

a
SKETCH of
COMMUNIST
positions

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A Sketch of Communist Positions

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ABOUT IC

The Internationalist Club is a free association of individual communists from different backgrounds and traditions based in the British Isles who meet to discuss politics and theory on a basis of intellectual honesty and mutual respect. If you wish to be a part of our conversation, you may write to us at: InternationalistClub@proton.me

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Contents

<i>Preface</i>	4
<i>Why the Ultraleft?</i>	8
<i>The Contents of Communism</i>	12
<i>Communists and the Left</i>	20
<i>Why can't we just be friends?</i>	25
<i>Fascism and Democracy</i>	27
<i>Action and Reaction</i>	31
<i>Form and Content in Revolutionary Practice</i>	33
<i>Consciousness and Action</i>	36
<i>Communism as the Social Doctrine of the Future</i>	43

Preface

This pamphlet is my first attempt since encountering the theories of the Communist Left and the Ultraleft to systematise my own thoughts. It is the first fruit of more than a year's worth of reading, analysis, and discussions with other comrades. The views elaborated here are outlined in good faith, welcoming of constructive criticism, and in the hope that they can be matured collectively and in a spirit of solidarity. This pamphlet is therefore not a definitive statement of rock-solid belief, but a snapshot taken at a specific time and place. I sincerely hope that it is not the final word on the questions it seeks to analyse. Instead, I hope it serves in some small way as the beginning of a re-examination of these questions in light of the actual practice of the communist movement. As communists, we must engage in a constant dynamic dialogue with our movement and the ultimate social transformation it seeks to bring about.

This text seeks to answer a question which was raised in the course of deliberations between comrades within the Communist Left milieu: *what should communists be doing in the here and now?* This is an age-old problematic, and one which presents itself to every generation of communists. In considering the role of communists in today's world, I came to the conclusion that it was important to examine the correct balance between *doing* and *thinking*; between theory and practice, ideology and material conditions. I reached this conclusion after engaging with the theory of *invariance*, put forward by comrades situated within the tradition of the Italian Communist Left. According to this theory (in very simplified form), communist doctrine is a set of immutable stone tablets, there is *always* a right answer it just has to be found through rigorous analysis; the doctrine of communism came into the world in 1848, and everything since then has merely been its elaboration; in times when the real movement of the proletariat is weak, the

primary task of communists is to study their theories, to separate right from wrong so that when the next wave of class militancy emerges the battles can be fought on the basis of a correct understanding of the revolutionary process.

However, this theory soon felt inadequate. Communists must indeed study and draw lessons from the defeats of the past, but the idea of a theory that can be proven objectively correct purely from study went against my understanding of Marxism as an evolving relationship of theory and practice which plays out in the field of the real-life class struggle. How can a theory be correct? If we believed that the question of revolution was reducible to a question of having the correct ideas, we would be teachers at best and prophets at worst, not communists. If we adhere to Marxism as an elaboration of the real movement of a class transforming social conditions through its fight against exploitation, this elaboration cannot be rendered into a rigid dogma.

The adherents of invariance will say that I am mischaracterising their position. It is true that much of the nuance in those theories is lost in the summary I have attempted to give above. I am not stereotyping them on purpose in an attempt to straw man those positions. A communist can learn a great deal from engaging seriously and in good faith with the fundamental texts of the Italian Communist Left; this is not an attempt to refute or dismiss that tradition. The only way to understand invariance is by reading what its adherents have to say about it and by studying the real revolutionary tradition from which it emerged. Nevertheless, with all due deference to the rich nuances of that body of theory, a real innovation and wellspring of insight for the communist movement, the limitations of that approach impressed themselves upon me in my conversations with other comrades, manifesting as a deep unease with what constitutes in practice a dismissal of the *rest* of the rich tapestry of communist theory. I came to feel in-

stinctively that *nobody* is entitled to claim the one right answer. In the present times, when the communist movement is still reeling from past betrayals and defeats, and the movement of the proletariat *appears* to have stalled, we must embrace the uncertainty of our position. We can look only to the class itself as a definitive guide; the only truths are class truths – socially contested positions, not God-given maxims.

This text is born from that dichotomy: in an age of counterrevolution and defeat, communists are searching for the right way forward. How can we be sure when we have found it? *Can* we have that certainty, or in the absence of a real revolutionary movement is the search for binding theses destined to be elusive?

This text does not seek to give conclusive answers, but rather to encapsulate an ethos which can guide our theoretical inquiries and practical interventions. The smart-Alec may retort that by writing this text, I am establishing a theoretical framework; I am asserting my own positions. Very well, but nobody expects us to act with *no* theory (would such a thing even be possible?). We cannot overcome ideological dogmatism by pretending to stand outside of ideology altogether. In writing this text, I felt that the resolution of the conundrum of communist organisation lies in the relationship between thoughts and actions. If we can discover *why* people behave the way that they do, then we as communists can work out where our energies are best expended. In retrospect, I have come to realise that the problematic itself is... *problematic*. I hope to explore this in future writings. Nevertheless, the theory of historical materialism makes claims about why societies move and shake, and in trying to define our place as communists under capitalism, this must be our starting point.

Marx and Engels were great thinkers, and they used their thinking prowess to obliterate our faith in thought itself. ‘*Let us revolt against the rule of thoughts.*’¹ Even the greatest thoughts are merely that – thoughts. The question of why people act is too complex to be definitively answered in a mechanistic manner. Indeed, the whole argument of this text is that seeking clear understanding or more correct theory, seeking *truth* itself, is an impossibility and a misnomer to the communist – the ultimate red herring. Rather, we are merely human beings, born of a context in time and space, grasping in the dark to find answers to the questions that confront us in our real lives; questions we did not ask for, and questions the full context of which we will never be able to appreciate with our limited knowledge and fallible faculties. The flicker of life is brief and the march of history infinite. The point, however, is to change it. We cannot abdicate the responsibilities of theory, but neither must we allow theorising to cloud out the realities in front of us.

This text ultimately offers an ethos for how we should relate to *each other* as communists. It is about our place within our movement and our self-reflexivity, our movement’s relationship with itself and ability to critique itself. Despite the problematic nature of the thought/action binary, I hoped to use that binary as a lens through which to examine how communists treat our own theories and our movement’s theoretical development. If nothing else, I hoped to make the case that communists *do* have something to gain from engaging with each other in good faith, from listening instead of polemicising, and from engaging with all the theoretical traditions of our movement deeply and seriously. Because we *don’t* have the right answers – not yet. And only our class itself can give them to us, through the action it takes to transform its reality. Our theories are a product of that action, not a prelude to it. Until the next great revolution emerges (and perhaps that process is already

¹Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology: A New Abridgement* (Tom Whyman ed, Repeater Books 2022) 27.

underway) and hands to us our own problematics, a whole new set of scores to settle – until then all we can do is fly the flag and band together as best we can in a spirit of solidarity, which means openness and mutual respect. As a new generation of communists emerges from the wreckage of the past, forged from the particularities and struggles of our own time and place, now is the time to put old grudges to rest.

Why the Ultraleft?

Space precludes a thorough analysis of the full weight and meaning behind the terms *Ultraleft*, *Communist Left*, and *Left Communist*. Others have written far more, and far more ably, about what these words mean in the context of our history.² The terms *Ultraleft* and *Communist Left* are overlapping but not synonymous. Unpacking the nuances of these terms is beyond the scope of this text, and in an attempt to avoid prejudicing one term over the other, both terms are used with equal weight. In both cases, the term represents a commitment to “our” tendency or tradition.

Whilst this text is firmly grounded in the specific tradition, however, it is addressed to all those who have come to grapple with the realities of exploitation and degradation in the arc of their own lives, and who have come to appreciate the need for the revolutionary transformation of our world, be they anarchists or Marxists, be they ultras or others. It is fashionable within the Ultraleft and the Communist Left itself to believe that we have nothing in common with the other lefts (left-wing, socialists, “Marxist-Leninists”, and the billions of other tendencies of thought that have unfortunately been violently brought into association with the hallowed term “communist”). On one level this is true, and further into the text we shall see precisely why this is the case.

²See for example, Lars Torvaldsson (ed), *International Conferences of the Communist Left 1977-1980* (Old Moles Collective 2023).

I'm sorry, friend, but we just *aren't* fighting for the same things. But in another sense, this nothing-in-common stance is not true, because there *are* things which we share in our lives as human beings. We share experiences of reality, observations about the world around us, and our thoughts and ideas are our attempts to grapple with them.

Together with the rank-and-file left-wing, we share a gripping sense of horror at the rampant environmental despoliation brought about in our modern industrial world and which threatens the ecological basis of life itself; at the mechanised warfare which has brought untold suffering to so many in the past century, and continues to scar the face of the earth with bombs and bullets; at the degradation of wage-labour and workplace despotism which we experience with alienation and distress; at the immiseration of grinding poverty which has consigned so many decent people to the scrapheap of humanity; at the depravity of bigotry which has for so long kept humanity at each other's throats, telling us that the solution to all our ills lies in hating thy neighbour. And, most important of all, there is one more thing we share in common. For whatever reason, our experience of life has brought us to the conclusion that all of these things are not inevitable; that they are products of a specific time and place, and we do not need to accept them with bent back. We believe, like so many before us, that when the right conditions present themselves, humanity is capable of doing away with all of these things and bringing about a nobler, more human world.³

The Communist Left is a tradition from which we inherit a register and a mode of thought, and which guides us in our search for communist knowledge. This tradition, in broad brush terms, derives from the historical experiences of the left-wing of the Comintern, which grew out of the revolutionary struggles of 1917-1923. The Communist Left formed out of attempts in various different countries to avert the counterrevo-

³Marx and Engels (n 1) 71-72.

lution which was perceived to be going on *within* the Comintern itself, where the majority of the Comintern adopted positions that stepped away from the revolutionary goals of communism and made peace with capitalist compromise. As such, the Communist Left has little in common with traditions such as Marxism-Leninism or Trotskyism, which uphold those compromises as being necessary and justified.

