



Old Left against New Left: the internal debates about the future of
Marxism in the radical Left periodicals *Socialisme ou
Barbarie* and *Pouvoir Ouvrier* (1958-1969)

Christophe Premat (Stockholm University)



Stockholms
universitet

POUVOIR OUVRIER

S O M M A I R E

Algérie

- Les luttes politiques en Algérie.
- Rencontre avec des Algériens.

France

- L'élaboration du IV Plan.

Angleterre

- Contre toutes les bombes.

U.S.A.

- La mort de Marilyn.

N°42 AOÛT 1962

0,30 NF

Background of the group and periodical *Socialism or Barbarism*

- 1948: creation of a group of radical left, *Socialisme ou Barbarie* (split from the Fourth International) which analyzed the USSR as a total bureaucracy. The question for his group: how can we reconnect to the initial revolutionary claim when the language is perverted? The first issue of the periodical was published in 1949.
- 1949-1953 The social, political and international context (Cold war, Korean war), strikes in France. The public of the review was made up of what was left of the old-style ultraleft groups: Bordigists, Council Communists, a few anarchists. Towards the end of 1952, a dozen of comrades, issues that came out infrequently
- Around 700 copies of the review (1.000 for some issues) were sold and a broader audience came to the meetings (around hundred)

Background on the periodicals *Socialisme ou Barbarie* and *Pouvoir ouvrier* (Radical left)

- *Socialisme ou Barbarie* (1948-1964) – 40 numbers
- The group continued to exist until 1967. Split inside the Fourth International. « Between 1958 and 1961, the group S. ou B. developed quite well, numerically. There were two or three cells in Paris, and several others in the provinces, with some students and a few workers. We were almost a hundred at the end of 1960 » (Castoriadis 2010: 24). In May 1961, a platform of discussion was initiated with *Pouvoir ouvrier belge* (Belgium), *Socialism reaffirmed* (Great Britain), *Socialisme ou Barbarie* and *Unita Proletaria* (Italy).
- *Pouvoir ouvrier* (1959-1969) – 99 numbers
- In early 1959, Castoriadis and the members of *Socialisme ou Barbarie* created a mimeographed monthly journal, *Pouvoir ouvrier*. ("Giving Labouring People a Voice"). From 1963, *Pouvoir ouvrier* is in the hands of some ex-members of *Socialisme ou Barbarie* after the disagreement.

Research question

- Did the internal rupture inside *Socialisme ou Barbarie* between the tendency and the antitendency affect the rhetorics of *Pouvoir ouvrier*?
- Method: synopsis of the periodicals / focus on the split of 1964 (articles before these years / articles after these years)
- Testimonies of former members of *Socialisme ou Barbarie* (**Castoriadis, Lyotard, Vega**)
- Digital access to these periodicals that had a very limited impact.
- Influence on the interpretation (Wulfman 2017: 230)

Castoriadis and the Marxist language

- « I don't want to go into the history of the group Socialisme ou Barbarie from the beginning to the end: to do so correctly you would have to do a 'case history' of it, in detail, and thoroughly scrutinize every aspect of the life of a small revolutionary organization (those aspects evacuated by the traditional conception), over an eighteen-year period, with its real and not only 'ideological' everyday life, the people involved, and so forth » (Castoriadis et al. 2010: 14).
- Previous studies about *Socialism or Barbarism* (Gottraux 1997; Rafflin 2005; Dosse 2014). For Dosse, *Socialism or Barbarism* is centered on the personality of Castoriadis. Curtis points out the fact that there cannot be two periods in Castoriadis' itinerary (Curtis 1997: X-XI). Coherence of philosophical and political positions.

The rejection of Marxist theories

- Marx' economic theories are invalidated (the text that creates tensions in the group is « On the content of socialism » published at the end of the 1950s)
- Critique of the deterministic approach of Karl Marx
- Rejection of Marx' main statement about the perception of socialism as a reversed form of capitalism.
- 1963. Reactions of **Maille, Lyotard and Souyri**. Debate between the tendency and the « anti-tendency » (Castoriadis 2010: 25). The « anti-tendency » controlled the publications of *Pouvoir ouvrier* (Lyotard 1990: 106)
- For Castoriadis, important to criticize the thought of Marx without making any differences between the young Marx and so on.

