Table of Contents

The Democratic Mystification

Camatte, Jacques
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The proletariat's assault on the citadels of capital only has a chance of success on condition that the proletarian revolutionary movement finishes with democracy once and for all. Democracy is the last refuge of all disavowals and betrayals, because it is the first hope of those who believe in purifying and re-invigorating the current movement which is rotten to its core.

5.1. The General historical phenomenon

> "Social life is essentially practical. All mysteries which misled theory into mysticism find their rational solution in human practice and in the comprehension of this practice." (Marx, Eighth thesis on Feuerbach)

5.1.1.

Broadly speaking, one can define democracy as the behaviour of humans, the organisation of those who have lost their original organic unity with the community. Thus it exists during the whole period which separates primitive communism from scientific communism.

5.1.2.

Democracy was born from the moment that there was a division between men and the allocation of possession. That is to say, it arose with private property, individuals and the class division of society, with the formation of the state. It follows that it becomes increasingly pure as private property becomes more general and as classes appear more distinctly in society.

5.1.3.

It presupposes a common good which is divided-up. Limited democracy in ancient society presupposed the existence of the ager publicus and slaves who were not men. In modern society this common good is more universal (touches a greater number of men). It is also more abstract and illusory: the homeland.

5.1.4.

Democracy in no way excludes authority, dictatorship and thus the State. On the contrary, it needs the State as a foundation. Who can guarantee the allocation, who can regulate the relations between individuals and between them and the common good, if not the State?

In fully developed capitalist society the State also presents itself as the guardian of redistribution from two different angles: it prevents the proletariat from nibbling away the surplus-value and it guarantees the distribution of this surplus value as profit, interest, rent, etc., among the different capitalist spheres.

5.1.5.

Democracy thus implies the existence of individuals, classes and the State; with the result that it is simultaneously a mode of government, a mode of domination by one class, and a mechanism of union and conciliation.

Actually, in the beginning the economic processes divided men (process of expropriation) who had been united in the primitive community. Ancient social relations were destroyed. Gold became a real power replacing the authority of the community. Men were opposed to each other because of material antagonisms that could break up society and make it impossible. Democracy appeared to be a means of reconciling opposites, as the most suitable political form to unite what was divided. It represented conciliation between the old community and the new society. The mystifying form lay in the apparent reconstruction of a lost unity. Mystification was progressive.

In our day, at the opposite pole of history, the economic process has led to the socialisation of production and men. Politics, on the contrary, tends to divide them, to maintain them as simple surfaces of exchange for capital. The communist form becomes more and more powerful within the old capitalist world. Democracy seems like a conciliation between the past, still acting on our actual present, and the future – communist society. Mystification is reactionary.

5.1.6.

It is often said that the seeds (or some even say the forms) of democracy are to be found in the origins of the life of our species, in primitive communism. However it is a misunderstanding to see the manifestation of the seeds of a higher form appearing sporadically in an inferior form. This “democracy” appeared in very specific circumstances. Once these had ended, there was a return to the former mode of organisation. For example: military democracy at its beginnings. The election of the leader took place at a particular time and for specific tasks. Once these were accomplished, the leader was reabsorbed into the community. The democracy which appeared temporarily was reabsorbed. It was the same for those forms of capital which Marx called ante-deluvian. Usury was the archaic form of money-capital which could appear in ancient societies. But its existence was always precarious, because society defended itself against its solvent effects and banished it. It was only when man became a commodity, that capital could develop on a safe foundation, and could no longer be reabsorbed. Democracy can only really appear from the moment when men have been completely divided, and the umbilical cord linking them with the community has been cut; that is, when there are individuals.

Communism can sometimes manifest itself in this society, but it is always reabsorbed. It will only be able to really develop from the moment when the material community has been destroyed.

5.1.7.

The democratic phenomenon appears with clarity in two historical periods: at the time of the dissolution of the primitive community in Greece; and at the time of the dissolution of feudal society in western Europe. It is incontestable, that during this second period the phenomenon appeared with greater intensity, because men had really been reduced to the status of individuals and the ancient social relations could no longer unite them. The bourgeois revolution always appears as the setting in motion of the masses. From which arises the bourgeois problem: how to unify them and fix them within new social forms. Hence, the institutional mania and the outburst of right in bourgeois society. The bourgeois revolution is a social revolution with a political soul.

During the communist revolution, the masses will have already been organised by capitalist society. They will not seek new forms of organization but will structure a new collective being, the human community. This appears clearly when the class acts in time as an historical being, when it constitutes itself as party.

