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## **How to Organize Emancipation**

Ruda, Frank

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Frank Ruda

## **How to Organize Emancipation: The Paris Commune**

I.

Emancipation, to be what it supposed to be, needs a form appropriate to it. Without the appropriate form of emancipation, emancipation might simply turn out not to be emancipation after all. It might then be in advance or always already enchained to and imprisoned by what it seeks liberation from. But what is the form appropriate to emancipation? It would be mistaken to identify emancipation also with the emancipation of any form whatsoever, whereby it would embrace the negation of form and thus be negatively and unwillingly determined by it. This is the danger of (at least irreflexive) anarchism. But to answer the question of what form is appropriate to emancipation, one should opt for a radicalization of the mutual reflection of form and emancipation: the form of emancipation must also entail the emancipation of what we mean by form and that implies an emancipation even of the previous forms of emancipation. To begin with such a radicalization of reflection that ultimately bursts into pieces the latter, one may start by determining some apparently given formal elements of emancipation itself, especially since it is not true that one can always determine who is supposed to be liberated – *le sujet supposé être libéré* –, from what, in which field of practice (or in which generalised medium of communication, to speak like Luhmann).

II.

This sounds all-too obvious, but it isn't. If it is unclear what form emancipation must take, and hence what emancipation is, things are more complicated. At least, if one trusts Karl Marx. He claimed that the Paris Commune brought about a “multiplicity of interpretations”<sup>1</sup> that all identified in it “a thoroughly expansive [*ausdehnungsfähige*]<sup>2</sup> political form” which in difference to “all previous forms of government” was not “repressive.” The Commune produced and created a new, a productive and creative form. But its very formidable political expandability did detract

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<sup>1</sup> Karl Marx, *The Civil War in France*, in: MECW, Vol. 22, 334. All subsequent citations from Marx are from this page unless indicated otherwise.

<sup>2</sup> The German term indicates that this political form was “capable”[*fähig*] of expansion [*Ausdehnung*], which in different terms means it is quantitatively (it could have included a greater quantity of people) and qualitatively expandable (it could be applied to qualitatively different political entities, like whole states).

most its interpreters from the Commune's "ultimate aim." It is as if that aim were so obvious, it became invisible.

### III.

The Paris Commune was a new, a different form of political government not simply because of its potential expandability. For Marx, this is not what makes it into a genuine historical novelty. Emancipation is not only the creation of an(y) exportable, expandable, extending form. Emancipation does something new to what is emancipation. To determine what makes the Paris Commune thus into a ground-breaking novelty means to expose and expound, to shed light on and reveal "its true secret." This true secret lies in entirely transforming the very idea of political organization and political form capable of bearing, supporting and sustaining emancipation. It did thus not add another form to the chorus of forms of government that we have known since antiquity. It did thus also not add another feature to the existing formal canon by simply reforming it. It transformed the very *modus operandi* of political organization and governance and thereby transformed the very *modus operandi* of political form(ation).

### IV.

The "true secret" of the Paris Commune "was this. It was essentially a working-class government, the produce of the struggle of the producing against the appropriating class, the political form at last discovered under which the economical emancipation [*Befreiung*] of Labour could have been carried out [*sich vollziehen konnte*]." The Paris Commune is the finally discovered political form of emancipation. This form is a form of how to carry out emancipation. It is a form of political organization that allows the workers to emancipate themselves from the enchainings of the economy. The Paris Commune was a form of collective political organization that allowed for an actual emancipatory conduct because it allowed to newly determine and thus distance the workers from the repressive grip of the economy. It was able to do so, because it established a novel *Vollzugsweise*, a new *modus operandi* of politics, in which collective political self-organization and determination had primacy over any economic conduct. When the former was established as collectively orienting principle, it proved effectively capable to determine the economy's functioning. This was a real turning point in the history of emancipation. The Paris Commune turned around the order of determination. A turn-over and around the hierarchy of dictates. No longer did it follow the dictates of the economy, but principally organized the

collective political dictate, the *dictata* of the economy. *Flectere si nequeo superos, Acheronta Movebo*. In this sense, Engels remarked pointedly to those social-democrats who were either terrified by, sceptical about or both with regard to the idea of the violent restructuring they associated with a potential dictatorship of the proletariat: “Well and good, gentleman, do you want to know what this dictatorship looks like? Look at the Paris Commune. This was the Dictatorship of the Proletariat.”<sup>3</sup>

V.

