of wage-dependents, wherever these may be taking place. It is rather a proposal on how communists could formulate their critique and visions more visibly in these struggles. What concrete practice would have to follow from this programmatic orientation differs depending on the place and the respective political conditions, and would have to be discussed in detail on the basis of these particularities. In any case, however, we should leave the wrong track, on which, in the midst of

fundamental left irrelevance, nothing seems more important than "promoting the division of the left into statist and anti-authoritarians" (25).

Notes

- (1) Friends of the Classless Society, *Thesen zur Krise* [Theses on the Crisis], 2009. 2.
- (2) See the introductory book *Rätekommunismus* [Council Communism] by Felix Klopotek, published this year in the Theorie.org series by Schmetterling-Verlag, here page 15ff.
- (3) Anton Pannekoek (1936), *Partei und Arbeiterklasse* [Party and Working Class], 501, in: *Arbeiterräte. Texte zur sozialen Revolution* [Workers' Councils: Texts on Social Revolution], Fernwald 2008.
- (4) Working group Gilets Jaunes of the Translib, *100 Euros und ein Mars* [100 Euros and a March], 2019.
- (5) Friends of the Classless Society, *Der Existenzialismus als Zerfallsprodukt revolutionärer Theorie*, [Existentialism as a decay product of revolutionary theory], 2012.
- (6) Friends of the Classless Society, *Die Ordnung herrscht in Kairo* [Order Reigns in Cairo], 2015.
- (7) *Kosmoprolet* #5, *Editorial*, 2018.
- (8) Friends of the Classless Society, *28 Thesen zur Klassengesellschaft* [28 theses on class society], 2007.
- (9) Friends of the Classless Society, *Reaktionen auf die 28 Thesen zur Klassengesellschaft* [Reactions to the 28 Theses on Class Society], 2009.
- (10) Endnotes, *Onward Barbarians*, 2020
- (11) See Thesis 28 of the *28 Theses on Class Society* by Friends of the Classless Society.
- (12) Friends of the Classless Society, *Theses on the Crisis*, 2009.
- (13) Paul Mattick (1975), *Spontaneity and Organisation*, p. 44.
- (14) MEW 18: 630.
- (15) MEW 17: 543.
- (16) Henk Canne Meijer, quoted in Klopotek, 66.
- (17) Friends of the Classless Society, *28 Theses on Class Society*, 2009.
- (18) Pannekoek, *Workers' Councils*, 1936.
- (19) Angry Workers of the World, *Endnotes no.5: A Melancholic Goodbye*, 2020.
- (20) Angry Workers of the World, *The necessity of a revolutionary working class programme*, 2020.
- (21) Friends of the Classless Society, *28 Theses*, 2007
- (22) Angry Workers of the World, *The necessity of a revolutionary working class programme*, 2020.
- (23) For a more detailed critique of the idea of the transition programme, see *A transition to nowhere*.

(24) For further discussion of the question of the minimum-maximum programme see, for example, Mike Macnair, *Transitional to what*, Donald Parkinson, *The Revolutionary Minimum-Maximum-Programme*, and Parker McQueeney, *Why have a political program?*

(25) Friends of the Classless Society, *Krisenlösung als Wunschkonzert* [Crisis Resolution as Wishful Thinking], 2013