

Are the revolutionaries one counter-revolution behind ?

(notes on an impossible class)

translated from
les révolutionnaires ont-ils une contre-révolution de retard
?
La Banquise No. 3 (Summer 1984)

1. define the proletariat, what for ?

Marx, Engels *The German Ideology*, I. II. 6. [MECW vol. 5. p. 52]

Everything that we say only has meaning and interest in terms of a reality which it is not easy to pin down in a simple definition, immediately accessible to those who are the bearers of that reality. This is the ironic paradox of revolutionary theory, present from its origins. As soon as it becomes a question of defining the revolutionary subject Marx's writings abound in surprising formulations : « **a class of civil society which is not a class of civil society** » (*Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law. Introduction.* MECW vol. 3, p. 186), « **the class which no longer counts as a class in society, which is not recognised as a class, and is in itself the expression of the dissolution of all classes, nationalities, etc., within present society** » (*The German Ideology.* MECW vol. 5, p. 52). As obscure as these definitions are at first sight, they have shown themselves to be much more fruitful than the simple equivalence which they stand alongside in the work of the selfsame Marx : that proletarians equal workers. These definitions, which take account of the contradictory nature of the proletariat, reflect those elements which are more profound, and more profoundly new, both in Marx's work, and in revolutionary theory in general. This innovation seems even more novel to us today because that contradiction has not stopped deepening and extending itself : the proletarian condition tends to impose itself on the greater part of humanity and the contradictory activity of the proletariat doesn't cease from spreading its booby-trapped products across the world. The deepening of the proletarian contradiction and the weakness of the proletariat's attacks explains the current crisis of theoretical communism, in which we see some people abandoning class struggle and others clinging to an attempt to formulate which sometimes resembles scholasticism. We are going to risk exposing ourselves to two kinds of criticism simultaneously.

The entire difficulty arises from the fact that the dynamic which defines the proletariat is that of its self-negation. It is not easy to grasp in reality an entity the peak of whose existence consists in abolishing itself ! The effort to understand this theoretically anticipates the proletariat's effort to grasp itself. Indeed it is only that future reality which gives theoretical effort its meaning. And yet this effort, which doesn't contain within itself its own meaning, is doubly necessary. Necessary, because if we had only our subjectivity to tell us that this world is miserable there would be nothing more to say about the revolutionary movement except poetry or mysticism. Doubly necessary, because the definition of the proletariat is that of the dynamic of its fundamental determination, and this is inevitably an analysis of the revolution to come, itself indissociable from an analysis of the current period. We cannot speak of the proletariat today in the way it was spoken of in 1840 or 1960.

In order to break with subjectivism it is not enough to simply wish to do so. The visceral refusal of the world, while it is our starting point, is no guarantee of the accuracy of our point of view. But no more is pure theoretical coherence. After all, like all great paranoid constructions, President Schreber's cosmogony¹ gives a strong impression of internal coherence. It is in practice that we can begin - but *only begin* - to verify that we are not crazy. Every day in its practice, the Church of Scientology « verifies » the accuracy of its views (it obtains undeniable successes in the struggle against drugs and the malaise of its members !), but each time these are only partial verifications, whose general meaning escapes the Scientologists. The general verification of the validity of theory is communist revolution. This alone completely detaches theory from the subjectivity of the theorist. If he wishes to go to the limits of himself - and not to resign himself in a way that, amongst other things, sustains this world - the visceral refusal of the world must be given a form which integrates him within those forces which will destroy this world. This doesn't preclude the fact that without revolutionary subjectivity there would be no revolutionary theory.

Revolutionary theory is not a science - and so much the better, for this is one more reason why it is not swallowed up by Capital. The subjective dimension of theory is only the reflection of a human practice which with difficulty seeks to find itself, and is conceived of, within a dominated language. It will only completely prove its validity at the moment that it has become useless, and therefore it is only a set of approximations. This banality - the antidote to a lot of pretensions - should never be lost sight of as one reads this journal - and all of the others.

We speak of the proletariat as a social relation, as a movement which will attain the peak of its existence in denying itself. Metaphysics ? Theory of an absent ? One might well wonder. But nobody speaks of metaphysics when the word « crisis » is pronounced. Yet where is the palpable reality of a crisis, or of a revolution (think of past movements), or even of an historical evolution ? These social facts are not measurable - one only adds up their effects. The proletariat only exists as association. To be proletarian is to be associated - even by force : this is nothing to do with affinity groups based on subjectivity. To be proletarian is to be immediately, with other men, in an association, a relationship that is different to that of the small peasant, the shopkeeper or the teacher... The more his work is deprived of meaning, the more the proletarian will be led to think that the accumulation of jobs within which human activity is degraded confers a meaning on each of these jobs.

¹ President Schreber, who Freud commented on, wrote an immense book in order to explain why god was plotting to transform him into a woman. [Original footnote]

But one soon discovers that this is a double edged sword : capitalist association is not the path which leads to communist association. Lenin made it the terrain *par excellence* of the socialist movement because he gave this movement the ultimate goal of creating a vast industrial and democratic world, and as its provisional goal, the creation of industrial armies. Hundreds of years of failures should have been sufficient to teach us that the revolution is not working class association standing up against Capital, it is an association which *from the start* is more than that of the worker, which *immediately* goes beyond the framework of the enterprise, and which presupposes the existence and the interpenetration of other associations... It is in that word immediately that all the difficulty lies.

2. the two-fold nature of the proletariat

The word proletariat refers to men caught in the dynamic of a relation within which they are one of the terms. It refers at the same time both to the men and to the relation, the latter being the fundamental determination of those who act according to that determination. For the purposes of demonstration, it can happen that the word is sometimes used to refer to the men, and sometimes to indicate the relation, but it should never be forgotten that the men are defined by the relation, nor that the relation is that of those men who bear it.

« The proletariat does not exist in the state of an observable and describable entity like the majority of social facts. The proletariat is a relation with Capital. It is the most important relation in the very heart of Capital, the most important relation internal to Capital. The proletariat is a relation of Capital with itself »

(P. Nashua, *Perspectives on Councils, workers management and the German Left*, p. 20, Editions de l'Oubli reissued by Spartacus). *

Against workerism, it was necessary to affirm the proletariat as « all the proletarians acting in a communist direction ». But, on pain of lapsing into tautology (Who will make the revolution ? The proletariat. What is the proletariat ? The agent of the revolution), we should not only seek to define the proletariat in relation to communism, but also in relation to capitalism.

What are proletarians ? What does it mean to act in a communist direction ? The two questions are necessarily linked, since it is in starting from proletarian determination that communist action takes form.

Proletarians are defined by their relationship with Capital : they are those men which the production of value has reduced to being no more than labour power. At first sight, in the modern world, this definition includes just about everybody and nobody. It is the strength of Capital to have made its fundamental relation something impalpable. *This definition includes nearly everybody* because of the generalisation of wage labour and because of the difficulty of isolating the productive worker from the rest of society. On the one hand, the extension of the waged condition to the majority of humanity, at least in the « advanced »

* Translators note. 'P. Nashua' was Pierre Guillaume. A former member of *Socialisme ou Barbarie* (1960-63) and *Pouvoir Ouvrier* (1963-67); active at the Censier centre in May 1968; a leading member of the informal ultra-left grouping focussed around the bookshop La Vieille Taupe he had founded (1965-72). In 1978 he developed an obsession with the work of Robert Faurisson and in the years since then has devoted himself to the cause of negationism. The year before this text was published in *La Banquise* that journal publicly broke with Guillaume over his support for Faurisson. See *Le Roman de nos Origines (La Banquise No. 2 1983)* translated as *Re-collecting Our Past*.

countries, makes easier the formation of this « most numerous class » of which Marx spoke, while tending to confuse ideas as to the importance of different social functions. On the other hand, and still according to Marx, today it is as much the engineer as the labourer who is a productive worker, and it is the social organisation as a whole which has become the producer of value.

This definition includes nobody because the life of even the most miserable of proletarians has other dimensions than those of his labour power and, moreover, it is thanks to these other dimensions that labour power can continue to produce value.

As against the advocates of the universal class, or against those who want to abandon the class struggle to Capital, it is nonetheless important to remember that exploitation is not the same for the senior middle manager and the unskilled worker, and that the latter sees his activity far more confined in the form of work. In the last resort, while the senior middle manager, to the extent that he organises the work of the unskilled, exercises a productive activity, the unskilled worker plays a specific role in the production of value.

It is the whole of society which produces value, but within this whole there are social strata whose activity remains in contact with the material support of value. These are the most exploited strata, all the others taking part in their exploitation to degrees which vary according to the place that they occupy in the hierarchy. The spread of wage labour should not blind us to this brutal reality : the existence of people whose immediate activity reproduces the material conditions of existence of humanity and thus of Capital.

Those wage workers compelled to undertake the tasks of execution experience, in the most raw and direct way, the proletarian condition which spreads or threatens to spread to the rest of society. As labour power that is constantly devalued by the movement of the value which they contribute to producing, they are at the heart of the capitalist contradiction. As activity valorising the most valorised labour power, their work represents the lowest common denominator of the activities within Capital - their general equivalent. Through their position in production, they are better able than others to overthrow it. They thus play a central role in the production of capitalism as well as of communism. Consequently, while one cannot reduce it to a sociological identity, to a class, the proletariat is initially born from these social strata and their struggles.

But it is not only the productive dynamic which is responsible for maintaining the old world. This is coupled together with an immense inertia. In the event of the revolutionary dynamic, it will perhaps be necessary that employees first of all throw the paperwork out of the window. But those who are in contact with the production of those things - objects but not these alone - which are necessary

to the revolution and to human life, will have a more essential and central role. The revolution will not be a vast *aboulia* [inability to act]. Revolution through inertia is a utopia which is produced today by those who are on the side of inertia, those whose social function is parasitic on the production of the things which make us live. Obviously we also want to change those things, but we will only change them starting from what they are. Otherwise it would not be a matter of overthrowing but of leaving this world : a way of generally abandoning capitalism in order to go « elsewhere ». Already the programme and the poetic demand of artists in the second half of the 19th century, spleen and « *anywhere out of this world* », are not a revolutionary programme.

Marx spoke of changing the mode of activity. However this mode is universal : just like the worker and the artist the managing director participates in it and reproduces it. One can infinitely refine sociological considerations : noting, for example, that the peasant small holder is exploited simultaneously by the world market and by his own labour, which empties agricultural activity of part of its content. But what is it that the mode of activity imposes on all the others ? It is rather the miner, the train driver and even the office worker who help run all of it. The managing director and the artist are always more or less capable of a change of life - of survival - without « changing life » and without changing this mode of activity. The miner, the mechanic and the employee do not have this possibility. Certainly, there is something inhuman in the work of the managing director, as alienated as the miner and perhaps more so. But this is because he integrates into himself the humanity of the miner, because he concentrates within himself the crushing of that which is human in the work of thousands of miners. The sub-division (*saucissonage*) of time within society - into work and non-work, into slices of the everyday - of which the managing director, the artist and the miner are all victims, is based initially on that which cuts up the life - both productive and unproductive - of the miner. It is labour which establishes all social organisation. And the spread of wage labour means the organisation of all social activity on the basis of the most restricted labour. In this world which is ours Socrates would be a college professor. On this basis reformism notes that everything consists of constraint, authority, waste and exploitation, and it never ceases putting forward remedies which in reality change nothing. Why this mystery ? It is necessary to seek the answer at source, in the very nature of alienated labour. The suppression of alienation can only start from what is alienated.

The question is not that of the personnel of capitalism (we know it finds its managers wherever it can), nor is it that of the personnel of the revolution. It is simply a matter of isolating (artificially, certainly, in a movement of provisional abstraction which is necessary for analysis) the crux of the problem - the place within which men produce their inhumanity. This is why - and it is the ambiguity of the whole of the above - we don't assert that the revolution will be the work of workers more than engineers, but that workers and engineers will make the

revolution on the basis of a radical critique of workers' labour, on the basis of its destruction and, thus, of everything which is constructed upon it.

What is it a matter of changing ? The relation between men, the relation between men and the world. The problem of the « proletariat » is thus of knowing whether there exists a human group that is more directly in connection with the world. A world created, of course, as much by the engineer as by the worker, but without forgetting that it is the worker who reminds the engineer that humanity (including that of the engineer) is reduced to nothing despite compensations and distractions - is reduced to labour power. The very condition of the exploitation of the most exploited strata - workers, employees, agricultural labourers etc. - is that their work retains to one degree or other a precarious character - this is true even in periods of full employment, and under State Capitalism. In order that the proletarian has only his labour power and nothing more, it isn't necessary that he is automatically guaranteed a job, and thus a place in society. The proletarian is thus a potential unemployed person and the unemployed person is a proletarian, as essential to Capital as the worker. While accepting that human wealth lies in activity and in the relations implied by that activity, today, more than ever before, we have the encounter which Marx spoke of between the « masses deprived of everything » and « all the riches and culture of the world ». It is not important that we cannot measure the degree of valorisation which this or that category of proletarian brings about. Proletarian activity visibly embodies an abstraction upon which society is truly based : the measurement of everything by the time dedicated to the expenditure of labour power. But Capital lives on its own inability to reduce human activity to labour and thus the activity of the proletarian also cannot be reduced to labour. Capital can only exist by sucking the lifeblood from the human activity which it cannot completely absorb - this is at the same time what revitalizes it and what threatens it : the being of Capital is a contradictory relation and the proletariat is made up of the whole of those individuals and social strata whose struggles tend to place this contradictory relation into crisis. Thus defined by everything that has gone before it can be seen that the proletariat only exists tendentially, and one can see that the moment in which it exists the most is that in which it denies itself, in the communisation of the world.

What does it mean to act in a communist direction ? This is the real question. A question which overshadows the idea of some « germ of communism » which it is necessary to isolate each time. Class struggles, whether they are illegal (theft (*coulage*), sabotage, doing ones own work on company time (*perruque*), etc.) or conducted for demands, are only bearers of communism when they supersede themselves. Resistance to exploitation is only the bearer of communism at the moment that it transforms itself, or tends towards transforming itself, into attack against exploitation. Exploitation and resistance to exploitation form part of the normal functioning of capitalism and, when resistance allows itself to be absorbed, one can only affirm that it is capitalism which is, in its functioning,

the bearer of communist first steps. One can only go beyond the « obligatory reversal of exploitation » by passing to direct attack on exploitation.

How ? The difficulty in answering this question today, like the poor state of the revolutionary movement, is due to the fact that this action, this attack against exploitation remains dreadfully embryonic.

For capitalism, the proletariat only exists tendentially, inasmuch as Capital provides men with, or allows them to produce, specific determinations (national identity, class identity, cultural identity. . .) which conceal the fundamental determination of the relation between labour and value, while at the same time nourishing it, and sometimes even while attacking it. Which doesn't stop these specific determinations from being eroded in their turn by value.

For communism, the proletariat only exists tendentially, since the realisation of communism is the abolition of the proletariat. That is why, although it forms itself through the class struggles of capitalist society, the proletariat is not a class of capitalist society. When it forms itself against the rest of society, the proletariat directly attacks its own class determination. The proletariat forms itself against the rest of society when workers, those excluded from work and *déclassés* attack, more or less voluntarily, that which unifies them both within capitalism and against it : the relation between labour and value.

