

The Urban Guerilla Concept

We must draw a clear line between ourselves and the enemy.

Mao

I hold that it is bad as far as we are concerned if a person, a political party, an army or a school is not attacked by the enemy, for in that case it would definitely mean that we have sunk to the level of the enemy. It is good if we are attacked by the enemy, since it proves that we have drawn a clear dividing line between the enemy and ourselves. It is still better if the enemy attacks us wildly and paints us as utterly black and without a single virtue; it demonstrates that we have not only drawn a clear dividing line between the enemy and ourselves but have achieved spectacular successes in our work.

Mao tse Tung
May 26, 1939¹

I. CONCRETE ANSWERS TO CONCRETE QUESTIONS

I still insist that without investigation there cannot possibly be any right to speak.

Mao²

Some comrades have already made up their minds about us. For them, it is the “demagoguery of the bourgeois press” that links these “anarchist groups” with the socialist movement. In their incorrect and pejorative use of the term anarchism, they are no different than the Springer Press. We don’t want to engage anyone in dialogue on such a shabby basis.

Many comrades want to know what we think we’re doing. The letter to 883, in May 1970, was too vague. The tape Michele Ray had, extracts of which appeared in *Spiegel*, was not authentic and, in any event, was drawn from a private discussion. Ray wanted to use it as an

1 This version is close to that in *Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse Tung* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1966), 15. Please note, however, that in keeping with the German translation, the ending here differs slightly from the standard English translation, which reads simply “achieved a great deal in our work.”

2 *Ibid.*, 230.

aide-mémoire for an article she was writing. Either she tricked us or we overestimated her. If our practice was as hasty as she claims, we'd have been caught by now. *Spiegel* paid Ray an honorarium of \$1,000.00 for the interview.

Almost everything the newspapers have written about us—and the way they write it—has clearly been a lie. Plans to kidnap Willy Brandt are meant to make us look like political idiots, and claims that we intend to kidnap children are meant to make us look like unscrupulous criminals. These lies go as far as the “authentic details” in *konkret* #5, which proved to be nothing more than unreliable details that had been slapped together. That we have “officers and soldiers,” that some of us are slaves of others, that comrades who have left us fear reprisals, that we broke into houses or used violence to take passports, that we exercise “group terror”—all of this is bullshit.

The people who imagine an illegal armed organization to be like the *Freikorps* or the Feme,¹ are people who hope for a pogrom. The psychological mechanisms that produce such projections, and their relationship to fascism, have been analyzed in Horkheimer and Adorno's *Authoritarian Personality* and Reich's *Mass Psychology of Fascism*. A compulsive revolutionary personality is a *contradictio in adjecto*—a contradiction in terms. A revolutionary political practice under the present conditions—perhaps under any conditions—presumes the permanent integration of the individual's personality and political beliefs, that is to say, political identity. Marxist criticism and self-criticism has nothing to do with “self-liberation,” but a lot to do with revolutionary discipline. It is not the members of a “left organization,” writing anonymously or using pen names, who are just interested in “making headlines,” but *konkret* itself, whose editor is currently promoting himself as a sort of left-wing Eduard Zimmermann,² producing jack-off material for his market niche.

Many comrades spread untruths about us too. They brag that we lived with them, that they organized our trip to Jordan, that they know about our contacts, that they are doing something for us, when, in fact, they are doing nothing. Some only want to make it look like they are

1 The *Freikorps* were right-wing paramilitary groups that sprang up in the period following World War I; many were later integrated into the Nazi rise to power. The Feme was a secret medieval court which meted out the death sentence, the bodies of its victims generally being left hanging in the streets.

2 Eduard Zimmermann was TV moderator for the German equivalent of Crimewatch. This program was used in the search for RAF members.

“in the know.” Günther Voigt³ had to pay for puffing himself up in a conversation with Dürrenmatt,⁴ claiming he was the one who freed Baader, which he regretted when the cops showed up. It’s not easy to clear things up with denials, even when they’re true. Some people want to use these lies to prove that we’re stupid, unreliable, careless, or crazy. By doing so, they encourage people to oppose us. In reality, they are irrelevant to us. They are only consumers. We want nothing to do with these gossipmongers, for whom the anti-imperialist struggle is a coffee klatch. Many are those who don’t gossip, who have some understanding of resistance, who are pissed off enough to wish us luck, who support us because they know that there is no point spending life implicated in and adapted to this crap.

What happened at the Knesebekstr. 89 house (Mahler’s arrest) was not due to carelessness on our part, but to betrayal. The traitor was one of us. There is no guarantee against that for people who do what we do. There is no certainty that comrades will not break under extreme police pressure, or will hold up in the face of the terror that the system uses against us, with which it attacks us. The pigs wouldn’t have the power if they didn’t have these tools.

Our existence makes some people feel pressured to justify themselves. To avoid political discussion with us, to avoid comparing their practice to ours, they distort even the smallest details. For example, the rumor is still circulating that Baader had only three or nine or twelve months to serve, though the correct length of time is easily ascertained: three years for arson, a further six months on probation, and approximately six months for falsifying documents. Of these 48 months, Andreas Baader had served 14 in ten different Hessian prisons—nine times he was transferred because of bad behavior, for example, organizing mutinies and resistance. Reducing the remaining 34 months to three, nine or twelve is intended to reduce the moral justification for the May 14 breakout. In this way, some comrades rationalize their fear of the personal consequences of entering into a political discussion with us.

