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# CONSUMPTION: DOMESTIC IMPERIALISM



MDS PAMPHLET No. 1

A NEW LEFT

INTRODUCTION TO THE POLITICAL  
ECONOMY OF AMERICAN CAPITALISM

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*This paper was developed in discussions with the Wisconsin Draft Resistance Union. This version was written with Bob Gottlieb and Susan Sutheim.*

Human history is a record of groups of men struggling to control their environment, in order to meet human needs — needs which are developed and defined in the context of that struggle, and which constantly change. Human needs change quantitatively: as population increases, a greater scale of production is required to sustain it. And they change qualitatively: the introduction of new technology creates a need for new kinds of tools, skills, services. The pressure of new needs creates a demand for new technology: new technology creates new needs.

Human activity is socially organized. The social organization of labor and the technical apparatus that men use to manipulate their environment comprise the notion of *production*. The *means of production* is the human labor and technical apparatus that men have at their disposal in the struggle to control their environment. The means of production changes historically; new tools and machines are introduced and human labor is consequently re-organized. Changes in the means of production lead to new social needs, to new forms of social organization and production, and to new forms of social stratification.

As feudalism develops into capitalism and the country/agricultural productive base develops into an urban/industrial base, the structure of society accordingly changes: a new class structure develops. For *class* most simply refers to who controls (and who does not control) the means of production in any historical situation. Class includes also the whole spectrum of differentiated social roles and differential access to power, both of which ultimately flow from control of means of production and concomitant division of labor (cf. Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*.)

Modern American capitalism fits this general historical model. But in one important area — the interaction of new technology and new needs — the historical process has been distorted. Instead of human needs providing the impetus for the development of new technology, the needs emerging from new technology are consciously manipulated to serve the survival needs of the capitalist system. This distortion is the result of a qualitative change in the means of production — the introduction of cybernated technology — which provides the basis for new forms of exploitation, and which also creates historically new potentials for human liberation.

## THE ECONOMIC DYNAMIC OF MODERN CAPITALISM

In modern American capitalism, the control of most industries is in the hands of a few large corporations. This economic form of control is called *oligopoly*. Oligopolistic firms tend to eliminate price competition. Although historically price competition was largely responsible for the introduction of new technology, other incentives for technological development still remain. One: Intra-industry competition – technology is introduced to enhance profits and the size of the market share, within a given industry with a given price structure, by lowering costs through higher productivity. Two: Inter-industry competition – technology is introduced in order to expand into new markets through new products and processes produced at lower costs. Three: International competition – technology is introduced to compete for markets with other capitalist countries through higher productivity and innovation. Four: The cold war – technology is used to compete with rising productivity in the socialist countries and, at the same time, to secure the continuing loyalty of the domestic population by offering them a higher standard of living.

All these incentives allow for the *partial* development of technology. The long term trend of modern capitalism is towards automation and cybernation (cybernation is the automated control of automation). The *rate* of introduction of new technology under modern capitalism is far slower than, in terms of human needs, it ought to be and in terms of what is *technologically* possible, far slower than it need be. But full cybernation is not possible under the social form of capitalism.

For the nature of capitalist society inhibits the trend towards automation and cybernation. Introduction of new technology means greater productive capacity. When this increase in production is not met with a simultaneous increase in consumption, capitalism faces the threat of an *underconsumption* crisis. Because there is no social control over production and consumption, the corporations will retard the growth of productivity in order to avoid underconsumption. The tension between the need to introduce new technology (inter- and intra-industry competition, etc.) and the restrictions that the threat of underconsumption place on that need is a central contradiction of modern capitalism.

## THE SOURCES OF UNDERCONSUMPTION

The cost structure of production of modern capitalism is highly vulnerable to the threat of underconsumption. A corporation

employs new technology in order to increase productivity – lower costs per unit produced. Costs *per unit* decline as a function of total volume produced. If consumer demand slackens, machines cannot be laid off (as workers can be): machines are fixed, as opposed to flexible, costs. The more dependent production is on technology, as it tends to be, the greater the proportion of fixed to flexible costs. A firm must cover basic fixed costs of production before it can start to realize profits; the breakeven point rises as a function of the introduction of new technology.