Number 23	1958 (January-February)	“Sur le contenu du socialisme”
Number 23	1958 (January-February)	“Devant le satellite artificiel russe”
Number 23	1958 (January-February)	“Documents: Gabor Kocsis: sur les conseils ouvriers”
Number 23	1958 (January-February)	“La situation en Hongrie”
Number 23	1958 (January-February)	“La révolution qui vient”
Number 24	1958 (May-June)	“Pologne: la kadarisation froide”
Number 26	1958 (November-December)	“Remarques critiques sur la critique de la révolution russe de Rosa Luxembourg”
Number 26	1958 (November-December)	“Le monde en question”
Number 27	1959 (April-May)	“Un nouveau rapport de Khrouchtchev”
Number 28	1959 (July-August)	“Les livres: la classe ouvrière d’Allemagne orientale”
Number 31	1960 (December-February 1961)	“Le mouvement révolutionnaire sous le capitalisme moderne”
Number 32	1961 (April-June)	“Le mouvement révolutionnaire sous le capitalisme moderne”
Number 33	1961 (December-February 1962)	“Le mouvement révolutionnaire sous le capitalisme moderne”
Number 34	1963 (March-May)	“L’éducation sexuelle en URSS”
Number 34	1963 (March-May)	“Le conflit sino-soviétique”
Number 34	1963 (March-May)	“Accélération et contradictions du dégel en URSS”
Number 35	1964 (January-March)	“Recommencer la Révolution”
Number 35	1964 (January-March)	“Le rôle de l’idéologie bolchévik dans la naissance de la bureaucratie”
Number 35	1964 (January-March)	“Kollontaï: l’opposition ouvrière”
Number 36	1964 (April-June)	“Marxisme et théorie révolutionnaire”
Number 37	1964 (July-September)	“Marxisme et théorie révolutionnaire”
Number 37	1964 (July-September)	“Le différend sino-soviétique”
Number 38	1964 (October-December)	“Marxisme et théorie révolutionnaire”
Number 38	1964 (October-December)	“La chute de Khrouchtchev”
Number 39	1965 (March-April)	“L’homme révolutionné et l’homme révolutionnaire”
Number 39	1965 (March-April)	“Le khrouchtchévisme sans Khrouchtchev”
Number 40	1965 (June-August)	“Marxisme et théorie révolutionnaire”
Number 40	1965 (June-August)	“Bureaucratie dominante et esclavage politique”

The analysis of *Pouvoir ouvrier*

- December 1958, First number
- Testimonies « *Un ouvrier chez Citroën* », « *Dans les égoûts de Paris* », « *Un syndicat vu de l'intérieur* », « *La situation politique* », « *Les élections* »
- Sociological work (interviews, quotes from the workers) and analysis of the signification of the event
- Example: strike in Denain in February 1959 (number 4). Critics of the bureaucratization of Trade-Unions which are not in favour of strikes. Number 6 (April 1959) also included some reactions of the readers and the answers from the editorial committee.
- Number 8 (June 1959). Marxist language used by the writers. Similar to *Socialisme ou Barbarie*. Social conditions of workers (Mothé 1959)

The analysis of *Pouvoir ouvrier*

- "Le capitalisme français, et plus particulièrement certains groupes de capitalistes, de politiciens, les colons ont des intérêts à défendre là-bas. C'est pour protéger et maintenir les INTÉRÊTS DE CLASSE de ces parasites qu'on essaie de briser par tous les moyens la révolte d'un peuple opprimé et férolement exploité » (*Pouvoir ouvrier*, number 8, June 1959: 2).
- Critics of the dominating *bourgeoisie*, Stalinian organizations (PCF, CGT)
- The workers (readers) can express themselves. Number 9, July-August 1959.
- « La parole aux travailleurs. Je travaille au vin Préfontaines (Dubonnet), à la halle aux vins, sur une chaîne d'embouteillage. 23 personnes, hommes ou femmes, travaillant sur une de ces chaînes, lavent remplissent, bouchent et étiquettent entre 60 et 80.000 bouteilles par équipe.» (Number 9: 9).

The analysis of *Pouvoir ouvrier*

- Concrete analysis (like *Socialisme ou Barbarie*) of the workers' situation (Leclerc, workers of Eiffel tower)
- Analysis of some movies (*Les 400 coups* of Truffaut)
- Links with *Socialisme ou Barbarie* (*Pouvoir ouvrier*, number 9: 6-7). Lyotard comments the colonial situation of Algeria in *Socialisme ou Barbarie*
- They cover some international events (Algeria, Civic Rights movements in the USA)
- The number 10 (September 1959) is presented as an additional journal for *Socialisme ou Barbarie*.
- Very careful review of the situation in Algeria (Lyotard 1989) in *Socialisme ou Barbarie* (Vega 2011: 34) and in *Pouvoir ouvrier*.