The question frequently asked, as to whether we would have proceeded with the breakout if we had known that Linke would be shot, can only be answered with a no. The question of what we would have

3 Günther Voigt was a West Berlin arms dealer. A pistol that could be linked to him was dropped during the Baader liberation. Voigt fled to Switzerland where he gave an interview that led to his arrest, claiming he was involved in the liberation of Baader.

4 Friedrich Dürrenmatt was a Swiss playwright and essayist.

done if... is ambiguous—pacifist, moralistic, platonic, and detached. Anyone who thinks seriously about the breakout would not pose this question, but would think it through for himself. In asking this question, people only want to see if we are as brutal as the Springer Press claims. It's like an interrogation in catechism class. It is an attempt to trivialize the question of revolutionary violence, by treating revolutionary violence and bourgeois violence as the same thing, which leads nowhere. In anticipating all the possible developments, there was no reason to believe that a civilian would intervene. It is suicidal to think that one can conduct a jailbreak unarmed.

On May 14, the cops fired the first shots. This was the case in Frankfurt as well, where two of us ran for it, because we are not going to just let ourselves be arrested. The cops shot to kill. Sometimes we didn't shoot at all, and when we did, we didn't shoot to kill. In Berlin, in Nuremberg, in Frankfurt.¹ It can be proven, because it is true. We do not "use firearms recklessly." The cop who finds himself in the contradiction of being a "little man" and a capitalist pawn, a low paid employee and monopoly capitalism's agent, is not obliged to follow orders. We shoot back if someone shoots at us. The cop who lets us go, we let him go as well.

It is clear that the massive hunt for us is really directed against the entire socialist left in the Federal Republic and West Berlin. This circus cannot be justified by the small amount of money or the few cars and documents we are alleged to have stolen, or by the attempted murder they're trying to pin on us. The ruling class has been scared out of its skin. They thought that they had this state and all of its inhabitants, classes, and contradictions under control, right down to the last detail: the intellectuals reduced to their magazines, the left isolated in its own circles, Marxism-Leninism disarmed, and internationalism demoralized. However fragile it may pretend to be, the power structure is not so easily damaged. One should not be tricked by this hue and cry into contributing to all this noise.

We are not saying that the organization of armed resistance groups can replace the legal proletarian organizations, that isolated actions can replace the class struggle, or that armed struggle can replace political work in the factories or neighborhoods. We are arguing that

1 Berlin refers to the Knesebeckstr. arrest mentioned above. On December 21, 1971, RAF member Ali Jansen was arrested following a shootout at a police roadblock in Nuremberg. On February 10, 1971, police in Frankfurt opened fire on Astrid Proll and Manfred Grashof, who escaped unharmed.

armed struggle is a necessary precondition for the latter to succeed and progress, that armed struggle is “the highest form of Marxism-Leninism” (Mao), and that it can and must begin now, as without it there can be no anti-imperialist struggle in the metropole. We are not Blanquists nor are we anarchists, though we think Blanqui was a great revolutionary and the personal heroism of many anarchists is certainly above reproach.

We have not even been active for a year yet. It is too soon to draw conclusions. The extensive publicity that Genscher, Zimmermann² and Co. have given us opens up a propaganda opportunity which we are using to share a few thoughts.

2. THE METROPOLE: THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC

The crisis isn't the result of the stagnation of development, but of development itself. Since the aim is to increase profit, development encourages parasitism and waste, harming whole social sectors, multiplying needs that it cannot satisfy, and accelerating the disintegration of social life. A monstrous apparatus is necessary to control, by means of manipulation and open repression, the tensions and revolts which it itself often provokes. The crisis in American political unity caused by the student rebellion and the Black Movement, the spread of the student struggle in Europe, the vehement renewal and the growth of worker and mass struggles leading to the “May” explosion in France, the tumultuous social crisis in Italy, and the rebirth of dissatisfaction in Germany all indicate the nature of the situation.

Il Manifesto:

The Necessity of Communism, extract from Thesis 33³

The comrades from Il Manifesto rightly place the Federal Republic of Germany last in their analysis, vaguely describing the situation here as

² Friedrich Zimmermann (CDU) was, at this time, the Chairman of the CDU/CSU parliamentary faction.

³ Expelled from the Italian Communist Party in 1969, *Il Manifesto* was an influential group in the Italian autonomist movement, having 6,000 members in 1972. They advocated council communism, whereby decisions would be made by workers' councils, not by a vanguard party or state. *Il Manifesto* was extremely influential for the entire European New Left. The quote comes from a manifesto of 200 theses issued by the group in 1971.

dissatisfaction. West Germany, which Barzel¹ described six years ago as an economic giant but a political dwarf, has not lost any of its economic power since, while its external and internal political power has increased. With the formation of the Grand Coalition in 1966, the political danger posed by the coming recession was forestalled. With the Emergency Laws the instrument was created to secure unified ruling class action in the event of future crises—the unity of political reactionaries and all those who cling to legality was established. The Social-Liberal coalition succeeded, neutralizing the “dissatisfaction” that had become evident in the student revolt and the extra-parliamentary movement. Insofar as the SPD’s supporters have not broken with reformism, this section of the intelligentsia has been prevented from embracing a communist alternative; in this way reformism acts as a brake on the anticapitalist struggle. *Ostpolitik* is opening new markets for capitalism, while at the same time it represents the German contribution to an accommodation and alliance between U.S. imperialism and the Soviet Union, which the U.S.A. requires in order to have a free hand for its wars of aggression in the Third World. This government seems to have managed to separate the New Left from the old antifascists, cutting off the New Left from its own history, the history of the working class movement. The DKP, which can thank the new collusion between U.S. imperialism and Soviet revisionism for its new legal status, has organized demonstrations in favor of this government’s *Ostpolitik*. Niemöller—a symbol of antifascism—is shilling for the SPD in the upcoming election.