Just look (if you have eyes that can see)! The Paris Commune was the dictatorship of the proletariat embodied. Even if only lasted for 72 days, the Paris Commune presented the living and working proof that the dictatorship of the proletariat was neither a practically useless fiction nor a utopian regulative ideal. The dictatorship of the proletariat “is not a ‘lifeless theory’ or a dream.” With the Paris Commune “it is a fact.”<sup>4</sup> One can dictate the rules to the economy (and to its defenders). The Paris Commune discovered, as it were, a new continent of political forms, on which the workers were able to prove that political emancipation is about the inventive discovery and discovering inventiveness of forms of prescription and their practical organization. They discovered a form in which they could appropriate (the very practical concept of) determination. The communards appropriated the means of determinations that left unappropriated immediately belong to the economy. By discovering this new form-practice – in distance from or beside of the traditional state-form(s) –, the Paris Commune effectively embarked on a unforeseen discovery trip to the “continent... of history”<sup>5</sup> – since there is no history, no historicity proper without a fundamental break with all previous forms (this is its negative side), which at the same time creates a new practice of (the) form (of political organization) and a new form of practice (this is its positive side). The Commune thus discovered the continent of history that according to Althusser Marx had “opened up” (after Thales and Galileo opened up the continent of the science of nature). After its opening up, there was a continental movement, a continental shift or rift in its discovery.

VI.

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<sup>3</sup> Frederick Engels, “Introduction,” *On the Paris Commune* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1985), 34.

<sup>4</sup> V.I. Lenin, The “Disarmament” Slogan, in: *Collected Works*, Vol. 23 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1964), 96.

<sup>5</sup> Louis Althusser, “To My English Readers”, in: *For Marx* (London: Penguin Press, 1969), 14.

The Paris Commune materialized a political form newly discovered, embodied a rift with all previous historical forms of repressive state-organizations. It was a political form of workers' government in which an economic (self-)emancipation of the workers became practically political possible, effective and realizable. Yet, at the same time "the working class did not expect miracles from the Commune. They have no ready-made utopias to introduce *par décret du peuple*... They have no ideals to realize..."<sup>6</sup> "The great social measure [*Maßregel*] of the Commune was its own working existence [*arbeitendes Dasein*]" that has "betoken the tendency of a government of the people by the people."<sup>7</sup> The great organizing rule and principle was that its *Dasein* was a working *Dasein*. This does not simply mean that the Commune created an organized and principled form of a collective *Dasein*, a collective-being-there, a being-together(e) of the workers. It also means that this collective *Dasein* was a self-organized product, it was self-generated, in this sense autonomous (auto-created), emancipated and hence determined by ongoing collective work.<sup>8</sup> It was a collective *Dasein* that was being worked on, figured out and formed while being-there. It was becoming what it was while being what it was becoming. The novelty of the newly and finally discovered political form was a form of a collective principled self-organization whose content was its very formation. It worked out, on and through the formation of its collective *Dasein* of equals. In this sense its practice can be described as what Werner Hamacher called affirmative<sup>9</sup> (it affirms the collective practice of inventing forms of collective self-organization and production in the very process of collective self-organizing).

## VII.

The Paris Commune was the dictatorship of the proletariat materialized. Its affirmative practice could not but be a practice of emancipation and it offered the historical proof that a primacy of politics over economy can be practically realized – a lesson that one should not forget. It is this primacy is what allows for emancipation as affirmative collective practice. This is also why, in slightly more traditional terms, some have seen in it an embodiment of "constituent power", so that here "the project of the abolition of the State is not subordinated to anarchist spontaneity but

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<sup>6</sup> Marx, *The Civil War in France*, p. 335

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 339.

