Many a socialist had posed the question whether a comprehensive overview of the economy as a whole is possible or attainable. For the sake of convenience, we will refer to the complex of questions concerning feasibility, the modalities and the limits of an overview of the economy as a whole as the Übersichtsproblem (Overview problem). It unquestionably constitutes an important area of socialist theory. It is an objective of socialism to replace the blind laws of the capitalist economic order by conscious basically transparent economics arrangements. "Scientific socialism" owes its existence to the insight that a progressively increasing degree of economic transparency is no pious wish, but represents a scientifically observable trend in capitalism. It is known that for "technical-economic" reasons capitalism tends toward centralization and concentration, and thus to an increasing degree of transparency of the process of economic activity. This does not mean of course, that the transparency problem will, one fine day, "solve itself," without our active assistance. Indeed, the achievement of a conscious social control over the economy requires our active understanding of that process of social transformation in which we are participants -- and our understanding of that process is of the essence. With respect to the Übersichtsproblem, socialist theory cannot impose a "scientific socialist" model on a historical vacuum, but rather must seek “to point present realities in a socialist direction.” The treatment of this problem by socialist theory is meaningful and justifiable only to the degree to which its results prove to be fruitful in the praxis of the working class movement. We must not lose sight of this as we broach the regretfully abstract problem of the nature of the Übersichtsproblem.

The matter appears, at first sight, to be quite simple. How is it possible to gain an overview of the economy as a whole? The conventional answer is -- with the aid of statistics. And if this does not take us far enough, then we are told that we will "organise the economy
centrally" and in this way it will become transparent.

The apparent simplicity of this solution, which we shall call the "administered economy model," soon disappears on closer examination. In such an approach the subject of the enquiry is the economy in general, as if the economy were a natural phenomenon, like a landscape which can be observed or surveyed from an aeroplane. But the economy is not a natural phenomenon; rather it is a social-natural process. In fear of falling into the error of fetishistic concepts of classical political economy which treat the wealth of societies as so and so many "commodities," the theorist of the administered economy tend to the false extreme of a crude naturalism whereby the economy is conceived merely in terms of tangible objects, machines, raw materials, etc. But when socialists speak of the "overview of the economy as a whole" (macro-economy?) we mean (or at least we should mean) the overview of the ultimate elements of the social-natural processes which constitute the economy. The elements of the economy are: 1) human needs; 2) human work and effort (Arbeitsleid); 3) means of production, i.e. minerals, tools and machines, available foodstuffs, raw materials and intermediate products, and finally the most important means of production, labour power. The optimal satisfaction of needs, given available means of production, with minimum of human effort and pain is the task of economic managers. Thus, the subject matter of macro-economics is not "the economy in general," treated as a natural phenomenon, observable like a flock of birds from bird watching post, but rather the above mentioned elements, i.e. needs, human effort, and means of production. Of these three aspects of the macro-economy, the administered economy approach concerns itself exclusively with physical and material things, i.e. means of production, inclusive of labour power. We must pose the question whether this approach is at all concerned with the other two aspects of the economy -- human needs, and human efforts?

To pose this question leads us to another aspect of the problem. It is obvious that the form of overview will be different according to subject and circumstance. There is obviously a difference between the observation of material objects of the external world (means of production such as labour power, factories, mines, arable land, etc.) and the psychological and spiritual phenomena of inner human existence (needs, effort, and work). Means of production are visible, tangible aspects of the external world, which can be counted, and measured. The needs and effort of another human being would be comprehensible to us only if we could
imagine ourselves in the situation of another person, feel and live his needs, his pain and
effort, enter into his inner self. Such an approach to the "inner overview" is basically quite
different from the external overview relating to material objects and things. Of the three
elements of the economy, only the means of production are accessible by means of the external
overview, the two other elements of economic life underlie an essentially different kind of
overview, which we have called "inner overview." The answer to our previous question,
(whether the administrative solution to the problem of the management of the economy is
capable of encompassing also needs and effort) depends on whether it can address also the
inner aspects of economic life.