*Harvard Business Review* (Sept.-Oct. 1967, page 8) puts it this way: “One of its (technology’s) ‘side effects’ will be on costs. Costs inevitably become stickier and breakeven chart curves flatten out when capital is substituted for labor. As a result, business will have an even greater incentive to maintain continuously higher levels of output. . . .” What this clearly implies is that business has a great incentive to maintain continuously higher levels of *consumption*, for if output produced is not bought, profits evaporate.

But there is, under modern capitalism, an apparently irresolvable impediment to domestic consumption: *maldistribution of wealth*, which is a structural feature of modern capitalism for several reasons. One, the accumulation of capital for investment is done privately. Two, control over the means of production is based partially on private ownership (i.e., wealth). Three, social privileges are partially realized through relative wealth.

The maldistribution of wealth affects the economic structure of modern capitalism in two ways: one, a disproportionate relationship of investment funds to consumption funds; and two, inability to fully utilize consumption funds. The first problem results in what are called *underconsumption cycles*; the second in *discretionary income*.

## UNDERCONSUMPTION CYCLES

The goal of modern capitalism is profit. Profit, by and large, is made available for reinvestment, in order to achieve and maintain a competitive market position necessary to continue realizing profit (see the earlier discussion on the economic dynamic of capitalism). The high proportion of the value of a product taken as profit is not available for workers’ wages which, by and large, are devoted to consumption. The social structure and values of capitalism, then, result in a disproportionate income devoted to investment funds as opposed to consumption funds. Investment (purchase of machinery, new processes, research, etc.) is used to increase the production of consumer goods. Hence profitable utilization of investment funds is

dependent on the level of consumption. But consumption, as stated above, is constricted by the high proportion of profit to wages. Hence a cycle of underconsumption tends to emerge. The inability to use investment funds leads to laying off workers in the production of machinery (producer goods). This in turn leads to a further slack in demand for consumer goods, which in turn leads to underutilization of investment funds, which leads to laying off workers... and so the cycle goes.

## DISCRETIONARY INCOME

Secondly, under modern capitalism, the problem of maintaining and increasing sufficient consumer demand is aggravated by maldistribution of wealth within the consumer sphere. Maldistribution of wealth means that, on one end of the spectrum, there is a group of people with very low (or no) income; while on the other end, there is a group of people with very high income. The group with high income has great consumer buying power; the group with low income, least consumer buying power. But the low income group is under much more pressure to spend its *full* income – it must, simply to meet survival needs. The high income group is under no necessary pressure to spend its full income: after survival needs have been met, it can choose to spend or to save. Over and above the survival level, it enjoys *discretionary income*. If people with discretionary income choose not to buy as many consumer goods as they potentially could, there is, at least short term, underconsumption.

Furthermore, discretionary income is rising. *Fortune's* (Dec. 1967) figures on discretionary income – defined as the sum of all family income above \$7500 – indicate that it now constitutes about one third of all personal income. *Fortune* estimates that it will grow to about 37% by 1975. (Since definition of discretionary income is somewhat arbitrary, these figures provide only general orders of magnitude and growth.)

Correlated with the growth of discretionary income is the increased proportion of durable goods – cars, household appliances, sports equipment – and luxuries on the consumer market. With these goods, a consumer has a good deal of leeway to defer consumption decisions by repairs, disregarding style changes, choosing to do without. The growth of discretionary income and the growth in the proportion of durable goods and luxuries to other consumer goods have served to make consumption very flexible.

Thus the general tendency is for production costs to become more and more rigid, while consumption becomes more flexible. As this tendency continues, the potential for economic crisis is clear: under particular political-social circumstances, demand can contract violently (people can choose not to spend their discretionary income), while producers have very little leeway to respond, since they are committed to a structure of high fixed costs.