In contrast to those tendencies, our tradition maintains certain red lines which are considered to be beyond reproach. These are: *proletarian internationalism* and *class autonomy*.

- **Proletarian internationalism** is the belief that communism can only exist as a global system, and that a revolution can only be brought to fruition on a global scale by the conjoined action of the revolutionary proletariat. We do not side with states or nations under any circumstances.⁴
- **Class autonomy** is the belief that communists, if we wish to create communism, must never sacrifice the independence of the proletariat as a revolutionary force to any cause, goal, or movement beyond its own emancipation and self-abolition (which is in and of itself both first the abolition of capitalism and all class divisions, and secondly the total emancipation of the human species).

We do not recognise anything that trespasses against these fundamental axioms as being either communist or revolutionary – and where the term “communist” is used throughout this text, it is on the basis of this understanding. Our rejection of other tendencies is a rejection of

⁴I fully appreciate the nuances of the national question in relation to issues such as the ongoing genocide in Palestine. In this regard, the rigid approach adopted by many traditional groups of the Communist Left towards Palestine is totally inadequate. Many of us know this, and we are actively pushing for a thorough analysis of the situation which recognises the struggle of Palestinian people against Israel's genocidal conduct. On the world scale we adhere to the general rule that the bourgeois state is a function of capitalist exploitation that communists must resolutely oppose. For communists, internationalism is not just a nice idea; it is a real living practice to which we must commit.

an ideology which we believe dissipates the real potential of the proletariat to transform society in the name of partial short-term objectives. This position is not, however, the elitist pursuit of ideological purity, but rather the fruit of a long series of historical defeats. Revolutionary movements have, time and time again, paid the price for turning their backs on the communist project when the revolutionary wave began to ebb.⁵ So, we uphold the view that communists should never ally with political factions which represent the left-wing of capitalism to achieve “realistic” goals.

Communism for us is not a utopian dream, it is the *only* thing worth fighting for. We have one life on this earth, why waste our precious and limited time engaging with political movements which offer false promises of human redemption? In carving out a space within our lives for political activity, we have chosen to dedicate ourselves to political activities which we believe authentically represent the capacity of humanity to revolutionise its conditions of life and to resolve the contradictions which up to the present have prevented the universalisation of human flourishing. As you will hopefully come to appreciate by reading this text, if the reader is not part of our tradition, then no attempt is being made here to change their mind. It is to be hoped that you will find something valuable in this text to think about, but I am not seeking to force a perspective on you. If our ideas are one day vindicated, they will be vindicated not in debate and discussion, not in the sterile search for pure knowledge, but in the practice of the revolutionary movement itself as it rises out of the ashes of more than a century of defeat. When that day does come, whoever you are, I hope

⁵This is not to suggest that the Comintern in some way snatched defeat from the jaws of victory. Their abandonment of revolutionary politics was a *response* to the failure of the revolution, not a *cause* of it. See for example, Gilles Dauvé and others, *Endnotes 1: Preliminary Materials for a Balance Sheet of the Twentieth Century* (Endnotes 2008, Libcom)

<<https://files.libcom.org/files/Endnotes\%201.pdf>> accessed 1 September 2025.

that you will recognise it for what it is and stand shoulder to shoulder with all of us who are searching to transform our way of life in the here and now. Perhaps we will stand together in the end. I hope you will let your better instincts guide you; at the end of the day, that is all that any of us can do.

The Contents of Communism

Communists believe in a revolution that will bring about the emancipation of the human species from exploitation and alienation. This is a totalising force, which will fundamentally alter the way in which human beings relate to each other and our physical environment.⁶ Our basic definition of communism is a *stateless, moneyless world commonwealth*. However, this is a simplistic slogan. At its most basic level, communism is a system where we produce and reproduce our means of existence directly, by ourselves and for ourselves, rather than our conditions of existence being mediated by capital.⁷ It is a system of production for need (in the fullest, richest sense of the word), not a system where our needs are met purely as a byproduct of a system of economic exchange. This section does not seek to give a total account of communism here, but rather to draw attention to crucial aspects of communism which are often passed over in discussion, especially with those who stand outside of our tradition.

A communist society is not capitalism+. Communism is not capitalism plus economic democracy; communism is not capitalism plus worker ownership; communism is not capitalism minus private property; and communism is definitely not capitalism plus rationalism or humanitarianism or justice or equality.⁸ We are not ‘knights-errant of

⁶Gilles Dauv , *Eclipse and Re-emergence of the Communist Movement* (PM Press 2015) 59.

⁷Dauv  (n 6) 51.

⁸International Communist Party, ‘Equality of Nations Supreme Swindle’

*the dream of Abstract Equality and Justice*⁹. Communism is nothing less than the appropriation of our social wealth *socially*.¹⁰ Capitalism is not merely the existence of private property, or the division of humanity into two classes of those who produce wealth and those who enjoy wealth. In one sense capitalism *is* both of those things, but that is merely the beginning of the story. Capitalism is an entire social system spanning the globe, where all of our social processes are warped around the drive to maximise the valorisation of capital through the cycle of production and exchange.¹¹ Capitalism therefore has three primary features: the existence of a market economy; the impossibility for workers themselves to appropriate *directly* the things which they create; and the payment of subsistence¹² wages to workers and the accumulation of the lion's share of the value produced by the workers for reinvestment back into the productive enterprise.¹³

(*Battaglia Comunista* No 7 of 1951, *ICP*) <https://www.international-communist-party.org/English/REPORTS/WARS/Equality_of_nations_1951.htm> accessed 1 September 2025; International Communist Party, 'Theses on the Historical Duty, Action and the Structure of the World Communist Party, According to the Positions that for more than Half a Century Form the Historical Heritage of the Communist Left' (*ICP*, 1965) <<http://www.international-communist-party.org/BasicTexts/English/65Naples.htm>> accessed 1 September 2025 ("Theses of Naples") Thesis 12.

⁹ Amadeo Bordiga, 'Proletarian Dictatorship and Class Party' (*Battaglia Comunista* Nos 3, 4, 5 of 1951, *Marxists Internet Archive*) <<https://www.marxists.org/archive/bordiga/works/1951/class-party.htm>> accessed 1 September 2025.

¹⁰ Dauv  (n 6) 55.

¹¹ Dauv  (n 6) 41.

¹² The term '*subsistence wages*' here does not mean poverty wages, but rather that the purpose of the wage is to provide a living (aka a subsistence) for the worker.

¹³ International Communist Party, *Property and Capital: Prometeo 1948-1952* (Communist Left Publishing) 26; Gilles Dauv , 'Notes on Trotsky, Pannekoek, Bordiga' (*Libcom*, 2009) <<https://libcom.org/article/notes-trotsky-pannekoek-bordiga-gilles-dauve>> accessed 1 September 2025; Nikolai Bukharin, 'Some Fundamental Concepts of Modern Economics' (2020) 4(16) *Revolutionary Perspectives* 41, 45.

In order to do away with capitalism, we cannot simply leave the main features intact and bolt-on a new socio-legal form of collective property like worker co-operatives or autonomous communes exchanging with each other in market-like relations. This socialised capitalism may be more humane, but it does not eradicate the commodity-logic, the value-logic which has made capitalism into the totalising social force it is today. Such projects aimed at reuniting the worker with his work are an attempt to fight the symptom of alienation, but without extinguishing the root cause, which lies in capital itself. If capital itself is left untouched in these circumstances, it will simply reassert itself as soon as conditions enable it to do so. This is *not* because human nature is greedy or selfish, nor is it because humanity cannot do better, nor because we as a species are incapable of revolutionising our mode of life, but rather because this kind of radical-egalitarian market system fails to address the things which make capitalism *what it is*, and so they will never be able to truly move beyond it.

A communist society will be a formless society. This means that there will not be a body of rigid dogmas which tries to establish in advance what social forms will and will not be allowed to exist in a communist society. The development and usage of social forms (e.g., governance, family, production) will be, if not outright spontaneous, then at least fluid and organic. Under communism there is no proletarian state, proletarian law, proletarian bureaucracy, or proletarian dogma.¹⁴ Attempting to establish binding rulesets which claim to regulate in advance and for all time the direction of future human evolution is incompatible with communism. For instance, state constitutions, which claim to infinitely prescribe boundaries within which the practice of governance may or may not change; or codes of law, which claim to infinitely regulate the resolution of ethical questions

¹⁴Evgeny Pashukanis, *The General Theory of Law and Marxism* (first published 1924, Barbara Einhom tr, Transaction Publishers 2002) 61.

and the permissible structures and boundaries of interpersonal relationships. Class society is one in which human relations are abstracted (as forms of political or moral authority, as economic value, as religion or spirit, as law and rights, etc) and these abstractions come to dominate the real existing relations which give rise to the abstractions.¹⁵ These abstractions form the basis of systemic logics; such logics are the criteria for the ideal (best possible) development of the abstracted relations, and these logics structure, condition, and limit the development of the real relations themselves.¹⁶ A classless society means that the relations themselves are freed from these logics through the overcoming and nullifying of the abstractions. We will govern our collective life in a dynamic and organic way, without the aid of states and armies.

