

Letter to the Hamburg Prisoners

*This letter was written to RAF prisoner
Werner Hoppe, who came to the RAF out of
communist section of the student movement. (M. & S.)*

We are beginning to find you truly insufferable—the class perspective with which you puff yourselves up. And it's not because of a question of definition, but because the *struggle*, meaning what is essential, doesn't exist in it. There is nothing there. It is a showpiece that has very little in common with what *we* want. What we want is revolution. That is to say, there is a goal, and, with regards to the goal, there isn't a position, but *only* the movement, the struggle, the relationship to *being*, which, as you say, means struggling.

There is the class reality: proletariat, proletarianization, declassing, humiliation, abuse, expropriation, servitude, poverty.

Under imperialism, the complete penetration of all relationships by the market and the nationalization of society by repressive and ideological state structures leave no place and no time about which you can say: this is my starting point. There is only illegality and liberated territory. Furthermore, you will not achieve illegality as an offensive position for revolutionary intervention until you yourself are on the offensive; without that it is nothing.

The class position is Soviet foreign policy presented as the class position of the international proletariat, and the U.S.S.R.'s accumulation model presented as socialism.

It is the line—the apology—for socialism in one country. Meaning, it is an ideology that aims to secure the domination of a dictatorship that does not proceed offensively against imperialism, but which instead responds defensively to the encirclement it now faces.

You can say that Soviet domestic and foreign policy was historically necessary, but you can't claim that makes it absolute as the class position. The class position—that is to say, class interests, class needs, the class obligation to struggle for communism so as to be able to live—is curbed through such politics. I would actually say it is abolished, which is nonsense. Position and movement are mutually exclusive. It is a construct geared towards creating a safety net and self-justification—a facade.

It is a reframing of class politics as economic interests, which is incorrect. Class politics are the result of the confrontation with the politics of capital, and the politics of capital are a function of its economy. I think Poulantzas¹ correctly addressed this when he said that the economic activities of the state are part of its repressive and ideological activities—they are part of the class struggle.

Class politics are a struggle against the politics of capital and not against the economy, which, directly or by way of the state, proletarianizes the class. The class position of the proletariat is war. It is a *contradictio in adjecto*—it is nonsense. It is nonsense from a class point of view, because the Soviet Union attempts to promote its state policy under the cover of class struggle. What I am saying is that it is the expression of Soviet foreign policy.

Which is to say, they can be allies in the process of liberation, but not protagonists. The protagonist has no position—the protagonist has a goal. The “class position” is always a cudgel. It is always the claim to possess and bestow, by way of the party apparatus, a conception of reality different from reality as it is perceived and experienced. Specifically, it is a claim to a class position without class struggle. As you say, it is “on this basis” that we should act, rather than on the basis of how we have been acting up to now.

In 1969, it was the MLs, the KSV, and the AO groups who, with the “class position,” depoliticized the movement in the universities by supporting policies that no student could relate to emotionally. It is a position for the liquidation of the anti-imperialist protest movement. And I think that that is the horrible thing about this concept and what it represents, the fact that it rules out any emotional identification with proletarian politics—it is a kind of catechism.

We do *not* act on the basis of a class position, no matter what its class perspective may be, but on the basis of class *struggle*, which is the principle of all history, and on the basis of class *war* as the reality within which proletarian politics are realized—and, as we have discovered, only in and by war.

The class position can only be the class *movement* within the class war, the world proletariat engaged in armed struggle, the true vanguard, the liberation movements.

1 Nicos Poulantzas was a Greek Marxist philosopher who was very influential in New Left intellectual circles in the sixties and the seventies.

Or, as Jackson² said, “connections, connections, connections.” As such: movement, interaction, communication, coordination, common struggle—strategy.

All of this is paralyzed by the concept of “class position”—and that is how you used it when you attempted to win over Ing.³ You must know by now that there is not much worse than being fed complete nonsense

Which is all to say, the class position is a triumphalist position.

Certainly, there is also something heroic about it. However, we’re not concerned with that. We are, instead, concerned with its consequences.

But that’s enough. I have the impression that I’m talking to a wall, and that is not the point of all of this. The goal is to have you climb down from your pedestal.

So, come on down. You’re boasting.

Ulrike Meinhof
April 13, 1976

2 George Jackson was a young Black social prisoner politicized in prison in the U.S. in the late 60s. He was the author of *Blood in My Eye*, a strategic manual for Black revolution, and *Soledad Brother*, a collection of writings consisting primarily of letters. He joined the Black Panther Party while in the prison. He was killed by guards during an alleged escape attempt on August 21, 1971.

3 Apparently an abbreviated pseudonym; translated as Ilse in the French version published by Maspero in 1977.