The proletariat is necessary to Capital because it produces this social relation, value, the measurement of everything by labour time. The proletariat is the agent of communism because the more that proletarians free themselves from their specific determinations, on the basis of the class struggle, the more they are led to face their universal determination. As both producers and prisoners of a fundamentally inhuman relation, they cannot situate themselves in respect of value without opposing themselves to it; they cannot determine themselves as labour power without breaking with labour. This grasp is not - or not only - a matter of consciousness. It is above all a practice, born from the contradiction between specific determinations, specific alienations of human wealth (communities, etc) and the universal determination of the production of value, the alienation of human activity which has taken hold of all the world's riches. Placed by Capital in a situation of universality, in « an existence which is directly connected to universal history », the proletarians of Longwy * oppose the consequences of this situation starting from specific determinations - their attachment to a region [*un soi*] - but in this movement they begin to grasp that they have lost any other quality than that of supernumerary labour power. By presenting themselves as men without quality in relation to the rest of society,

* Translators Note. A reference to the bitter, but ultimately unsuccessful, resistance to closures and restructuring conducted by the steelworkers of Longwy in Lorraine for several years from 1978 onwards. See *Le Monde Diplomatique* October 1997 for some background articles - an english translation can be found on their website. <http://mondediplo.com/1997/10>

the workers of Longwy might contest the scandal of their reduction to labour power, otherwise, they will only draw back and lose themselves in working class identity.

3. capitalism, the concentration of human history

Because we can send machines billions of miles from the earth, it is easy to forget the material roots of the present day world. To be communist, is to consider that the primary and perhaps the only human wealth lies in human relations and make everything else follow from this. However, we can see that everything that is common to human activity escapes from human beings in order to return to them in the form of entities which crush them : money, work, the State... Why is this ?

Marxism supplied an answer which agreed with common sense : because men live in scarcity. Therefore abundance is necessary ! But the age of abundance always remains to be created. On the contrary the reason for the appearance of the State, of money and of value lies in the very *activity* of social groups over the last ten thousand years, and not in their supposed « poverty ».

These mediations, which humanity invented little by little, must fulfil functions which cannot be summed up as the management of poverty for the benefit of a minority, nor as the maintenance of an order which each day proves itself to be a catastrophic disorder. It is necessary to retrace the thread of time and distinguish within material and social activity (which are one and the same activity), what it is that generates these mediations.

The evils of industrial society were prepared by pre-industrial society - or at least the majority of them. It would not be uninteresting to know how the change towards work took place over millennia, since the human groups closest to communism which exist today survive in exceptionally protected regions. We know more about that activity which has already been transformed into work than about this all too rare total social activity, whether « communist » or « generic ». Yet even archaic class societies still retained within work a dimension which it has lost under capitalism. Although painful, work preserved a sacred dimension that went beyond its content and which integrated the worker within a **totality**. This served to ensure the reproduction of a world which was experienced as religious, that is to say, where activity had its meaning outside itself, within a protective transcendence which it was necessary to secure. The Emperor held from the sky the mandate to guarantee the balance and unity of the world, through taking care of the rituals which ensured the fruitfulness of the soil, the maintenance of the dams, etc. But the shoemaker produced more than shoes, his work formed part of the totality within which it took on meaning.

It is here that we can see the after-effects, yet also the definitive loss, of **what there had been that was** communal in that previous activity which was

already extinct. The presence of a common element was henceforth associated with a transcendence : the community was no longer that of mans acts (*gestes*) but only that of a cosmic whole. Certainly the existence of the latter is older and it was also present in minds and thus in behaviour. But, from now on, this totality was out of mans reach : religion and power had sole charge of it. Men emancipated themselves from nature and from the superstitions which made a rock, a spring or a tree the seat of occult forces. But they transferred their belief to a social group or to a man. The slightest local dependence was accompanied by an increasingly remote submission, which in capitalism would end by becoming completely impersonal.

The process of the autonomisation of work reached a decisive stage with the transition from agriculture to industry as the central activity of society. For ancient man, time was filled with a sacred totality and marked by festivals and rites that ensured its permanence and its renewal. The man of industry, himself, takes the place of time and is used up in its place, within a desacralised work. Work always has a meaning outside its content, and even increasingly independent of the latter, but this exteriority is henceforth profane, is non divine. The exploited peasant worked for the lord, but also for The Lord. The modern worker works to earn the money necessary to live.

This is a development which took place over several centuries. In Central Europe, from the 12th to the 15th centuries, associations of artisan miners worked the mines. They disappeared when exploitation began to be produced in depth. Craftsmen were no longer able to take on the community of their activities themselves : only merchants had the capital necessary for the investments that from this point on were essential to workers, who they would thus transform into employees. At this point in time the German word *Arbeiter* appeared : one who works for others, in opposition to the free worker.

The protestant countries then discovered work as the factor which structured society, and [which did so](#) more effectively than family ties or religious practise. Protestantism completed the separation between religion and myth, it isolated man, it gave the individual work as the reason for living, and made social labour the sole basis of the collectivity. Hegel reserved for labour a central place, at least as important as history, within his philosophical system. On this point, he extended and synthesised the thought of the Enlightenment : on the celebrated planks of the *Encyclopédie*, the bourgeoisie of the 18th century took the measure of the proprietor. Hegel described a progression from the animal to the spiritual which was based on the movement of labour conquering the world before dematerialising itself in art, philosophy and religion.

The bourgeois revolutions, and particularly that of 1789, were made in the name of work against idleness, of social utility against parasitism. It is not surprising that the French Revolution remains the great point of reference of the left and

even of the extreme-left (see trotkyist theorisations of Thermidor and Bonapartism). All of the contradictions within which the left lives and dies were already to be found in this revolution, which prevailed thanks to the impetus of the masses, and which, incapable of satisfying them, ended up by fighting them. The contradictions of the Montagne and of Jacobinism are repeated in the impossible ideal of a democracy of the humble, of a self-management of the Republic which would eliminate Evil (the rich, the immoral, the idle dropouts, the asocial without friends, as Saint-Just put it), to the benefit of the Good (those people who were not rich but also not poor, the good worker both honest and moral).

*« He who does not work shall not eat »
Motto of L'Artisan. [L'Atelier ?] **

Thus modern capitalism achieves the secular ideal of a society based on work. A profane transcendence, that is to say, exteriorised neither in a god or in a principle of the world, but interiorised by society, work forms a community of immanence : henceforth things stand by themselves, through their ceaseless motion, which involves all the beings of the species in a sort of universal gravitation.

This tendency which has appeared *for scarcely* a few centuries is now realised. Previously, human beings and groups had been determined by one of their specific traits. Today, everything is determined in relation to Capital, which constantly focuses everything around itself.

* Translators Note. L'Atelier (1840-50) Journal produced by working class followers of the Catholic Christian Socialist Phillipe Buchez. The words are St Paul's.

4. the myth of the mortal crisis

The idea of a final mortal crisis was never obligatory either for Marx, or Lenin, or Luxemburg. Marx always believed that the possibility of revolution lay in the movements of workers. Within Social-Democracy, people predicted that an inevitable crisis would occur *one day*, but no economic crisis was ever put forward as the last. In the « era of wars and revolutions » which Lenin and Luxemburg announced, they did not see the dawning of any technical impossibility for Capital to function. The theory of a mortal crisis whose outcome would inevitably be either revolution or barbarism (for its holders did not give in to a blind optimism which was scarcely tenable at that time) was born after 1920, precisely when it became difficult to believe in the revolutionary virtues of the proletariat. The failure of the hopes of 1917, occurring after the disarray of 1914, encouraged a belief in the necessity for an economic stimulus which would drive the proletariat towards the revolution which it was so reluctant to make.

Today there is a strong temptation to take up the idea of a final crisis either by extending it or by displacing it to the social level : since Capital is supposedly no longer capable of expanding its social relation, we will either go towards communism or towards a totalitarianism exposed to unprecedented ecological catastrophes. It's necessary to recall that *the crisis of capitalism, lies in its inability to integrate its fundamental contradiction : the proletarians on which it lives. The various crises which it undergoes and the very serious one that it is passing through at the moment, will only become fundamental in the event of communist intervention by proletarians. The fundamental crisis of capitalism is the proletarian action which attacks its basis.* There is no social crisis without a certain amount of economic crisis, which creates a favourable context by shaking its social bases, by revealing its fault lines and by preventing certain forms of domestication. There is no guaranteed equivalence between the level of economic difficulties and the level of the communist capability of proletarians.

Theoretical communism is not the theory of the collapse of capitalism but of human emancipation, to which Capital, despite itself, brings a new momentum. The purpose of theorising crises isn't to prophesy the imminent end of Capital, but to read into its upheavals the « general conditions for the establishment of a communal production » (Marx) *.

* Translators Note - Capital volume III . The citation is based on the revised French translation in Karl Marx, *Oeuvres*, vol. Two edited by Maximilien Rubel (Paris : Gallimard La Plaiede, 1968) p. 1044. Rubel went back to the original manuscripts which Engel's had used in preparing Volumes two and three of Capital. This French translation does not quite correspond to either the standard English or German editions of the same sentence in Capital vol. III. (Chap. 15. iv). In Engel's (1894) English edition the sentence is « transformation of the conditions of production into general, common, social, conditions ».

Capitals' limit is neither economic, nor natural, but human. There is no highest stage of capitalism. Engels was already mistaken in attributing to Chartism absent radical qualities on the pretext that the workers living conditions appeared so dreadful to him that they could no longer endure them.

Men will never be confronted by a Capital that dominates everything, and is thus « pure », and which arouses against itself a proletariat which is just as « pure » and thus finally radical. The temptation to reduce social life to a machine emerges when human action seems to be lacking. It is as misleading as the opposite temptation to deny the objective character of historical phenomena, by placing all ones hopes in a vanguard, or in becoming conscious.

Socialism or barbarism, apocalypse or revolution : to assert such alternatives is still to seek for guarantees of success. In affirming that if the proletariat does not make revolution things will be hell, one hides from oneself any possibility of Capital evolving, and one gives oneself an obligation to act immediately and radically. This theoretical alternative distorts reality and in practise imposes the alternatives of a necessity to act that is close to militantism, or else despair.

5. what world are we refusing ?

Capitalism is indissociable from *a world of material production for valorisation*. We will get rid of valorisation by transforming material production. Big companies, assembly lines, enormous concentrations of energy, etc, are principally explained by the need to save time. By creating different relations we will be able to make them useless.

And conversely, dismantling and undermining the technological basis of an industrial colossus which crushes human relations beneath it, will both contribute to, and push to the limits, the expansion of different social relations.

There is no technological determinism. No mass production in itself is synonymous with exploitation. Just as no type of food guarantees a style of life that is convivial or in harmony with nature. Communism doesn't grant primacy to the survival or even the « stability » (defined by what criteria ? by who ?) of the species. How do we know if from a technical point of view the humanity of zombies which Capital dreams of might not be more « stable » and more capable of survival ? Communism is not the same thing as eugenics. There is neither « good food », nor « good » housing, nor « good » technology in themselves. Our point of view is neither that of technology, nor of ethics, but that of a rational passion.

This chapter is extremely succinct. This is because it contains material for essential development which will take place in forthcoming texts...

6. the problem and its solution lie in human activity

Capital lives on the activity of men. The need to act, to feel, to create, to participate, everything that makes up « human nature » and which animates the communist movement, Capital is thirsty for all of it; it is both this thirst and the desert in which its thirst leads it astray. Here lies its contradiction.

The result of this is that Capital, reducing all activity that is in any way creative to waged work, exploits the attraction of the activity which is imprisoned within wage labour. A significant fraction of workers are led to no longer « believe » in work and to sabotage it whenever possible, and are available for subversive action. But many wage workers (sometimes *the same ones*) find just as much relative satisfaction in work, and reasons to support it, because there remains in wage labour an activity offering a semblance of community. For many people, in a society which prohibits any adventure that has not « receded into a representation » *, the only adventure is work. The bankruptcy of ideology, the cracks in the protective shell of the family, the failure of religion, and of politics, which has been transformed into a spectacle that is often less stimulating than the commercials, make the workplace one of the rare collective situations in which a lot of people have the feeling of *doing* something, of participating in a common activity.

Capital makes use of the fact that there remains something of the human, of the « generic », even in the most degraded work. It could not have triumphed since the 1920's without this movement in which wage labour and human activity feed on one another.

It has succeeded in placing children into schools and adults into workplaces, however Capital cannot integrate the totality of human life. Its very nature prohibits this. For Capital does not purchase work but labour power : with the worker there to set it in motion. The wage worker thus acts under the constraint of work, but all the same it is he who *does* this work. Even when « really » subordinated, work retains a relative autonomy. The same essential human need drives the « good » wage worker to accept his work by conforming to it, and the « bad » to subvert it, that is, most of the time, while also accepting it through making it less boring, even « playful ».

The worker at the beginning of the 20th century could sabotage while retaining a craft (*compagnonnique*) pride. Today, absenteeism and sabotage can become additional safety-valves. The massive absenteeism in some societies makes

* Translators Note. Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, thesis one [Ken Knabb translation]

possible a second job in the black economy. Thanks to the practise of doing ones own work on company time, Hungarian workers can both supplement their wages, and carry out, inside the framework of work, the activity which work deprives them of. This activity, more collective than individual, shows that the breaking up of work into pieces does not prevent the existence of a real working knowledge and of much greater control than is commonly thought over the conditions of production. It also attests to an « adherence (...) by the traditional model worker, to the life of the factory. » (Daniel Mothé *). The worker shows that, whereas the dividing up of his labour might have persuaded him that he was nothing without the collective being of the factory, in other words without Capital - that autonomised force which sets him and his comrades in motion - actually he is capable of making something by himself. This can even become a rite of initiation recognised by the supervisor.

*In a large company like ours, in which there is the one and only trade union - the CGT - doing ones own work on company time is also a very individualistic means of taking back autonomy in relation to the endless dialogue of these two institutions : bosses power and trade union power.
A worker, quoted in le Monde, 16-17th November 1980.*

Doing your own work on company time is an activity which anticipates communism. But creativity itself is also a condition of capitalism, which presupposes the active intervention of workers, despite and even against the capitalist organisation of work, as Mothé showed in his articles in *Socialisme ou Barbarie*. While Mothé saw in informal workers organisation an embryo of that workers management which he hoped and prayed for, today we can no longer believe that the autonomous action of the worker is an embryo of communist revolt, or of a communist attitude, when it is at the same time both that and also a product, if not a condition of Capital. Here is a gordian knot which proletarians will have to cut in order that the conflict which is bound up in it acquires a revolutionary scope.

Everything seems to differentiate ritualised strikes from spontaneous acts like sabotage or doing ones own work on company time. But these acts are also the modern form of the proletarian demands imposed by Capital, which has transformed activity into a means to live. Demands no longer just bear on the wage or on « working conditions » in the usual restricted sense. They also address the condition of work, they emerge from the action and reaction within activity done for wages. Capitalist development obliges it to act within all dimensions of human life. People ask for more money and for less work. In addition people demand « being » through recovering part of the « doing » which

* Translators Note. Daniel Mothé - (pseud. of Jacques Gautrat) (1922-). Member of *Socialisme ou Barbarie* (1952-66). Worked for many years at Renault Billancourt and wrote a number of articles about it for the *SouB* journal, a number collected in the book *Journal d'un ouvrier*, 1956-58 (Éditions de Minuit, 1959). In the 1970s became a sociologist.

is simultaneously forbidden and stolen by wage labour.