Let us first see how the "command economist," whose attention is directed firstly at the
material means of production, has dealt with this problem. In so far as he regards the economy
as a technical-material process of production, his treatment of economics narrows down to the
area of production; thus needs and effort slip into the background. As regards needs, these are
simply assumed to be known. As a substitute for the neglected study of needs, it is common
practice to take actual use in a past period as an estimate of present need. Needs and use are
however two totally different things -- as everybody whose actual use does not satisfy his needs
knows perfectly well! Previous use would more closely correspond to present need if it were
more closely related to previous need, and if needs were to remain static and unchanging. To
establish this, however, requires some knowledge about needs in the first instance. In the
absence of such information there is nothing to be done except to force equality between needs
and use, or more exactly to do so on paper because in reality needs are proclaimed by fiat, and
take to be "known." This however is no solution at all, because, in order to establish real
norms of needs, it is first necessary to know what they really are. The same is true of human
effort and labour (Arbeitleid und Arbeitsmühe) which is related to the quantity of work done.
The economic planner has also to balance satisfaction of needs with the pain and effort of
work. But the work effort cannot be measured by work done, or by the wages paid, as is the
practice of economic planners. On the contrary, an appropriately fair and just wage and work
requirement are in part a function of the effort and disagreeableness of the work to be done.
This requires a knowledge of the "disutility" of labour (Arbeitsleid, Mühe der Arbeit).
Knowledge of hours of work done, production targets achieved, or wages paid is no substitute
for knowledge of the actual amount of toil and effort expanded by the worker. With respect to human needs and actual human toil and effort, the economic planner of the administered economy rests content with the mere appearance of a solution.

Whether it is at all possible, within a planned, administered economy, to achieve the "inner overview" depends on the means and modalities available. We now turn to a brief examination of available means and their limitations.

One of the available tools is statistics. Statistics are, of course, only a general means to gain an overview of a mass of phenomena, in so far as they are quantifiable and historically experienced events. Statistics are not, however, a magic solution because they can inform us only about measurable, i.e. external, realities such as quantities of people, wealth, acres, consumption of commodities. Moreover they are useful only in the ex post and not their ex ante or current aspect. Inner and qualitative phenomena in their current, i.e. present, manifestation escape statistics. These, then, are the limits of statistics in clarifying the totality of economic life. Statistics are thus the classical means of the external overview of the economy.

Equally general in applicability, but far greater significance is a second means available to the economic planner: i.e. organization. Everybody knows that when an industry, a branch, or an army is organized, there is significant increase in ability to oversee and manage. Organization achieves this in two distinct ways: first, information is generated for the leadership as a result of the fact that "lower levels" must report to "higher" ones; secondly, the leadership is able to benefit from the messages it receives from lower levels in the formulation of policy. Policy thus formulated, in the course of implementation by the lower ranks of the organization, is amended and developed. In this fashion, each organization functions as an organ of control or direction, in so far as it generates information and also because it substitutes for an complements the task of overall administration. Any organization is, thus, Übersicht-creating, and Übersicht-replacing. Important as it is for the solution of the problem of Übersichts over the economy, it is clear that the contribution of organizations, whose purpose are purely economic in narrow sense, are necessarily limited.

Unfortunately, we do not as yet have a theory of social organization. With the assistance of such a theory, it could easily be shown that the capacity of an organization to contribute to the general management of the economy is limited by its underlying purposes and
principles. This is to be understood as follows: An organization constructed exclusively on the principles of power, such as an army of slaves, could not offer any "leitungsübersicht" and its leadership would have to obtain information from sources other than those internal to the organization if it wishes to avoid leading it blindly. An organization built exclusively on the principle of legal duties and obligation, such as the civil service, is limited in its capacity of Übersichtleitung. However efficient its performance in certain areas, such as production, may be it may also be severely limited in other aspects. Precisely the desired "inner overview" of the changes in human needs and work effort of the people at the bottom of the organization escapes even the most efficiently organized bureaucracy. These, then, are the limits of Übersicht achievable by the administered economy.

The most obvious deficiency of the approach of the centrally planned economy related to its failure to encompass the concrete reality of the working class movement and the historical mission it embodies. The presently existing capacity of the trade unions, industrial associations, cooperatives and socialist municipalities to contribute to a socialist economy is entirely overlooked by the theoreticians of the administered economy. All these formulations are, as we will show, organs of the "inner overview" of the economy, with great significance for socialist development. The evolution of this Übersicht can be illustrated with respect to the political party, the trade unions, cooperatives, industrial associations and socialist municipalities.