<sup>8</sup> Heidegger will later claim that this is the main feature of *Dasein* tout court, if properly understood.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Werner Hamacher, "Affirmative, Strike. Benjamin's 'Critique of Violence,'" in: *Walter Benjamin's Philosophy – Destruction and Experience*, ed. by Andrew Benjamin and Peter Osborne (London: Routledge, 1994), 110-138.

focused on the nexus... between political movement and political power.”<sup>10</sup> Others have seen in it, in different terms, “a new type of power, proletarian power.”<sup>11</sup>

## VII.

It is important to here add another qualification, since the form that the Paris Commune “at last” discovered provided an answer to a conundrum. It solved a historical riddle or problem. This problem was bequeathed to emancipatory thinking by the French Revolution. Hegel articulated it by remarking that the French Revolution did not “allow [for a] political organization to be firmly established.”<sup>12</sup> It declared the principle of equaliberty (Balibar), the equality and freedom of and for all, but it did not propose a real and effective form of the universalized organization of equality and freedom (think of Haiti, for example). Rather it led to repeated collisions between its principles and all attempts to effectively realize them, whereby “agitation and unrest are perpetuated. This collision, ... this problem is that with which history is now occupied, and whose solution it has to work out in the future.”<sup>13</sup> The Paris Commune embodied precisely this future (solution), worked out, on and through the problem and at last discovered the form of freely organizing collective egalitarian emancipation.<sup>14</sup> Put differently: the Paris Commune was an embodiment of the dictatorship of the proletariat because it allowed to conceive of an affirmative organization of equaliberty that effectively meant to affirmatively organize the impossibility of inegalitarian politics and positions. This implies that the Paris Commune proved that equaliberty can only spring from a primacy of politics over the economy implementing of a primacy of equality over an economic interpretation of unrestrained (individual-ized) freedom. Therefore the Commune had no choice, it “was bound to take a socialist tinge....”<sup>15</sup>

## VIII.

This is why the lessons of the commune are so crucial to all thinkers of emancipation afterwards. Lenin, to single out just one example, claimed that “the picture of its life and death, the sight of a

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<sup>10</sup> Antonio Negri, “Constituent Power: The Concept of a Crisis“, in: *Contemporary Marxist Theory. A Reader*, ed. By Andre Pendakis, Jeff Diamanti, Nicholas Brown, Josh Robinson, Imre Szeman (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 494.

<sup>11</sup> V. I. Lenin, “Extraordinary Seventh Congress of the R.C.P.(B.)”, in: *Collected Works*, vol. 27 (Moscow: Progress Publishers 1965), 133.

<sup>12</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Philosophy of History* (New York: Prometheus Books 1991), 473

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> I am obviously leaving aside for the present purposes a lot of the important historical and conceptual steps.

<sup>15</sup> V.I. Lenin, “In Memory of the Commune”, in: *Collected Works*, Vol. 17 (Moscow: Progress Publishers 1974), 139.

workers' government which seized the capital of the world... the spectacle of the heroic struggle of the proletariat and its sufferings after defeat – all this has raised the spirit of millions of workers, aroused their hopes... The thunder of the cannon in Paris awakened the most backward strata of the proletariat from deep slumber... This is why the cause of the Commune did not die. It lives to the present day in every one of us... And in this sense, it is immortal.”<sup>16</sup> The Paris Commune does not only, as for Kant the French Revolution did, instil enthusiasm in contemporary, but disengaged, bystanders. Rather it creates a timeless enthusiasm in everyone engaged in the theory and practice of emancipation. It woke everyone, like Hume for Kant, from a slumber and it will do so again, if needed. In this sense, the Commune is immortal, even though it failed to practically and effectively translate its impossible discovery into a lasting form. It did not last historically, but it will forever last trans-historically, since it demonstrated, it offered a historical proof of the real possibility of political emancipation. It proved that there is another way of collective egalitarian self-organization; one that is different from capitalist democracy, whose “essence... Marx grasped...splendidly when, in analysing the experience of the Commune, he said the oppressed are allowed once every few years to decide which particular representative of the oppressing classes shall represent and repress them in parliament.”<sup>17</sup> The Paris Commune was the proof that there is another kind of collective, “democratic” organization. It proved that democracy is not to come, but first to be destroyed in its bourgeois form, which always was a hidden dictatorship, a dictatorship of the bourgeoisie. After this constitutive destruction, it was concretely and practically to be invented (in its proletarian form). It proved that the form in which to do that is the dictatorship of the proletariat. It demonstrated that what was deemed impossible was in fact possible, since it found a form in which the impossible could take place and shape. The Commune will be with us, it will be present in every one of us who seeks to conceive of how to organize emancipation. Because forever it has been proven that one can collective create an organization of what appears impossible.