Using the smokescreen of “the common good,” the government has established state control and curbed the union bureaucracy with its wage guidelines and its notion of concerted action. The strikes of September 69 showed that things have been overwhelmingly skewed to the benefit of profit; and the fact that these strikes only addressed economic issues indicates how firmly the government holds the reins.

The system shows its strength in the way that the Federal Republic, with its 2 million foreign workers and unemployment approaching 10%, can make use of the looming recession to develop the terror and the disciplinary measures that unemployment implies for the proletariat, without having to deal with any political radicalization of the masses.

In exchange for development aid and military support for the U.S.A.’s wars of aggression, the Federal Republic profits from the exploitation of

¹ Rainer Barzel was, at this time, the party Chairman of the CDU.

the Third World, without having to take responsibility for these wars, and without having to struggle against internal opposition. While it is no less aggressive than U.S. imperialism, the Federal Republic is less vulnerable.

The political options open to imperialism here have not been exhausted in either their reformist or their fascist forms, and imperialism has not exhausted its ability to either integrate or repress the contradictions that it produces.

The RAF's urban guerilla concept is not based on an optimistic evaluation of the situation in the Federal Republic and West Berlin.

3. THE STUDENT REVOLT

The conclusion that it is impossible to separate the revolution in the "heartland" from that in "underdeveloped areas" is based on an analysis of the unique character of the capitalist ruling system. Without a revival of revolution in the West, the imperialists, with their logic of violence, will be able to develop their exit strategy through a catastrophic war, and it will be impossible to prevent the world's superpowers from imposing crushing oppression.

Il Manifesto: from Thesis 52

To dismiss the student movement as a petit bourgeois revolt is to reduce it to the grandiose claims that accompanied it, to deny its roots in the contradiction between bourgeois society and bourgeois ideology; it means recognizing its obvious shortcomings while ignoring the theoretical level that this anticapitalist protest managed to achieve.

The pathos with which the student movement became aware of its mental immiseration in the knowledge factories was certainly exaggerated, as was the identification of this with the situation of the exploited peoples of Latin America, Africa, and Asia. The comparison between the mass circulation of *Bild Zeitung* here and the massive bombing of Vietnam was a grotesque oversimplification, just as it was arrogant to compare the ideological critique of the system here and the armed struggle over there. The students' belief that they were the revolutionary subject, insofar as it was based on the appeal of Marcuse, betrayed their ignorance as to the actual nature of bourgeois society and the mode of production which it has established.

The student revolt in the Federal Republic and West Berlin—with its street fighting, its arsons, its use of counterviolence, its pathos, as well

as its exaggerations and ignorance... in short, with its practice—has the merit of having reconstructed Marxism-Leninism, at least in the consciousness of the intelligentsia, as that political theory without which the political, economic, and ideological factors and their outward manifestations cannot be combined into an overall analytical perspective. Without this, internal and external relationships cannot be described.

The student movement was based on the contradiction between the theory of academic freedom and the reality of monopoly capitalism's control of the universities. Precisely because it was based on this, and not merely on ideology, it didn't run out of steam before it had established the relationship between the crisis in the universities and the crisis of capitalism, if only in theory. Not before it was clear to the student movement and their public that "liberty, equality, and fraternity" would not be achieved by appeals to human rights or the UN Charter, that what was occurring here was what had always occurred in the colonialist and imperialist exploitation of Latin America, Africa, and Asia: discipline, subordination, and brutality for the oppressed and for those who take up their struggle by protest, those who resist and wage the anti-imperialist struggle.

In its ideological critique, the student movement viewed almost all aspects of state repression as expressions of imperialist exploitation: in the Springer campaign, in the demonstrations against American aggression in Vietnam, in the campaign against class justice, in the *Bundeswehr* campaign,¹ in the campaign against the Emergency Laws, and in the high school student movement. Expropriate Springer! Smash NATO! Resist Consumer Terror! Resist Education Terror! Resist Rent Terror!—these were all correct political slogans. They aimed to expose the contradiction between new needs which could be satisfied through the development of productive forces, on the one hand, and the pressure of irrational subordination to class society, on the other. Their identity was not based on class struggle here, but rather on the knowledge that they were part of an international movement, that they were dealing with the same class enemy as the Viet Cong, the same paper tigers, the same pigs.

The second merit of the student movement was that it broke through the old left's parochialism: the old left's popular front strategy in the form of the Easter Marches, the German Peace Union, the *Deutsche*

1 An SDS campaign encouraging soldiers to desert from the *Bundeswehr*, the West German Army.

Volkszeitung, an irrational hope for a “massive landslide” in some election or another, a parliamentary fixation on Strauß here or Heinemann there, their pro- and anticommunist vacillation about the GDR, their isolation, their resignation, and their moral conflicts: ready for every sacrifice, incapable of any practice. The socialist section of the student movement developed its consciousness, in spite of theoretical errors, from the correct recognition that “the revolutionary initiative in the West can be based on the crisis in the global balance of power, and on the development of new forces in old countries.” (II Manifesto, Thesis 55) They based their agitation and propaganda on what can be considered the most important aspect of German reality. They opposed the global strategy of imperialism by internationalizing national struggles, by creating a connection between the national and international aspects of the struggle, between traditional forms of struggle and international revolutionary initiatives. They managed to turn their weakness into strength, because they recognized that continuing resignation, parochialism, reformism, and popular front strategies could only lead to a dead-end for socialist politics in the post- and pre-fascist conditions existing in the Federal Republic and West Berlin.