Let us examine the situation of a democratically organized workers party in the course of an acute political crisis, i.e. in the moment of its maximal effectiveness. The surveillance of the party leadership over the mood, determination and fighting capacity of the party militants and activits, all currents and undercurrents within the masses, their direction and intensity -- is monitored hour by hour and the party leadership can react with the sensitivity of the most fine-tuned scientific instrument. The "inner view" of the will and desires of broad strata of the electorate is, within such a party, constantly being shaped. The leadership can feel the pulse of the membership, while the membership of a living and democratic party organization can judge, at any point in time, whether the movement is losing or gaining strength. The lucidity of the overview depends almost exclusively on the democratic character of the party. This living "inner overview," within the framework of the party organization, serves to protect the
political interests of the electorate and the mobilization of the strength, determination and sacrifice of each individual member by the leadership of the party.

The situation is similar with respect to the economic organizations of the working class movement.

Let us examine, for example, a democratically constituted trade union on the eve of a decisive conflict with an association of employers. The leadership and membership have an exact and detailed reading of the trends and countertrends within the union and thus can weigh their objectives and the means at their disposal to achieve them in the light of their available bargaining power. Besides the immediate understanding concerning the specific battle to be fought, there is another, less conscious process of understanding taking place within the trade union movement, whose full significance relates less to the existing capitalist order than to a future socialist one. Thus, before a union is ready to engage an adversary in full battle, it must take stock of the conflicts and contradictions within its membership. The conflicting interests and objectives of the members have to be recognized, assessed and negotiated into balance. The various factors relating to the demands of a union -- age, number of dependents, skill, danger, responsibility, uniqueness of the work, etc. -- have to be brought into a fair and equitable relationship. In the absence of such a process the union could be smashed in the course of the conflict. This is so obvious that it is not generally necessary to discuss it explicitly. It belongs to the normal life and activity of the trade union movement and takes place, in effect, automatically. The fact that this process really can take place is proof of the fact that, within the union, there exists a complete living inner Übersicht of the membership concerning these individual and collective requirements relating to work. Thus, the trade union is already today an organ of inner Übersicht relating to the world of work, in so far as there exists a process whereby members and leaders can achieve a consensus regarding all forms of Arbeitsleid. The trade union is more than an organ regulating the external phenomenon of the price of labour power as a means of production; it is also an instrument, a means of "inner Übersicht" over a wholly different aspect of economic life, i.e. Arbeitsleid. Whereas the capitalist order can address itself only to the determination of the price of labour power in the labour market, we have a fundamentally different modality of addressing the problem of the inner, subjective assessment of organized workers concerning Arbeitsleid - admittedly still
within the limitations of capitalist wage determination.

**Industrial associations** are equally instructive. What takes place within a trade union with respect to an occupation or profession is here addressed with respect to an industry. An industry is comprised of manual and intellectual workers, factory and office workers of the various branches of the industry. Each of these branches occupies a specific function within the industry. An industrial association of workers will effectively battle the employer and can eventually take over the successful management of an entire industry only if it has a clear overview of the significance of each of its components activities and sectors for the industry as a whole. The importance of each of the branches which constitute an industry association is not a matter for formal democracy in the sense of decision by majority vote. But within any well-functioning industry association, there exists a comprehension of the relative importance of each of the major functions within the enterprise or set of enterprises, i.e. the industry. This "inner overview" is no more general sense of the order of things, but derives from the actual purpose of the organization. The inner overview of the functional significance of each branch within the totality of the enterprise or the industry is one of the most important contributions of the working class movement of today to a socialist future. It is a precondition of industrial worker self management.

Similarly, the case of the democratically organized consumer cooperative movement. Daily contact with working class women and continuing relationship with the entire population of the communities in which they operate enable the voting members of the cooperatives to advise, criticize, and guide the leadership of the coop. The consumer cooperatives are an organ of "inner overview" of the needs of their members, which could be as intensive and comprehensive as that of the head of a family regarding the needs of the family members.

In different fashion, socialist town councils play a significant role. The inhabitants of a neighbourhood, who share the same common needs, with a leadership drawn from the same area, can establish a comprehensive picture of the common needs of the members of the community.

We thus can reach the conclusion that the existing formations of the working class movement have great significance for the Übersichtsproblem. All these organizations share the characteristics that they each contribute to the ability to comprehend one or another of the basic
elements of the economy as a whole.