A communist society ends specialisation and the division of labour.¹⁷ This means that all capable individuals will participate in varied productive activities which blend craftsmanship, intellectual engagement, and aesthetic considerations. Specialists as a social stratum claiming authority to regulate the process of production (or any other social behaviour) from officially legitimised knowledge (so legitimised because of its role within the capitalist system) will be rendered obsolete. Individuals will no longer be defined by their occupation. Concepts of work categories, job types, and rigid academic disciplines will no longer be relevant. All humans will both contribute to and benefit from the development of intellectual knowledge and productive capacity. The effect of abolishing the division of labour (or perhaps, the division of labour is an effect of this phenomenon) is to abolish the distinction between production and life itself.¹⁸ This means that rather

¹⁵ Marx and Engels (n 1) 53–55; Dauv  (n 6) 51.

¹⁶ Michael Heinrich, *An Introduction to the Three Volumes of Karl Marx's Capital* (Alexander Locascio tr, Monthly Review Press 2012) 46, 75, 78, 88.

¹⁷ Marx and Engels (n 1) 54; Amadeo Bordiga, 'The Immediate Program of the Revolution' (first published 1953, *Libcom*, 2016) <<https://libcom.org/library/immediate-program-revolution-amadeo-bordiga>> accessed 1 September 2025.

¹⁸ Dauv  (n 6) 52–53.

than work being something we do to “earn” the right to live, we will instead see labour and life as mutually supportive. When the satisfaction of our physiological, psychological, and cultural needs are no longer a mere by-product of the system of capital’s self-valorisation, when the production of our means of daily existence (food, clothing, shelter) is no longer a squalid affair eked out under conditions of factory despotism and Social Darwinism, labour will become once again something fundamental to our communal existence rather than something alienating and distressing. Not easy, not necessarily always joyful or playful, but tangibly and directly rewarding to us; an affirmation of our individual and collective humanity.

A communist society obliterates the false separation between the individual and the collective. This dichotomy manifests itself in the separation between the State and (Civil) Society which was expressed in its theoretical form by Enlightenment thinkers such as Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Paine, Smith, and Hegel, and then subsequently critiqued by Marx and Engels.¹⁹ This theoretical development in bourgeois thinking was produced by real developments in the growth of capitalism as a relationship of exchange, since law and right which stamp the “private” individual as a fixed axiom of exchange arose out of the needs of the marketplace.²⁰ The State is the sphere of politics, where man is abstracted into a status of citizenship and his relations function on the basis of an idealised equality. By contrast, Civil Society is the sphere of economics, where humans are expected to act in an egotistical manner. This is the distinction between “public” and “private”.²¹ This dichotomy between the equality of collective life and the

¹⁹For example, Amadeo Bordiga, ‘Inflation of the State’ in Pietro Basso (ed), *The Science and the Passion of Communism: Selected Writings of Amadeo Bordiga (1912-1965)* (Giacomo Donis and Patrick Camiller trs, Haymarket Books 2021) 327, 327-328.

²⁰Pashukanis (n 14) 117-119.

²¹Karl Marx, ‘On the Jewish Question’ (first published 1844, *Marxists Internet Archive*, 2008)

inequality of individual wills competing in a marketplace is the basis of the separation of the individual from the community. A communist society will be one in which the free development of one and the free development of all are not contradictory but exist as essential conditions of one another.²² In this sense, communism will re-unite the abstracted man (man as citizen in relations of idealised equality with others) with the concrete (biological) person who pursues his own physiological and psychological needs, rendering the State-Society dichotomy totally irrelevant.²³

A communist society is the negation of the negation.²⁴ The original condition of our species was one of primitive communism.²⁵

<<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/jewish-question/>> accessed 1 September 2025; Jacques Camatte, 'The Origin and Function of the Party Form' (translated from Invariance VII(II) 1974, *Marxists Internet Archive*, 2006) <<https://www.marxists.org/archive/camatte/origin.htm>> accessed 1 September 2025.

²²Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (first published 1848, Samuel Moore and Friedrich Engels trs, *Marxists Internet Archive*, 2004) 27

<<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/communist-manifesto/>> accessed 1 September 2025; Amadeo Bordiga, 'Theses of the Abstentionist Communist Fraction of the Italian Socialist Party – May 1920' in Pietro Basso (ed), *The Science and the Passion of Communism: Selected Writings of Amadeo Bordiga (1912-1965)* (Giacomo Donis and Patrick Camiller trs, Haymarket Books 2021) 134, 136-137.

²³Marx (n 21); Pashukanis (n 14) 132; on the impulse behind state logic, see Dauv   (n 6) 36.

²⁴Karl Marx, *Capital: Critique of Political Economy Volume 1* (Paul North and Paul Reitter eds, Paul Reitter tr, Princeton University Press 2024) 691; Friedrich Engels, *Anti-D  hring: Herr Eugen D  hring's Revolution in Science* (first published 1877, Emile Burns tr, *Marxists Internet Archive*, 2010) Part 1 XII <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/anti_duhring.pdf> accessed 1 September 2025; Balance y Avante (tr), 'Reality and Perception: Contribution to the Revolutionary Theory of Knowledge' (2013) 33

Quinterna/N+1 27, 31 <<https://solarcollective.comrades.sbs/assets/pdfs/Reality%20and%20Perception-1.pdf>> accessed 1 September.

²⁵Friedrich Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (first published 1884, Penguin Classics 2010, online *Marxist Internet Archive*, 2010) <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/origin_family.pdf> accessed 1 September 2025.; Dauv   (n 6) 33-34.

Human life was not dominated by abstractions; it evolved organically; the characteristic features and preconditions of class society (division of labour, paternalistic family structures, political authority, property relations) did not exist. Through humanity's organic struggle against the elements of nature, our quest to sustain our life and to thrive, all of these things developed, giving rise to class society. As we dispensed with our communistic origins and primitive freedom, man gained the ability to command greater mastery over our environment; we gained the ability to transform and shape our environment, to control it for our benefit and comfort. All productive activity is the alteration of physical objects through the expenditure of human effort. This process has allowed us to reach our present stage of development. The communism of the future returns humanity to a state of freedom, but without sacrificing the productive, technological, social, cultural, intellectual, artistic leaps which represent the fruits of thousands of years of human social evolution. Future communism negates the negation of our primitive freedom, restoring freedom but at a higher stage of development. In this sense, when we are able to simultaneously master our environment *and* freely actualise our self-development, this represents not the end of history but the beginning of history; communism is the '*riddle of history solved*'.²⁶

A communist society is queerness universalised. There is one other feature which must be laid out as a matter of some urgency in our movement. Despite the existence of queerness as a social and cultural phenomenon now being recognised beyond dispute,²⁷ the world com-

²⁶Karl Marx, 'Private Property and Communism' in Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* (Martin Milligan tr, Progress Publishers 1959, *Marxists Internet Archive*)

<<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/manuscripts/comm.htm>>
accessed 1 September 2025.

²⁷See for example, Robert Beachy, *Gay Berlin: Birthplace of a Modern Identity* (Vintage Books 2015) outlining the birth of sexology as a bourgeois science and its development in Germany from the 1870s-1930s, as well as the political support provided to gay, bisexual, and transgender people by the social democrat and

unist movement has yet to reach a firm position on it. The woman question and the racial question have both been dealt with at length, and the positions taken by our movement have always been unequivocally in favour of female emancipation and inter-racial unity.²⁸ Yet despite the struggle for gender freedom (the right to select a gender of one's own choice free from legal and bureaucratic restraints) forming what is indisputably the most significant newly emerging civil rights struggle of the modern age, queerness continues to evade our analytical lens and many groups claiming for themselves the mantle of Marxism have regrettably fallen into the error of peddling reactionary opinions on this issue.

The resolution to this question lies in the fact that queerness and communism are both conceptions of authentic self-actualisation, expressing the same premise in different modes. Communism applies at the level of the universal that which queerness represents at the level of the individual conscious being. Therefore, communism is the precondition of queerness. By contrast queerness, which represents not merely a sexual preference but more crucially the absolute insistence of the individual conscious creature to a mode of expression which accords with their desire for self-actualisation in all facets of life, is an inherent feature of the communist future. Ergo, a communism that is not queer cannot be truly communist. The denial of queerness is itself tantamount to a denial of the full self-actualisation of the conscious creature. Similarly, a queerness that is not communist cannot be truly queer at all, because it denies the possibility of its own universalisation, and moreover rejects the conditions of complete human flourishing which render it possible to exist in the first place. This is our solution. Regardless of sexual and

communist movements during the Weimar era.

²⁸Cf Ernest Belfort Bax, *The Legal Subjection of Men* (The New Age Press 1908). The story of Mr. Bax is an object lesson in what fate befalls socialists who do not concern themselves with the plight of human beings *beyond* a theoretically vulgarised, workerist “proletariat”.

gender preferences, we stand for the proposition that *all* communists are queer communists, and those who are repelled by this notion have failed to understand both communism and queerness.