## HOW MODERN CAPITALISM DEALS WITH UNDERCONSUMPTION

An interesting aspect of a potential underconsumption crisis is that Keynesian techniques are largely irrelevant. Measures to increase income (welfare, negative income tax, guaranteed minimum income) do not raise consumption and investment in a situation where an already significant proportion of consumers already have sufficient income but neither need nor want to spend it. Economic reforms are still available. The government can and does create demand *directly* (although most of the important "multiplier effect" would be lost in this situation) and can attempt limited redistribution of wealth. But as the potential magnitude of this sort of crisis grows, there are definite limits to what can be done within a capitalist structure: relative maldistribution of wealth and the exploitation of labor is systemic to capitalism; it is necessary to maintain class privileges. Further, the type of social situation likely to precipitate such a crisis (e.g., widespread urban rioting) might well limit the government's flexibility.

In addition to limited redistribution of wealth and demand creation, modern capitalism deals with the problems of underconsumption through its policy of imperialism, both foreign and domestic. Foreign imperialism is becoming more and more a policy of extending markets: securing the investment and consumer potential in other countries. This policy holds true especially in Western Europe; the resultant political and social tensions give rise, e.g., to the nationalistic politics of Gaullism. Even more impressive is American foreign policy of the 60s, which encourages internal economic growth in the Third World both in order to improve market possibilities, and to create a native bourgeoisie that serves as a bulwark against socialist revolution (i.e., stabilizes the investment and consumer markets, to use State Department jargon). In fact, securing markets and encouraging a certain kind of economic growth, while preventing revolution, is the essence of corporate liberal foreign policy. The meaning of Vietnam is under-

scored by the fact that the danger of underconsumption is heightened every time a successful socialist revolution cuts off another area from U.S. economic domination.

The other form of imperialism has to do with the ways capitalism deals with the problem of insufficient consumption domestically. First, capitalism has to make sure that a certain proportion of investment funds are used in ways other than increasing true productivity. Simply put, these funds are used to create new industries whose specific purpose is to create the desire to consume more. These industries include communications media that extend corporate influence and control to every sector of the population, and advertising that not only distorts and manipulates real needs, but also creates the desire for a quantitative increase in consumption. Similarly, funds invested in new technology are used to create waste and obsolescence: style changes, planned breakdown, gimmick products.

Paralleling the deflection of technological innovation into non-productive channels is the growth of the various industries that contribute to the management of demand. The way to insure that demand does not fall below a certain level is to manipulate and distort people's needs, to make them consume more and more and more. Market research and advertising are the key demand-management industries, but others contribute. —It is not an entire accident that maxiskirts finally made it into the consumer market the month after *Bonnie and Clyde* hit the movie houses. (The fashion industry has been pushing maxiskirts unsuccessfully for two years.)

But modern capitalism and its policy of imperialism has aroused political responses which have the potential to destroy it. The response to America's attempts to secure markets abroad is, increasingly, the emergence of national liberation movements. Similarly, waste production and the management of demand (domestic imperialism) seems to be leading to the development of a large-scale domestic movement (a new left) reacting against meaningless jobs and manipulative consumption. In fact, the development of some of the industries key to the survival of modern capitalism (e.g., mass media, mass education) themselves contain the roots of its potential destruction. For people—especially the young and the blacks—are becoming more and more aware of the gap between potential social wealth and the reality of their own lives, whether in the ghetto, in the classroom, or on the job.

## COMMODITIES AND MEN

In capitalist society, wealth is measured in terms of the accumulation of commodities (products), with money serving as the universal

commodity, the medium of exchange. In earlier periods of history, products were directly consumed by the producers and their overlords. Commodities are distinguished from non-commodities by the fact that commodities have a market (or exchange) value, in terms of which they can be traded for other commodities or for money. In a capitalist system, commodities include the majority of *men*, since the majority of men must sell their labor power on the market in order to live.

The more commodities men produce, the greater is men's control over nature and the greater is the potential for human liberation. But at the same time, every extension of commodities is a negation of human freedom. The key to this contradiction is the position of the majority of men as commodities. Men who sell their labor power do not conceive, create and consume their own products for their own purposes. Rather, they produce according to the needs of the capitalists who hire them for the purpose of making profits. Thus, a worker confronts his own product not as an extension of himself and his control over his environment, but as an alien object outside himself. The more man produces, the greater the power of these alien objects. Moreover, capitalism constantly creates (*must create*) new needs and new products, thus extending this alien power over him. (Marx: *The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844; Capital*, Vol. 1, Chap. 1.)

