Extract from **Internationale Situationniste** at **Context XXI**

(http://contextxxi.org/instructions-for-an-insurrection.html)

extracted on: 15 November 2026
Date of this contribution: August 1961

Instructions for an Insurrection

n KEN KNABB (TRANSLATION) ■ SITUATIONISTISCHE INTERNATIONALE

If it seems somewhat ridiculous to talk of revolution, this is obviously because the organized revolutionary movement has long since disappeared from the modern countries where the possibilities of a decisive social transformation are concentrated. But *all the alternatives* are even more ridiculous, since they imply accepting the existing order in one way or another. If the word "revolutionary" has been neutralized to the point of being used in advertising to describe the slightest change in an ever-changing commodity production, this is because the possibilities of a central *desirable* change are no longer expressed anywhere. Today the revolutionary project stands accused before the tribunal of history — accused of having failed, of having simply engendered a new form of alienation. This amounts to recognizing that the ruling society has proved capable of defending itself, on all levels of reality, much better than revolutionaries expected. Not that it has become more tolerable. The point is simply that revolution has to be reinvented.

This poses a number of problems that will have to be theoretically and practically overcome in the next few years. We can briefly mention a few points that it is urgent to understand and resolve.

Of the tendencies toward regroupment that have appeared over the last few years among various minorities of the workers movement in Europe, only the most radical current is worth preserving: that centered on the program of workers councils. Nor should we overlook the fact that a number of confusionist elements are seeking to insinuate themselves into this debate (see the recent accord among "leftist" philosophico-sociological journals of different countries).

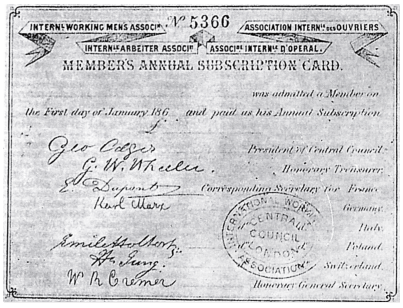
The greatest difficulty confronting groups that seek to create a new type of revolutionary organization is that of establishing new types of human relationships within the organization itself. The forces of the society exert an omnipresent pressure against such an effort. But unless this is accomplished, by methods yet to be experimented with, we will never be able to escape from specialized politics. The demand for participation on the part of everyone often degenerates into a mere abstract ideal, when in fact it is an absolute practical necessity for a really new organization and for the organization of a really new society. Even if militants are no longer mere underlings carrying out the decisions made by masters of the organization, they still risk being reduced to the role of spectators of those among them who are the most qualified in politics conceived as a specialization; and in this way the passivity relation of the old world is reproduced.

What's this? We calculated *all* the barriers! Could this be an *unknown* wall?

People's creativity and participation can only be awakened by a collective project explicitly concerned with all aspects of lived experience. The only way to "arouse the masses" is to expose the appalling contrast between the potential constructions of life and the present poverty of life. Without a critique of everyday life, a revolutionary organization is a separated milieu, as conventional and ultimately as passive as those holiday camps that are the specialized terrain of modern leisure. Sociologists, such as Henri Raymond in his study of Palinuro, have shown how in such places the spectacular mechanism recreates, on the level of play, the dominant relations of the society as a whole. But then they go on naïvely to commend the "multiplicity of human contacts," for example, without seeing that the mere quantitative increase of these contacts leaves them just as insipid and inauthentic as they are every-

where else. Even in the most libertarian and antihierarchical revolutionary group, communication between people is in no way guaranteed by a shared political program. The sociologists naturally support efforts to reform everyday life, to organize compensation for it in vacation time. But the revolutionary project cannot accept the traditional notion of play, of a game limited in space, in time and in qualitative depth. The revolutionary game — the creation of life — is opposed to all memories of past games. To provide a three-week break from the kind of life led during forty-nine weeks of work, the holiday villages of Club Med draw on a shoddy Polynesian ideology — a bit like the French Revolution presenting itself in the guise of republican Rome, or like the revolutionaries of today who define themselves principally in accordance with how well they fit the Bolshevik or some other style of *militant role*. The revolution of everyday life cannot draw its poetry from the past, but only from the future.

The experience of the empty leisure produced by modern capitalism has provided a critical correction to the Marxian notion of the *extension of leisure time:* It is now clear that full freedom of time requires first of all a transformation of work and the appropriation of this work in view of goals, and under conditions, that are utterly different from those of the forced labor that has prevailed until now (see the activity of the groups that publish *Socialisme ou Barbarie* in France, *Solidarity* in England and *Alternative* in Belgium). But those who put all the stress on the necessity of changing work itself, of rationalizing it and of interesting people in it, and who pay no attention to the free content of life (i.e. the development of a materially equipped creative power beyond the traditional categories of work time and rest-and-recreation time) run the risk of providing an ideological cover for a harmonization of the present production system in the direction of *greater efficiency and profitability* without at all having called in question the experience of this production or the necessity of this kind of life. The free construction of the entire space-time of individual life is a demand that will have to be defended against all sorts of dreams of harmony in the minds of aspiring managers of social reorganization.



The different moments of situationist activity until now can only be understood in the perspective of a reappearance of revolution, a revolution that will be social as well as cultural and whose field of action will right from the start have to be broader than during any of its previous endeavors. The SI does not want to recruit disciples or partisans, but to bring together people capable of applying themselves to this task in the years to come, by every means and without worrying about labels. This means that we must reject not only the vestiges of specialized artistic activity, but also those of specialized politics; and particularly the post-Christian masochism characteristic of so many intellectuals in this area. We don't claim to be developing a new revolutionary program all by ourselves. We say that this program in the process of formation will one day practically oppose the ruling reality, and that we will participate in that opposition. Whatever may become of us individually, the new revolutionary movement will not be formed without taking into account what we have sought together; which could be summed up as the passage from the old theory of limited permanent revolution to a theory of generalized permanent revolution.

Situationist International: Situationistisch / Situationist: All das, was sich auf die Theorie oder auf die praktische Tätigkeit von Situationen bezieht. Derjenige, der sich damit beschäftigt, Situationen zu konstruieren. Mitglied der situationistischen Internationale.
Situationismus: Sinnloses Wort, missbräuchlich durch Ableitung des vorigen gebildet. Einen Situationismus gibt es nicht — was eine Doktrin zur Interpretation der vorhandenen Tatsachen bedeuten würde. Selbstverständlich haben sich die Anti-Situationisten den Begriff „Situationismus" ausgedacht.

Ken Knabb: Geboren 1945 in Louisiana. Autor, Übersetzer und radikaler Theoretiker, Betreiber des Website *Bureau of Public Secrets.*

License of this contribution
Public domain
Public domain