Communists and the Left

*[Social] relations impose a certain form of rationality to which all individuals must adhere if they wish to maintain their existence within these conditions. If their actions correspond to this rationality, then the activity of individuals also reproduces the presupposed social relations.*²⁹

Capitalism is not a force of nature or a thing outside of us. It is a system of social relations which we reproduce through our actions. As communists, we aim for the self-abolition of the proletariat. The classless society is *not* a society where everybody is a worker, it is a society where we relate to each other as human beings, and our productive activity is an emanation of our self-actualisation rather than something that appears like a foreign entity floating above us and dominating our lives (The Economy).

The broad church of leftism does not have coherent theory of social power or social change. Leftism (the broad church of radical social democracy, democratic socialism, Trotskyism, Marxism-Leninism etc) fails to understand that the Ultraleft does not support insurrectionary politics because we *desire* the revolution as an end in itself. We base our stance on the empirical observations that insurrections and violent struggles keep happening all across the world, and they happen for a *reason*. We are not trying to summon revolution into existence from the ideologically pure aether because we think they are more aesthetically pleasing – we simply understand that the history of society is

²⁹Heinrich (n 16) 46.

a history of tumultuous conflicts over the control of resources and the reproduction of daily life.

The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles.

Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight...³⁰

Conflict is not something we desire for its own sake, in the abstract. As early as 1847, Engels wrote that although peaceful social transformation is certainly desirable,

revolutions are not made intentionally and arbitrarily, [...] everywhere and always, they have been the necessary consequence of conditions which were wholly independent of the will and direction of individual parties and entire classes.³¹

Conflict is something which happens, and which shapes our society. We are partisans of our class – the proletariat – because it is the only class capable of transforming this society. For that reason, we wish to carry the insurrection of the proletariat to its logical conclusion: communism.

Since communism is the movement and the destiny of a specific exploited class coming into being in a specific time and place (the proletariat), communists believe that our prime duty is to support the combat of this class to its crescendo in the abolition of class itself.³² Our ideas, theories, and doctrines express the historical perspective of

³⁰Marx and Engels (n 22).

³¹Friedrich Engels, *The Principles of Communism* (1847) (Marxists Internet Archive, 2005)

<<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1847/11/prin-com.htm>>
accessed 1 September 2025.

³²Theses of Naples (n 8) Thesis 8.

this class, which is relevant to us not as a working class within and for capitalism but as the class capable of making the revolutionary critique of this society, the class against capitalism.³³ Our ideas are the radical potentialities of what this class can achieve when it acts under certain conditions.³⁴ A more democratic, more egalitarian, worker-led capitalism is still capitalism; it does not fulfil the radical potentiality of the proletarian class, the promise of doing away with class itself. The communist programme, by contrast, does not rest in simply abolishing the form of private property and substituting it with a socially managed social apparatus. Communism rests in the abolition of the market economy and enterprise economy itself,³⁵ and the creation in their place of non-mercantile human relationships.³⁶ Therefore, in assessing the possibilities of political action, we do not turn to a spectrum of ideas (Left-Wing to Right-Wing), but to the class content of movements and political actors. Understanding social life politically is a step forward when compared with spiritual understandings, however both are narrow and limited ideological forms, failing to reveal the whole truth of social relations.³⁷

The Ultraleft does not ally with factions which represent the Left Wing of the bourgeois political spectrum. We believe that such movements tend to militate against the development of class consciousness, and inhibit, rather than grow, the possibilities for radical revolutionary transformation. The clean break between the progressive bourgeoisie and

³³Gilles Dauv  , *The Eclipse and Re-emergence of the Communist Movement* (PM Press 2015) 49; Amadeo Bordiga, ‘Party and Class’ (Rassegna Comunista No 2 of 15th April 1921, Marxists Internet Archive)

<<https://www.marxists.org/archive/bordiga/works/1921/party-class.htm>> accessed 1 September 2025.

³⁴Karl Marx, ‘Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right’ (first published 1843, Joseph O’Malley ed, Cambridge University Press 1970, Marxists Internet Archive, 2000) <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/Marx_Critique_of_Hegels_Philosophy_of_Right.pdf> accessed 1 September 2025.

³⁵*Property and Capital* (n 13) 37.

³⁶Dauv   (n 6) 61.

³⁷Marx and Engels (n 1) 45-46.

the revolutionary proletariat was achieved, decisively and irreversibly, at the very moment when the bourgeoisie won their victory inside of the state structure in the middle of the nineteenth century.³⁸ Those who misguidedly attempt to recreate alliances with progressive bourgeois factions today will invariably end up trapped in their own June Days,³⁹ and with predictably similar results. Reformism and minimum programmes are the history of the integration of the labour movement *into* the state; they represent nothing less than the pacification of the proletariat. Reformism does not take us a “step closer” to anything, it simply seals off the possibilities of extending the proletarian struggle to its logical end, the emancipation of humankind.⁴⁰

All political movements, from social democratic to explicitly fascist, will find swathes of proletarians amongst their ranks.⁴¹ In bourgeois society, the proletarian (abstracted as political subject, as citizen) is offered a choice between political alternatives competing for his attention and support. We cannot presume that merely because a movement claims to represent the workers, or is Left rather than Right, that it represents anything resembling our proletarian perspective. Though there may be resemblances at the political-ideological level, once one digs below the surface level one can see that their class composition is incompatible with our own. Thus, our theory

³⁸Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (first published 1852, Progress Publishers 1937, *Marxists Internet Archive*, 2006)
<<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1852/18th-brumaire/>>
accessed 1 September 2025.

³⁹The massacre of Parisian workers in 1848 by the liberal democratic government they themselves had fought to establish. See *ibid*.

⁴⁰Dauv   (n 6) 40-41.

⁴¹See for example, Gy  rgy Luk  cs, ‘The Fascist Slogan “Liberalism = Marxism”’ (first published 1931, Anton P tr, *Marxists Internet Archive*)
<<https://www.marxists.org/archive/lukacs/works/1931/liberalism.htm>>
accessed 1 September 2005.

does not see state interventionism as an anticipation of socialism, justifying political support for bourgeois reformers, and slowing down the class struggle; it considers the political-economic state as a more developed, aggressive and ferocious enemy than the abstract purely legal state, and pursues its destruction...⁴²

However, neither do we expect theoretical perfection from proletarians in struggle.⁴³ Those who accuse us of this misunderstand, because they continue to be trapped at the level of analysing social phenomena *politically*. In other words, we are not purists as is often supposed by our critics. When the proletariat is in struggle, we expect its political maturation to be a process of development, as concrete questions are raised and answered in the heat of battle. We expect to see proletarians reaching out and grasping into the darkness, searching for answers to the real questions which confront them in their actual social reproduction. Communism will not fall out of our minds fully developed and perfected; it will be forged through the real life and real struggle of the proletariat. Communism began embryonically as a class movement in the early nineteenth century and its development from embryonic form to maturation over time has already been well analysed.⁴⁴ Though we *have not lost* the theoretical heritage of the past two hundred years of struggle, we *must* accept that the reintroduction of this theoretical learning to our class can only take place in the context of its receptiveness to revolutionary ideas which comes with the growing strength of our real movement.

⁴²Property and Capital (n 13) 143.

⁴³Karl Marx, ‘‘No Politics’’ and Revolution’ (1922) 14(11) The Plebs 389 (*Marxists Internet Archive*)

<https://www.marxists.org/history/england/pubs/plebs/v14n11-nov-1922_The%20Plebs.pdf> accessed 1 September 2025.

⁴⁴Friedrich Engels, *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* (first published 1880, Bookmarks 1993).

Thus, why are we – the ultimate pragmatists in guiding and learning from our class movement – labelled as ideologues, dogmatists, and purists? It is because we refuse to accept the surface level similarities between proletarian movements and left-bourgeois movements. Unlike the Left partisans (including those who are communists in name only), we understand that these movements are not merely *quantitatively* different – aiming for different degrees of the same substance – but *qualitatively* different – aiming for substances of a different nature.⁴⁵ As the tragedy of the *Quarante-Huitards*⁴⁶ shows, and later examples in the form of ill-conceived Popular Fronts,⁴⁷ if both are followed to their natural conclusion one will invariably devour the other. We recognise our friends and our enemies by identifying the class for which they stand, not surface-level political beliefs which control nothing and are decisive in no social struggle.

Why can't we just be friends?

To thrive and flourish, capitalism needs to pacify the rebellious tendencies of the proletariat in order to integrate the working class into the system of value production. If the working class cannot be integrated into bourgeois society, bourgeois stability itself is shattered, producing crises which precipitate revolutionary struggle. The replacement of proletarian objectives (revolutionary emancipation) with bourgeois

⁴⁵Dauv   (n 6) 32.

⁴⁶The veterans of the Springtime of Nations, the revolutionary wave of 1848 that both cemented the dominance of the bourgeoisie in Europe *and* represented the first (failed) attempt of the proletariat to assert itself on the world stage.