Under modern capitalism, the process of creating—or more accurately, the channeling into commodity form—of basic human needs has reached a qualitatively new phase. Of course the natural process of the extension of human needs with the overall development of society has continued. But the high productivity now possible with the introduction of automated technology, and the correspondingly lesser necessary labor time, has made cultural activity and other social needs—*non-commodity needs*—important, and increasingly important in proportion to purely material needs.

Simultaneously, the economic dynamic of modern capitalism, as discussed earlier, demands a constant rise in consumer (commodity) sales. Thus those who control production must consciously develop needs for specific commodities, in order to increase consumption. They must even create life styles defined by consumption, to assure that higher income levels don't permit sudden, capricious drops in demand. Leisure time becomes consumption time. Sports and culture are not extensions of human social activity, but are commodities for which we buy a \$2 ticket, or enjoy at home via television (consumer durable good) while watching beer commercials and drinking beer.

The basis for creating and manipulating consumer needs is using

and redirecting real human needs, associating them with a given commodity. Thus the needs for sex, love, personal identity and creativity, etc., are used to sell products with which they have no necessary connection. Thus, not only do man's products become an alien power outside himself; at the same time, his own (socially formed) inner needs are turned against him, to make him desire those same alien products.

The logical extension of this process is man defined and delimited by the commodities outside himself. Man becomes defined by what he has, rather than what he is and does. A magazine ad announces: "Your clothes *are* you." Masculinity is a red convertible with a stick shift. Security is a house in the suburbs. Love is a warm blanket.

## EXPLOITATION

Exploitation, traditionally, has been defined as the difference between what a worker produces and what he receives. The difference goes to the person who bought the labor of the worker, in the form of profits, rents, etc. The quantitative aspect of a commodity's social value is derived from the amount of human labor that went into it. The costs of producing a given commodity, other than the direct application of human labor—things such as raw materials and machinery—are themselves products of labor. This notion of exploitation fitted the context of early industrial capitalism, where the direct material wealth associated with human labor could be fairly easily measured and thus the exploitation of the working class fairly accurately assessed.

Before attempting to reformulate exploitation in terms of modern conditions, it will be useful to distinguish carefully between *oppression* and exploitation—terms that have often been confused for each other. Exploitation refers to a *class* situation—the degree to which a man's labor is appropriated—under a given productive system. Oppression refers to the situation of a social domination in the context of the total environment, not simply to men's labor. How a man is oppressed can be seen by the difference in the conditions of his life relative to the conditions of the most privileged group in the society—the oppressors. The conditions of life include material wealth, physical environment, culture, etc. In a given society, the exploited and the oppressed are not identical, although they certainly overlap. Thus, in modern America, a technically skilled worker might be the most exploited (given his relative labor value), and a ghetto dweller the most oppressed (given the relative misery of the total conditions of his life). This distinction is important for any critique of society

(e.g., this one) which attempts to include class conditions as well as environmental conditions within its scope.

The traditional approach to exploitation made sense when most of the commodities consumed by the working class went to the physical sustenance of the worker and his family according to minimal social conditions. The worker consumed in order that he continue to work. This was defined as the social reproduction of labor. But the pattern of working class consumption has changed significantly under modern capitalism. On one level, the growth and complexity of capitalist society has resulted in a rise in the cost of the social reproduction of labor (higher standard of living). Secondly, qualitatively new processes involving such things as a \$16 billion advertising industry, planned obsolescence, and frequent style changes (to all of which a worker is of course subject) have assumed importance with respect to the notion of exploitation. These new processes, discussed earlier in connection with the management of demand, can be defined in relation to exploitation as *waste production*.

As described earlier, management of demand is crucial to the survival of modern capitalism. Waste production concomitant with the management of demand amplifies the notion of exploitation as appropriation of labor, and extends the notion of exploitation into the sphere of consumption. Here is how it works: Part of a worker's labor goes into the production of waste. For example, a worker produces a light bulb. Some of his labor is utilized to make sure that the light bulb will burn out sooner than it should (planned obsolescence). Not only is that amount of his labor wasted; the worker will have to buy two, three, many light bulbs (instead of one that would last and last), thus helping to fulfill the capitalist system's need for people to consume, consume, consume.