These organizations of the working class have a second, very important characteristic: they are not artificially created by fiat according to some preconceived administrative model, but are the outcome of independently created organizations of the working class. This development, from the "bottom up," from the "inside outward," constitutes their capacity of "democratic surveillance" (Übersichtsleitung). The principle underlying these organizations is a different one from that which underlies the administered economy model. We maintain that, the principles underlying an organization determine the degree to which it is able to serve as an organ of economic management. The principle which underlies the organizations of the working class movement is neither that of power, nor coercion, nor authority, nor the abstract principle of legal or constitutional rights. Rather, it is, in the broadest sense of the word, the principle of comradely cooperation, the principle of relations among equals, of genuine auto-organization. Our principle conclusion is that Selbstorganisierung (self-reliant organization) is an instrument for the achievement of innere Übersicht over the specific aspect of daily life which has given rise to the establishment of the organization. Whoever has joined with others to form a consumer cooperative to meet the need for consumer goods, has contributed to the creation of an organ of inner democratic surveillance, over the intensity and direction of the needs of its members. Whoever has joined with other for the defense of an occupation or profession to form a trade union, had contributed to the creation of an organ of inner democratic surveillance over the intensity and direction of the various views of its members concerning working conditions and Arbeitsleid. When workers belonging to different occupations or sectors within an industry combine to create an industrial association, they have created an organ of inner democratic surveillance over the various branches and departments, which constitute the industry as a whole. Whenever residents of a locality have joined with others for the satisfaction of their collective needs within the framework of a socialist municipal community, they have created an organ of inner democratic surveillance of the intensity and direction of their collective needs as residents of a neighbourhood or city. The more actively and intensively each individual is engaged in these organizations, the more effectively they assist the leadership in serving the membership and ultimately in obtaining an economic overview of society.
What does all this signify for the praxis of the working class movement? Are these insights of any practical use? We can answer in the affirmative at least in one respect: The insights into the essence of the Übersichtsproblem offer some clear and simple criteria concerning the important practical question of organization. The correct form of organization generally emerges as a natural course of events in accordance with specific requirements and prevailing circumstances. At the same time, there is often a choice to be made between organizational models. Too often this results in a fruitless discussion of which of various possibilities we should favour, as socialists. In such cases, we need only pose the question: which of various possible forms of organization will result in maximal Übersichtlichkeit? Strange and unfamiliar organizations, so dear to the advocates of the administered (command) economy can only be regarded as progressive when the sacrifice of "inner democratic surveillance" -- which is almost always unavoidable -- is more than compensated by other advantages. Not every new "organization" represents organizational progress in a socialist sense. There are also erroneous organizations and one of the means to avoid them is by the test of transparency - i.e. the degree of their inherent contribution to Übersicht. The practitioners of the administered economy with their (possibly well-intentioned) mania for the creation of new organizations massively violate this test. Secondly, the practical organizer can gain a deeper understanding of the vital importance of democracy within the organizations of the working class in so far as he can clearly see that their effective functioning is dependent on the vitality of their inner democracy. Thirdly, the organizers will learn that it is not sufficient for the leadership alone to have a comprehensive overview of the situation within the organization, and that the participation of the membership in this process can greatly increase the degree of Übersicht. The realization of this requirement is known to be one of the more interesting and difficult tasks of the practical work of building an organization. The leadership alone can never succeed. Each worker must contribute his best efforts to the success of the organization. For the organizational practitioner, the striving for maximal comprehension and overview by the membership as a whole should provide useful pointers regarding the best forms of participation of individual workers in the daily life of the organization. In this sense it is true, and doubly true, that the road to socialism is primarily a problem of organization.

These insights concerning the contributions of the trade unions, industry associations,
cooperatives, socialist municipalities and the socialist parties to the achievement of an overview of economic life are by no means irrelevant to the ultimate aims and objectives of the working class movement. The functional democracy, defined by Otto Bauer as "the constant cooperation of comrades in the service of the interest of the whole and the effective performance of each individual within his particular occupation and function." is possible only if each individual is conscious of his particular function. Bauer is absolutely correct in his insistence that the educational work to be done is the problem of socialist organization. As concerns the problem of raising the consciousness of the function of each and every individual within the working class movement, we repeat: for all the questions of socialism it is true and valid that "consciousness without context, without specific circumstances, without - in the case of a collectivity - Übersicht, is an impossibility. Consciousness or particular economic functions requires, as its precondition, an overview and collective comprehension of all the elements of the economy. The provision of such an Übersicht is one of the most important achievements of the original and deeprooted organizations of the working class movement. Our contribution to the solution of the Übersichtsproblem relates to the larger problem of functional democracy as the living essence of socialism.