⁴⁷Gilles Dauv  , 'When Insurrections Die' (*Libcom*, 2016) <<https://libcom.org/article/when-insurrections-die-gilles-dauve>> accessed 1 September 2025; Organisation des Jeunes Travailleurs R  volutionnaires, 'Militancy: highest stage of alienation' (*Libcom*, 2016) <<https://libcom.org/article/militancy-highest-stage-alienation-organisation-des-jeunes-travailleurs-revolutionnaires>> accessed 1 September 2025; International Communist Party, 'Lessons from the Counter-Revolution: Spain 1936' (*Le Proletaire* 1965, online *International Communist Party*) <https://www.international-communist-party.org/English/REPORTS/WARS/Spain_36.htm> accessed 1 September 2025.

left objectives (democracy, civil rights, the welfare state, redistribution of wealth, anti-fascism) is simply a less nakedly coercive method of achieving this integration. Left-wing reformism is the proverbial carrot to the stick of state authoritarianism.

The development of the Moscow-aligned Communist Parties in the period c.1920-1970 is proof of this tendency.⁴⁸ After the revolutionary wave that followed Red October 1917 subsided, the Comintern made a number of tactical and strategic concessions in the belief that they could play for time until the spasmodic crises of capitalism produced a second revolutionary wave strong enough to push communists into power. This began with the United Front and Revolutionary Parliamentarism. These concessions, suspending revolution in conditions of political amicability with the leaders of left-bourgeois factions, began a process culminating in the complete integration of Communist Parties of the world into their national states by the end of the Second World War. The participation of the PCI and PCF in national unity governments of reconstruction in Italy and France, the theoretical “innovations” of Togliatti and Thorez which saw “communist” leaders acting as directors-general of capitalist labour discipline, are a shameful low point for these organs which had once acted as focal points for the rallying of revolutionary proletarians.⁴⁹

What began with temporary tactical concessions to the bourgeois left that had moments before wildly cheered on the slaughter of millions in the imperialist war of 1914, ended with the Communist Parties supplanting and becoming that same bourgeois left. When the next phase

⁴⁸ International Communist Party, ‘Supplementary Theses on the Historical Task, the Action and the Structure of the World Communist Party’ (ICP, 1966) <<https://www.international-communist-party.org/BasicTexts/English/66SuppTh.htm>> accessed 1 September 2025 (“Theses of Milan”), Thesis 5.

⁴⁹In a similar vein, see also the post-WWII attempts of the CPGB in Britain and the CPUSA in America to create “anti-imperialist” and “anti-monopoly” coalitions with the Labour Party and the Democratic Party.

of proletarian struggle began to emerge in embryonic form (1968-69 in France and Italy) sending explosive shockwaves across the world, the mask of communism indefatigably dropped from these degenerated “Communist” Parties, and they gleefully joined with the Party of Order to break strikes and coerce proletarians into passive acceptance of the status quo.⁵⁰ The proletarian struggles of the 1960s and 1970s may have been immature and incomplete; but their development into revolutionary combat was prevented by having to battle against their own community leaders. Deprived of a rallying point, the militant wave of the 1960s and 1970s subsided without ever having made a serious bid for power.

In the next wave of proletarian struggle, we cannot content ourselves to stand idly by while it is strangled at birth by our leftist compatriots. Class autonomy, rather than ideological unity, is the crucial factor for us because it is the very thing by which our entire project lives or dies. We cannot afford to repeat the mistakes of the past.

Fascism and Democracy

The opposition to fascism is often given as justification by leftists as a decisive reason for supporting Popular Frontism. Very well: we find the rise of the far right, the increasing authoritarianism of the state, and the erosion of rights and freedoms to be totally disturbing. We experience these retrogressions with horror. By virtue of our belief in human emancipation and our commitment to the cause of the proletariat, we are resolute antifascists. The anti-fascist coalitions have as their objective the defence of democratic rights and institutions from fascist attack and authoritarian erosion. Based on the simple obser-

⁵⁰See for example, Mouvement Communiste ‘May-June 1968: An Occasion Lacking in Workers’ Autonomy’ (*Libcom*, 2010) <<https://libcom.org/article/may-june-1968-situation-lacking-workers-autonomy>> accessed 1 September 2025.

vation that there is strength in numbers, and that it is more pleasant to be exploited under a democracy than an outright police state, they seek to combine in this cause as many possible organisations which publicly declare themselves as opponents of fascism. We are sympathetic: it is indisputable that communists have always been at the forefront of the struggle against fascism.⁵¹ However, the tying of proletarian organs (parties, unions etc) to the cause of anti-fascist fronts represents the loss of independence of these organs, which is the final step in their complete disintegration. Anti-fascist struggle cannot be separated from the struggle for communism itself.⁵² To blindly support anti-fascist fronts is to be taken in by the naïve delusion that democracy and dictatorship are *free choices*, rather than forms taken by the system in responding to its internal logics. Democracy v. police state, (bourgeois) freedom v. fascism; but these supposed oppositions are not in contradiction with each other at all. Rather, they exist as mutually supportive axioms within the overarching and always-existing *dictatorship of the bourgeoisie*⁵³ (by which we mean the overwhelming social power of capital, its ability to bend all social forms to its logic, and the extreme social power possessed by the masters of capital themselves in consequence of this). We are given democracy *only when* democracy is capable of violently pacifying the proletariat; when the proletarian becomes uncontrollable, the bourgeoisie has no qualms in substituting political democracy with dictatorship.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Pietro Basso, 'Introduction: Yesterday's Battles in Today's World' in Pietro Basso (ed), *The Science and Passion of Communism: Selected Writings of Amadeo Bordiga (1912-1965)* (Giacomo Donis and Patrick Camiller trs, Haymarket Books 2021) 31-36.

⁵² Ottorino Perrone (Vercesi), 'Fascism? Democracy? Communism' (anon tr, *League of Internationalist Communists*, 2024) <<https://internationalistcommunists.org/2024/09/10/fascism-democracy-communism-ottorino-perrone/>> accessed 1 September 2025.

⁵³ The critique of bourgeois democracy as something which exists in name only is a time-honoured part of the Marxist analytical toolkit. Democracy is a *form* taken by the bourgeois dictatorship, under which the social content of capitalism (violence, exploitation, and oppression) continues unabated and even strengthened.

⁵⁴ Gilles Dauvé, 'A Contribution to the Critique of Political Autonomy' (*Libcom*, 2008) <<https://libcom.org/article/contribution-critique-political->>

Democracy is not *merely* a fig-leaf of naked bourgeois oppression. The constitutional state does fulfil this mystifying role, but it does nonetheless have a real existence.⁵⁵ In reality, we *would* all prefer to be exploited under a democracy than an outright police state. But dictatorship is a tendency of the system which emerges in response to objective conditions. We cannot defeat the police state by battling for democracy, because the conditions of social crisis which give rise to the police state make the restoration of democracy impossible until this social crisis itself is resolved. The bourgeois democracy of rights and freedoms can be maintained in accordance with its theoretical basis (the abstraction of man as citizen) *only* on the basis that class struggle is suppressed and mystified, and that members of the social body think of themselves not as members of classes in antagonistic relations but rather as abstract citizens equal to one another.⁵⁶

Once class antagonism breaks out into open struggle, the state is forced to increasingly dispense with its democratic characteristics. Police powers are augmented, the delegated authority of ministers and agencies is increased, emergency laws are passed suspending civil liberties and overriding ordinary judicial procedures. We can see *all of this* occurring today around us.⁵⁷ Remember that the perfect bourgeois democracy of Weimar was decapitated not by Nazism, but by the centrists!⁵⁸ It was against the attempts of the proletariat to assert itself as a great social

autonomy-gilles-dauve> accessed 1 September 2025; Amadeo Bordiga, ‘On Fascism, against Fascism’ in Pietro Basso (ed), *The Science and Passion of Communism: Selected Writings of Amadeo Bordiga (1912-1965)* (Giacomo Donis and Patrick Camiller trs, Haymarket Books 2021) 156, 184.

⁵⁵Dauv   (n 54).

⁵⁶Perrone (n 56).

⁵⁷Space precludes a full analysis, but recent examples include laws restricting the freedom of peaceful protest, making it easier to break strikes in key industries, and granting immunity to state agents who commit unlawful acts.

⁵⁸See for example, Herman Heller, ‘Authoritarian Liberalism’ (2015) 21(3) ELJ 295; Tosaka Jun, *The Japanese Ideology: A Marxist Critique of Liberalism and Fascism* (Robert Stolz tr, Columbia University Press 2024) 285.

force that democracy gave way to the police state, the *constitutional* police state, which subsequently welcomed the fascists with open arms. The democratic state *must* take on greater and greater authoritarian forms in order to preserve its own existence as the bastion of the *status quo* and as guarantor of the social peace, its sole ultimate *raisons d'être*. When class struggle heightens, the state sheds more and more its neutral appearance. It is the failure of the class movement to win *as class movement* which seals democracy's fate. As communists, we know that this periodic social crisis can be resolved in only one of two ways: the violent re-assertion of authority by the bourgeoisie, or the revolutionary conquest of the proletariat.⁵⁹

This is why the Ultraleft does not seek to link up with bourgeois factions in defence of rights and freedoms, because the maintenance of bourgeois freedoms can only be secured in exchange for the bloodletting of the revolutionary proletariat.⁶⁰ The pundits of the *status quo* tell us that defending democratic norms is a step in the right direction. However, democratic norms are secured only at the cost of the violent pacification of workers. We believe that the revolutionary proletariat itself is the only social force capable of overthrowing bourgeois authoritarianism, and it is the very substitution of bourgeois freedoms with dictatorial forms of state that proves that objective conditions *no longer allow* for the maintenance of democratic forms in a given situation. When democracy turns to dictatorship, it is because dictatorship is the only feasible way of pacifying social conflict and integrating insurrectionary groups into the state. Democracy is the fruit of, the accomplice to, and in all historical cases *the initiator* of this systematic class violence. We are implacably opposed to the bourgeois state in both its democratic *and* dictatorial forms and to everything inbetween.⁶¹

⁵⁹Dauv   (n 13).