The left knew that it was correct to link the distribution of socialist propaganda in factories with actually preventing the distribution of *Bild Zeitung*. It was correct to link propaganda against GIs being sent to Vietnam with actual attacks on military planes targeting Vietnam, and the *Bundeswehr* campaign with attacks on NATO airports. It was correct to link the critique of class justice with the blowing up of prison walls, and the critique of the Springer Corporation with the disarming of its private security services. It was correct to set up radio stations, to demoralize the police, to have safehouses for *Bundeswehr* deserters, to combine agitation amongst foreign workers with the production of false documents, to prevent the production of napalm by sabotaging factories.

It was an error, however, to make their own propaganda dependent on supply and demand: to have no newspaper if the workers could not yet finance it, no car if the “movement” could not afford it, no transmitter because they had no license for it, no sabotage because capitalism wouldn’t collapse immediately as a result.

The student movement fell apart when its typically student and petit bourgeois form of organization, “antiauthoritarianism,” proved itself ill-suited to achieving its goals. Its spontaneity proved ineffective in the factories, nor could it create a functioning urban guerilla movement

or a socialist mass organization. Unlike in Italy and France, the spark of the student movement here failed to ignite the prairie fire of class struggle, and it was at that point that it collapsed. It could enumerate the aims and contents of the anti-imperialist struggle, but it could not be the revolutionary subject, could not offer the necessary organizational structure.

Unlike the proletarian organizations of the New Left, the Red Army Faction doesn't deny its roots in the history of the student movement, a movement that reshaped Marxism-Leninism into a weapon of class struggle and established the international basis for revolutionary struggle in the metropole.

4. THE PRIMACY OF PRACTICE

If you want to know a certain thing or a certain class of things directly, you must personally participate in the practical struggle to change reality, to change that thing or class of things, for only thus can you come into contact with them as phenomena; only through personal participation in the practical struggle to change reality can you uncover the essence of that thing or class of things and comprehend them.

Marxism emphasizes the importance of theory precisely and only because it can guide action. If we have a correct theory but merely prate about it, pigeonhole it and do not put it into practice, then that theory, however good, is of no significance.

Mao tse Tung: *On Practice*¹

The decision of leftists and socialists, the student movement's authority figures, to turn to the study of scientific socialism and transform the critique of political economy into a self criticism of the student movement, was at the same time a decision to retreat into the classroom. Considering their paper output, their organizational models, and their bombastic statements, one might think that these revolutionaries were leading a violent class struggle, as if 1967/68 was the 1905 of socialism in Germany. In 1903, Lenin pointed out, in *What Is to Be Done*, that the Russian workers needed a specific theory, and postulated, in opposition to the anarchists and the Social Revolutionaries, the necessity

1 *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1967). The first of these two paragraphs comes from pages 299-300, the second from page 304.

of class analysis, organization, and all-encompassing propaganda, because a broad-based class struggle was unfolding:

The fact is that the working masses are roused to a high pitch of excitement by the social evils in Russian life, but we are unable to gather, if one may so put it, and concentrate all these drops and streamlets of popular resentment that are brought forth to a far larger extent than we imagine by the conditions of Russian life, and that must be combined into a single gigantic torrent.

Lenin: *What Is to Be Done?*²

Under the existing conditions in the Federal Republic and West Berlin, we doubt it will be possible to create a strategy to unify the working class or to create an organization that could simultaneously express and initiate the necessary unifying process. We doubt that the unity of the socialist intelligentsia and the proletariat can be “molded out of” the political programs or the declarations coming from the proletarian organizations. The drops and streamlets based on the horrors have long been collected by the Springer Corporation, to which they then add new horrors.

We believe that without a revolutionary initiative, without the practical revolutionary intervention of the vanguard, the socialist workers and intellectuals, and without concrete anti-imperialist struggle, there will be no unifying process. Unity can only be created through the common struggle of the conscious section of the working class and the intellectuals, one which they do not stage-manage, but which they model, or else it will not happen at all.

The paper output of these organizations shows their practice to be mainly a contest between intellectuals for the best Marx review before of an imaginary jury, which couldn't possibly be the working class, as the language used excludes their participation. They are more embarrassed when they are caught misquoting Marx than when they are caught lying in their practice. Talking is their practice. The page numbers in their footnotes are almost always correct, the membership numbers they give for their organizations seldom are. They fear the accusation of revolutionary impatience more than corruption by bourgeois careers. It's more important to them to spend years pursuing a degree

² Marxists Internet Archive “Lenin’s What is to be Done? Trade-Unionist Politics and Social Democratic Politics,” <http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1901/witbd/iii.htm>.

with Lukacs¹ than to allow themselves to be spontaneously inspired by Blanqui. They express internationalism in the form of censorship by favoring one Palestinian guerilla organization over another. White masters who claim to be the true guardians of Marxism, they express themselves through patronage, begging their rich friends for alms in the name of the Black Panther Party—not with a view to “victory in the people’s war,” but to soothe their consciences. That’s not a revolutionary method of intervention.

Mao, in his *Analysis of the Classes in Chinese Society* (1926), contrasted the revolution and the counterrevolution in this way:

*Each has hoisted a huge banner: one is the red banner of revolution held aloft by the Third International as the rallying point for all the oppressed classes of the world, the other is the white banner of counterrevolution held aloft by the League of Nations as the rallying point for all the counterrevolutionaries of the world.*²

Mao differentiated between classes in Chinese society based on the positions they took towards the red and white banners. It wasn’t enough for him to analyze the economic situation of different classes in Chinese society. Part of his class analysis involved the relationship of different classes to the revolution.