It has been said a number of times in the communist movement that the revolution is not a problem of forms of organisation. For capitalist society, on the contrary, everything is an organisational question. At the beginning of its development, this appears as the search for good institutions; at the end as the search for the best structures to enclose men in the prisons of capital: fascism. At both extremes, democracy is at the heart of this search: first political democracy, then social democracy.

5.1.8.

Mystification is not a phenomenon planned by the members of the ruling class, a hoax that they perpetrate. If so it would be enough to have a simple adequate propaganda to eradicate it from men's minds. In fact it acts in the depths of the social structure, within social relations:

> "A social relation of production appears as something existing apart from individual human beings, and the distinctive relations into which they enter in the course of production in society appear as the specific properties of a thing – it is this perverted appearance, this prosaically real, and by no means imaginary, mystification that is characteristic of all social forms of labour positing exchange-value." (Marx, 'Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy', Collected Works Vol 29, p. 289)

It is thus necessary to explain in what ways reality is mystifying and how this simple mystification at the beginning, becomes greater and greater and reaches its maximum with capitalism.

5.1.9.

Originally, the human community was subject to the dictatorship of nature. It had to fight against it to survive. The dictatorship was direct and the community in its totality was subjected it.

With the development of class society, the state presents itself as representing the community and pretends to embody man's struggle against nature. However, given the weakness of development of the productive forces, nature's dictatorship is always effective. It is indirect and mediated by the state and weighs especially on the most underprivileged strata. When the state defines man, it takes the man of the dominant class as the substratum of its definition. Mystification is complete.

5.1.10.

Under capitalism, there is a first period when, although the bourgeoisie has taken power, capital only dominates formally. Many remainders of previous social formations persist, hindering capital's domination over the whole of society. This is the epoch of political democracy when there is the apology of individual liberty and free competition. The bourgeoisie presents this as a means of liberation for men. However this is a mystification because:

> "In free competition, it is capital that is set free, not the individuals." (Marx, 'Grundrisse', Collected Works V. 29, p. 38)

> "Hence ... the absurdity of regarding free competition as the ultimate development of human freedom, and the negation of free competition as equivalent to the negation of individual freedom and of social production based upon individual freedom. It is merely the kind of free development possible on the limited basis of the domination of capital. This type of individual freedom is therefore, at the same time, the most sweeping abolition of all individual freedom and the complete subjugation of individuality to social conditions which assume the form of objective powers, indeed of overpowering objects – objects independent of the individuals relating to one another. To bring out the essence of free competition is the only rational answer to its glorification by the prophets of the middle class and to its anathematising by the socialists." (Marx, 'Grundrisse', Collected Works V. 29, p. 40)

5.1.11.

> "Democracy and parliamentarianism are indispensable for the bourgeoisie after its victory by force and terror because the bourgeoisie want to rule a society divided into classes." (*Battaglia comunista* no. 18, 1951)

It required conciliation to be able to dominate for it was impossible that domination should endure solely through terror. After its conquest of power by violence and terror, the proletariat does not need democracy, not because classes disappear from one day to the next, but because there must no longer be any masking or mystification. Dictatorship is required to prevent any return of the opposing class. Moreover, the accession of the proletariat to the State, is its own negation as a class, as well as the negation of the other classes. It is the beginning of the unification of the species, of the formation of the community. To demand democracy would imply the need for conciliation between classes and that would amount to doubting that communism is the solution to all antagonisms, that it is the reconciliation of man with himself.

5.1.12.

With capital, the economic movement is no longer separate from the social movement. The union took place with the purchase and sale of labour power, but it led to the submission of men to capital. Capital constitutes itself as material community and there are no more politics since it is capital itself which organises men as slaves.

Until this historical stage there was a more or less clear separation between production and distribution. Political democracy could be envisaged as a means of distributing products more equitably. But when the material community is achieved, production and distribution are indissolubly linked. The imperatives of circulation

thus condition distribution. However circulation is no longer something completely external to production but is, for capital, an essential moment of its total process. It is thus capital itself which conditions distribution.

All men fulfill a function for capital which fundamentally presupposes their existence. In relation to their execution of this function, men receive a certain distribution of products through the intermediary of a wage. We have a social democracy. Incomes policy is a means of achieving it.

5.1.13.

In the period of the formal domination of capital (political democracy) democracy is not a form of organisation opposed as such to capital, it is a mechanism used by the capitalist class to attain domination over society. During this period all the organisational forms included in this struggle achieved this same result. That is why the proletariat can also can for a certain time intervene on this terrain. On the other hand, oppositions can also occur within the same class, between the industrial and financial bourgeoisies, for example. Parliament is therefore an arena where these various interests clash. The proletariat can use parliament as a platform to denounce the democratic mystification and can use universal suffrage as a means to organise the class.