⁶⁰Theses of Naples (n 8) Thesis 7; Theses of Milan (n 48) Thesis 5.

⁶¹Bordiga (n 9).

*Though it may seem paradoxical at first glance, the workers' movement will only succeed in actually preserving its organisations from the assault of reaction on the condition that they maintain their fighting positions intact, not tie them to the fate of democracy...*⁶²

Action and Reaction

As communists, we must sometimes stand outside of the world. When events break the momentum of communist organisation, '*the revolutionist becomes isolated, and registers temporary defeat. He must wait till the situation changes...*'⁶³ To believe that there is always a communist solution, a viable revolutionary practice, is to '*fall victim to democratic illusions*'.⁶⁴ In times when revolutionary practice is decisively defeated, communism becomes, for a time, mere theory without a practice and in search of a practice. In these times, the communist militant is faced with a choice: do we surrender communist theory and engage in non-revolutionary practice, or do we surrender practice and retreat into theory? This zugzwang position arises whenever practice and theory are separated by objective conditions.

It is to be hoped that an answer to this question can be developed, but ultimately the successful resolution of the question depends not on our own actions during the period of defeat (being as we are a fragmented and impotent minority), but on objective conditions once again enabling our re-entry into the world and world politics.⁶⁵ Thus,

⁶²Perrone (n 56).

⁶³Paul Mattick, 'Karl Kautsky: From Marx to Hitler' (1939) (*Marxists Internet Archive*, 2025)

<<https://www.marxists.org/archive/mattick-paul/1939/kautsky.htm>> accessed 1 September 2025.

⁶⁴Ibid.

⁶⁵This way of putting things is problematic; it upholds the idea that communists are separate from the proletariat, playing to the worst elements of Kautsky's and Lenin's theories of communist organisation. Nonetheless, we cannot

our prime directive should be the continual dynamic analysis of actual events and developments, seeking to identify tensions, fault-lines, and tendencies in order to assess when and where this vital reunification of theory and practice may be rendered possible in reality. Whilst we abhor petty activism which '*enormously exaggerat[es] the possibilities of the subjective factors of the class struggle.*'⁶⁶ we also abhor the prospect of missing our moment when it does ultimately arrive.

Is the answer to the question *What is to be Done?* therefore nothing? Of course not, but we must recognise that our level of organisation corresponds to objective conditions of class struggle which mould possibilities for engagement. We must not '*abstain from resisting*'.⁶⁷ We must fight, but we must do so with nuance, pragmatism, and intellectual honesty – both with ourselves and others.

deny that communists are a minority – a very isolated and fragmented minority. We are simultaneously part of our class *and* a minority within it seeking to push it forwards towards revolutionary objectives. That is what makes us the revolutionary vanguard according to Bordiga. This is *not* a vanguard in the top-down, statist sense associated with Marxism-Leninism, but rather a bottom-up vanguard made up of the most militant anti-capitalist rank-and-file proletarians – including even the anarchists. Unfortunately, Bordiga's terminology on this is somewhat contradictory. See for example, Amadeo Bordiga, 'Party and Class Action' (1921) (*Rassegna Comunista* No 4 of 31st May 1921, *Marxists Internet Archive*)
<<https://www.marxists.org/archive/bordiga/works/1921/classact.htm>>
accessed 1 September 2025.

⁶⁶Amadeo Bordiga, 'Activism' (first published 1952, Libcom, 2014) <<https://libcom.org/article/activism-amadeo-bordiga>> accessed 1 September 2025. In other words, running around like a headless chicken under the mistaken belief that *if we just get enough people doing such-and-such the revolution is bound to happen*. Unfortunately, your one-person crusade isn't going to halt the juggernaut of capital – but it *is* the fastest way to burnout. Don't worry, as we shall see later it's not all doom and gloom.

⁶⁷Amadeo Bordiga, 'Considerations on the Party's Organic Activity When the General Situation is Historically Unfavourable' (1965) (*Marxists Internet Archive*) <<https://www.marxists.org/archive/bordiga/works/1965/consider.htm>>
accessed 1 September 2025.

The existing small movement perfectly realizes that the dreary historical phase it has traversed makes it very difficult, at such a great historical distance, to utilize the experiences of the great struggles of the past, and not just those of resounding victories but also those arising from bloody defeats and inglorious retreats. The forging of the revolutionary programme, shaped by the correct and un-deformed outlook of our current, isn't confined to doctrinal rigour and deep historical criticism; it also needs, as its vital life-blood, to connect with the rebellious masses at those times when, pushed to the limits, they are forced to fight.⁶⁸

Form and Content in Revolutionary Practice

Communism is not an idea, at least not *just* an idea. It is also a practice. It is the '*real movement which abolishes the present state of things*'.⁶⁹ Communism is thus not a form but a content consisting of '*the creation of non-profit, non-mercantile, cooperative and fraternal social relations*'.⁷⁰ Communism is the set of social relations that will be built in place of the social relations that exist today. Therefore, we recognise something as communist not because it comes packaged in a certain organisational form (i.e., union, mass party, vanguard party, workers' state, commune, cell, cadre etc), but because its contents are the contents of communism.⁷¹ Communists are not form fetishists. We

⁶⁸Theses of Milan (n 48).

⁶⁹Marx and Engels (n 1) 58.

⁷⁰Dauv  (n 54).

⁷¹The framing of form and content here is problematic. It implies that there is *no* relationship between form and content. A comrade who reviewed an earlier draft of this text referred to Parmenides on the relationship between the two. There is no doubt that form and content *are* interrelated, but space precludes a thorough unpacking of what that relationship entails. It was hoped that by emphasising the *distinction* between form and content, the reader's attention could be drawn to the futility of trying to locate the success or failure of the communist movement in finding the "right" organisational form – as if resisting counterrevolution was just a question of finding the right formula of party versus

do not subscribe to the mistaken belief that the creation of communism is a question of finding correct institutional formulas.⁷² We do not fetishise the collective, and we are not afraid of individual initiatives; it is the despot who ‘*pretends to have no personal interest and to serve the interests of the rank and file*.’⁷³ Minorities may be right, and majorities may be wrong. We decide not by recourse to a show of hands, but by recourse to our goals, which are always and forever defined by the social content of communism – i.e., the obliteration of class and capitalism.⁷⁴

The communist movement and its doctrines are a product of the changing fortunes of class struggle, communist organisation travels through forms. Communist organisation is a tendency or process. Put another way: communist organisation is not the form but instead develops the potential to inhabit the form like a spectral visitant. Communists chase always the spirit-content, not its host which can be dropped at any moment and left as an empty shell devoid of communist content. Thus, when the Comintern was established in 1919, it was the form which contained the content of communist organisation, around which the revolutionary proletariat cohered. After its painful and protracted de-

union versus workers’ council.

⁷²See for example, Dauv  (n 6) 58; Amadeo Bordiga, ‘A Condemnation of the Renegades to Come: A Reflection on “Left-Wing Communist, an Infantile Disorder”’ (*Marxists Internet Archive*, 2020)

<<https://www.marxists.org/archive/bordiga/works/1960/condemnation.pdf>> accessed 1 September 2025; Theses of Naples (n 8) Thesis 11; Organisation des Jeunes Travailleurs R volutionnaires, ‘Militancy: highest stage of alienation’ (*Libcom*, 2016) <<https://libcom.org/article/militancy-highest-stage-alienation-organisation-des-jeunes-travailleurs-revolutionnaires>> accessed 1 September 2025.

⁷³Gilles Dauv , ‘A Contribution to the Critique of Political Autonomy’ (*Libcom*, 2008) <<https://libcom.org/article/contribution-critique-political-autonomy-gilles-dauve>> accessed 1 September 2025; see also, Amadeo Bordiga, ‘The Fundamentals of Revolutionary Communism’ (1957) (*Il Programma Comunista* Nos. 13, 14, and 15, 1957, *Marxists Internet Archive*, 1976) <<https://www.marxists.org/archive/bordiga/works/1957/fundamentals.htm>> accessed 1 September 2025; Despite differences in phrasing, Dauv  and Bordiga are fundamentally making the same point.

⁷⁴Bordiga (n 22) 141 – Thesis III(3).

generation (by what point precisely this degeneration was complete is irrelevant for the purpose of this analysis), the form was left devoid of communist organisation, and communist revolutionaries were fragmented and scattered across the world to begin again.

As our class movement matures, we desire to move towards an increasing centralisation, or unity. This means that revolutionaries cohere around shared goals, shared objectives, shared understandings, and shared discipline.⁷⁵ Whilst unanimity or even majority is neither necessary nor even inherently desirable, the increasing process of unifying centralisation represents the solidifying of class action, and its increasing capacity to batter against the doors of capitalism. This process of centralisation is the crucial tendency in the maturation of class struggle which points the way towards the transformation of our social life, and it is this class unity in the quest for our collective self-emancipation for which we must constantly be striving.