The response of the wage worker is like his activity. He both refuses and accepts it at the same time, caught despite himself in a revolt against both the exchange value and use value of his work, to put it in the terms employed by Marx : both against the always insufficient money he makes, and against what his actions become as he hires them out to Capital. When he fights exclusively on the level of exchange value he remains within Capital. Here, as Marx said in a critique of Proudhon, there is only « the movement of labour in the determination of Capital » *. Revolution will be the challenging in deeds of value work. Trade unionism expresses and organises that which is non-communist in proletarians, who are not outside Capital. They will be able to make the communist revolution because they make capitalism.

* Translators Note. Marx, *1844 Manuscripts* - Human Requirements and Division of Labour Under the Rule of Private Property XXXIV. para. 2

7. the image of a monster

Whereas the importance of direct labour is declining in production, as in society, (because the whole of society works), the link between the energy pumped into men and its result (the accumulation of goods, machines and institutions which crush us, and of leisure activities which divert us), no longer appears very clear. Hence the appearance in peoples minds of the notion of social automatism.

The feeling of being operated by remote control is a recent historical construct. Ancient man conceived himself to be at the mercy of divine forces which controlled his life, and he often identified his masters with these supernatural realities. At least he had the, quite real, feeling of a close connection between his everyday acts, the reality which they shaped and the result which derived from this. A lord or a merchant might extort the fruit of his labour; what was taken from him was at least his, both materially and in the imaginary. Today, professions in which one doesn't lose sight of the relation between work and its outcome are the exception.

Capital crushes us doubly. Firstly, by maintaining us in this situation. Subsequently, by instilling within us, almost naturally, a belief in an automatic monster. *The height of alienation : forgetting that this world is our handiwork, that Capital is made - and that we could unmake it.*

People have never spoken of monsters as much as in capitalist society. Once, myths and legends were filled with mythical creatures. Today, we more and more hear it said that it is human collectivity, or our lives, or society which supposedly are monstrous. Capitalism is certainly a monster in the sense that the monstrous combines real elements while recomposing them in such a way that we no longer recognise them, and that **as a result of this** places, acts and familiar beings take on an alarming shape. It is also monstrous in the sense that it has mixed together *indissolubly* (which no society of exploitation has ever done before) the human and the non-human, man and machine, both living activity and artificial device. But Capital is certainly not monstrous in the sense that it has abolished or absorbed the human within us for good.

Capital has a quite different relationship to human energy than other modes of production. It does indeed create a society of the spectacle, something which Feuerbach had had a presentiment of. It strips man of his activity and returns it to him after having reconstructed it, whereas previous systems of exploitation had only amounted to extorting a surplus product, the surplus of a labour which had not itself been profoundly changed from top to bottom. Even the great slave or « Asiatic » societies, which mobilised innumerable masses of men for agricultural or ceremonial works, rested on the life of basic village communities : their gigantic enterprises (the construction of networks of

irrigation, or of monuments, and war effort) coexisted with rural communities without destroying them. Capital reorganises the entire life of the wage worker, channels his creativity, gives rise to passivity, a life that is watched and not acted, a world of representations and not actions - although in reality the modern wage worker potentially has more means to act collectively upon the wage system than the Egyptian slave had on the Pharaonic system.

The emergence of a « spectacular » society is contained within the very nature of exchange. No matter what one says about Marx, and we are not going to deprive ourselves of criticism, including further below, his detailed and nuanced consideration of the theory of the commodity was not written in vain. The polarity between use value and exchange value implies that each protagonist in an exchange forgets the real content of what he offers, in order to consider only the content of the commodity offered by his counterpart. He is not interested in what he has : on the contrary what he has produced only serves *to represent* what he does not yet have; his own activity must be forgotten in favour of a different enjoyment. In this way exchange is the world of the deferred, the imagined and the promised, and not of the real, the tangible and the visible. Capital, a social relation, would not have imposed itself on men if it had not exploited and enormously increased imagination, dreams, the future. In this way, it gave free rein to one of the characteristics of the human, which, as is repeatedly said, is to always modify mans own being, to always seek change ².

What was true of simple exchange between two commodities reaches its height with wage labour. Here, eight hours a day, it is the totality of life which is denied and repressed by the employee, who only endures it by imagining what he will make, thanks to this activity which has itself become secondary. Rare are those who take more pleasure in their profession than in the leisure they purchase, and whose professional life stimulates the imagination more than their so-called free time. Those who least experience this separation between work and leisure are those who most identify with Capital (managers).

There is obviously something horrible about this loss of reality, this generalised daydream, this global hallucination, but also something tenderly fascinating, as tender as the moment in which one sinks into sleep, in which images form themselves without truly being a dream. You don't have to be a *punk* in order to be seduced by the horrible loss of reality of the capitalist world. Fourier, whose system offered a free hand to the human passion for speculation, which he termed cabalist, preserved market exchange as the guarantor of a circulation of anticipated desires and impulses. Conversely, in certain bordigist - *not to say bordigan* - texts about communism as the abolition of exchange, we can see a dangerously clean and clear aspect : without too much movement, and in

² We leave to one side the question of whether this is a characteristic which will last as long as human beings. [Original footnote]

particular without any disorder, one will manufacture what is strictly necessary, and that will do...

Man is a premature child, and unlike other species is not born equipped for life. Human development has coincided with an increasingly lengthy preparation of the young until their entry into supposedly real, adult life. The interposition of more and more complex and infantilising mediations between the young individual and society, especially when these detours take the form of an ever more voracious school-monster, show what a waste of human resources we have been led into. A kind of paralysis ensures that more and more one dedicates oneself to preparing for living, rather than to living itself. Here again, anticipation turns around and, far from heightening reality, replaces it. Everything becomes the general repetition of a play whose representation recedes ever further away.

At all events, if society rests on the socialisation of its premature members, this passage presupposes rites and the transmission of codes. In pre-capitalist societies, these were religious rites. Capital, creating a world of objects whose immanence is sufficient to ensure a social tie, needs less religiosity. Transcendence is transferred into the inter-circulation of commodities and of commodified-men, and no longer into a reality that is external in relation to society, even though this community of objects, despite its apparent familiarity, is more foreign to men's acts than the ancient gods. Consequently, in a world which becomes blurred in mist, we increasingly have the impression that it runs without us, without anyone, without even its supposed leaders : it runs on its own. Excluded from his own life by wage labour, in his work as in his commodified leisure, the employee thus has the feeling of being excluded from doing in relation to a global society which runs without him. This illusion of social automatism inevitably leads to the conviction of personal and collective impotence (for where would drifting atoms find the strength to unite ?). **At least this illusion does not indicate false solutions.** What is truly monstrous is that we have so much difficulty in recognising ourselves in the monster : the image of the monster is our own.

One might better compare Capital to a cancer than to a robot : « ...cancer - the height of alienation - is life expelling the life of the being in which it develops... » (*Invariance*, Series III nos 5-6, p. 102). * But humanity is not a being : it is a set of relations. And Capital is not a disease which communism will cure humanity of. Communism doesn't come from an intervention from outside capitalism, because capitalism needs the tendency towards communism, which is inseparable from the human activity within Capital. Integration and negation live off one another.

In reaction to that tendency, which was also once our own, to see revolution

* Translators Note. from the article Beaubourg : le cancer du futur by Jacques Camatte.

everywhere to some extent, we have effected an inversion so that today we know how to see the counter-revolution in certain acts by proletarians, but we no longer know how to distinguish the revolution in them. However it must certainly be found in *almost* the same place ! It is the question of work, within which Capital contradictorily confines vital activity, which makes it possible to grasp how revolution and counter-revolution may take place starting from the same actors, and from the same gestures.

8. is the working class the only class in history ?

If one defines a class as a group of men playing a role and having similar reactions and interests in relation to production (the definition offered by classical marxism), then social classes appear when production achieves independence and tends to become the master of society, something it only attained, at the conclusion of a long evolution, within modern capitalism. A long history leads to the appearance of social groups entirely determined by production.

When the word *class* was used for the first time, in Rome, it referred to a fiscal category : citizens were divided into classes according to their wealth : *proletarians* were those who possessed only their children (*proles*) and were thus the most lacking in resources. As can be seen, other determinations, and in particular the determination of family, define class. Until the 19th century, classes were simultaneously economic, social, political and legal groupings, these things being merged together and superimposed onto the formal distinctions of « orders », « estates », etc.

Only modern capitalism creates the conditions of social fluidity which allow movement from one class to another, in other words the atomisation of individuals, and thus the domination of determination by production. No longer are there closed « class » communities - the orders and estates - but instead there is the community of Capital.

History, since the end of the archaic communities, **cannot be summarised** as the struggle of classes. Communist revolution isn't the transition from one class domination to another, even if the new dominant class is supposed to rapidly blend into humanity, absorbing all beings within itself through putting them to work. These **schemas** do no more than take up the conceptions of the bourgeois revolution and bourgeois society, while universalizing them.

The « working class » of the 19th century is the first class in the full modern sense, in the sense that determination by production entirely defines it. Its members are « free » of any attachments. Uprooted and derived from several classes, the workers of 1840 formed a group which responded well to the sociological definition : they only held a social function through the wage labour they entered into. They could only reproduce as a class through the mediation of Capital. However they had more ties in common with previous communities than present day wage workers do. For a long time waged work remained caught in the protections and constraints imposed by custom and statute. But workers at the

beginning of the 19th century had in common what present day employees, generally, no longer have : manual industrial work, and at the same time the experience of a recent brutal dispossession.

And the bourgeoisie ? The borders were always fuzzy between this group and that of the former ruling classes, such as the « nobility » in the West, itself more a status than a socio-economic group. Through their commercial, but also through their juridical functions (the bourgeoisie of the parliaments in France), bourgeois often escaped from narrow class delimitation : they were not just those who possessed the means of production.

One also cannot speak of class in the countryside before the modern era. Village life remained that of a community of families, obviously dominated by the rich, but in which social relations that were regulated by custom forbade that the interests of individuals, whatever their place within production, overrode those of the community. Pure agricultural wage-labour as we know it in the West is an historical exception. In the same way the class of small rural landowners was only an historic entity in certain countries and at certain periods.

In pre-capitalist societies, as today in archaic capitalist societies (in the East and in the Third World), the State controls the development of social groups and does not authorise the individualisation of aggregations which are based only on a community of interests that is internal to themselves. In the pre-capitalist universe the State was not the concentration of society, its revitalising strength, but above all was the guarantor of its equilibrium. It was not an apparatus like the modern State. No social authority became autonomous.

9. who theorised the class struggle ?

The definition of classes refers to production. Everything is contained in this. What society, and within it, what group, is primarily based on production ? *It was not the physical movements (gestes) of the slave or the serf which distinguished them from the free peasant, but their social relations.* However « social » relations, outside the « productive » act itself, have more or less weight, and more or less determine that productive act, depending on the society in which they exist. Slave and serf existed in a relation that was far more personal, and in a life far more socialised than that of the wage worker, including in relation to their work. Today people don't take their children to the office, and they don't invite their friends there.

When the economic sphere was born, we can see the emergence of classes. The criteria of property in, or control of, the means of production only makes sense if the use of these instruments is an activity separated from the rest, and if these goods are mobile things, transferable from one individual to another, are saleable, are « free ». There could not be an economy in Mesopotamia when City and Temple possessed the bulk of productive wealth. We speak of classes when beings can easily pass from one class to another and things can easily pass from one being to another. It is therefore necessary that groups have differentiated functions. As long as a society-community or State-community still exists, one cannot speak of real classes.

By contrast, if the differentiation of functions is rigid, and beings are linked to a function by birth, then we see the emergence of castes which ossify the circulation of beings and goods, and block the formation of the commercial wealth which tends towards a modern capitalism and State.

We know that English colonialism reinforced the caste system in India; function became frozen in status. In present day Japan there are still several million sub-citizens, the Eta, descendents of castes who occupied those functions which were most despised, because they were judged impure. One only finds the Eta in the least skilled and least well paid employment.

At the same time that it froze India, English capitalism created the conditions for a modern capitalist class. Companies like the East India Company produced « a capitalism at odds with traditional trading practises » (Braudel) *, in which Capital became more important than the shareholders, a power which was managed by administrators more powerful than the owners, and which in either event escaped from their control. Up until the 19th century only the West

* Translators Note. Fernand Braudel, *Civilization And Capitalism 15th-18th Century Vol. III The Perspective of the World* (London: Collins, 1984), p. 494.

produced this capitalism which went beyond family property. We may note that the real capitalist class was not the traditional bourgeoisie but the group of managers... salaried employees.

This development was not yet complete at the start of the 19th century but was sufficiently advanced, however, that the bourgeoisie itself, especially after the French revolution, needed to discover classes and the class struggle. Marx and Engels more than once acknowledged their debt to French bourgeois historians in this connection. *

Michelet regretted this division of the « people », which he celebrated, into classes, and in this way he prefigured the Left in all periods. Marx stated that the « discovery » of class struggles was not made by him. Even though Engels added a note in 1888, correcting the assertion in the *Communist Manifesto* whose opening reduced history to class struggles **, nothing came of this. The current viewpoint still remains that proletarian revolution is the continuation of the class struggle. However, while the bourgeoisie declared the class struggle finished after its revolution, theoretical communism doesn't just limit itself to affirming the continuation of this struggle.

The workers' movement, organised in parties and trade unions, would loudly affirm the class struggle. For them it would be a matter of prolonging an indefinitely perfectible bourgeois revolution, by adding to it a working class, social, democratic and popular content. All of this was linked to belief in a progressive capitalist development, in an industrialisation that was beneficial because it bore in its womb the class struggle which itself led to socialism...

* Translators Note. Engels to Borgius (25th January 1894) « While Marx discovered the materialist conception of history, Thierry, Mignet, Guizot, and all the English historians up to 1850 are the proof that it was being striven for, and the discovery of the same conception by Morgan proves that the time was ripe for it and that indeed it had to be discovered. »

** Translators Note. Engels, 1888 Preface to English edition of the *Communist Manifesto* :
« (...) the fundamental proposition which forms the nucleus (...) is: That in every historical epoch, the prevailing mode of economic production and exchange, and the social organization necessarily following from it, form the basis upon which it is built up, and from which alone can be explained the political and intellectual history of that epoch; that consequently the whole history of mankind (since the dissolution of primitive tribal society, holding land in common ownership) has been a history of class struggles, contests between exploiting and exploited, ruling and oppressed classes; That the history of these class struggles forms a series of evolutions in which, nowadays, a stage has been reached where the exploited and oppressed class — the proletariat — cannot attain its emancipation from the sway of the exploiting and ruling class — the bourgeoisie — without, at the same time, and once and for all, emancipating society at large from all exploitation, oppression, class distinction, and class struggles. »

10. proletariat, social negative

Simultaneously, a little before the middle of the 19th century, both bourgeois and revolutionaries found the need to theorise the « proletariat », because the concept of worker was no longer sufficient to understand the new world they saw before them. After 1830, and in particular after the Lyonnais insurrection in 1831, something more was seen in the worker than one who worked, and he was seen as being more than a manual worker. The idea emerged, including within the work of perplexed bourgeois or philanthropists, of a proletariat, a group defined not by what it did, but by what it was dispossessed of, and thus by the refusal of that dispossession. *Worker* referred to a sociological reality :

« Refers in general to any artisan who works at whatever trade it might be. »
(Encyclopédie)

It was no longer sufficient to evoke « the lower classes of society », like Marat in 1790. The appearance of the term « proletariat » was inscribed within a reflection on history, and on the perspective offered by emergent capitalism and its possible failure. In the *Almanach of the Community* (1842), Dézamy named as « proletarians the workers of the towns and the peasants of the countryside ». A socio-occupational definition didn't suit him. For him they were not merely, or particularly, workers and peasants. A special term was needed in order to unite them according to what they had in common. That their « work depends on causes outside of themselves ». * A subsequent author would write : « the worker is born proletarian, and dies proletarian ». **

As opposed to the classes in conflict, which Guizot spoke of ***, the proletariat was not just conceived of as a group in struggle against society, but as a group whose existence was already, in itself, a negative of society, if not its forthcoming negation, the revelation of the true face of industrialisation and its remedy.