## IX.

However dwarfed we may feel in whatever particular concrete situation we find ourselves in, we should thus never forget that “we are standing on the shoulders of the Paris Commune,”<sup>18</sup> and

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 143. Note that Lenin here points to a materialist theory of immortality (and thus eternity).

<sup>17</sup> V.I. Lenin, *State and Revolution*, in: *Collected Works*, Vol. 25 (Moscow: Progress Publishers 1964), 466.

<sup>18</sup> V. I. Lenin, “Extraordinary Seventh Congress of the R.C.P.(B.)”, 133.

hence should always feel lifted up. Whatever seems undoable, has been done before. Even though, it lasted no longer than a few weeks and existed only in one, albeit important, city Lenin believed one can draw crucial lessons from its exceptional *Da-Gewesen-Sein*. Simply put, we can learn from its mistakes.<sup>19</sup> This is *inter alia* the case because the Communards were not “conscious of what they were doing. The Commune was not understood by those who created it; they established the Commune by following the unfailing instinct of the awakened people....”<sup>20</sup> And even though for a while Lenin himself believed that those who have the “the dubious good fortune”<sup>21</sup> of having been born later are endowed with the advantage of knowledge, he realized that more profoundly, when it comes to historical transformative action, one will always act without knowing what we are effectively doing – because this is what it means to invent and create new forms. This means that one can learn from the Paris Commune something eternally relevant about eventual, transformative, revolutionary historical action per se: it is never an action that is derivable from knowledge. This is, by definition, an element of actions affirmative nature – one does not understand it, but one does it anyhow. The Paris Commune thus becomes a paradigm of the affirm of the labouring collective practical *Dasein* of the people that they – in its essential parts – exercise without knowing how. But this also means that we certainly always know things and learnt from history, so what we do not know is not always the same. The point here is that the Communards did not know how they did what they did; they did what they could not do by recourse to any readymade or available knowledge, but they did it anyhow. They had to (unknowingly) invent what they discovered. This is what it means that they did what seemed epistemically and theoretically and therefore practically impossible. They did it by gradually producing the organization of the collective in the process of collective decision-making. In this very sense, the

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<sup>19</sup> Its mistakes are multiple for Lenin. But one thereby can learn from it more than that it was unable to defend itself. One can learn determinately negative things, indications of problems that must be resolved (these determinate negations must themselves be negated, so to say). As Lenin puts it: “But two mistakes destroyed the fruits of the splendid victory. The proletariat stopped half-way: instead of setting about ‘expropriating the expropriators’, it allowed itself to be led astray by dreams of establishing a higher justice in the country united by a common national task; such institutions as the banks, for example, were not taken over, and Proudhonist theories about a ‘just exchange’, etc., still prevailed among the socialists. The second mistake was excessive magnanimity on the part of the proletariat: instead of destroying its enemies it sought to exert moral influence on them; it underestimated the significance of direct military operations in civil war, and instead of launching a resolute offensive against Versailles that would have crowned its victory in Paris, it tarried and gave the Versailles government time to gather the dark forces and prepare for the blood-soaked week of May.” Cf. V.I. Lenin, “Lessons of the Commune”, in: *Collected Works*, Vol. 13 (Moscow: Progress Publishers 1972), 476.

<sup>20</sup> V. I. Lenin, “Extraordinary Seventh Congress of the R.C.P.(B.)”, 133.

<sup>21</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Three Studies on Hegel* (Cambridge: MIT Press 1993), 1.



Paris Commune is not only a historical and political novelty but also a collective event of freedom, “an event unprecedented in history.”<sup>22</sup> The Paris Commune is the suspension of (previous historical, political and practical) all known rules and all rules of knowledge (and thus of rule-following). It is precisely therein emancipation.

X.