When capital arrived at its real domination, and constituted itself as a material community, the question was resolved: it seized the State. The conquest of the state from inside no longer poses itself because it is no more than:

> "a formality, the haut gout of popular existence, a ceremonial. The estates element is the sanctioned, legal lie of constitutional states, the lie that the state is the people's interest, or that the people is the interest of the state." (Marx, 'Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law', Collected Works V. 3, p. 65; the word people is substituted for nation to match the French translation cited in the original)

5.1.14.

The democratic state represents the illusion of control over society by man (that man can direct the economic phenomenon). It proclaims man sovereign. The fascist State is the realisation of this mystification (in this sense it can appear as its negation). Man is not sovereign. At the same time, this is in fact, the real acknowledged form of the capitalist state: the absolute domination of capital. Social unity cannot exist with a divorce between theory and practice. Theory said: man is sovereign; practice affirmed: it is capital. Only insofar as the latter had not come to dominate society absolutely, was there possibility of imbalance. In the fascist state reality subjugates the idea to make a real idea of it. In the democratic state the idea subjugates reality to make an imaginary reality of it. The democracy of capital's slaves suppresses mystification the better to achieve it. The democrats wish to highlight it when they believe it can reconcile the proletariat with capital.

Society having found the being of its oppression (which abolishes the duality, the reality/thought imbalance), it is necessary to oppose to it the liberatory being which represents the human community: the communist party.

5.1.15.

Hence most nineteenth century theorists were statists. They thought that they could resolve the social facts at the level of the state. They were mediatists.

Only they did not understand that the proletariat not only had to destroy the old state machine, but also had to put another in its place. Many socialists believed that it was possible to conquer the state from inside and the anarchists believed that one could abolish it from one day to the next.

Twentieth century theorists are corporatists because they think that it is only a matter of organising production and of humanising it to resolve all problems. They are immediatists. This is an indirect proof of the theory of the proletariat. To say that it is necessary to reconcile the proletariat with the economic movement, is to recognise that a solution can only emerge on this terrain. This immediatism arises from the fact that communist society is forever strengthening inside capitalism itself. It is not a question of reconciling the two, but of destroying the power of capital, its organised strength, the capitalist State, which maintains private monopoly when all economic mechanisms tend to make it disappear. The communist solution is mediate. Reality seems to evade the state, it is necessary to highlight it and, at the same time, to indicate the need for another transitory state: the dictatorship of the proletariat.

5.1.16.

The development towards social democracy was discounted from the start:

> "While the power of money is not the relation of things and men, social relations have to be organised politically and religiously." (Marx)

Marx always denounced the swindle of politics and laid bare the real relations:

> "Therefore it is a natural necessity, the essential human properties however estranged they may seem to be, and interest that hold the members of civil society together; civil, not political life is their real tie." ('The Holy Family', Collected Works, Vol. 4, p. 120)

> "Precisely the slavery of civil society is in appearance the greatest freedom because it is in appearance the fully developed independence of the individual, who considers as his own freedom the uncurbed movement, no longer bound by a common bond or man, of the estranged elements of his life, such as property, industry, religion, etc., whereas actually this is his fully developed slavery and inhumanity. Law has here taken the place of privilege." ('The Holy Family', Collected Works, Vol. 4, p. 116)

The question of democracy only remains in another form as the false opposition between competition and monopoly. The material community integrates the two. With fascism (= social democracy), democracy and dictatorship are also integrated. It is a means for overcoming anarchy.

> "Anarchy is the law of civil society emancipated from diverse privileges, and the anarchy of civil society is the basis of the modern public system, just as the public system in its turn its the guarantee of that anarchy. To the same extent that the two are opposed to each other they also determine each other." ('The Holy Family', Collected Works, Vol. 4, p. 117)

5.1.17.

Now that the bourgeois class, which led the revolution which allowed the development of capital, has disappeared, and been replaced by the capitalist class which lives on capital and its valorization process, capital's domination has been assured

(fascism) and because of this there is no longer a need for a political conciliation, since it is superfluous, but for an economic conciliation (corporatism, doctrine of needs, etc.), and it is the middle classes which are adepts of democracy. Only the more capitalism grows, the more the illusion of being able to share management with capital vanishes. All that remains is the demand for a social democracy with political pretensions: democratic planning, full employment etc.. However by creating social security, while trying to maintain the full employment that it claims, capitalist society achieves the social democracy in question: that of slaves to capital.

With the development of the new middle classes the demand for democracy takes on a tinge – only – of communism.

5.1.18.