The proletariat of which the revolutionaries, and thus Marx, spoke in the 1840s,

* Translators Note. from an article entitled 'Définition de mots prolétaires et bourgeois' in *l'Almanach de la communauté, 1843, par divers écrivains communistes*, Paris [1842] edited by Théodore Dézamy with J.J. Navel, Barthel and Jules Gay. pp. 69-72. (Reprinted in 1844 as *l'Almanach de l'organisation sociale*). The words cited are not in fact by Dézamy but had been taken from an 1832 article by Jean Reynaud. See Jacques Grandjonc, *Communisme/Kommunismus/Communism* [Trier : Karl-Marx-Haus, 1989] vol. 2 pp. 380-82.

** Translators Note. Constant Blondeaux, *Les partis et les classes sociales* [Paris: Garnier, 1871] p. 26 cited in Jean Dubois *Le vocabulaire politique et social en France de 1869 à 1872* [Paris: Librairie Larousse, 1962], p. 388.

*** Translators Note. François Guizot (1787-1874) liberal conservative historian and politician. The reference is to *The History of Civilization in Europe* (1828) [London: Penguin, 1993] pp. 130-31. See quotation on page 104 of this text..

was not formed by the union of manual workers as opposed to other workers and non-workers. It was the formation by Capital, but in opposition to it, of individuals combined in a community, without them being there as members of a sociological class : they did not bring to it the supposedly positive qualities of the manual as compared to the intellectual, for example. It was the union of all those who were denied, and workers were by far the greatest number of these, not as workers, but as denied.

At the same time this grouping (rather than social group) possessed the greatest numbers : « a class which forms the majority of all members of society » (*German Ideology*, 1845). * Its members were at the heart of society, whereas until the 19th century, the exploited in revolt had emerged at the periphery of the activities that were then the most important (slaves, craftsmen).

* Translators Note. Marx, Engels *The German Ideology*, I. II. 6. [MECW vol. 5. p. 52]

11. the working class, embodiment of the proletariat in the 19th century

Marx and the other radicals would identify this « ensemble » with the working class, which answered their twofold requirements. The workers were dispossessed : the negative definition. And they handled the most advanced productive forces of their time : the positive definition. Roughly speaking, in improved versions this twofold definition has been the common stock of revolutionaries, ourselves included, until now, even since the revolutionary revival around 1968... However it is not appropriate : and not just because of the « new forms of capitalism ». It was inadequate in 1848. Revolutionaries of that period tacked a sociological reality, of which an insufficiently critical study had been made, onto a negative definition, in order to give it a body, a concrete content. Even at that time it was ineffective. The proof of this was that the communists completely forgot about communism in 1848-50. Even the *Communist Manifesto* said nothing about the abolition of exchange although it had been mentioned in Engels' preliminary draft, [note] and it affirmed the class struggle of the proletariat in a very political manner : the social content of the communist revolution wasn't even outlined in it. This was a regression compared to previous texts by Marx and Engels, whose interest they poorly recognised, since they would never publish the most important of them (the 1844 Manuscripts). This is a rather extraordinary fact which we cannot ignore. Their lack of understanding of their own contribution is explained by the ambiguous relationship that the revolutionary movement always maintains with its own period, something from which it would be absurd to believe or wish that it might completely emancipate itself. The revolutionaries of the middle of the 19th century in part remained prisoners of the rise of capitalism. Their theory of the proletariat bore the marks of this.

Take the *plus side* of the definition : it makes the productive forces a good, and capitalism an evil to be eliminated. Is technology liberatory by definition, and is the « development of the productive forces » inevitably a good thing ? Marx himself showed that the opposite was the case. He took care not to defend industry, but the bourgeois idea of progress infiltrated his theorisation of the proletariat. With implications which others did not fail to draw, even during his lifetime and despite his opposition : if the machine liberates, then first of all it is necessary to build many machines, and always to work...

If, on the other hand, one makes money and commodities an « evil » - is this any more accurate ? It is obvious that revolutionary proletarians will not destroy money in order to get rid of bits of paper, but rather the machines, the technology, the anti-human objects conceived and produced for valorisation :

thus it is this material basis of which it is necessary to make a critique. It would be even more true to say that workers are the proletariat because they are capable of *stopping*, not developing, harmful production. Certain capitalist achievements already posed a serious problem to a possible revolution in 1920 (irrational urban concentration). Others have today reached a threshold which will be difficult to rectify : what is to be done with nuclear power ? Without underestimating the possibilities of human intervention, still communism will receive this threat to humanity as a free gift.

The « productive forces » are not an inheritance which can be managed by communism : this idea is well on the way to becoming a basic banality, but what is less obvious is the falsity of the idea of an opposition between workers who produce use value as against the rest of the wage workers who are parasitic on that « value ».

Recently critique has borne a great deal upon this point, and less on what seems to be obvious - the *minus* side of the definition : dispossession. Firstly, people skip over the error of perspective committed in the first half of the 19th century concerning the living conditions of the workers, an error that was subsequently to be taken up again. When Marx said in the *Inaugural Address of the International Working Men's Association* in 1864, that economic crises were worsening, he reasoned according to conceptions that were already superseded. From 1820 to 1845, with each textile crisis in England there was certainly a fall in real wages and enormous unemployment. At that time two extremes could be seen growing and moving away from one another : an accumulation of wealth at one pole and an aggravation of living conditions, absolute pauperisation, at the other. In *Capitalism and Socialism on Trial* Fritz Sternberg convincingly demonstrated that the dramatic character of the crises at that time was due to a labour market « inundated » by rural exodus and the transformation of ruined craftsmen into workers, at the precise moment when England had not yet found the export markets it needed, the world market still being in limbo *. The other industrialised countries, on both sides of the Atlantic, did not experience such massive unemployment. During the period 1850-1914 these aggravating factors were eliminated, especially as emigration slowed down the formation of the industrial reserve army. The most brutal effects of the expansion were reserved for the colonies, notably India whose textile production was ruined by English competition. The violent destruction of the pre-capitalist remnants inside the metropolises gave way to a softer but continual transformation directed towards the outside. At the same time, while mechanization reduced the number of workers necessary for any given production, production increased in volume thanks to the expansion of markets.

* Translators Note. Fritz Sternberg, *Capitalism and Socialism on Trial*, [London: Gollancz, 1951] see pp. 52-60.

In short the identification of the working class with the proletariat would be asserted just as this class had lost the most visible, but also least essential, characteristic of dispossession : « poverty » understood in the capitalist sense, defined as the lack of objects of consumption. Admittedly, workers did not cease being poor after 1850. But they at least participated in the functioning of Capital by receiving work and a salary that gave access to objects. However, in the period after 1840, dispossession had not been conceived as the fact of having nothing : this was much too obvious ! But rather, as the fact of being nothing, of being determined only by labour, and often of seeing oneself more in [the course of](#) refusing that labour. In part this subsequently became false, because of economic expansion, but revolutionaries persisted in speaking in praise of workers' labour while at the same time organised reformism came into existence, and Marx time and time again gave revolutionary support to trade unions which were by no means revolutionary.

The proletarian whose labour contains everything that is positive about the productive forces, and the dispossessed proletarian : these two unevenly mystifying definitions brought together realities between which there was no split, and this was certainly very serious. On the one hand, the proletarian is above all dispossessed of social relations, of his humanity, which is to act, feel and produce with others, and to communicate - all things which are prohibited by wage labour, both inside the factory and outside work. On the other hand, the factory and contact with the productive forces partially gave back to the proletarian a positivity, a mystified activity, and, with wage labour itself providing the opportunity to create links, a collectivity which overflowed the framework of the factory (working class culture). By speaking in praise of work and the world of work, revolutionary theory contributed to strengthening that by which Capital had neutralised this dispossession. Revolutionary theory thus contributed to neutralising what had produced it.

Firstly, revolutionaries were profoundly mistaken about the community among proletarians before 1848, and then about what it became later on. Far from being atomised and incapable of responding, workers before 1848 maintained traditional ties which were dependent on their different origins. In England many workers came from small rural industry. Until the beginning of the 20th century, every English industrial town was composed of a juxtaposition of villages. The persistence of village ties gave cohesion to the workers world and, inseparably, they also limited it : the original trade unionism as a unitary workers movement (the *One Big Union* theorised by Owen) took root here. What the English named *radicalism* was not the work of uprooted and ill adjusted individuals, but rather of groups derived from fairly stable communities, that were threatened by the global society, and yet which circumscribed their activity.

The working class appeared as the bearer of a social project very distant from

the bourgeois world. What was this ? In 1788, Sieyès demanded for the Third Estate the place that it deserved. * Later, Saint-Simon, in the same terms, celebrated the virtues of the class of producers, in which workers and bosses were mixed together and united. ** After 1830, the workers' newspaper *L'Artisan* took up the slogan : « the most numerous and useful class of society » ***. Confused, the movement seldom raised the question of communism but tended to locate itself in the margins of capitalism, while trying not to reproduce within itself the institutions and ideas of the society it criticised. In France, England and Germany, workers meetings before 1848 were also, despite their reformism, the means of obtaining something else. Demands and politics were the false language of a community which was in search of itself.

When this community found itself, the workers understood themselves through their work, they wanted *association*. They had in front of them the twin examples of craft work and industrial work. Capital was associated and subdivided work : association was not so much an ideology as a spontaneous tendency, which to begin with played a revolutionary role, as a perspective within which workers dared to imagine uniting themselves and working and living without a boss.

As soon as it passed on to practise, association either failed or adapted itself to what it wished to avoid : cooperation became the longest road towards capitalism. Proudhon gave it a general and political form : a working class organisation without political change, but going as far as the economic elimination of bosses. Proudhonism acted as a foil to the workers movement which adopted its spirit (in Germany Lassalle suffered similar treatment). It was the demand for the maximum possible autonomy within capitalism.

This project did not lose its validity with the decline of craft industry (which was slow in France and elsewhere). The ambition to constitute a working class world is in part to be found in the craft unionism of the second half of the 19th century, led by former craftsmen who had become skilled workers, and who often retained a considerable autonomy in the organisation of their work.

This working class separatism only declined with the Scientific Organisation of Work, which put an end to the autonomy of the workshop and reduced skills. But

* Translators Note. Abbé Sieyès, *What is the Third Estate ?*, 1788

** Translators Note. « The national party consists of : 1. Those whose work is of direct use to society. 2. Those who direct this work or whose capital is invested in industrial enterprises. 3. Those who contribute to production through work which is useful to the producers. » from *Comparison Between the National (Industrial) Party and the Anti-National Party* (1819) in *Henri Saint-Simon 1760-1825, Selected Writings on Science, Industry and Social Organisation*. tr. and ed. Keith Taylor [London: Croom Helm, 1975].

*** Translators Note. *L'Artisan. Journal de la class ouvrière*. Newspaper produced by Parisian printers in Sept-Oct. 1830. The quotation is from the opening sentence of the prospectus reprinted in *La parole ouvrière*, ed. Alain Faure and Jacques Ranciere [Paris: UGE 10/18, 1976]

Proudhonism did not die, it took the form of attachment to the enterprise, and to the ideal of self-management in which each workshop fixed its own norms.

This point had not been reached around 1850, but it is essential to recognise the social ties woven around work, under penalty of basing revolutionary action on what one is fighting. After having neglected the complex sociality which was woven around work, the revolutionary movement glorified what it interpreted as relations antagonistic to Capital, which was the inevitable formation of a working class world around the labour of workers. One always has roots, one always lives in a community. Such was the case for workers in the slums of London in 1830, and such is the case for the disinherited in the Third World.

It is thus a matter of being clear about knowing which dispossession one is speaking of. The deprivation of the human essence, denounced in the *1844 Manuscripts*, has too often been confused with the deprivation of what capitalism has made necessary in order to live in its society. For revolutionaries, the proletariat is a set of men placed in a situation of universality : negative because in revolt against the « mode of activity » (Marx) *; positive because it has the effective means for that revolt. The question is that of the movement between this positivity and this negativity. The means which these human beings dispose of are identical to their place in society. The modern proletariat, unlike its Roman counterpart, is at the heart of society. How can proletarians act on the basis of their function, but without remaining fixed there ?

* Translators Note. Marx, Engels *The German Ideology*, I. II. 6. [MECW vol. 5. p. 52]

12. labour against capital, but still as labour

The theorisation in the middle of the 19th century which started out from workers' labour was not an accident or an error. **It was all the more natural to make the working class the revolutionary subject since at the time 90% of wage workers were industrial or agricultural manual workers and because, in practise, those social movements hostile to bourgeois society were produced by workers.**

« (...) we definitely appear to have gone beyond that period of history in which the deeds of isolated men made them outstanding. It is the people, the parties, the masses which are on their own account the heroes of the new times ». This is how Henri Heine (in *De la France*, Calman-Levy, 1884), commented on the Parisian insurrection of 1832, the « good » insurrection in the eyes of Victor Hugo, which he opposed to the « bad » barricades of June 1848. The workers appeared to be the backbone of a popular mass from which arose the innumerable rioters and the other « heroes of the rue Saint-Martin, all the anonymous dead ». However...

However, whereas the rise of capitalism caused the proletariat to emerge in theory as well as in practise, it forbade it from struggling on its own terrain. The 19th century was the century of Capital. This social relation was certainly not as omnipresent as it is today. But the capitalist movement was the dominant dynamic capable of attracting all, and of drawing all in its wake. If there were insurrections they were above all defensive movements. Proletarians were killed on the spot without leaving their condition. The Lyons insurrection of 1831 was that of organised wage labour, the hierarchical structure of the workshop being transposed into a military community - wage labour in arms as Blanqui would describe what he wanted. Whereas Babeuf's plans had been based on an extreme mobility, making provision for bridges of boats over the Seine, in June 1848 the Parisian workers remained in their own district. Babeuf's communist conspiracy of the Equals had aimed at the whole of society. [note] It failed because it was not connected to a social force capable of revolutionising society. But, when that force appeared, the world of the worker was constituted as an entrenched camp. 1831 and 1848 resulted directly from the impossibility of the work demanded by these movements. The proletariat attempted to emancipate itself *on the basis* of what it was within Capital, which was inevitable, but *without leaving it*, which spelt its death.

Why didn't it succeed in making a critical assessment of the inevitable basis of its struggle, why did it remain the prisoner of the causes of its revolt ? Because

at the beginning of the 19th century, workers needed to recognise themselves in what they had in common, in what formed their sign of recognition in relation to the bourgeois : work. Above all in the work of those former artisans, brought together in the same place by an owner, but without their mode of work fundamentally changing. The working class attempted to directly constitute themselves as a unit through their social function. They asserted the impossible ownership of their fundamental determination, determination in relation to production.