Common fights for *Socialisme ou Barbarie* and *Pouvoir ouvrier*

- The volume VI (13th year, December 1961-February 1962, n. 33) is worth being analyzed in its conception. It is written: "theoretical review of the organization *Pouvoir Ouvrier*, quarterly publication" (*Socialisme ou Barbarie*, volume VI, pp. 1961-1962). In this number, article of Jean Delvaux on the crisis of Gaullism, then an article of Jean-François Lyotard on the situation in Algeria, an article of Mothé on the young workers, an article of Canjuers on the South-African society and an article of Paul Cardan (Castoriadis) (Premat 2016: 507).
- Mimetism of *Pouvoir ouvrier* and *Socialisme ou Barbarie* with less theoretical texts (sociological texts)
- Collection of worker narratives. The closer the reader is to the social reality, the more he/she can contribute to a self-emancipation (consciousness) (Lassere, Monferrand 2019: 96). Phenomenology of social reality of workers (Phenomenology of proletarian condition)

The autonomy of *Pouvoir ouvrier*

- Focus on categories of workers (hospital, schools...)
- 1964 No reference to the supplement of *Socialisme ou Barbarie*
- Number 70, May 1965: « envoie-nous des adresses d'amis ou de camarades que 'Pouvoir ouvrier' pourrait intéresser, nous leur enverrons quelques numéros gratuitement »
- Direct messages to the readers
- Educational sessions organized by *Pouvoir ouvrier*
- Analysis of bureaucratic illusions (critics of the intellectual fascinations of some Stalinian and Trotskyist movements)

Conclusions

- The goal of *Socialisme ou Barbarie* was to describe the imaginary of bureaucratic societies in order to save the revolutionary project surrounding the autonomy.
- No concurrence between *Socialisme ou Barbarie* and *Pouvoir ouvrier* after 1964. Even if the periodicals are organized around important actors (Castoriadis for *Socialisme ou Barbarie* and Lyotard for *Pouvoir ouvrier*), no personal disagreement. Lyotard had also other ideas than Souryi but the periodicals were still publishing similar articles on the phenomenology of working conditions.
- 1964: a very important year for Castoriadis and his future theory of imaginary significations and for Lyotard who develops the critics of Marxist language as a meta-narrative (pre-elaboration of the postmodern theories). Idea of a strong proximity between Castoriadis and Lyotard (Vega 2011: 41)

References

- Castoriadis, C., Arnold, H., Escobar, E., Gondicas, M & Vernay, P. (2010). *Society Adrift: Interviews and Debates, 1974-1997*. Fordham University Press.
- Curtis, D. A. (1997). *The Castoriadis reader*. Oxford: Blackwell Publisher.
- Dosse, F. (2014). *Castoriadis: une vie*. Paris: La Découverte.
- Gottraux, P. (1997). *Socialisme ou Barbarie: un engagement politique et intellectuel dans la France d'après-guerre*. (*Socialism or Barbarism: a political and intellectual engagement in the postwar France*) Paris: Payot.
- Lassere, D. & Monferrand, F. (2019). Les aventures de l'enquête militante. *Rue Descartes*, 96(2), 93-107. <https://doi.org/10.3917/rdes.096.0093>

References

- Lyotard, J. F. (1989). *La Guerre des Algériens: Écrits 1956-1963. (The war of Algerians: Writings 1956-1963)* Paris: Galilée.
- Lyotard, J. F. (1990). *Pérégrinations*. Paris: Galilée.
- Mothé, D. (1959). *Journal d'un ouvrier (1956-1958)*. (A worker's diary (1956-1958) Paris: Minuit.
- Premat, C. (2016). Acting and Thinking as a Revolutionary Journal: The Case of the French Review *Socialisme ou Barbarie*. *Journalism and Mass Communication*, Vol. 6, No. 9, 499-511.

References

- Raflin, M. F. (2005). *Socialisme ou Barbarie: du vrai communisme à la radicalité (Socialism or Barbarism: from true Communism to radicality)*. Paris, Institut d'études politiques: PhD.
- Vega, A. (2011). Socialisme ou Barbarie et le militantisme de Lyotard. *Cités*, 45(1), 31-43. <https://doi.org/10.3917/cite.045.0031>
- Wulfman, C. (2017). The Rise and Fall of Periodical Studies? *The Journal of Modern Periodical Studies*, 8 (2), 226-241.