What has been written above deals with the European/North American area and has no validity for the countries where the Asiatic mode of production for a long time predominated (Asia, Africa) or where it still dominates (e.g., India). In these countries, the individual has not been produced. Private property could appear but it could not autonomise itself; it is the same for the individual. This is related to the geo-social conditions of these countries and explains the impossibility of capital developing itself there, as long as it has not constituted itself as community. To put it another way, it is only when it has reached this stage that capitalism will be able to replace the ancient community and thus conquer immense zones. Only, in these countries, men cannot behave as in the West. Political democracy is necessarily avoided. One can have, at most, only social democracy.

This is why in those countries most racked by the implantation of capitalism we have a double phenomenon: a conciliation between the real movement and the ancient community, and another with the future community: communism. Hence the difficulty in dealing with these societies.

In other words, a whole immense section of humanity will not know the democratic mystification as it is known in the West. This is a positive fact for the coming revolution.

With regard to Russia, we have an intermediate case. We can note with what difficulty capitalism was established there. It needed a proletarian revolution. There too, western political democracy did not have a basis for development and we may note that it cannot flourish there. As in the contemporary West, we will have social democracy. Unfortunately over there also, the counter-revolution brought poison in the form of proletarian democracy and, for many, the involution of the revolution is to be sought for in the non-realisation of democracy.

The communist revolution will begin again, by recognising these facts and granting them their full importance. The proletariat will reconstitute itself as class and thus as party, in this way superseding the cramped limits of all class societies. The human species will finally be unified and form a single being.

5.1.19.

All historical forms of democracy corresponded to stages of development where production was limited. The various revolutions which followed one another were partial revolutions. Economic progress was unable to take place, and to advance, without the exploitation of a class occurring. We may note that since antiquity revolutions have contributed to the emancipation of an increasing section of humanity. From which arose the idea that we are moving towards perfect democracy, a

democracy gathering together all men. As a result many are in a hurry to make the equation: socialism = democracy. It is true that it is possible to say, that with the communist revolution and the dictatorship of the proletariat, a greater section of humanity than before enters the domain of this ideal democracy; and that by generalising the proletarian condition to the whole of society, the proletariat abolishes classes and achieves democracy (the 'Communist Manifesto' stated that the revolution is the conquest of democracy). However it is necessary to add, that this passage to the limit, this generalisation, is at the same time the destruction of democracy. Because at the same time, the human mass does not remain constituted with the status of a simple sum of individuals, all equivalents in right if not in fact. That can only be a reality for a very short moment of history, due to forced equalisation. Humanity will constitute itself in a collective being, the Gemeinwesen. This is born outside the democratic phenomenon, and it is the proletariat constituted as party which transmits this to society. When one passes on to future society, there is a qualitative change, and not merely a quantitative one. For democracy is "the anti-marxist rule of this powerless quantity, for all eternity, to become quality". To demand democracy for post-revolutionary society is to demand impotence. In addition, the communist revolution is no longer a partial revolution. With it, progressive emancipation finishes, and radical emancipation is achieved. Here again there is a qualitative leap.

5.1.20.

Democracy is based on a dualism, and is the means to surmount it. Thus it resolves the dualism between spirit and matter, which is equivalent to that between great men and mass, through delegation of powers; that between citizen and man, through the ballot paper and universal suffrage. In fact under the pretext of the accession to reality of total being, there is a delegation of the sovereignty of man to the state. Man divests himself of his human power.

The separation of powers requires their unity and this is always done by violation of a constitution. This violation is founded on a divorce between situation in fact and situation in right. The passage from one to the other being assured by violence.

The democratic principle in reality is only the acceptance of a given fact: the scission of reality, the dualism linked to class society.

5.1.21.

Often some wish to oppose democracy in general, an empty concept, to a form of democracy which would be the key to human emancipation. Now what is a fact, whose characteristic is not only in contradiction with its general concept, but must be its negation? In reality theorising a particular democracy (proletarian democracy for example) still evades the quantitative leap. Indeed, either the democratic form in question really contradicts the general concept of democracy, and thus is really something else (why, then, call it democracy?), or it is compatible with this concept, and there can only be a contradiction of a quantitative nature (for example that it includes a greater number of men), and, because of this, it does not go beyond the limits of the concept, even if it tends to push them back.

This thesis often appears in the form: proletarian democracy is not bourgeois democracy, and one will talk of direct democracy to show that while the second needs a break, a duality (delegation of powers), the first denies this. The future society is thus defined as being the realisation of direct democracy.

This is only a negative negation of bourgeois society, and not its positive negation. It still wants to define communism as a mode of organisation that would be

more adequate to various human manifestations. But communism is the affirmation of a being, the true Gemeinwesen of man. Direct democracy appears to be a means for achieving communism. However communism does not need such a mediation. It is not a question of having or of doing, but of being.