Theoretical communism limited itself to reproducing what served as self-recognition for proletarians. In 1830, the workers almost seemed capable as a whole of being revolutionaries, since they did not live in a purely capitalist community. At the meeting point of two worlds, workers remained in contact with a non-capitalised universe which gave them both their attachment to the past and their collective aspirations. They appeared as those who did not suffer a « particular wrong » but « unqualified wrong », and could only revolt with a « human title ». [note] A global phenomenon, the « workerism » of the beginning of capitalism was not limited to the West. A Chinese worker wrote in 1920 : « The world of the future, it is necessary to make it a workers' world ». [note] [bog]

Against the bourgeois who was identified with the idle rich, Coeurderoy [note] exalted the worker as the real creator, and he considered the productive labour of the inventor and the craftsman (Fulton, Jacquart, Watt) as the value filling the « emptiness of the 19th century ». Productive and revolutionary capacities were closely associated. We are not far from the worship of inventors celebrated by the Third Republic. When workers spoke, they demanded their due, refused the dispossession undergone by the craftsman and asserted a collective labour. The proletarian only knew himself, and only became aware of himself and of the possibility for common action, through work, that is to say he remained the prisoner of his own contradiction. Capital filled the « emptiness of the 19th century » and occupied all social space.

13. which theory of value ?

Revolutionaries didn't gamble on the working class and lose. They took part in practical activity born of real social relations, in the forms which they took at that time, and from this produced the theory they were able to. That it turned out to be partly inadequate is not unconnected to the period in which it was produced, which was marked by the dynamic of ascendant Capital.

The serious point for us today, is that the real existence of the proletariat of the period, both within and through work, involved perceiving the revolution through the same filter as capitalism. Communism was lost from view.

Every class needs to understand itself, but the bourgeoisie more so than any other. The class of management, of measurement, of accounting, of the government of men through things, it very soon needed to see things more clearly as regards its own accumulation of wealth. What is the location of the exact place in which the transmission of wealth is transformed into its growth ? And what is the precise nature of this elusive wealth, borne by men, materialised in objects, but which cannot be reduced to things, and escapes them as flux and movement ? Little by little the abstraction « value » appeared. In 1581 John Hales was the first to say that it was not the work of the king but of the market. Then Locke (1689), Smith (1776) and Ricardo (1817) discovered its source in labour. From a view of the world as an order to be understood and respected one passed to the conception of a network of functions which were necessary in order to make it function.

« Every man thus lives by exchanging, or becomes in some measure a merchant ».
(Adam Smith) [note]

The theorisation of value came into existence as an attempt at a solution to a bourgeois problem. People saw in value a substance, a material to be mastered in its flows and its stockpiling. **Then the bourgeoisie gave up posing this problem.** It was far better to manage wealth than to wonder about its origins. Political economy declined by shrinking its horizons, it made itself apolitical, and it finished up as economic policy.

The communist movement took up this problem at about the moment that the bourgeoisie abandoned it, in order to see, behind the positing of value as a substance, the social relation which this concealed. But while criticising political economy, it lost itself within it.

In the beginning was activity. At man's beginnings, value did not exist. Men and things circulated within and between limited communities. The common

character of beings, acts, gestures and behaviours wasn't embodied in any reality, whether man or thing. The progressive universalisation of activity occurred through the appearance of a series of mediations, embodied in men (chiefs, priests...), objects (money) and disembodied entities (god), and finally led to the constitution of a unified social space in the 20th century. Market exchange was little by little extended, forcing everything to be measured on the basis of the yardstick of time. The common character of activities was materialised in money, but money was only the concrete support for an abstraction which ruled the world : value.

Of the two dimensions, time and space, within which we live, time devoured everything until it was swallowed up itself, the goal of society always being to reduce it, and thus to destroy it. « Space no longer exists », announced the futurist Marinetti [note]. With the motorway, we no longer travel in space but in time. Credit allows man to emancipate himself from time, until the moment that time catches up and crushes him. The abstraction-value became both social link and social motor.

What shows through in Marx's immense effort to get to the bottom of this concept, by exhausting wealth to the point of exploding it, is the loss, albeit never complete, of the critique of the world. In reproaching the world for being based on value, communism of course aims at what this concept hides : the impossibility of acting, of producing and of transforming matter, or even of just gazing at ones naval, in relation with other men. What is at stake remains the critique of a whole way of life for humanity.

We cannot be content to say that the suppression of commodities, by itself, will completely transform the mode of life which we are refusing. That is still to remain at a level of ineffective generality. Didn't they, so it appeared, suppress money for a brief period in Pol Pot's Cambodia ? It is necessary to see what would be changed through a whole set of practical measures *aimed at destroying exchange*. There is an interaction between the suppression of value and the material measures to be taken. Or rather, the material measures to be taken, are the suppression of value.

However the analysis of value remains an obligatory path for theoretical communism. For the world to be rejected depends, in particular, on what is summed up in the term « value », and this offers the link making it possible to grasp the whole, with the proviso that it is not turned into an economic concept, but is seen as a social-abstraction that is present behind the concrete relations between beings, and which explains those relations. Otherwise, one produces only political economy or metaphysics.

In 1844 Marx made a critique of political economy. Effecting a synthesis of an entire current of thought, he affirmed that alienated labour is not the result of

a bad organisation of work, but of a society based on *money*. But what is money ?

« The essence of money is not, in the first place, that property is alienated in it, but that the mediating activity or movement, the human, social act by which man's products mutually complement one another, is estranged from man and becomes the attribute of money, a material thing outside man. »

(Marx, Notes on Mill, 1844) [note]

Marx remade the genesis of political economy on the basis of the emergence of abstract and universal labour, the source of all wealth. He tackled the question of value just as the subversive movement which had borne the theoretical research of the 1840s subsided. Abandoning a revolutionary anthropology which was insufficiently anchored in history and was thus too abstract, he entered into the concrete and there lost some strands of his original thread. In order to escape philosophy (Feuerbach), he lapsed into economics. In order to escape the dangers of empty humanism, he thought too much like a specialist. He finished by posing a bourgeois question in a different way to the bourgeoisie, while **at the same time** providing many elements useful for the deconstruction of that question.

In the marxism, which Marx thus contributed to, critique was summed up as « the theory of labour-value ». The concept of « surplus value » was put forward in order to prove that the worker was exploited. In passing we might wonder whether it was really vital to prove exploitation « scientifically ». It is striking that such a concern became central, including in Marx's thinking, since it led on to the idea of « theft » and thus to the suppression of private ownership, and to the extension of the condition of worker to all human beings. Marx warned against what was, for him, only a deviation - for him infinitely less dangerous than anarchism, which shows that at the very least he was mistaken in evaluating the dangers which threatened the movement.

In marxist ideology, the theory of value is used as an ornament, or as a guide in « socialist » planning. In the work of the revolutionaries who have restored its subversive impact, it remains too much a magic invocation : one will do without [ie. boycott - trans] money in the way that leftists do without Ford or Boussac. « Value » is used to conceal the vagueness of a thought which poorly discerns what a revolution can and must change. Here, value is still perceived as a substance or an instrument, and not as the crystallisation, on the basis of men's actions, of what is common to them, within an entity which crushes them.

14. theoretical communism is not the theory of class struggle but of the struggle which puts an end to classes

The working class first recognised itself as workers, and secondly as a distinct group in conflict or alliance with other groups. Marx (see his famous letter to Weydemeyer in 1852) and the revolutionaries clearly showed that their essential contribution was not to affirm the existence of class struggle, but the three following notions : classes are explained by socio-economic conditions; class struggle will have as its end a revolution and the dictatorship of the proletariat; the latter will be the end of classes. However, once again, the clarification was not sufficiently explicit. It carried little weight compared to the real, massive and not very critical support given by the communists to the formation of a workers movement that to start with was reformist and non-revolutionary, before subsequently becoming counter-revolutionary and employing revolutionary theory while neutralising its subversive dimensions (during Marx's lifetime and from the formation of the First International in 1864).

A succession of shifts led to the following equations :

communist action = workplace struggle against Capital
the class action of the proletariat = labour conflicts

Such an evolution was the result of a given social reality, that is, the practical activity of the working class of that period, which would subsequently be continued in different forms, and of which it is necessary to draw up an assessment.

The highest degree of radicality in the existence of a working class that is constituted into a distinct bloc, with its own values and even weapons, can be seen in the example of the Bolivian miners.

After 1945 they gave themselves a trade union organisation which in practise took a very hard line : against class collaboration, and against the State and its army. This was an extreme withdrawal of the « class » into itself, which imposed itself *as a class*, in the strict sense, on the bourgeoisie and the State : the only forces in the country in the last resort being the army and the workers militias. Living on their high plateau, as autonomous as one can be on the political and cultural level, with free radio stations and their economy a closed circuit, they were thus assured of remaining workers as long as there were mines. But the ore itself had to be got out, and regularly the army crushed the workers and seized the radio stations (1956, 1967, 1976 - after that, the army was permanently

stationed in the mining areas - and 1980 when the army subdued the mines). But the movement would re-emerge; sometimes, as in 1979, the unions decided on a strike and mobilisation, and the State did not intervene. Some will say that the miners were in a dead end because they neither went beyond a trade union nor a regional framework. Isn't it rather the type of action undertaken which confines one to these limitations, to supporting and then maintaining an apparatus which, later on, negotiates with other apparatuses in order to support the regime, or not as in 1952 ?

In an extreme form, the Bolivian miners illustrate the formation of workers into a class as a pressure group. But, during the Mexican Revolution, the workers sometimes organised themselves as an army against the peasant revolt. Class struggle can, and generally does, become a confrontation between groups each seeking its own interest to the detriment of the interests of the others. Workers don't have exclusive rights to it.

The new Ethiopian regime, since 1974, has got the peasants, to whom it distributed land, to form a militia in order to defend the unity of Ethiopia against Eritrean and Somali rebels, in the name of the revolution .

When Lech Walesa [note] wrote to General Jaruzelski (29/12/83, quoted in *le Monde* on 21/12/84) : « I am not an adversary, I am only a demanding partner (...) », he merely expressed one aspect of the general practice of proletarians throughout the world.

The contradiction of the proletarian is that wage labour makes him a collective being by associating his activity, but within an activity in which he reproduces Capital. As long as he is only organised on this level, he acts as an element, however rebellious, of Capital. Struggle is not necessarily synonymous with a fight to the death against Capital. There is reformist class struggle and revolutionary class struggle. Workers resistance has three functions according to case : it can have revolutionary potentiality; it can drive capitalist development (England in the 19th century); or it can slow that modernization down (Germany in the 1920s); the three are combined. Currently, demands both accelerate and limit the investments necessary for robotization.

The communist movement is not the same thing as class struggle. Its goal is not to draw one part of society up against another. At least since the war in Spain, we have known that a civil war *may* be counter-revolutionary. Lebanon shows as much. But *so can* the defence of working class interests. Not every conflict between bourgeois and workers, or even between State and workers, is necessarily positive.

But the communist movement passes through the class struggle, since Capital, like any social relation, is borne by men who are united in order to defend it, and

to that end have social *and* official power. The opposition of one fraction of society to another, and the armed struggle which results from this, are only aspects of the communist movement.

On the contrary it is reformism which claims to represent the class struggle, although it practises it through negotiation rather than by waging battle. Trade unions and parties require class struggle in order to play at intermediaries : they need an eternal class struggle. What is revolutionary is not to insist on the class struggle, but to say that it can have an end in communism and through a revolution. *Glorifying « struggle » is not radical in itself. **The language of war, of which we make too great a use, corresponds no better to the nature of our movement than the language of humanism.***

A communist revolution will have a classist dimension because we live in a class society, but in order to be communist, it will reabsorb this component, which is mere raw material, unavoidable historic compost from which will emerge the human and communal dimension.

Those who speak the most about class appear to protect our activity from harmful influences, but this is an illusion ! Membership of a class and the passionate claim to working class identity are by no means incompatible with membership of the wider society. People, such as many English workers, want to be working and not middle class, but people also want to be English or American, etc. Working class speech gives a meaning to the life of isolated men who thus rejoin society *through* adhesion to one of its groups. Work, production and class are capitalist realities which cannot *as such* set themselves up as revolutionary.

15. the proletariat is not a class

People conceived of the proletariat as a transitional class, as simultaneously a socio-economic group and as the opening of all classes, or nearly all, onto a community, because the working class was mainly composed of déclasses of different origins, almost all derived from those social layers whose appearance on the historic stage would cause the other « classes » to go bust. The proletariat was seen not as a group, but as a gathering together and a bursting forth towards a humanity still to be born, regrouped however around work, and which thereby avoided the danger of dispersal and of becoming lost in humanism and democratism. In this sense one might speak of the proletariat as a class, although the word was ill-chosen and misleading.

On the one hand this prospect had not been achieved around 1848, and the subsequent movements (1917-21) which we will speak about, formed themselves, and acted on the basis of, different foundations, closer to an uprising of labour than to this radiating outward announced by Marx, which would start from a layer of workers, itself open and exploded.

On the other hand, for precisely this reason, the identification of the proletariat with a class had and still has serious consequences. Today it is impossible and unacceptable. From the moment that one no longer identifies those who will make the revolution with a socio-economic group, it is absurd to talk about classes. Unless by giving the word a meaning that is so different from the current meaning as to be its opposite ! This confusion amounts to employing the language of the enemy. One can snatch back from Tchernenko [note] the term « communism » because it more or less indicates the movement towards the human community, but the term « class » is already inadequate, even in itself.

It is not a matter of getting rid of it, as if one were replacing an old obvious fact with a new one, and of ourselves producing another mutation, with the difference that this time Capital is undergoing a structural crisis, but rather of getting to the bottom of the mutation that has been effected since the 1840s, and since the loss of the former meaning of the notion of proletariat. It would be both easy and useless to add the non-workers to the workers and create from this a « modern » proletariat.

Those who threw the baby out with the bathwater, Castoriadis [note] in particular, allowed themselves to be *dazzled* by their discovery of a flaw in the revolutionary conception. Their vision clouded, and deprived of their previous reference points, they successively described the various mirages which presented themselves.

One of the conditions making it possible to avoid this drift is undoubtedly to evaluate the way in which people abandoned revolutionary theory in the past. One of the decisive turning points was the introduction of the idea of a « minimum programme », thanks to Guesdes [note] in 1880, with the assistance of Marx and Engels. At the same time, in *On Authority*, Engels demonstrated the need for authority by referring to the constraints of factory work. In opposition to anarchism which denounced the lack of democracy in the factory.

Even before Lenin, Engels made the factory a model for organisation and activity. Marxism started out as a theory of the popular reform of capitalism, before the crisis of the bourgeoisie in the 20th century made it the necessary intellectual complement to capitalism. Marxism then underwent the same fate as the working class : after having survived in a ghetto, it merged with all the other ideologies.

« We see in it [marxism] a cultural asset of the Left; better still : since the death of bourgeois thought, it is itself the only culture, for it alone allows us to understand men, works and events ».

(Sartre, *Les Temps Modernes*, March-April 1956).