There will be no leadership role for Marxist-Leninists in future class struggles if the vanguard doesn’t hold up the red banner of proletarian internationalism, if the vanguard can’t answer the question of how to establish the dictatorship of the proletariat, of how to develop the power of the proletariat, of how to break the power of the bourgeoisie, if it isn’t prepared to do anything to answer these questions. The class analysis we require cannot be developed without revolutionary practice or revolutionary initiative.

The “provisional revolutionary demands” put forward by the proletarian organizations throughout the country—such as the struggle against the intensification of exploitation, for a shorter work week, against the squandering of social wealth, for wage parity for men, women, and foreigners, against production quotas, etc.—are nothing but trade union economism as long as they don’t address the question of

1 George Lukacs was an influential Hungarian Marxist philosopher and art critic. His work greatly influenced the New Left of the 60s and 70s.

2 Mao Tse-Tung “Analysis of the Classes in Chinese Society,” Marxists Internet Archive, http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-1/mswv1_1.htm.

how to break the political, military, and propaganda power that always stands firmly in the way of these demands when they are put forward in mass class struggles. If these demands stay the same, one can only call them economistic shit, because they are not worth the revolutionary energy wasted in fighting for them, and they won't lead to victory if "victory means to accept the principle that life is not the most precious thing for a revolutionary" (Debray³). Trade unions intervene with demands like these—but "the trade union politics of the working class are bourgeois working class politics" (Lenin). That's not a revolutionary method of intervention.

The proletarian organizations failed to pose the question of armed struggle as a response to the Emergency Laws, the army, the BGS, the police, or the Springer Press. This shows that the proletarian organizations differ in their opportunism from the DKP only in that they are even less rooted in the masses, even if they are more verbally radical and theoretically advanced. In practice, they function at the level of civil rights and are concerned with gaining popularity at any price. They support the lies of the bourgeoisie by supporting the idea that with this state it is still possible to correct social problems by parliamentary means. They encourage the proletariat to engage in struggles that have no chance of success, given the state's capacity for violence and its barbaric ways. "These Marxist-Leninist factions or parties," Debray writes of the communists in Latin America, "move within the political environment as if they were controlled by the bourgeoisie. Rather than challenging the political status quo, they reinforce it...."

These organizations don't offer any alternatives to the thousands of apprentices and young people who, as a result of being politicized by the student movement, became determined to put an end to exploitation in their workplaces. They simply advise them to adapt to capitalist exploitation. Concerning youth crime, when it comes down to it they share the position of prison wardens. Regarding the comrades in prison, they share the point of view of the judges. And regarding the underground, they share the point of view of social workers.

Without political practice, reading *Capital* is nothing more than bourgeois study. Without political practice, political programs are just so much twaddle. Without political practice, proletarian internationalism

3 Regis Debray was a French Marxist intellectual and a proponent of *foco* theory, the theory that a small group of guerillas could act as an inspiration to revolutionary activity. He joined Che Guevara on his ill-fated Bolivian adventure.

is only hot air. Adopting a proletarian position in theory implies putting it into practice.

The Red Army Faction asserts the primacy of practice. Whether it is right to organize armed resistance now, depends on whether it is possible, and whether it is possible can only be determined in practice.

5. THE URBAN GUERRILLA

Hence, imperialism and all reactionaries, looked at in essence, from a long-term point of view, from a strategic point of view, must be seen for what they are—paper tigers. On this we should build our strategic thinking. On the other hand, they are also living tigers, iron tigers, real tigers which can devour people. On this we should build our tactical thinking.

Mao tse Tung, January 12, 1958¹

If it is true that American imperialism is a paper tiger, this means it can, in the final analysis, be defeated. And if the thesis of the Chinese communists is correct, then victory over American imperialism is possible, because struggles against it have erupted all over the world, and as a result imperialism's power is divided. It is this division that renders its defeat possible. If this is true, then there is no reason to exclude or leave out any country or any region from the anti-imperialist struggle simply because the forces of revolution are especially weak, and the forces of reaction are especially strong.

If it is incorrect to demoralize the revolutionary forces by underestimating them, it's equally incorrect to push them into confrontations that can only lead to defeat. In the conflicts between the honest comrades in the proletarian organizations—let's leave the big talkers out of it—and the Red Army Faction, we accuse them of demoralizing the revolutionary forces, whereas they feel we are leading the revolutionary forces down a blind alley. There is an attempt to bridge this divide between the comrades in the factories and the neighborhoods and the Red Army Faction, and if we succeed in doing so, we will arrive at the truth. Dogmatism and adventurism are typical deviations in any country during periods in which the revolutionary movement is weak. Since the anarchists have always been the strongest critics of opportunism,

1 *Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse Tung* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1966), 74.

everyone who criticizes opportunism is called an anarchist—this is nothing more than fashionable nonsense.

The concept of the urban guerilla comes from Latin America. There, like here, it is the method of revolutionary intervention by generally weak revolutionary forces.

The urban guerilla struggle is based on an understanding that there will be no Prussian-style marching orders, which so many so-called revolutionaries are waiting for to lead the people into revolutionary struggle. It is based on the analysis that by the time the conditions are right for armed struggle, it will be too late to prepare for it. It is based on the recognition that without revolutionary initiatives in a country with as much potential for violence as the Federal Republic, there will be no revolutionary orientation when the conditions for revolutionary struggle are more favorable, as they soon will be given the political and economic developments of late capitalism.