The amount of time the worker expends on waste production is part of the social costs of production: the social costs of maintaining the irrational capitalist system which entails the necessity of constantly increasing consumption. Early industrial societies also had their share of the social costs of production (for example, expenditures for the state and defense). But these costs have been increased so drastically by modern capitalism that the quantitative change verges on a qualitative change: exploitation extends to the consumer sphere. Thus the notion of exploitation proper to modern capitalism must include not only the difference between what one produces and what one receives, but also the difference between what one ought to be able to produce (were it not for waste production) and what one ought to receive (enough, but not an addictively increasing enough). In short, exploitation under modern capitalism is the difference between potential social productivity and overall quality of

life (including both work and consumption). This new and total form of exploitation is important in the way it has affected class structure, consciousness, and the potential for creating a new society in contemporary America.

## CLASS, CONSTITUENCY AND CONSCIOUSNESS

The class structure of a society is based on men's relations to the means of production in a given historical period. The key aspects of these social relations are: one, the control or non-control of the means of production; and two, the expropriation of value (men's labor)—the dynamic of profits and exploitation. The means of production and the concomitant forms of exploitation are constantly changing, and with them, the class structure of society changes. Therefore, during the last half of the 19th century, with the emergence of factory labor and the early crude industrial plants, the industrial working class became potentially the most revolutionary class, because of its essential relation to production coupled with its being the most *exploited* group in the society. Yet the industrial working class always constituted a minority of the population.

For a class to develop revolutionary action, it must achieve a certain degree of class consciousness. Consciousness develops out of experience, life activity, which for the working class was primarily *direct* activity in production (directly productive work). And it was *shared* experience, based on a common relationship to the means of production. With the perception of common interests, political organization and revolutionary activity can follow.

In modern American capitalism, certain quantitative and qualitative changes have occurred within the class structure. These changes can be traced to the way technological change has affected the economic structure and the form of exploitation. Fundamentally, these changes have led to an alteration in the productive system itself. Production has become increasingly *socialized*. This means two things: one, the extension of commodities into all spheres of human activity besides those directly connected with material needs (everything ranging from cultural and educational industries to defense); and two, a restructuring of work because of the tremendous growth of jobs that no longer relate directly to material production (more and more jobs have to do with the machines that turn out products rather than with products directly; there has been a huge increase in jobs that deal with the social aspects of production—e.g., accounting, advertising, social services).

The restructuring of work has produced a series of new contradictions in capitalism. First, there is the tendency to increasing job

specialization and fragmentation that technology is responsible for and which capitalism desires. But the technological trend towards cybernation creates the *potential* for jobs being integrated, and for each person's work being more and more involved with the overall development and benefit of society. Secondly, the waste production allowed by the social irresponsibility of capitalism stands in contradiction to its technologically possible elimination, and to the creative and meaningful work that we are taught (both in school and through corporate advertising) to seek.

Any examination of the American class structure must integrate these new contradictions. Because of the increasing socialization of production, the American ruling class is defined not only by those who control the means of production and directly profit from the labor of others, but also includes the people who control such non-productive sectors as education and communications. The changes in class structure in the working class and underclass—those who do not control the means of production or the nonproductive sectors which contribute to the maintenance of the capitalist system—have been more complicated.

The socialization of production which has led to a restructuring of the work force differentiates various strata within the American working class. The oldest and most recognizable of these strata is the *traditional working class*, which is still a crucial force in production and constitutes about 30% of the work force. This group works directly on production. Because the technological trend is toward automation and cybernation, the traditional working class will possibly diminish. But because of the internal contradictions of capitalism, automation is introduced at an uneven rate, allowing the traditional working class to survive and to play an important role.

The traditional working class, as well as other strata of the working class, has been affected by the rise in the domestic standard of living. They, as well as everyone else, feel the brunt of new forms of exploitation in their role as *consumers*. It is this fact more than anything else that can potentially link the traditional working class with other groups.

Since the other strata of the working class are more directly affected by the changes in the nature of *work*, they can be defined, for lack of a better term, as the *new working class*. This group can be subdivided into three kinds of work: technical work, human service work, and white-collar (middle sector) work.