If it just had the time.... Since, even though it is immortal, paradoxically, “the chief thing the Commune lacked was time – an opportunity to take stock of the situation and embark on the fulfilment of its programme.”<sup>23</sup> The political-historical eventual character of the Paris Commune did not have the time to realize what it has made possible for the first time in history. Because it challenged all principles of previous inegalitarian societies, it was harshly attacked and swiftly destroyed. But in the fragmentary phase of its existence, it helped to create a material-practical image and vision of the dictatorship of the proletariat, and this means an image-vision of “the new type of the state...”<sup>24</sup> A collective afform of organization that makes it possible to replace the repressive state machinery after its dismantling with something else. One cannot get rid of the current problematic and inegalitarian organizational form if one does not have any form to replace it with. One remains an idealist and a dreamer if one is just critical and does not propose how things should be effectively and practically run. One fetishizes and idealizes the revolution, without any organizational suggestion for the day after. The Commune powerfully made such a suggestion. The discovery of the Commune is for Lenin therefore also a discovery of a supplementary form — a supplement of the state-form that can stand on its own. This is why he can remark in *State and Revolution* that “‘the Commune was no longer a state in the proper sense of the word’ – this is the most theoretically important statement Engels makes.”<sup>25</sup> The discovery that is linked to the Paris Commune is therefore multiple: it discovered that politics can take primacy over economy, that there can be collective emancipation and “complete self-governance, the absence of any supervision from above”<sup>26</sup>; that people invent without knowing how and that there can be a principled collective self-organization that can function without being a state, a

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<sup>22</sup> .I. Lenin, “In Memory of the Commune”, 140.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 141.

<sup>24</sup> V. I. Lenin, “Extraordinary Seventh Congress of the R.C.P.(B.)”, 133.

<sup>25</sup> V.I. Lenin, *State and Revolution*, 446.

<sup>26</sup> V.I. Lenin, “The Petrograd City Conference of the R.S.D.L.P. (Bolsheviks), April 14-22, 1917”, in: *Collected Works*, Vol. 24 (Moscow: Progress Publishers 1964), 150.

status quo, in the proper sense of the term. This does not simply mean, that the people just do what they do. It means that they organize themselves, strictly and in a strictly disciplined way. Sometimes, it does not take much for people to realize that they have all they need, and that they were effectively the ones they were waiting for. They were the solution to their own problem.

## XI.

This may all sound radically anachronistic in times of over-present grotesque sovereigns, of corruption that does not even feel the need to disguise itself anymore and that therefore seems even harder to criticize; in times where many seem to feel that a return to less crude and average normal, to an old-school liberal exploitative society with a dose of empty ecological promises would already be a marker of progress; a government that at least cared for the well-being if not of most, then at least for that of the average wealthy citizen, etc. Did not emancipation in its global and universal collective dimension die in the camps, ruins, tombs and mass graves of previous attempts to realize it? Are we not in a time after its death, and therefore have nothing but bad options at hand? The Paris Commune, and this is important to recall, as event of emancipation and as mass grave of its own, ended in a slaughter of the innocent, not by its own hands, but by that of its enemies. It was the workers who died for the idea of collective emancipation, while attempting to stand strong for helping others and themselves. In this sense, the shoulders that we, those who are thinking through emancipation, are standing on are the shoulders of the dead. With 1917, Lenin – who danced in the snow when the Russian revolution lasted one day longer than the Paris Commune – sought to solve what he identified as *the* problem of the Commune. The Commune did not last, it did not have the time to practically realize what it invented. This was what Lenin saw as its main problem. Lenin thus thought that the solution to the problem of the Commune – and it may be no accident that time here is of the essence, as capitalism is, as is well-known, a gigantic organizational repressive form of economizing time – must be identical to the answer to the question: how to make the Commune last? This is why Lenin was able to understand the Russian Revolution as “a continuation of the road taken by the Paris Commune.”<sup>27</sup> The latter was made possible through the answer to the Commune’s problem. This answer was that emancipation needs a strict disciplined and militarized organizational form, able to defend itself against the attacks of its enemies, without losing any bit of the Commune’s potential expandability, of its

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<sup>27</sup> V. I. Lenin, “Extraordinary Seventh Congress of the R.C.P.(B.)”, 135.

expansive potentiality. The party was supposed to fulfil this function. The Bolshevik answer came with impressive political and military success (but also within a highly difficult economic and military conjuncture), but it also failed harshly (and here is not the space to analyse this failure in greater detail). It failed, however, by creating problems that Lenin and the Communist party were unable to foresee and to solve. What to do with this?

XI.

