CHAPTER 11

The Political and Ecological Situation in Spain and the Way to Approach This Situation Critically from a Position on the Left

In regard to the situation here, I think that we can dispense with data, which we all have. This will allow me to move forward and stimulate – without provocation – a discussion or reflection, and to talk about what can be done given our situation, beginning with the clarification of one of the fundamental problems, probably the fundamental problem, confronting initiatives from the classical, and mainly (but not exclusively) Marxist Left, in the face of this new situation.

This problem is the following: an idea has appeared, on various occasions and among authors of some importance, even authors with a socialist background, to the effect that the demands imposed by ecological-social problems were, to begin with, hardly foreseeable, on the basis of the labour movement’s classical assumptions [planteamientos]: the labour movement was generally based on the prospects of a deployment of the productive forces and not on the desirability of restricting them. And secondly, the immediate solution to these problems also seems to clash with the basic traditions, so to speak, of the trade union movement. Hence, for example, Bahro and some other authors who think that the crucial question of revolutionary political thought, the question of who is the subject or agent of social transformation, needs to be changed altogether. For this author, for example, we need to look for the agent of the new change, of the socio-ecological revolution, to use a term that is already rather well established, not in the industrial working class (in accordance with the Marxist schema), nor even in the most dispossessed, deprived, exploited strata, as in the tradition of the labour movement as a whole (including the anarchists), but in the stratum of intellectuals in production, technicians, scientists, and critical humanist intellectuals, supported, at best, by the most enlightened sectors of the working classes.

My opinion in this regard, which I would like to propose merely as a basis for discussion, is that this is fairly superficial thinking. First of all, for a negative reason: it is inconceivable that the agent of social change should be, on the one hand, a minority and, on the other, a beneficiary, to a large extent, of the existing situation. And this is, in my view, equally true in regard to East and West; I mean that the stratum of intellectuals in general, and that of the technical intellectuals in particular, cannot be counted among those who are directly harmed in a classical sense. If anyone can benefit from the technical products and at the same time avoid their worst consequences, it is the social strata that include at least a large proportion of the intellectuals. And secondly, for a positive reason: because the social class which is most productive in terms of survival is, in my opinion, indispensable for change, so I do not view the stratum of intellectuals as an adequate agent, nor do I see the possibility of making an important social change without the class that most decisively maintains society’s subsistence.

Of course, there is a possibility of getting around my two objections: the possibility of those intellectuals having a despotic power that could force the working classes to continue working and, at the same time, to accept, under conditions of domination, a new austerity, a new type of daily life.

Without elaborating any further, I will simply state my opinion. I believe that the new set of problems does not alter the revolutionary labour movement’s old conviction that the agent of social change is found in the working classes, primarily in the industrial proletariat. Having said this, it is in any case worth reviewing schematically the new problems, which may lead us to think, according to Lukács’s famous boutade, that we are worse off than in 1848 from that point of view, from the point of view of the active self-consciousness of those who ought to be the material agent of social change.

The new problems are cultural and material. The cultural problem is the entire tradition of the labour movement: it will surely be very difficult for the labour movement, in, for example, its most direct expression, the trade union movement, to perceive any time soon the need to consider the satisfaction of its needs in a new way. All of us who work in the labour milieu have had experience of just how difficult it is. For example, I myself have faced the following, spontaneous response from militant, combative worker cadres when they heard the idea that the private automobile is surely something whose elimination is necessary: ‘now that the workers can own a car you theorists discover that the car is bad’. Laura Tremosa has had an experience even more dramatic than this one: in a workers’ environment in which she was employed, they went so far as to forbid her from saying, or to threaten to interrupt her if she said, anything against the automobile during her work. And it is in the