In order to better understand the reality of the programme of a generalised setting to work, in Marx's theory (and others), it is necessary to see that the number of workers, even in England in the middle of the 19th century, was not as great as people imagined. Marx quotes statistics for England and Wales in 1861 : the number of textile, mining and metal workers was less than the number of domestic servants ! After discounting the army, the clergy and the rentiers... there were over eight million economically active people :

- agricultural workers : 1 million
- textile workers : 640,000
- mineworkers : 560,000
- metalworkers : 400,000
- servants : 1.2 million

(Capital Volume One, [note])

In the same way the conclusion of Capital Volume One describes over several pages the future of the capitalist mode of production, a mode of socialisation demanding, through its contradictions, the transition to a different socialisation. But here are Marx's own words : « The monopoly of capital becomes a fetter on the mode of production (...) » [note] [MECW, vol 35, p. 750(?)]. A much broader socialisation is necessary which is « co-operation and (...) possession in common » [ibid, p. 750]. Expropriation of the expropriators, fine; but the slippage is there, through making *Capital* a matter of *capitalists*. Marx concluded by opposing « the mass » to a few « usurpers » (ibid.). Capitalism is considered as being equivalent

to private property for which it will be necessary to substitute common property. The least that can be said is that the conclusion to Volume One of Capital, the only one actually written and completed by Marx, contains very little of the communist perspective. To put it another way, this perspective is expressed in such a way that it is in no way incompatible with all the possible and existing variants of State capitalism. Such a conclusion could be signed up to by the Social Democrats and Stalinists, from Kautsky to Marchais, and passing through Olaf Palme. [note?]

Loss of the communist perspective is not the exclusive prerogative of marxism : anarchism has its share of it. While Louis Blanc wanted to organise work, Proudhon wanted to organise credit as the means of organising work differently. In 1849 his *Right to Work* described the management of the mines, canals and railroads by workers associations supervised by the State as « suggested models » for the whole economy.

« As for States, the final conclusion is that the problem of their organisation will be bound up with that of the organisation of work (...) the workshop will cause government to disappear (...) ».

(Letter of 12th December 1849, quoted in Sargent and Harmel, *Histoire de l'anarchie*, Le Portulan, 1949, p. 227)

Forgetting its rural roots (idem. p. 22), anarchism also made revolution an industrial problem. Like marxism it had its partisans of a return to a more communist viewpoint, however partial. Rejecting the syndicalist theories of the future society as an association of production syndicates, Jean Grave [note?] wrote in his novel *Terre Libre* (1908) :

« I do not believe in groupings which deal exclusively with production. In my opinion, it is the needs of consumption which will elevate individuals and cause them to group themselves in order to obtain what they need, either by manufacturing it themselves, or through an exchange of commodities, freed from any kind of measurement of value. Exchange of services and not of commodities ». [b1?] [note?]

The revolutionary upheaval after 1917 would cause marxism and anarchism to come together again. For Prudhommeaux [note] (*Essais et Combats*, December 1937) the « bases of a new art of revolution (...) are still unused. These are : 1. A « concrete psychology » of the individual and of the subconscious highlighting the fundamental revolutionary act : breaking the former chains, reconciliation with oneself (...); 2. (...) an aesthetic of production and distribution based on the pleasure in creating and freely giving; 3. (...) the reconciliation of men with one another and with nature (...) the final subordination of the machine » (Cited in J. Rabaut, *Tout est possible !*, Denoël, 1974). [b] [note?]

Propositions all the more striking because of the return to the roots which they express, and because of their recourse (prefiguring more recent times) to psychology.

The revolutionary movement was above all a reaction, the response of labour to Capital, within the same social relation, whose bases were very seldom called into question.

[b1?] cited in Maitron, *le mouvement anarchiste en france*, vol II, [Paris: Maspero, 1975, reprinted Gallimard, 1992] p. 167.

16. defeat of the radical movements based on labour

The theoretical evolution of which we have just given an account obviously has its source in social history. It was only for a relatively short period that proletarians undertook revolutionary action of any scale, *as workers*. Thereafter, until roughly 1914 (with some extensions beyond this date, in Spain and elsewhere) these actions were no more than tendencies organised inside an anti-revolutionary labour movement. Finally, radical proletarian action, driven out of apparatuses that still called themselves workers organisations but which were completely anti-communist, was only exerted in wildcat forms.

In the USA and in England, the unitary Unions of *all* trades (National Trades Union) disappeared around 1840, to be slowly replaced first by Craft Unionism and then from 1880 by Industrial Unionism. The primary American trade unions in the last third of the 19th century brought together the unskilled. When pre-capitalist ties were broken for good around 1914, the only community which remained was that of wage labour, the only link that of labour power brought together in monopolies.

And labour power itself escaped from workers. Either it was deskilled, or else it was no longer trained in contact with the environment of work, but in a school, whereas previously the relatively autonomous acquisition of a skill had made it possible to travel and a great many militants had been formed in this way.

Faced with this movement, the *Bourses du Travail*, [note] to start with, met the needs of proletarians to exist on a basis distinct from the factory. This resistance subsequently disappeared, and only survived where trade unions controlled recruitment (in France in printing presses, in the docks and among spectacle makers). But the refusal to model trade union organisation on industrial organisation, led to a workers' world which remained centred on *individual* companies. The labour movement socialised the workers. The *Bourses du Travail* were born as industrialisation became a mass phenomenon and when workers could legally organise themselves (IIIrd Republic). Like the other extra-factory functions of the labour movement they would fade away when Capital carried them out directly (recruitment).

The crisis of large scale mechanised industry, its slow replacement by a new system of production characterised by Taylorism, and the resort to new sources of energy, etc., involved a twofold change : craftsmen and skilled workers gave way to the unskilled and skilled workers of the large companies, and in this way self-recognition through work gave way to self-recognition within the

enterprise.

« Industrial Unionism » was a large-scale working class attempt to recompose a community within and in spite of this mutation. It was especially active in Great Britain, in the United States where De Leon theorised it, in Germany in connection with what would become the communist left, but also in Latin America. In France things were very different since revolutionary syndicalism preserved the commitment to the craft. Industrial unionism intended to consider the proletarian as much as the worker. It was no longer the particular *trade* which it was necessary to promote, but the *whole of labour*. Very fertile in the « production of revolutionaries », it contributed greatly to German revolutionary Unionism. It formed the transition between the struggles of the 19th century and modern trade unionism. Until then the mirror of work had offered the worker a *personal* identity. With the restructuring of trade unions by branch of industry, the workers defined themselves through the framework of their activity, the *place of production*, which they would simply wish to purify by eliminating the bourgeoisie. Between these two **positions**, industrial unionism offered the identification of a community of *producers* which it wished to promote even *beyond* the boundaries of the enterprise : the union of all producers, the industrial republic, all dreams which were at work in 1917-21, and which would grow dim after the defeats which concluded this period.

But what was really defeated between 1917 and 1921 ? Radical proletarians after 1917, in Germany and elsewhere, had in opposition to them an important fraction of the working class, for whom a communist solution was not desirable, because no positive communist transformation was begun. And they also had against them the other classes who they frightened without their offering perspectives outside class society. In his *Open Letter to Lenin* in 1920, Gorter **[note]** correctly said that radical workers were isolated. But he theorised this impotence by concluding that the working class must fight alone. Class struggle *internal* to society, without proletarians leaving the « defence of the class », contributed to a paralysing social crisis which only Nazism would resolve. As opposed to the revolutionaries, to the SPD and to the centre parties, but also to a narrowly conservative bourgeoisie, Hitler prevailed by superseding class divisions - at least in words - and by offering everyone a community.

It is true that Gorter asserted German working class solitude in opposition to the Russian « alliance » of workers and peasants. In fact, the Russian working class, very combatative, conducted a long civil war without communising the ground it conquered, even though there existed conditions favourable to such an attempt, something Marx had had a presentiment of in theorising the possible reactivation of the rural commune. Though this opportunity was wasted, the working class found itself carried away, despite itself, in a fratricidal conflict with the peasantry. The class struggle ended up in counter-revolutionary tragedy. People fought without any camp being able to offer a social perspective,

worker against peasant, each in the name of those « class interests » so much vaunted by the revolutionaries. Neither communism, nor small production triumphed, and the missing perspective was rapidly supplied by Capital.

In Germany as in Russia, the class struggle turned in on itself, internal to society, without an alternative taking shape. Proletarians remained within the assertion of particular interests. Communist revolution is not an alliance of classes in which workers add their contribution to the rest. But it is also not working class compulsion over the other groups in order to force them to accept « workers' interests ». Proletarians don't have to make concessions, but to communise themselves while integrating within themselves increasingly large social strata. This process will stretch over at least a generation, and it will presuppose of course that one handles some groups carefully and that one neutralises others, but in terms of an extension of communist relationships.

The revolutionary failure around the end of the First World War gradually cleared the ground for a trade unionism that was purified of subversive inclinations. In the United States, the formation of the CIO in the 1930s completed this development. In the words of one trade union leader, « trade unionism needs capitalism like a fish needs water ». Reformism and corruption did not prevent American trade unions from conducting long and violent strikes, far longer and more violent than in many countries whose trade unions have a reputation for combativeness. On average the United States accounted for more working days lost because of strikes or lock-outs than France. Over the period 1951-75, it was only thanks to the events of 1968 that France went beyond the United States in this respect. The most discredited trade union, the *Teamsters*, was also one of the most powerful, the one which best applied capitalist principles. Practising an authoritarian discipline (it was one of the few centralised American trade unions), it organised effective solidarity, sometimes with other trade unions. In other cases it was hostile to them and fought them like an alien world. It brought together varied trades (including policemen) who only had « organisation » in common. Through an effective defence of its wage workers, it gathered together a set of workers which was closed in on itself.

17. the counter-revolution in the name of work

For almost the whole of the socialist, libertarian and trade union movement at the end of the 19th century, communism resembled the viewpoint of Kautsky [note]: a gigantic enterprise extending to the whole of society, the radicals merely adding to this viewpoint what today we would call self-management. At the decisive moment, in 1917 and after, the revolution was fought by the parties of the left and the trade unions on behalf of organised labour. Instead of allying itself with the liberal middle classes, as Bernstein [note] had recommended since 1890, German socialism united with the army and the reactionaries, by playing the stability of labour against the revolutionary adventure.

Stalinism was also based on organised labour, in countries like France as well as those in which it took over from a failing bourgeoisie. The Czech regime after 1945, in an old industrialised country, was based for a long time on a strong political and trade union workers' corporatism. The Prague coup (1948) was not only due to Russian pressure, but also to the action of bureaucratized workers militias. The new regime of Slansky had a powerful trade union base. Today in Afghanistan, the USSR, incapable of crushing resistance in the countryside, has concentrated its intervention on the cities and the rural population of the plains. It occupies itself in *constituting a working class*, especially in heavy industry in which the big trade unions might unite the mass behind the State in order to modernize the country. It was in the name of industrial development and progress that Stalinists the world over supported the USSR in Afghanistan.

The counter-revolution made no distinction between socialism and work for all. The temptation was strong for revolutionaries to oppose reformism and Stalinism by asserting a « worker communist » identity (this was the title of Prudhommeaux's journal - then left communist - at the end of the 1920s), in order to affirm that « their » communism came from proletarian experience and not from the bureaucratic apparatuses. They did no more than turn back against the counter-revolution its own discourse. The most awful trade union also has something to do with workers' struggles. Revolutionary syndicalism was perhaps the most coherent attempt to erect a working class culture that confronted bourgeois culture, without any mediation. The French Communist Party subsequently achieved a global project, no longer by isolating « the class », but by constituting it in order to integrate it into the society called the nation.

18. end of the traditional classist workers' movement

The workers movement, as a unified whole comprising forms of life, reactions, institutions and ideas, which was organised around the defence of labour power but which offered a field of action to radical groups, this movement has disappeared. From the end of the 18th century to 1914-18, the revolutionary movement depended on it. It criticised the workers movement, but it drew its militants and its energies from it. Today, revolutionary groups are not even « fractions » in the way the Communist Left had conceived of them, minorities but linked to real conflicts. A revolutionary movement is not carried by a workers movement. We have been orphaned.

Formerly, on the one hand an autonomous working class world came together around its own values and institutions : cooperatives, mutual insurance funds, peoples palaces, sporting and cultural associations, *bourses du travail* and press had constituted the universe of organised wage labour. On the other hand, the workers movement took charge of fields that were not directly working class : culture, sexuality, craft training, leisure activity. *The workers' movement was the soul of reformism.* One could be born, work, marry, militate, amuse oneself and die a « worker ».

This was the golden age of propaganda which brought into being a milieu of authors and lecturers, the period of the workers' district and the workers' city, a space which in its values was closed and autarchic. Social Democracy was not the only instigator of this separate world, nor the only beneficiary of its establishment. In 1875, the anarchist James Guillaume called on workers to form themselves into a counter-society [note], and at the end of the 19th century there were a certain number of anarchists who lived on their writing and lecturing.

At first Capital treated workers (and the other social elements it needed : the State, culture, etc.) as material which it used without completely penetrating them. But then it reproduced them itself, and organised them directly by joining them together through the mass consumption of objects and signs.

After having had an autonomous existence during the phase of extensive development and consolidation by Capital (broadly from 1871 to 1914-29) the workers' world became a mere appendage of Capital. Where it is an immense power in the economy, as is the case in West Germany, it is only as a kind of capitalist enterprise deprived of specific working class features. The social functions formerly provided by workers organisations have been taken in hand

by Capital and the State : the supermarket has replaced the workers co-operative, social security has replaced the workers mutual funds. The State doesn't substitute itself for Capital, it carries out its laws, organising payment in money for every service rendered.

During its period of relative autonomy, the workers' and trade union movement developed a working class capitalist utopia : the elimination of parasitic Capital (finance) to the benefit of productive Capital (industry); the generalisation of work; and the management of production, and thus of society, by the organised workers. The idea of a republic of labour, democratic and totalitarian, took on a thousand different forms in the socialist and trade union milieux, as well as in most « reactionary » circles (Sorel and Georges Valois in France). This utopia took the greatest hold in those working class areas dominated by one or two basic industries. The coal miners in some regions of Wales offer an example of an extremely combative movement, to the point of suicidal action (striking for several months in 1926 in a completely unfavourable context and finishing in a crushing defeat). They wanted « an industrial cosmos » in which the State would be the consequence of a pyramid of democratic waged collectivities. The Fabians advocated an industrial democracy : the miners took reformism at its word in order to try to genuinely achieve it.

This utopia was not just impossible because the development of Capital cannot be democratically controlled. It was also impossible because of the disintegration of the working class community on which this dream was based, and in the image of which it wanted to remake the world.

The end of the counter-society was not a matter of organisation. The old workers' movement disappeared because a multitude of capitalist mediations had taken charge of its function, reformism. Reformism multiplied itself with arbitration boards, workers' socials and the media. After 1968 leftism accelerated this penetration of reformism throughout the social body, with the development of neo-reformisms which autonomised all of the dimensions hitherto explored by the workers' movement (feminism, pedagogy, sexual questions...).

19. integration through negation

Partisans of the theory of the disappearance of the proletariat see it as having been integrated or dissolved into industrial or post-industrial society : workers are supposed to have ceased being themselves. The reality is different. It is by continuing to be themselves and *only workers* that they are integrated. (We are not saying that they are integrated for good; they remain the actors of their own evolution, although under conditions that they did not choose, but which they can, however, change).

Capital *also* lives on workers disputes within a framework that is anti-boss and anti-bourgeois but still capitalist. The experience of 150 years of modern classes proves that one can struggle *against* Capital while remaining *inside it*, or in other words fight for one form of Capital against another.

There is a *positive integration* : Capital directly wins to itself proletarians who conform to its norms. There is also a *negative, indirect integration*, in which proletarians rebel against the norms but without calling into question the origin of those norms : Capital.