*Technical work:* With the growth of technology and automation, more and more laborers work directly on machines, which in turn produce a product. Such jobs include inventing, designing, building,

programming, repairing and supervising machines—jobs generally for technicians and engineers. Although workers of this type existed in the early stages of capitalism, they have by now become a special strata because of their tremendous growth in numbers and their importance in the new technology. Although still a small percentage of the work force, it is the fastest growing sector.

There are several aspects of technical workers' experience that relate to political consciousness. Their high pay, relatively privileged positions, and possible promotion into management all militate against radical political consciousness. These factors, however, tend to diminish as technical workers come to constitute a larger percentage of the work force. On the other hand, their relatively great rate of exploitation (stemming from high labor value plus exploitation through waste consumption) enables them to perceive first hand the nature of waste production and could lead to radical consciousness. This radical consciousness is based on the perception of the gap between potential and reality: the central contradiction of capitalist production. The potential of modern technology in the service of creative and rational control of production includes the elimination of waste production and the possibility of integrated, creative work responsible for the development of the whole society. The reality of capitalist production is meaningless (if not destructive) and boring work, and the manipulated consumption of waste.

*Human service work:* With socialized capitalist production, more and more jobs are created that deal with people (including their physical environment and culture) as commodities. These jobs include teaching, social work, city planning, medicine, law, architecture, communications, and entertainment (which used to be called culture). Generally classified under the general rubric of professional work, the essential contradiction in these jobs has to do with the quality of life in America, with its manipulated passivity and misery. "Professionals" are turned against their clients; to the extent that this is effective, service workers do not develop radical consciousness. The development of radical consciousness comes when a "professional" realizes that the system of which he is an instrument, and through which he victimizes his clients, is in fact victimizing him. A teacher, for example, realizes that his role in the educational system is the socialization — brutalization and channeling — of children into the "American way of life." The teacher wants to be a creative educator; he is in fact a cop in the classroom. The recognition of this contradiction can turn him against the system itself.

*White collar and middle sector work:* These jobs fall in the area of the social costs of production. They include workers in sales, advertising, accounting and clerical work. This group is the largest sector of the work force, constituting more than a third of the total.

The question of consciousness here is blurred by ambiguous class positions (class being based on relation to the means of production). These workers sell their labor power on the market, yet do not directly create value. Essentially, their function is to help the capitalists appropriate surplus value (realize profits). Their wages, however, do not come from direct expropriation of other workers: they are not capitalists. Rather, the middle sector is paid according to the prevailing market and social standards to perform labor necessary to the capitalists for realizing profits. The middle sector is essentially a special sector of the working class (cf. Marx's discussion of the "mercantile wage worker" in *Capital*, Vol. III, pp. 289-300). Further, the middle sector workers are highly exploited in terms of our new definition of exploitation, in that they realize little value compared to their expenditure of time and energy.

Historically, this sector has shown both socialist and fascist potential. The revolutionary potential of middle sector workers today is dependent on their ability to perceive their exploitation as *consumers*, relying on leadership exerted by other strata of the working class.

## STRATEGY FOR THE NEW LEFT

As has already been clearly indicated, changes (and coming changes) in the work force imply new strategic directions. Unlike the 30s, strategy can no longer be based on material demands alone (wage demands in reaction to economic crisis). Rather, it must be based on a more encompassing projection of the social and economic alternatives to the status quo. Briefly, we propose a strategy that posits, on the one hand, a critique of the reality of meaningless jobs, manipulated consumption and growing maldistribution of wealth, and on the other hand, a vision of the liberating potential of a fully automated, fully communist society.

Two vanguard groups have emerged in America: youth and the underclass, specifically blacks. The underclass includes the chronically poor and unemployed. They are the most oppressed. Further, they have been treated more and more as commodities within the service sector of production. And as they are socialized by the service sector, they are brutalized – to which systemic

racism contributes. The most radical demands they can raise – which go beyond the demand to be included in the system – can force the whole society to confront itself. They have the potential of developing a nonmarketable culture, nonmarketable because it could include elements antipathetic to the system as a whole. But if black people are forced to develop in isolation from the rest of society (cut off by racism when they can't be bought off by liberalism), their potential power will be limited because of their non-relation to production.