The urban guerilla is the consequence of the long since complete negation of parliamentary democracy by the elected representatives themselves. It is the inevitable response to the Emergency Laws and the Hand Grenade Law. It is the willingness to struggle with the very means that the system appropriates for itself to neutralize its enemies. The urban guerilla is based on facing facts, not making excuses for them.

The student movement already had a partial understanding of what the urban guerilla could achieve. It can give concrete form to the agitation and propaganda work to which the left has been reduced. For instance, in the Springer campaign, in the Carborax campaign of the Heidelberg students,² in the squatting movement in Frankfurt, in the context of the military aid that the Federal Republic gives the comprador regimes in Africa, and in the security measures and the in-house justice in the factories. The urban guerilla can make verbal internationalism concrete by providing weapons and money. It can blunt the system's weapons and the banning of communists by organizing an underground that can elude the police. The urban guerilla is a weapon of class struggle.

2 A campaign to stop the building of a massive dam in Mozambique, then a Portuguese colony. The right-wing Portuguese government had plans to settle over one million European colonists in the African country. By 1969, five German companies were implicated in the project. There were protests in the FRG, particularly in Heidelberg, against the project when the U.S. Minister of Defense Robert McNamara visited the country.

The urban guerilla struggle is armed struggle in a situation in which the police use their weapons recklessly and in which class justice finds Kurras not guilty and buries comrades alive. The urban guerilla struggle means not being demoralized by the violence of the system.

The urban guerilla aims to destroy certain aspects of the state structure, and to destroy the myth of state omnipotence and invulnerability.

The urban guerilla requires the organization of an illegal structure, including safehouses, weapons, cars, and documents. What one needs to know about this, Marighella describes in his *Minimanual of the Urban Guerilla*. What needs to be known beyond that, we are always ready to tell anyone who wants to participate in the guerilla struggle. We don't know that much yet, but we know a little bit.

Before deciding to take up the armed struggle, it is important that one first experience the legal struggle. When one's connection to the revolutionary left is based on just wanting to follow the latest fad, then it is better not to start anything you will not be able to get out of later on.

The Red Army Faction and the urban guerilla represent the only faction and practice which draws a clear line between ourselves and the enemy, and is therefore subject to the sharpest attack. This requires that one have a political identity, and it presumes that a learning process has already occurred.

Our original organizational concept implied a connection between the urban guerilla and the work at the base. We wanted everyone to work in the neighborhoods, the factories, and the existing socialist groups, to be influenced by the discussions taking place, to have some experience, to learn. It has become clear that that doesn't work. The degree to which the political police can monitor these groups, their meetings, their appointments, and the contents of their discussions is already so extensive that one has to stay away if one wants to escape this surveillance.

The urban guerilla struggle requires that one be totally clear about one's motivations, that one not be put off by the attacks from *Bild Zeitung*, the antisemitic-criminal-subhuman-murderer-arsonist label that they apply to revolutionaries. All that shit they spit out and are willing to say, and which still influences what many comrades think about us, must have no effect.

Naturally, the system doesn't give any ground, and there is nothing they will not do and no slander they will not use against us.

There are no publications that have any goals that can be distinguished from those that serve the interests of capital. There is still no

socialist publication that reaches beyond itself, its circle, the people handed copies, and its subscribers, and which does not exist primarily in an incidental, private, personal, bourgeois context. All forms of media are controlled by capital, through advertising sales, as a result of the ambitions of the writers, who want to write their way into the establishment, through the radio stations' boards of directors, and through the market control of the press corporations. The leading publications are the publications of the ruling class. They divide the market opportunities between themselves, developing ideologies for specific milieus, and what they publish serves to assure their market domination. Journalism is about one thing: sales. News is a commodity; information is a consumer product. Whatever isn't suitable for consumption is vomited back out. The need to retain the readership for advertisement-heavy publications, and point system ratings for television, prevent antagonistic contradictions from developing between these media and the public; no antagonism, nothing of consequence. Whoever wants a place in the market must maintain connections with these extremely powerful opinion shapers. This means that dependence on the Springer Corporation grows in step with the Springer Corporation itself, which has also started to buy up local papers. The urban guerilla can expect nothing but bitter hostility from this public. It has to orient itself around Marxist criticism and self-criticism, and nothing else. As Mao said, "Whoever is not afraid of being drawn and quartered, can dare to pull the emperor from his horse."

Long-term, meticulous work is crucial for the urban guerilla, insofar as we want to go beyond discussion to action. If the option of retreating to a bourgeois profession is not kept open, if the option of leaving behind the revolution for a townhouse is not maintained, if none of this is even desirable, then, with the full pathos of Blanqui's statement, "The duty of the revolutionary is to always struggle, in spite of everything to struggle, to struggle until death." There is no revolutionary struggle, and there has been no revolutionary struggle, in which this hasn't shown itself to be true: Russia, China, Cuba, Algeria, Palestine, Vietnam.

Some say that the political possibilities of organization, agitation, and propaganda are far from being exhausted, and only when they have been exhausted should one consider armed struggle. We say that the political possibilities will not be fully utilized until armed struggle is recognized as the political goal, as long as the strategic conclusion that all reactionaries are paper tigers is not grasped despite the tactical conclusion that they are criminals, murderers, and exploiters.