As a side note (since, once again, space precludes a full analysis) may we speak of a *communist party*? Is party merely one form amongst many, or is the *communist party* our ultimate organisational aspiration? In Marx's own time, "party" was a loose and fluid concept akin to a school of thought or popular movement. Whigs, Tories, Chartists. The development of capitalist bureaucracy, mass politics, and the administrative state transformed the meaning of the word "party" itself, and parties arose which adopted bureaucratic centralism – the Social Democratic Party of Germany founded in 1875 being the foremost case in point. This conception was later brought into the Comintern by the Bolsheviks. Bordiga rightly rejected bureaucratic conceptions of the party,⁷⁶

⁷⁵Balance y Avante (tr), N+1 'In a Broad and Narrow Sense' (2016) 39
Quintera/N+1 <<https://solarcollective.comrades.sbs/assets/pdfs/In\%20a\%20Broad\%20Sense\%20and\%20in\%20a\%20Narro\%20Sense-3.pdf>>
accessed 1 September 2025.

⁷⁶Bordiga (n 33); Theses of Milan (n 48) Thesis 5.

whilst simultaneously never *openly* breaking with Lenin or Leninism.⁷⁷ So, what are we left with? Is the essence of the party-form tied to the development of capitalist society, to the development of the class movement, or do we prefer to use it in the sense of meaning *our party*, our camp, our school of thought, our movement? These questions need further clarification in future debates. What we know, however, is this: the Party of the Communist Revolution is not a bureaucratic form with rulebooks and constitutional wrangling, nor is it a weapon of ideological terror and conformism; it is the body of proletarians dedicated to carrying out the communisation of society. Constituted as such, we are not afraid of (and indeed we openly call for) the centralisation and unity of the most active, forward-positioned elements of our class in the struggle against capitalism.

Consciousness and Action

When we refer to consciousness, we speak in the sense not of the spark of conscious life, but of consciousness as an awareness of certain facts. This can be class consciousness (the awareness of one's class position), political consciousness (the awareness of one's capacity as a political actor), communist consciousness (the awareness of communist theory) and so on. We do not bother with the preposterous question of so-called "false consciousness"; all consciousness is true, because all consciousness is generated as a real mental response to real inputs.⁷⁸

Marxists assert that social existence determines consciousness, *not* the other way around.⁷⁹ Since external reality (or, what human beings perceive as external reality) is always the subject-matter of thought, even

⁷⁷Dauv   (n 73).

⁷⁸Marx (n 24) 52; Heinrich (n 16) 76.

⁷⁹Karl Marx, 'A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy' (first published 1859, Progress Publishers, *Marxists Internet Archive*, 1999) Preface <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/Marx_Contribution_to_the_Critique_of_Political_Economy.pdf> 1 September 2025.

in a negative sense,⁸⁰ reality is therefore the precondition of thought and forms its material basis. The point is not that we can or even should try to deterministically identify a rigid separation between thought and practice (we do not think such a thing is possible), but rather to drive home the point that '*[a]ll social life is essentially practical*' and '*[a]ll mysteries which lead theory to mysticism find their rational solution in human practice and in the comprehension of this practice.*'⁸¹ We can think for as long as we wish, but only by *doing* can we *do*.

Fundamentally, then, it is the world around each and all of us which serves as the basis for the development of our ideas, because the world around us is *what we think about*. We cannot imagine heaven as a concept; we can only imagine heaven as a reflection of our real existence. We imagine a pearly gate, like the gates we have encountered in reality; we imagine clouds, like the clouds we have observed in our world. Rather than ideal forms serving as a basis for real constructions, our real constructions serve as the basis from which ideal forms are abstracted.

In relation to consciousness, the crucial result which flows from this idea-reality relationship is that what we as individuals can imagine as being possible and achievable is itself conditioned by our own conditions of life. Our communist knowledge is structured by, perhaps warped by, and always invariably a product of, externalities. These externalities include, most chiefly: the means and ways by which our conditions of existence are produced and reproduced, and the ebbs and flows of class struggle. Proletarian victory gives rise to greater possible imaginaries; proletarian defeat saps our ideas of vital life, and they then wither

⁸⁰John Keracher, *How the Gods Were Made: A Study in Historical Materialism* (first published 1929, Socialist Party of Great Britain 2015) 14.

⁸¹Karl Marx, 'Theses on Feuerbach' (1845) (*Marxists Internet Archive*, 2002) Thesis VIII <<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/theses/>> accessed 1 September 2025.

away. In other words: the extent to which we perceive communism as a real possibility depends on the extent to which communism is becoming a possibility in reality. Communism may or may not be an inevitable consequence of the pattern of human evolution; the only way for us to answer this question definitively would be to live in a communist society. Everything is inevitable in hindsight.⁸²

This brings us to the question of our role. In the past, communists have been stereotyped as crude determinists. Some may say, “Well if communism is inevitable as a consequence of the development of the productive forces, why do you need to bother doing anything?” Very well, if thoughts and ideas and theories are not decisive, then why *are* we doing anything? Why not just let the class conflict ride to its own logical conclusion? Our belief is that communist consciousness – those understandings and theories which are relevant to our objectives and which facilitate our work – resides only in the movement itself. Outside of participation in the real life of the communist milieu, this kind of understanding and consciousness cannot exist.⁸³ At the same time, and despite this knowledge existing only within and across our movement, we must accept that attempting to create an artificial separation between those with knowledge and those without goes wholly against the grain of our understanding of the relationship between thought and action.⁸⁴ Rather, in light of all we believe, we must understand that both as individuals *and* as a collective, we cannot ever expect to develop and maintain the correct answers in totality.

⁸²Dauv   (n 6) 51; Avante (n 24) 31.

⁸³International Communist Party, *The Communist Party in the Tradition of the Left* (Communist Left Publishing, 2024) 17-18 (ICP, 1974)

<<https://www.international-communist-party.org/English/Texts/CPTraLef/CPTraLe1.htm>> accessed 1 September 2025.

⁸⁴Theses of Naples (n 8) Thesis 5.

The correct answers are infinitely scattered across our class movement, our historical party, in its history and the lessons we draw from it and in our analyses of its contemporary developments. We are not striving for total theoretical rightness. We recognise that we too as conscious creatures are products of class society and our own consciousness, our capacity to understand what is around us, is stamped with all that this entails. Thus, we reject '*the most putrid myth of this putrefying society*', the idea that

*the individual, with his miserable little brain, can learn about, or make decisions about, anything other than that which has already been dictated by those astute manipulators of culture and ideas: the ruling classes.*⁸⁵

The Bordigist theory of the party holds further that within the party there is a '*reversal of praxis*', by which

*the relationship between action and consciousness is turned on its head and the action of the Party organ can become conscious, something denied to any other organism, and especially the individual militant.*⁸⁶

This theory is right in its outline, in the sense that we can take control of our human species-destiny through our participation in the revolutionary movement. Yet, this must not be allowed to mean that the carrying out of practice is merely a question of applying our theories to reality. This is only one half of the relation and forgets the crucial point that our theories are *drawn from* the reality of class-divided society. Our understanding as human beings, even human beings as part of a revolutionary milieu, will always be incomplete in this context. The communist organ will always be an organ composed of human beings, and its knowledge, no matter how advanced in theory, will never be able to reach any heights beyond what it is permitted to discover through

⁸⁵ *The Communist Party in the Tradition of the Left* (n 83) 24-25.

⁸⁶ *Ibid* 33.

continual verification of its theory in practice. We draw the lessons of the past, and in applying them to reality we generate new lessons. To suggest that the communist organ (the party, if you will) *can* possess, of itself, a totally and objectively correct understanding at all times is to make a mockery of the reality-idea relationship upheld in Marxist theory.

Rather than claim correctness or understanding, communists instead seek to elucidate a theory that lives in its practice; we reject any notion that more theory, more correctness, more answers can save us and our movement.⁸⁷ Theses are worthless to us as literary relics, and are relevant to us only if we can apply them in practical action.⁸⁸ The communist movement does not rise or fall on the correctness of its theory, but rather the communist theory which we develop highlights and corresponds to the level of actual development of the communist movement as it is elaborated through practice in a succession of confrontations with concrete questions. We cannot develop theory, and we certainly cannot gain individual knowledge, beyond what is allowed to us by the objective conditions in which we find ourselves. The production and reproduction of communist knowledge is therefore in one sense a totally fruitless enterprise, since the contents of that knowledge will always necessarily be conditioned by external limitations imposed on us by objective developments in society such as the technologies available for travelling, gathering information, and communicating thoughts and ideas.

Despite this, the production and reproduction of communist knowledge is a necessary part of communist practice; *not* because the body of theory – conceptions, ideas, analyses – serve as decisive in resolving

⁸⁷ Amadeo Bordiga, ‘The Batrachomyomachia’ (*Il Programma Comunista* No.10 of 1953, ICP) <<https://www.international-communist-party.org/English/Texts/ThreadTi/53Batrac.htm>> accessed 1 September 2025.