Some fundamental errors fill the heads of revolutionaries. People still claim with Lenin that « in every strike there lurks the hydra of revolution » [\[note\]](#). No. The initial response to the announcement of a strike or even of a confrontation with the police should not be automatic delight. A large majority of social movements form part of the normal functioning of capitalism and, as such, work for its conservation. Everything depends on what the strike is and what becomes of it.

Democracy is capitalist organisation par excellence, for fundamental and non contingent reasons. Capital presupposes competition, the confrontation of rival poles of value, even if they are monopolistic and even if they are controlled by the State. However democracy is not simply the reduction of every proletarian to a twofold citizen, both producer and consumer. It does not just tolerate reasonably contradictory groups, it needs them. Working class identity has served, and still serves, as a powerful common denominator for regroupings which facilitate negative integration.

A workers' struggle which is only a struggle, merely maintains itself, in other words it participates in the self-destruction of humanity. Like the ouroboros, a mythical creature which devours itself.

Of course, when revolutionaries today speak of class action, like those at the start of the 20th century they mean revolutionary action. But what counts, as opposed to what the Italian Left (and others) believed, is that the self-defence

of the exploited is neither revolutionary in itself, nor an essential stepping stone to revolutionary action. Some had an intuition of this difficulty, for example Bakunin, although within a perspective which inhibited his critique (see Sargent and Harmel, p. 414, note 1) [f2] [note] .

[f1] Lenin, Lecture on the 1905 Revolution, Collectd Works Vol 23,
<http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/jan/09.htm>

[f2] « There is another expression in that programme which is deeply antipathetic to us revolutionary anarchists who unconditionally advocate full popular emancipation, and that is the designation of the proletariat, the world of the workers, as *class* rather than as *mass*. Do you know what this means ? Nothing more or less than a new aristocracy, that of the urban and industrial workers, to the exclusion of the millions who make up the rural proletariat and who, in the previsions of the German social democrats, will in effect become subjects of this great so-called popular State. *Class, power and State*, these three terms are inseparable, each of them necessarily implying the other two, and summed up in aggregate by these words : *the political subjugation and economic exploitation of the masses*. » from Lettre à la Liberté, (1872) in Bakunin, *Selected Writings* ed. Arthur Lehning [London: Jonathan Cape, 1973] pp. 253-54.

20. a great class of wage labour

Today the reality of wage labour has been profoundly modified : it still pays for the hire of labour power (this is essential) but it is no longer individual remuneration for work done.

Henceforth there is an income without, or in addition to work, known as the social or indirect or separate wage. In effect, direct wages only remunerate, whether daily or monthly, the everyday value of labour power, not the value of the reproduction of that labour power. Direct wages were never enough to ensure the value of reproduction. Even the super-exploited workers of 1830 gave one another embryonic mutual aid. From the start the organisation of labour was a capitalist necessity. But the social wage grew in size as it uncoupled income from the labour provided.

Almost all of the big capitalist countries have seen the share of indirect wages grow enormously, which only goes to show that this was necessary and not that capitalism has become philanthropic : it in no way prevents, and on the contrary accompanies, what GLAT [note] called *The destruction of labour power* by modern civilisation. In France, the share of the social wage within total remuneration was 2% in 1925, 20% in 1940 and more than 30% in 1950. Today in companies with more than 10 workers it is about half the wage. Moreover, by preference collective effort is remunerated rather than individual effort. In France since 1972 collective bonuses combined with the full time wage offer workers more than merely payment by results (Verret, p. 60-61)

To the decoupling of individual work and income, must be added the relative and sometimes absolute decline in the number of industrial workers, as compared to the number of employees (both manual and office workers) in the service sector. In France between 1974 and 1981 the service sector increased by 192,000 workers a year, while industry lost 129,000 workers a year. However there is a relatively constant number of workers in France : 7.5 million in 1876 (without Alsace Lorraine), 9.2 million in 1931, 7 million in 1936, 7.6 million in 1954, 8.5 million in 1975 (including 300,000 farm labourers). In 1975 there were 3.8 million office and shop workers. We can note a fall in the proportion of workers in the total population (20% in the 19th century, 16% today), an increase in the proportion of them within the economically active population and a reduction in the proportion of them in the total number of wage workers : from 4/5 a hundred years ago to less than half today. It is not irrelevant that the State employs nearly a million workers, and since the nationalisations of 1982, 1.5 million.

But in the course of this what has become of the characteristic nature of the

working class ? It is sufficient to go to Poland or certain English cities to see that working class identity always exists. The development of youth culture and of music in Great Britain over the last 25 years is incomprehensible without understanding this « hereditary proletariat » which we don't have in France, at least not in the form of a world closed in on itself. But it is also typical that the most dynamic element is its youth. Looking closely at the phenomena of mods, rockers, punk or Oi, one can see that they all express a resistance by the working class community in the face of the invasion of a modern capitalist lifestyle which dilutes workers' values and behaviour within the vast conglomeration of wage workers. From which comes the loud reaffirmation : we are nothing to do with the middle class ! We are proles and proud of it, if only they'd fucking leave us alone ! When they become adults, whether they have a job or not, for the most part they lose the desire for this assertion. Like their elders they no longer have anything except passive membership of the working class. From which emerges, some years later, a new movement declaring in its turn its loyalty to the working class milieu. Rather than testifying to the vitality of the former working class community, this unrest testifies to its survival in a country in crisis, which has not managed to pass on to a higher level, and which allows a good part of its industrial strength, men included, to lie fallow.

The trees cannot be allowed to hide the woods. The massive spread of wage working breaks down the identity which differentiated bourgeois, workers and the traditional middle classes (craftsmen, tradesmen and the liberal professions). This phenomenon is less new than it first appears. It began after 1920 and only became marked after 1945. On the other side there is a recomposition of all kinds of identities (see « Before the Deluge », in issue 1 of *La Banquise*), due to the resistance of non work-based communities (local, regional, ethnic, sexual, etc). And in the same moment that the separate working class world disappears almost everywhere, the world of wage labour in its turn adopts the demands and methods of workers struggles. Now everyone goes on strike, even pharmacists.

This is something really new. This general spread of wage working from the bank Chairman, in short from the bourgeoisie itself, to the unskilled worker, has no equivalent in any previous class society. Because the capitalist mode of production rests on the primacy of production over society, when production becomes widespread it involves everyone. Unification through wages doesn't put the Chairman and the unskilled labourer on the same level. But it indicates a change due precisely to the expansion of commodity production.

Workers, it was said, supposedly held a primary role as a class because they handled the modern productive forces. However, as Marx had already said more than a century ago, the development of capitalist production produces a situation in which one can no longer locate the site of value production by distinguishing this from those which only cause it to circulate. (*La Banquise*, No

2, p. 4). There is always valorisation, but we can no longer tell that which is productive of value from that which is unproductive. All capitalist social activity contributes to valorisation. Value can less and less be located. Occupying everything, it offers less for observation to take hold of. From Swedish coins weighing up to 20 kg, to the universal credit card which perhaps we will all have one day, it has become an omnipresent, and thus invisible and impalpable, social tie.

According to Marx, when labour comes to play a negligible role, value will become null and void. A society in which the labour time necessary to produce goods became unimportant could not persist in measuring them, or in measuring everything by labour time, nor in making the whole of social life rest on this. But this was not and is not a technical caducity [tendency to fall], something making it impossible for Capital to function. Even less is it a sign that value is already a fiction, a reality fallen into disuse. This tendency to fall is a social contradiction, a (quite real) absurdity to be superseded. Maybe by a new face of Capital incorporating this contradiction at a higher level, something which is not yet the case. Or maybe by a revolution which tears apart the envelope of exchange.

21. the apparent dematerialisation of capital

Value strives to become autonomous. Capital seems endowed with a life of its own. It creates a facticity without itself becoming fictitious. To believe that it loses its being in order to no longer exist, except in appearance, is to believe in the modern image which Capital has given itself : it presents itself as having escaped its own laws, as standing above matter and as having become pure energy and movement. It wants to escape forms and yet it only lives in and through them. It is astonishing to observe to what extent fashionable theories in every period reproduce the most visible and most superficial forms of Capital. People once took it to be an industrial system, through forgetting the analysis of value. After having compared it then to a machine, nowadays they compare it to a brain. One no longer produces, one *informs*. This image corresponds to the transition to a society based on services, in which industry has become secondary. But all of this is to see things from a capitalist point of view. For, in reality, its support is quite material.

In extrapolating from the concepts of the spectacle, or of fictitious capital, or of the *exhaustion* of Capital, or even of the determining influence of ideologies, one can lose sight of the fact that there is an authority of the real and of production, and an authority of ideas, and that the first plays a preponderant role whatever the « ensuing effects » may be. One can only lose sight of this on condition of giving up rational thought. The existence of rational thought rests on the distinction between thought and reality, with reason endeavouring to establish a bridge between them. When we theorise communism we do so in the form of rational thought. This is why we put forward as an a priori that reality and its simulacrum are not the same thing, however convincing the latter is. Or rather : reality contains its simulacrum, *but not vice versa*. To those who want to think about communism from outside the dichotomy between ideas and matter, we declare that for the moment we don't have a common language with them. For the concept of praxis, or activity, supercedes this dichotomy, but for all that the two terms are not dissolved... in reality.

The flight from matter, Capital's dream, is not its reality. It has taken the form of everything and everything has taken its form. *Invariance* is quite right to stress that Capital has only succeeded through satisfying the aspiration of men, who have been separated from their community and from divine and natural reference points, to find another community, even an artificial one. Capital undoubtedly has as its fundamental contradiction that it has the tendency to eliminate the human being which it cannot do without. With each technological turning point by which it attempts to conjure men away - the steam engine,

Ford's assembly line, the computer - Capital is obliged to reintroduce them, or more exactly allow them to reintroduce themselves, **because, at the very moment that one believes it has been dispensed with, human intervention never ceases making its way, indispensable.**

As valorisation through production, Capital strives to escape from the latter in order to valorise itself to the maximum, to exist as a pure circulation of signs borne by objects, and preferably by non-material objects. Its ideal would be to eliminate even circulation, to make it so rapid that it was equal to zero. It would be necessary for it to pass without delay from one place to another very far away, to be informed immediately of everything that happened in any part of the world, to have access in a second to any information stored in a computer which was personal but interconnected to all the others, and so on. In short, that everything communicated with everything else. It would be necessary to abolish time and distance. That Paris and New York were as accessible to one another as Vitry is to Ivry [adjacent suburbs of Paris - translator]. Which implies the reduction of everything to a common measure. Are not sound and image at the same time readable, translatable and reducible to numbers ? Which would of course involve, if the dream were to become a reality, standardization : in the end there would be as little difference between Paris and New York as between Ivry and Vitry.

In the 17th century in Amsterdam, people were more concerned with stocks than with flows. It was even necessary to limit maritime discoveries so that there was time for the warehouses to be emptied. Today, the race against time, the frenzy to free oneself from it, proves that one is a slave to it. The civilisation which takes as its basis and ideology the greatest possible reduction of production times in everything, had to come to this. For this circulation which abolishes itself the ideal is an immaterial commodity, susceptible to easy storage and transportation : no longer objects, nor even services, but rather information, culture, the world transformed into light signals.

Art reflects this obsession. Futurism celebrated speed through the support of objects. It wanted to be machine-like.

« We affirm that the world's magnificence has been enriched by a new beauty: the beauty of speed. A racing car whose hood is adorned with great pipes, like serpents of explosive breath—a roaring car that seems to run on grapeshot is more beautiful than the Victory of Samothrace. »
Marinetti, 1909. [b1] [\[note\]](#)

Then the machine itself served to organise time. Movement (cinema, television) would like to escape time in order to be movement in itself. This is certainly the dream of value, comparable to the dove which philosophers have spoken of who believed it better to fly in a vacuum since it would thus avoid wind resistance : a

Capital which would be nothing but flow. The video captures time, the video recorder manufactures a different time « a deferred time, a time elsewhere » (P. Virilio) [note]: a time with which one can play after it has been stolen from us and dominates us. The movie screen like the windscreen delivers a **stream of images** to us, an automatism in place of the old routines of traditional cyclical time from which the modern world flatters itself that it has freed us. But take note of the superficial sociology. This society which is addicted to, and oversaturated with, signs (24 hour radio), nonetheless regularly interrupts this automatism. It is necessary to do this for otherwise we would fall asleep and the mechanism would stop, because it only functions with our participation. Even when passive, human beings, in the heart of their passivity, are not robots.

Economy contains the seeds of the development of automation since by nature it is already specialisation, activity separated from the rest. Production as master of society contains the seeds of standardisation, since its vocation is to radiate everywhere and to measure everything against itself. As we have seen, Capitalism contains within itself the possibility of a society of the image. What we have said about the link between money and wage labour on the one hand, and representation and alienated image on the other, also means the promotion by Capital of a culture of movement and of the elusive, a worship of the ephemeral, an « aesthetics of disappearance » (Virilio).

None of these phenomena, a grasp of which is necessary in order to understand what the Situationist International termed the function of social appearance in our society, is explicable without the economic and productive base. They do not annul it, on the contrary they draw their *raison d'être* and their logic from it. When Capital seems to emancipate itself from its support, the very manner in which it moves away shows that the link remains. And the necessity by which it ends up by sinking back to comply with its own rules testifies to the fundamental invariance of capitalism.

Money is crystallized labour. One depreciates it by creating beyond that which living labour is able to produce as new value. In 1970, in connection with the Special Drawing Rights on the IMF, people spoke of the creation of money from nothing. A series of monetary extravagances have subsequently reinforced this impression of a sign without content, which exists and maintains control because we believe in it : a circulation of pure signs, without foundations, which support one another. It's no accident that this mirage appears at the same moment as those theories which make language a relation with itself, whereas it is always initially the means for a human connection, a setting into communication of beings who are in relation with one another through acts, whatever these may be. The global economy is not a sum of fictions which have become realities through pure convention.

The debt economy and all the forms of credit pushed to extremes are the

natural product of a capitalism which lives in and upon anticipation, through being cunning with time, through restructuring it. It is not the technical superiority of the computer over the abacus which today permits infinitely more flexible combinations than at the time of the bill of exchange and the sailing ship. The real change is the constitution of Capital as both a global and everyday network at the same time. It is this which makes it possible to play with credit cards, to juggle with the movements of real and fictional capital (in the sense of capital in the form of [shares](#)). Capital can give itself (and us) the illusion of immateriality : it is everywhere, therefore it exists and yields profits without necessarily taking tangible forms, which on the contrary only delay it in its passage.

The creation of new means of payment is necessary in order to drive demand for capital and commodities, to perpetually draw Capital [from the front](#). We probably won't see, as in 1929, individuals besieging bank branches in order to demand their deposits. But a financial crisis cannot be ruled out, halted by States, but itself the cause of other upheavals. People say that the ten largest American banks would lose 40% of their capital if Mexico did not honour its commitments, and that total debt in the USA is already twice the value of national production, and is growing at a faster rate. Even in prosperous periods like 1950-70, debt was considerable. The expansion of credit is increased by the current crisis of profitability : the increasing need for capital aggravates inflation and indebtedness which in their turn have an impact on productivity and investments.