We will not talk about “armed propaganda”: we will do it. The prison breakout didn’t take place for reasons of propaganda, but to get the guy out. The bank robberies they try to lay at our doorstep, we’d only do that to grab the money. The “spectacular successes” that Mao tells us we must have scored if “the enemy paints us as utterly black” are not our successes alone. The big clamour that has been made about us is due more to the Latin American comrades—given the clear line they have already drawn between themselves and the enemy—which has led the ruling class here, suspecting us of some bank robberies, to “energetically oppose” us, because of what we have begun to build here: the urban guerilla in the form of the Red Army Faction.

6. LEGALITY AND ILLEGALITY

Revolution in the West, the challenge to capitalist power in its strongholds, is the order of the day. It is of decisive importance. The current world situation offers no place and no power that is in a position to guarantee peaceful development and democratic stability. The crisis is intensifying. Parochialism or the decision to postpone the struggle would mean being sucked into the abyss of complete collapse.

Il Manifesto, extract from Thesis 55

The anarchists’ slogan, “Destroy what destroys you,” is aimed at mobilizing the base, young people in prisons and reformatories, in high schools and training centres. It reaches out to all of those in the shittiest situations. It is meant to be spontaneously understood, and is a call for direct resistance. Stokely Carmichael’s¹ Black Power slogan, “Trust your own experience!” means just that. And the slogan is based on the insight that in capitalism there is absolutely nothing that oppresses, tortures, constrains, and burdens that does not have its origin in the capitalist mode of production, and that each oppressor, in whatever form he may appear, is a representative of the class interests of capital, which makes him the class enemy.

To this extent the anarchists’ slogan is correct, proletarian, and in line with the class struggle. It is incorrect insofar as it leads to false

¹ Stokely Carmichael was a prominent militant in the Black Liberation Movement in the United States, playing a leading role in the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and then the Black Panther Party.

consciousness. One goes on the offensive simply to give them a kick in the teeth, and organization then takes second place, discipline becomes bourgeois, and class analysis superfluous. If you don't work out the dialectic of legality and illegality in terms of organization, you will be defenseless against the heavy repression that will follow your actions, and you will be legally arrested.

The statement of some organizations, "Communists are not so stupid as to get themselves banned," renders them a mouthpiece for class justice, that is to say, for no one. The statement is correct insofar as it means that the legal possibilities for communist agitation, propaganda, and organizing for a political and economic struggle must be fully utilized and cannot be carelessly jeopardized—but that is not what they mean. They mean that there is no way of getting around the limits that the class state and its justice system establish for the socialist project, that one must stop at these limits, that one must retreat from the state's illegal encroachments as these encroachments are legalized—legality at any price. Illegal imprisonment, terroristic sentences, police harassment, blackmail and coercion on the part of the BAW—eat shit or die—Communists are not that stupid....

This statement is opportunist. It shows a lack of solidarity. It abandons the comrades in prison. It excludes the organization and politicization in a socialist context of anyone who, as a result of their social background and situation, has no choice but to survive through crime: the underground, the subproletariat, innumerable proletarian youth, and guest workers. It facilitates the theoretical criminalization of all those who are not members of these organizations. It expresses complicity with class justice. It is stupid.

Legality is a question of power. The relationship between legality and illegality has to be determined by examining the contradiction between reformist and fascist domination, whose representatives in Bonn are, on the one hand, the Social-Liberal coalition, and on the other, Barzel and Strauß. Their media representatives are, for the former: the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, *Stern*, the WDR² Third Program, SFB, and the *Frankfurter Rundschau*. And, for the latter: the Springer Corporation, the *Sender Freies Berlin*, the *Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen*, and the *Bayernkurier*. The Munich police line here, and the Berlin model there. Here the justice of the Federal Administrative Court and there that of the Federal Supreme Court.

2 *Westdeutscher Rundfunk*, West German Radio.

The reformist line attempts to avoid conflicts by using institutional options (co-management) and promises of improvements (in prison conditions, for example), by addressing obsolete sources of conflict (the Chancellor's genuflection in Poland, for example), by avoiding provocation (the soft line of the Munich police and the Federal Administrative Court in Berlin, for example), and by airing grievances (regarding public education in Hessen and Berlin, for example). As part of this reformist line of avoiding conflict, they move a bit further inside and a bit less outside of legality. They do this to look legitimate. With the Constitution in hand, they intend to neutralize contradictions and leave left-wing criticism dead in the water and empty of content, thereby keeping the *Jusos* within the SPD.

There is no doubt that, in the long run, the reformist line is the more effective way of stabilizing capitalist domination, but it relies on certain conditions being met. It requires economic prosperity, because the soft line of the Munich police, for example, is much more expensive than the hard line of Berlin—as the Munich police chief pointed out: “Two officers with machineguns can hold a thousand people in check. 100 officers with truncheons can control a thousand people. Without weapons of this sort, 300 or 400 police officers are necessary.” The reformist line requires a situation in which no organized anticapitalist opposition exists, as one can see by the Munich example.

Camouflaged by political reformism, the concentration of state and economic power accelerates. What Schiller has achieved with his financial policy and Strauß has pushed through with his financial reforms is an increase in exploitation through the intensification of work and heightened division of labor in the productive sector, and through long-term rationalization in the administrative sector and the service industries.

The concentration of violent power in the hands of the few can occur unopposed if it is done quietly, if unnecessary provocation, which can set a process of solidarity in motion, is avoided—that is something that was learned as a result of the student movement and the Paris May. Therefore, the Red Cells¹ are not yet banned. Therefore the KP can exist as the DKP without the ban on the KP being lifted. Therefore there are still some liberal television programs. And, therefore, some organizations can get away with thinking that they are not as stupid as they really are.

