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## **Socialisme ou Barbarie.**

*Socialisme ou Barbarie* was a group, with an associated journal, which was established by Cornelius Castoriadis in 1949. Born in Constantinople and a student of law, economics and philosophy in Athens, Castoriadis had come to Paris after World War II, where he joined the French section of the Trotskyist Fourth International. He and others – notably Claude Lefort – became disillusioned with the fourth International. *Socialisme ou Barbarie* was a splinter group. In the journal's opening number (March, 1949), Castoriadis argued that "Today the 'Fourth International' uses a spurious faithfulness to the letter of Marxism as a substitute for an answer to the important questions of the day" (Castoriadis, ed. Curtis, Vol I, 1988, 77). The most important 'question of the day' was how to preserve the agency of the working classes when, in both capitalist and communist countries, they are represented by gigantic trade unions and political parties which are "cynically playing the role of direct agents of the ruling class and of the capitalist State, or of the bureaucratic capitalism that reigns in Russia" (Castoriadis, ed. Curtis, 1988, 77). Castoriadis concluded with a sentence which clearly indicated the basis of the alternative expressed in the title of the group and the journal and of their prescriptions for the future: "Only one force can arise today to challenge the continuing decay and increasing barbarism of all regimes based upon exploitation: that of the producing class, the socialist proletariat" (Castoriadis, ed. Curtis, 1988, 106).

In late 1972, Castoriadis wrote a 'general introduction' to a collection of his early essays entitled *La société bureaucratique* in which he indicated that the first of several theoretical lessons learnt after World War II, articulated in 1953-4, was that the 'independence of ruling strata vis-à-vis their own population' (Castoriadis, ed. Curtis, 1988, 12) as well as in relation to the populations of the opposing dominant world blocs had been overestimated. In an article published in *Socialisme ou Barbarie* in 1954, entitled "Situation de l'impérialisme et perspectives du prolétariat" [The Situation of Imperialism and Proletarian Perspectives] Castoriadis argued that 'the fundamental characteristic of the contemporary era' was the struggle between the American and the Russian blocs to dominate and exploit the rest of the world. In spite of their different ideologies, both blocs were indistinguishable in the colonial context in wanting to suppress any kind of domestic uprising which might impinge upon their attempts to secure international supremacy (Castoriadis, ed. Curtis, 1988, 256).

In 1982, Lyotard wrote a Preface to a posthumously published book on revolution and counter-revolution in China up to 1949 by a former associate in *Socialisme ou Barbarie* – Pierre Souyri – which was also published in *Esprit* (Souyri, 1982; Lyotard, 1982). Lyotard added this article to the American and French editions of *Peregrinations* (Lyotard, 1988, 1990) because it supplemented the account of his intellectual development given in those Wellek Library lectures – detailing his involvement with *Socialisme ou Barbarie*. Souyri and Lyotard had joined the group together in 1954. As a result of his experience as a teacher in Algeria from 1952 to 1954, Lyotard became the Algerian 'correspondent' for the journal. 12 of the articles written by Lyotard between 1956 and 1963 during the Algerian War of Independence were published together in 1989 in his *La guerre des Algériens*, and 8 of these were included in his *Political Writings* (1993). Lyotard's texts gave tangible detail about the specifics of the North African situation to support the group's general views on local bureaucracies and its dissatisfaction with the stance of the Communist Party on colonialism.

Lyotard and Souyri both became members of a sub-group of *Socialisme ou Barbarie* – entitled *Pouvoir Ouvrier* [worker power] with an associated monthly publication – in 1959, and this developed into a full secession from the main group in 1964. (Castoriadis disbanded the main group during the winter of 1965-6). In 1966, Lyotard resigned from *Pouvoir Ouvrier*, having

lost confidence in the capacity of Marxist thought to deliver social change. Souyri never gave up on his Marxist convictions and regarded Lyotard's resignation as a betrayal. Using the language which he was developing in the early 1980s, Lyotard's article of 1982 on Souyri treated the analysis of their intellectual differences as a case-study analysis of their 'differend', thereby absorbing the differences of their relationships to the Marxist grand narrative into a broader political and ethical agenda which would build on dissensus rather than imposed ideological consensus. This transition in Lyotard's thought commenced with his resignation from *Socialisme ou Barbarie* which had been a dominant influence, and it continued through his involvement with the events of May 1968, as reflected in *Dérive à partir de Marx et Freud* (1973), leading, at the end of the 1970s to the publication of *The Postmodern Condition* (1979, 1984).