Youth, and particularly students, can also reject the system as a whole. As trainees in a system of exploitation, their rejection of the role of trainee is a rejection not simply of the specific task they are being trained for, but a rejection of the process as a whole. This includes a rejection of consumer culture and manipulative consumption as well as the rejection of meaningless work they refuse to participate in (viz., the hippies). It can extend – has begun to extend – to a global critique of American capitalism's role both at home and abroad.

Youth, as the object of intense socialization of education, are best able to perceive the potential that socialized production contains. Yet they are being trained for individual roles as workers and consumers that are boring, uncreative, wasteful. The perception of this fundamental gap between potential and reality leads youth to radical consciousness. And we have already begun to develop alternatives to the existing system. In the liberated buildings of Columbia, in the dropout communities of New York, San Francisco, and dozens of other cities, we are beginning to build our own commonwealth, our own culture.

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This class analysis is more static than the current situation in fact is. With the growth of technology, production comes to be based more on the general productivity and technical level of society as a whole than on any particular group of workers. In other words, while technology has tended to fragment job structure, it has also socialized production as a whole, creating the basis for the perception of a unity of interests among all sectors of the working class and the underclass. Exploitation through consumption provides a further basis for socialization and unity of interests. While there are different styles of consumption among different classes, the mass culture developing out of advertising and mass media provides a partial basis for common experience within the working class.

In the short run, job fragmentation will necessitate constituency politics as a prelude to a full class politics. Potential constituencies might include the sectors and subsectors of the working class already discussed, as well as groups such as students, women and consumers, which constitute overlapping constituencies. To avoid reformism, and even fascism, such constituency politics must be based on relating the concerns of each constituency to the central contradictions of capitalism and imperialism. Through the experience of common struggle against exploitation and oppression, the constituencies can develop into a full class movement, a movement to abolish class.

## TECHNOLOGY, REPRESSION AND LIBERATION

The opening paragraphs of this paper pointed out the distortion of the historical relationship between needs and production under modern capitalism. Production is held back because of the threat of underconsumption which in turn stems ultimately from the maldistribution of wealth. And yet, were it not for the irrational and anti-human organization of production necessitated by modern capitalism, modern technology provides the real potential for a post-scarcity economy\* for the first time in history. Further, cybernation points to a mode of production that can abolish the necessity of externally imposed labor. Only through the elimination of material scarcity and division of labor can the basis of social domination be abolished. Then, man's activity becomes defined by his own, consciously determined needs, not by external necessity. This potential, embodied in the increasingly socialized means of production, creates the basis for communist revolution and a new quality of human relationships. Marx described this potential a century before full automation made it an imminent reality:

*As large-scale industry advances, the creation of real wealth depends less on the labor time and the quantity of labor expended than on the power of the instrumentalities set in motion during the labor time. These instrumentalities, and their powerful effectiveness, are in no proportion to the immediate labor time which their production requires; their effectiveness rather depends*

\*For an excellent discussion of the economics of "fully automated full communism," see E. J. Nell's article "Automation and the Abolition of the Market" in *New Left Notes*, Aug. 1967.

on the attained level of science and technological progress; in other words, on the application of this science to production . . . . Human labor then no longer appears as enclosed in the process of production – rather man relates himself to the process of production a supervisor and regulator . . . . He stands outside of the process of production instead of being the principal agent in the process of production . . . . In this transformation, the great pillar of production is no longer the immediate labor performed by man himself, nor his labor time, but the appropriation of his own universal productivity, i.e., his knowledge and his mastery of nature through his social existence – in one word; the development of the social individual. The theft of another man's labor time, on which the wealth still rests today, then appears as a miserable basis compared with the new basis which large scale industry itself has created. As soon as human labor, in its immediate form, has ceased to be the great source of wealth, labor time will cease, and must of necessity cease to be the measure of wealth, and the exchange value must of necessity cease to be the measure of use value. The surplus labor of the mass has thus ceased to be the condition for the development of the universal faculties of man. The mode of production which rests on the exchange value thus collapses . . . .

(*Grundrisse der Kritik der politischen Oekonomie*, pp. 592-596 *passim*, translated by Herbert Marcuse in *One-Dimensional Man*, pp. 35-6.)

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