⁸⁸ Theses of Milan (n 48) Thesis 6.

the social struggle, but because the elaboration and communication of ideas is the only barometer by which we can assess the balance of class forces. Theory is therefore vital but not controlling. To situate in ideas a decisive or even significant role in the development of class struggle is to fetishise thinking, to ascribe to it a false causal capacity. Lenin claimed that without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement.⁸⁹ This is correct, but *not* because revolutionary theory *makes* the revolutionary movement. Lenin's dictum is correct because theory is the only form in which we become conscious of our movement and theory is therefore the only way in which we can objectively perceive that movement.

We uphold the following formulation: first instinct, then action, *then* comprehension (or consciousness). Only long after the last vestiges of capitalism have been obliterated will we *truly and completely* have the opportunity to understand in its totality the processes of human evolution which have taken us to that special place. Since human beings can only interpret social phenomena on the basis of what we have already encountered in our lived reality, we must recognise that people do not become revolutionary because they have read and understood communist ideas but rather they become revolutionary *through their actual practice* of revolutionising their conditions of life, a path which they conspire to undertake because their conditions of life have rendered their experience of the status quo intolerable and caused them to push against its constrictions.

⁸⁹Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, *What is to be Done?: Burning Questions of our Movement* (first published 1902, Joe Fineberg and George Hanna trs, Foreign Languages Publishing House 1961, *Marxists Internet Archive*, 2008) <<https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1901/witbd/>> accessed 1 September 2025.

The role of the communists is to seek to bring to this struggle – which develops outside of our individual control – an understanding of the need for revolution as its only resolution. In other words: we cannot create class struggle, our role is to guide the struggle of the exploited class towards taking the only steps which can resolve class struggle itself. Our ideas are not the impulse which drives class action, but rather the reflection of class strength – the necessary barometer; a necessary but insufficient condition.⁹⁰ We are ourselves a part of our class movement; as communists, we reserve the right to take any action within that struggle necessary and appropriate to its development, and we do not renounce our role as individuals within our class.⁹¹ We are participants in social processes, not controlling them but unavoidably acting them out through our consciousness and practice. On the basis of all of this, we must oppose educationalism and the idea that the riddle of revolutionary practice can be solved in any way by correct education or the spread of correct ideas.⁹²

Finally, in terms of how we relate to the real movement, we do not separate ourselves from it. We must find each other as communists within this movement, rather than raising organisational and institutional separations between ourselves and the mass of struggling proletarians.⁹³ Our communism is an extension of our desire to live outside of capitalism, and we reject sterile conceptions of militancy that subjugate ourselves as human beings to an abstract notion of the political subject.⁹⁴ Communism is the emanation of our humanity which cannot be contained within the limits of capitalism. We are not seeking to construct a book-club bureaucracy in the service of sectism, but to actualise ourselves in our own lives.

⁹⁰Theses of Naples (n 8) Thesis 9.

⁹¹Bordiga (n 67).

⁹²*The Communist Party in the Tradition of the Left* (n 83) 25.

⁹³Bordiga (n 67).

⁹⁴Organisation des Jeunes Travailleurs Révolutionnaires (n 72).

Communism as the Social Doctrine of the Future

Communists are not programmatists,⁹⁵ we are not seeking to draw up plans and programmes for the future communist society, producing recipes for the cookshops of the future or forging bureaucratic and top-down mass parties. Rather, the organisation of communists is fluid, stretching across the historic party, and the myriad Ultraleft and Left Communist groups which exist are merely a part of it.⁹⁶ When the push for centralisation and unity amongst the proletariat is thrown up by the heat of struggle, it will not be on the basis of a neatly formulated policy prospectus declared in advance by the learned heads of the “Marxist” organisations but rather of demands forged from the real unfolding of the struggle of the proletariat to reclaim their lives from the clutches of the juggernaut of capital. We agree with these words of Marx, writing about the potential communist transformation of society as he saw it in his own century:

The social revolution of the nineteenth century cannot take its poetry from the past but only from the future. It cannot begin with itself before it has stripped away all superstition about the past. The former revolutions required recollections of past world history in order to smother their own content. The revolution of the nineteenth century must let the dead bury their dead in order to arrive at its own content. There the phrase went beyond the content – here the content goes beyond the phrase.⁹⁷

⁹⁵For a full analysis of the term “programmatism”, see Dauvé and others (n 5).

⁹⁶Balance y Avante (tr), ‘Death Prayer of the Trinity of Religion, Philosophy, and Science’ (2004) 15 Quintera/N+1, 4 <<https://solarcollective.comrades.sbs/assets/pdfs/Death%20Prayer%20of%20the%20Trinity%20of%20Religion,%20Philosophy,%20and%20Science.pdf>> accessed 1 September 2025.

⁹⁷Marx (n 38).

Another point we must insist upon: just as communists reject pragmatism, so too do we reject constructionism. In other words, we are not trying to build an embryonic communism within capitalism. We are not builders, architects, engineers, or cooks of the future. A communism based, today in the 21st century, upon notions of development of the productive forces or an attempted expansion of the “positive” aspects of capitalism is anti-Marxist, anti-revolutionary, and anti-human. Communism rejects ‘*steeleater*’ ideology.⁹⁸ We create communism by transforming our social lives; not by creating plans or platforms for transitional stages eked out into a distant future. Communism is not a vision of paradise, but of something which we are fighting for in our lives today, something that can be created by us when we transform our lives, nothing more and nothing less. *That* is our Ultraleftism. And before our adversaries point the finger of unpragmatism, let us be clear: we do not expect communism overnight, but the only way to begin is by beginning.⁹⁹ The proletariat will not wait for programmatic permission to transform this society; through its real-world struggles, it is doing so already.

We communists go forward, then, with the promise to throw off from our brains the parasitic traditions of the dead generations of revolutionaries who came before us. We salute you and bury you; and our iconoclasm is our remembrance. This does not mean, however, that we do not learn from our history and engage seriously with our theory. Two equally grave dangers imperil us: the danger of clinging to what is dead and useless, and the danger of dismissing what is alive and electric. Whilst we must seek always to follow the red thread, today we find ourselves in need of shaking off the choke hold of mystifications, distortions, and misconceptions that have been foisted on us by our communist forefathers. We will thus chart our course on the same road

⁹⁸Loren Goldner, ‘Amadeo Bordiga, the Agrarian Question and the International Revolutionary Movement’ (1995) 23(1) Critique 73, 95; Bordiga (n 17).

⁹⁹Dauv  (n 6) 28.

as always, determined to overcome the mass of falsifications that are the inevitable result of the past century of counterrevolution. These falsifications have seeped their way into every aspect of our humanity and threaten, if we are not careful, to shake out of our tired bones the revolutionary energy that is essential for the formation of communists. We must stamp this message on our foreheads for all to see: our communism belongs not to the past, but to the future.

Today, the future looks bleak. Social conditions are deteriorating, and the grinding poverty in a planet of slums and sweatshops and council estates is supplemented by the existential challenges of climate change, fascism, war, and genocide. Many of us are resigned to apathy, falling prey either to the rampant xenophobia or to the vacillating left-wing parties that are impotent to prevent it. An overwhelming sense of loss prevails in the world: the loss of the future we were promised, and the world we could have had.¹⁰⁰ We have lost our vision. But the revolutionary movement that began over two centuries ago has not gone away; it is a movement created by capitalism, and so long as capitalism prevails the spectre of communism will continue to haunt the conscience of the bourgeoisie. The proletarian revolution has suffered great defeats, turned on itself, been co-opted into the status quo, and '*recoil[ed] constantly from the indefinite colossalness of [its] own goals*'¹⁰¹ but it has never vanished. The insurrection will rise again, and maybe this time the point is approaching when the conditions themselves will cry out: *no turning back*.

We are those who have nothing to gain from this world, and that is precisely why we march inexorably towards another. We are the class which has a '*universal character by its universal suffering*' and we ask

¹⁰⁰Mark Fisher's writings on the concept of hauntology express perfectly this sentiment of gut-wrenching loss for a whole generation of the disenfranchised proletariat.

¹⁰¹Marx (n 38).

for nothing but our human title.¹⁰² We are not afraid of apathy, for only by ridding ourselves of our illusions about the present world can we understand in all its intensity and might the urgent need for a new one. As Marx says (referring here specifically to religion, but we may apply it to all of the myriad ideological illusions that tie us to the status quo):

*Criticism has plucked the imaginary flowers on the chain not in order that man shall continue to bear that chain without fantasy or consolation, but so that he shall throw off the chain and pluck the living flower. The criticism of religion disillusions man, so that he will think, act, and fashion his reality like a man who has discarded his illusions and regained his senses, so that he will move around himself as his own true Sun.*¹⁰³

It is time to shed our illusions. Salvation is not coming within this system. As the world sinks deeper into the malaise, the need for the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism is becoming increasingly clear. Our times cry out for the vision of a communist way of life that will unite our individual self-actualisation with the flourishing of the entire human community and the world in which we live. We are not seeking to build a better version of the current system, but rather to destroy it altogether, and transform our way of life through this creative destruction.

*So let there come with socialism a new and fruitful barbarism, such as that which descended from the Alps and renewed Europe, which did not destroy but exalted the centuries of knowledge and art imprisoned in the dungeon of the formidable empires.*¹⁰⁴

¹⁰²Marx (n 34) Introduction.

¹⁰³Ibid.

¹⁰⁴Amadeo Bordiga, ‘Onward Barbarians!’ (first published 1951; Radical Reprints, Libcom, 2021) <<https://libcom.org/article/onwards-barbarians>> accessed 1 September 2025.