1 The Red Cells were an independent university-based Marxist organization.

The margin of legality that reformism affords is capital's response to the attacks of the student movement and the APO—the reformist response is the more effective one, so long as they can manage it. To rely on this legality, to count on it, to perpetuate it metaphysically, to base statistical projections on it, to want to defend it, means repeating the errors of the Latin American self-defense zones. It means you haven't learned anything and have provided the reactionaries with time to regroup and reorganize, creating a situation in which they won't ban the left, they'll smash it.

Willy Weyer² doesn't play at tolerance. When the liberal press complains that his highway breathalyzers treat all drivers like potential criminals, he maneuvers and audaciously responds, "We will carry on!"—and in so doing he demonstrates the irrelevance of the liberal public. Eduard Zimmerman creates a whole nation of police agents, and the Springer Corporation has taken on the role of leading the Berlin police—*Bild Zeitung* columnist Reer recommends arrest warrants to the custodial judges. The mass mobilization in favor of fascism, of crackdowns, of the death penalty, and for more and better-armed police carries on unabated—the New Look of the Brandt-Heinemann-Scheel administration is a facade for Bonn's policies.

The comrades who only deal with the question of legality and illegality superficially have obviously misunderstood the amnesty with which the student movement was to be tamed. In lifting the criminalization of hundreds of students, they sent them away with just a fright, preventing further radicalization and impressing upon them the value of the privileges that come with being a bourgeois student—that in spite of the nature of the knowledge-factory, the universities are helpful to social climbers. This deepens the class divide between students and the proletariat, between their privileged everyday life and the everyday life of those who do the shit work and who were not offered the same amnesty by the same class enemy. So once again the division between theory and practice is maintained. The equation: amnesty equals pacification.

The social democratic voter initiative involving some respected writers—not only that fuck-up, Grass³—is an attempt at a positive, democratic mobilization, and is a form of resistance against fascism, and

2 Willy Weyer (SPD) was, at this time, the Minister of the Interior for North Rhine Westphalia and a key proponent of the militarization of the police force.

3 At the time a member of *Gruppe 47*, Günter Grass is one of the most significant German post-World War II authors and a noted liberal.

therefore should not be dismissed lightly. It is having some effect on the reality presented by certain publishers and some radio and television editorial departments, those that have not yet capitulated to the logic of the monopolies and have not yet been absorbed into the superstructure, with its overarching political reality. The areas of increasing repression are not those with which writers are normally concerned: prison, class justice, intensified work, work-related accidents, installment plans, schools, *Bild* and the *Berliner Zeitung*, barrack-style housing in the suburbs,¹ and ghettos for foreigners—all of this troubles these writers aesthetically, not politically.

Legality is the ideology of parliamentarianism, of social partnership, and of a pluralistic society. Legality becomes a fetish when those who insist upon it ignore the fact that phones are legally tapped, mail is legally monitored, neighbors are legally interrogated, and informants are legally paid. The organization of political work, if it is not to be under constant observation by the political police, must be simultaneously conducted both legally and illegally.

We don't count on terror and fascism provoking a spontaneous antifascist mobilization, nor do we think that legality is always corrupt. We understand that our work offers pretexts, just as alcohol does for Willy Weyer, just as the increase in crime does for Strauß, just as *Ostpolitik* does for Barzel, just as a Yugoslav running a red light does for a Frankfurt taxi driver, just as a tool in the pocket does for the murderers of car thieves in Berlin. Regarding other pretexts that result from the fact that we are communists, whether communists organize and struggle will depend on whether terror and repression produce only fear and resignation, or whether they produce resistance, class hatred, and solidarity, and whether or not everything goes smoothly for imperialism. It depends on whether communists are so stupid as to tolerate everything that is done to them, or whether they will use legality, as well as other methods, to organize illegality, instead of fetishizing one over the other.

The fate of both the Black Panther Party and *Gauche Prolétarienne*² resulted from an incorrect understanding of the contradiction between the constitution and legal reality and the increased intensity of this

1 Unlike North America, suburbs in Northern Europe are generally occupied by the subproletariat and poorly paid immigrant workers.

2 *Gauche Prolétarienne* was a French Maoist organization that, in 1968, began attempts to build a factory-based guerilla group. They were banned in 1970.

contradiction when organized resistance occurs. And this incorrect understanding prevents people from seeing that the conditions of legality are changed by active resistance, and that it is therefore necessary to use legality simultaneously for political struggle and for the organization of illegality, and that it is an error to wait to be banned, as if it were a stroke of fate coming from the system, because then the banning will constitute a death blow, and the issue will be resolved.

The Red Army Faction organizes illegality as an offensive position for revolutionary intervention.

Building the urban guerilla means conducting the anti-imperialist struggle offensively. The Red Army Faction creates the connection between legal and illegal struggle, between national struggle and international struggle, between political struggle and armed struggle, and between the strategic and tactical aspects of the international communist movement. The urban guerilla means intervening in a revolutionary way here, in spite of the weakness of the revolutionary forces in the Federal Republic and West Berlin!

Cleaver said, "Either you're part of the problem or your part of the solution. There is nothing in between. This shit has been examined and analyzed for decades and generations from every angle. My opinion is that most of what happens in this country does not need to be analyzed any further."³

**SUPPORT THE ARMED STRUGGLE!
VICTORY TO PEOPLE'S WAR!**

Red Army Faction
April 1971

3 Eldridge Cleaver was the Minister of Information for the Black Panther Party. When the party splintered into warring factions, he went into self-imposed exile in Algeria. He is the author of several books, including *Soul on Ice*, from which this quote is drawn.