Already 35 years ago – and thus long before the formulation of the so-called “communist hypothesis”<sup>28</sup> –, Alain Badiou suggested that a reformulation of the very idea of emancipation is needed and that it is, after the experiences of emancipatory failures which everyone should study and from which everyone should learn, high time to reformulate the *Communist Manifesto*.<sup>29</sup> Everyone knows, that the Paris Commune is the crucial reference in one of the prefaces to a reedition of the *Manifesto* – that proved that one cannot simply appropriate the existing machine of the state. If one seeks to follow Badiou’s suggestion to rearticulate the *Manifesto* after the previous attempts to realize collective emancipation, does one thus also need new references for this remake? It seems that that the previous solutions and thus the previously encountered problems have to be revisited. Lenin’s solution to what he identified as the problem of the Paris Commune historically proved to create a disaster. In addition, there has also been a problematic appropriation of the idea of the Commune in other territories (think of the liberal and libertarian, sexual emancipation communes that are nowadays assimilated in a slightly modified way and started to determine how one, for example, lives as a member of the creative industries). But all this does not necessarily imply a retroactive invalidation of the Paris Commune (almost a century later, the Shanghai Commune can be read as an attempt to rejuvenate and reinvigorate emancipation after its ossification under the government of the Communist party). But what to learn from the Paris Commune today, in and for our present conditions?

XI.

It is literally not my place to reformulate (here elements of) a new Manifesto. Therefore, let me – with another nod to Lenin – draw on the Commune in the most concrete manner I can. Lenin remarks at one point that through the egalitarian nature of its organization, there was no separate

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<sup>28</sup> Cf. Alain Badiou, *The Communist Hypothesis* (London: Verso 2015).

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Alain Badiou, *Can Politics Be Thought?* (Durham: Duke University Press 2019).

armed force that would not have been part of the self-organization of the people. Certainly, seen through and with European eyes, such praise of the emancipatory potential of popular armament and people's militia, may also produce some worries and doubts: may this very measure not be used to endorsement of reactionary anti-statist groups. This would obviously open the door to all kinds of structural problems (of injustices, hatred, racism, dispersion of authority, etc.). As much as this is an important discussion to be had (and one should not forget that these militias could potentially overtake a lot of the – social-infrastructureal – work that otherwise specialized forces and institutions have to fulfil<sup>30</sup>), a point that Lenin in this context makes in passing in worthwhile thinking about, especially today. He argues that the organization he envisages against the background of the Paris Commune must share with the latter the principle that in it “the existence of a police is impossible”<sup>31</sup> – and one should again recall that the Commune can be described as collective organization of the impossibility of inequality. Is not the idea of a functioning society that functions well inter alia because it is collectively organized around the principle that within it the existence of a police is impossible a still pertinent idea (that even radicalizes the calls to defund the police)? What if organizing a collective in such a way that police in it is impossible would not simply mean that one naively believes that everyone will just be good all the time, but that there are other ways, other institutions of how to deal with what the police is dealing with in rather problematic ways? Could one not immediately imagine things to look quite different in several European and American states that struggle with police violence and structural racism, inequality, oppression and so forth, if there simply were no police? This is not – and this is as important as it should be obvious – a plea for a trivialized form of non-violent anarchism or a simple “laissez-faire, it will certainly all go well”- socio-political strategy. The idea would rather be that the Paris Commune made it imaginable that there could be an affirmative collective organization of free equals that made the existence of a separate police-force controlling the people impossible. Might this not be a point worth thinking about: what could we do today to make this principle effective, real and practicable in our current situation? “Do not defund the police! Make its very existence impossible!” This is not utopian, but can offer some clear orientation of what has to be done. What if this is could be considered a problem bequeathed to us by the Commune that shows it is still

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<sup>30</sup> Cf. for example: Fredric Jameson, *An American Utopia: Dual Power and the Universal Army* (London: Verso 2016).

<sup>31</sup> V.I. Lenin, “The Petrograd City Conference of the R.S.D.L.P. (Bolsheviks), 146.

with us? Could, especially today, our task not be to find a practical answer to this question? In this way, we'd think with and through the Commune. It thereby becomes a medium of our thought and discussion and we become a part of it as well as it becomes a part of our shared working *Dasein*. It is in this sense that the Paris Commune can still and forever be our beacon, and the Communards our contemporaries.