In the face of this spiral of credit accumulated by States, by enterprises and by individuals, even without speaking of the debts which are constantly paid off and then re-emerge in the third world, or about the countries of the Eastern Bloc, we see an immense liability that does not seem to be offset by any truly active dynamic, a hole which Capital floats above without seeming to fall into it. We thus see a cycle without an end but in particular without a beginning, without a point of origin in which wealth is formed, a kind of perpetual motion. Having made workers its flesh, Capital seems to have become disembodied. It offers the spectacle of an unreal, non-existent Capital, present only through its effects (everyone works, and yet...), but at its heart absent, the productive moment having become impalpable because diffused throughout the social fabric. We have the impression that it keeps going by itself, and people theorise this illusion of a de-realisation of Capital.

« At its limit the concept implies not just the elimination of « individual capitalists », but the abolition of « capital » as such and of the « economy » as a sector that is actually separated from the rest of social life (...) here, there is no longer a real « market », no longer a « production price », no longer a « law of value » and finally no longer « capital » in the sense that Marx gave this term (which contains as an unavoidable (inéliminable) moment the idea of a sum of

« values » in the process of self-enlargement). »

(Castoriadis, The Social Regime in Russia) [note]

Capital is value set in motion by labour which has become social labour, within a capitalism that has conquered everything. It is the systematic search for productivity, for time « gained », and not just in the enterprise. The debt economy can last as long as there isn't a sudden crisis in the reproduction of capital, that is, as long as profitability, however difficult, ensures the circulation of goods, investment, etc. When this mechanism is shaken too much, credit, which in itself is not determining, can become blocked and then aggravate things. *Invariance* cites an illuminating passage by Marx which stands in opposition to the arguments put forward by that journal :

« It is faith in the social character of production which allows the money-form of products to assume the aspect of something that is only evanescent and ideal, something merely imaginative. But as soon as credit is shaken - and this phase of necessity always appears in the modern industrial cycle - all the real wealth is to be actually and suddenly transformed into money, into gold and silver - a mad demand, which, however, grows necessarily out of the system itself. »

(Capital III, Chapter 35, Precious Metal and Rate of Exchange. I. MOVEMENT OF THE GOLD RESERVE, cited (incorrectly as being from *Capital* vol. II) in *Invariance* Series III, nos 5-6, p.61. [note]

The crisis calls to order the value which strives for an independent existence. Otherwise we could not understand why the car or iron and steel industries lay off personnel. If the productivity of value could be held to be a mere convention, then a fall in profitability would simply be recorded, or one would not take it into account, that would be all.

However one cannot do that because it does matter. And in the Eastern Bloc as well. (see the GLAT bulletin for February 1976, *Value and Planning*, and January-February 1977, *Capital, Profit and Crisis in the USSR*).

There isn't a « crisis of value » analogous to a new variant of the « mortal crisis » we have discussed. Nor is there a Capital which has freely escaped from itself. This theory, like previous theories of a freely organised capitalism - State capitalism, Monopoly capitalism, Bureaucratic capitalism, and so on - leaves to one side what is fundamental to Capital. For it leads to the illusion, a typical product of Capital itself, of a Capital that has become a being, dominating its own contradictions, in short that it has become a totalitarian entity : against which it only remains, in a movement of loss of reality, to invent a completely new solution.

[b1] F. Marinetti, *Manifesto of Futurism*, first published in *Le Figaro*, Paris 20th February 1909. Slightly modified from uncredited English translation.

22. when work tends to become inessential

This evolution entails a reduction in the real importance of work in our society. Those who do indeed work, who manufacture and transport the food, the cars and the furniture, who transport us, and so on, have become a minority. The bourgeois revolution was made in the name of work, and the working class revolution was to have done the same, in a different way. Now nearly everyone « works » but work itself, and not just a small part of it, has become parasitic.

These transformations are complex. If it is true, as one person says, that an American farmer feeds about fifty people, it requires two industrial workers to manufacture all the materials he uses. In the USA, the whole of the activities linked to the provision of food still involve a third of total employment. Capital gives the impression of having escaped from immediate needs - and from the crucial human activities surrounding [food supply](#) with all that this represents - but it remains subject to fundamental human needs.

Nevertheless we must take account of the fact that in a France of 55 million inhabitants the principal occupation, 5 days out of seven for eight months of the year, is that of the twelve million people who go to school. Here we have one gigantic fact of civilization, among others, which profoundly characterises an entire world.

We have seen the numerical importance of the French working class. More interesting still are the tendencies in its evolution. The following figures aim at giving a rough idea. American manufacturing industry numbered 26% of the active population in 1940 : 19% in 1980. Industry occupies only 28% of the active population in the United States, 38% in France and 45% in West Germany. On the other hand Japan is not as oriented as the United States towards becoming a service society and endeavours itself to manufacture high technology goods with high added value. Statistics have to be used with caution. Their design is itself revealing : in the United States « services » include construction, transport and high technology. Defined in this way 70% of the American working population are in service industries. There are supposedly 900,000 American jobs in « artistic personnel ».

Distribution of employment in Japan in 1982

Total employment : 56 million people; 100%

Public sector : 5.5 million people; 9.7%

Manufacturing sector : 19.3 million people; 34.2%

Tertiary (Service) sector : 31.4 million people (including 10 million in services); 55.7%

In France roughly half of the workers work in the most modern sectors : 30% in « integrated technology » (the beginning of self-regulation of the machine monitored by man) and 20% in the OST. But among these a good number work in industries with a low capital coefficient, or weak composition of capital, the unskilled being not only in the high-tech field, but also in the older sectors like textiles. In the processing industries (which excludes building, public works and transport) 44% of the workers work with bare hands (handling, packing) or with hand tools (maintenance). 23% on manually operated machines, 32% on automated machines (monitoring and control).

Of around 8 million workers, one million are highly skilled, three million skilled and 4 to 5 millions have no skill. (Figures extracted from Verret, pp. 34-35 and 50).

Ouvriers et Robots [Spartacus, 1983] shows that the active population increased from 1977-81, but more in the service sector, whereas the numbers in industry fell. Increased : administrative middle managers, employees in commerce, skilled workers. Decreased : the unskilled, labourers

In 1979-80 American industry lost two million jobs. The use of semiconductors may increase productivity but it led to a fall in labour which could rise to 10%. From July 1981 to April 1982, American industry lost 1.3 million jobs, while the service sector gained 217, 000.

It is estimated that half of the French working population and the major part of American wage workers form part of the « knowledge workers » who process data (civil servants, accountants, secretaries, etc.). Those activities for which one can conceive no use outside of a capitalist society never stop increasing. But it is not a matter of isolating and selecting the small amount of « truly useful » work that remains. Which is less harmful, advertising or the motor car ? It would still be a capitalist point of view to search for what one could keep. But the development of activities which no longer have much to do with material production or obvious social utility necessarily has an effect on a revolutionary

dynamic which claims to base itself on work. This evolution has destroyed for ever « working class » collectivity in its identity through work. The proletarian can no longer consider himself as one who, at least, makes something valuable in and for the society of today and tomorrow.

From now on, a large part of the transformation towards the service sector isn't directly explained by the requirements of productivity, but by the need to maintain the social system. When the living labour necessary for production comes to play no more than a secondary role, our society based on wage labour begins to have difficulty paying people. The capitalist problem is not then paying people to do nothing, but of finding something for them to do as the counterpart of the money they receive. Everyone must enter the monetary circuit : as a worker, as an unemployed person, as a « trainee », etc. In the United States at the start of the crisis in 1974, Moynihan proposed the idea of a minimum guaranteed income for all, less than wages in order to encourage people to work, together with assorted social benefits (housing, education, medicine) at a discount. This organisation of inequality recalls Italian « guaranteeism », the demand for an income for all those not integrated into production (the unemployed, women, students, etc.). We are slowly moving towards a society in which people will receive money corresponding to a share in consumption, even if they don't provide a share of the work.

The heart of the system remains, despite everything, its capacity to offer man prospects within wage labour. Capital could not survive, as in Rome, by offering its proletarians nothing but bread ([complete](#)) and circuses (televised), for modern proletarians work or are supposed to, and our world is based on work. Perhaps this will no longer be the case in 50 or a 100 years, but in the meantime we cannot see how the system could find another « heart ».

The crisis of wage labour, occurring at the end of a period marked by the apparent effacement of the [distinctions between](#) worker, employee, middle manager, owner, and so on, behind the notion of the wage worker, has created a belief in the disappearance of classes in favour of a mere differentiation in income or in power. The delimitations between bourgeois and proletarians are just as present however, that is to say just as decisive and just as fuzzy, because they are as complex as during the 19th century.

Capital will only come out of economic crisis by resolving its social crisis. It cannot indefinitely extend the Welfare State without this leading to paralysis, as is shown by the example of Belgium. In this country we see at the same time an immense unionisation, and the presence of nearly 20% of the working population in the civil service, in particular because of the increase in the State apparatus following communal conflicts. This phenomenon has absorbed social struggles, but also social and economic dynamism.

Capital is in search of new ways of life. In the past it opened up markets with the railroad, the motor car, domestic appliances, all products which corresponded to a phase of transformation in the way of life. Nowadays, Capital doesn't **yet** have a product that simultaneously responds to all three needs : to **improve** productivity, to provide work and to obtain objects which meet a need that is foreseen and experienced as fundamental. Electronics undoubtedly answers the third need, inasmuch as it enlarges the field of the race against time and multiplies images (equivalent in fact to a shrinking of the world). It answers neither the second need - since automation abolishes jobs, nor the first, since its implementation requires heavy investments. There remains the hypothesis advanced in *La Banquise* no. 2 : that surmounting the social crisis presupposes either a revolutionary defeat or a war - in any event an historical upheaval.

The crisis of the Scientific Organisation of Work is also the crisis of those who do not have any work. Our world is dominated by the crisis of work far more than by that of its organisation. The crisis of the Scientific Organisation of Work expresses the crisis of waged work : the difficulty in making man work for valorisation. And the crisis of wage labour simply expresses the crisis of work, the crisis of this human activity concentrated in an exclusive form which polarises everything around it by reducing all other forms.

But in itself the crisis of the Scientific Organisation of Work will not result in cancelling out wage labour. And the crisis of wage labour will not automatically call into question work and all the societies based on the triarchy of work-family-State, which more or less dominate a world in which capitalist and pre-capitalist systems coexist.

23. overthrowing the work ethic

In the 19th century the ideal of the bourgeoisie was work. The school system introduced by Jules Ferry [note] gave small children a model : the good worker. Industrial labour was the ideological mould of society, even in the importance attached to production within the projects of *dirigiste* [state interventionist - trans.] and corporatist planners after the Second World War. When Capital becomes the « real use-value » (Marx) it penetrates everywhere. Social division into classes no longer derives from a modified capitalist inheritance : Capital increasingly produces it for itself. Since 1945, it is neither the workers nor the old middle strata who have set the tone, but the new middle strata, an exclusive product of capitalism. Those who Debord theorised under the term « cadres », who share in consumption, set an example to society, while to a greater or lesser extent they involve in their way of life the workers, who are divided between the dream, still alive, of their former community, and the permissive and consumptionist mirage.

The work ethic which capitalism borrowed from Christianity has changed over the course of time and is still evolving. **Work as a necessary evil** at its origins had given way at the end of the 19th century to **work as a social duty**, but also to individual promotion. Work was no longer a natural obligation or an obvious fact, as is shown by unemployment. It was firstly necessary to work in school, in order to be able to obtain work, and if possible to « go further » : skilled worker, teacher, engineer... The transcendent constraint of the bygone era, in which religion directly served the boss by limiting itself to teaching respect, became personal constraint : work was no longer a divine law but a duty owed to society. More and more this was interiorised.

The outdated countries of the Eastern Bloc still speak this language, which has ceased being dominant in the West, where only the Communist Party and some leftists remain firmly workerist. The Scientific Organisation of Work disintegrated working class values. The appetite for work well done and pride in occupying a skilled position hasn't totally disappeared, any more than the dream of advancement within working class identity. But the terrain is increasingly occupied by **work as a means of earning a living**. Capitalist society no longer emphasises the concrete character of the worker, his capability within a field, but his adaptability and his aptitude for retraining. Man has become, for good, the envelope for an interchangeable activity whose content is of no interest. Work becomes visibly abstract.

The morality of work disappears. Heavy but redemptive labour is no longer the principal watchword. The dominant ideology is no longer transmitted mainly by the school but through advertising which glorifies the **formless** middle class.

From now on capitalism glorifies less the effort than the activity, and participation in collective life. By placing the emphasis more on activity than on work, it apes communism. Having become the totality, Capital can produce a liberal image. Who today would say like Jaures [note] that « there is no more noble ideal than that of a society in which labour would be sovereign » ?

Even if workerism has ceased being the motivating ideology of capitalism, there is certainly little merit in ceasing to criticise it. Revolutionary theory must denounce work by showing the possibility of a different activity.

24. a new counter-revolution

The decline of the former working class community is obvious. The massive Belgian strikes in 1960, the first social upheaval in Europe marking the end of the post-war period, was still the sudden appearance of crowds of workers leaving the places and areas of production in order to go... They did not even go as far as Brussels, the much anticipated march on the capital always being put back. Drawn up as producers against the State which attacked them, the workers themselves had numbers, cohesion and the weapon of production. Ultimately they made nothing of this because they remained on the terrain of demands. Once again, production was only useful to them as a means of applying pressure.

On the other hand, the gigantic strike of 1968 in France began from specific conditions but did not advance specific demands, outside of those areas where the strike enabled archaic businesses to enter the modern world, that is, those in which it made possible trade unionisation and an attack on overexploitation. As a whole, people discovered demands *after* having got going. May 68 was neither produced by an accumulation of demands nor by the masses unifying around central demands. It was a rejection that remained superficial, of a way of life, made by a society which had been plunged into it too rapidly. In the years which followed the same process was at work in other countries, one of them Great Britain where many movements were located beyond demands from the start. The bridge which had been presumed to be necessary, the gradual transition from struggles over working conditions to a more general questioning, did not occur. The revolutionary mechanism was not where people had been waiting for it.

By contrast, the counter-revolution carried the day in Poland, where proletarians, undoubtedly rather rapidly, allowed themselves to be confined in the framework of work and industry. In the riots by French steelworkers in 1979, and even more those of 1984, the workers recognised themselves and acted communally to defend their work, with the result that the virulence of their action could not lead to an attack on Capital. The recent strikes by unskilled car workers, [note?] especially as compared to those by the same sector ten years ago, were carried to a global level. However it would be a mistake to project onto these unskilled workers the image of a finally radical dispossession. In addition to the fact that they got together as a national or ethnic community, which helped them to struggle but also shut them in upon themselves by isolating them from French workers, the general meaning of their action remained to survive within their company.

The modern proletarian is scarcely concerned with an identity through work, but

precisely in this as well are to be found Capital and its triumph : to succeed so that men no longer consider their work as part of their life, but as a means to earn money. Modern lucidity and disillusionment lead to an acceptance of the separation between work time and « free » time, a negative and un-theorised recognition - even refusing any theory - of the true nature of capitalism. A universe without illusion, in which people no longer believe in anything in order to accept a great deal.

There is no reason to be particularly delighted by the loss of working class identity : while capitalist association was a recruiting ground for the rackets, atomisation is just as much of one.

The emptiness of work is obvious to many workers, and to young people in particular. Many of them doubt that it will bring lasting emotional or even material satisfaction. They make fun of the company and prefer less work with more pay. This attitude generates a kind of « disinterest » in work. People expect nothing from it but nevertheless it is done, as an absurdity which cannot be escaped. Every time that one can, it is diverted into play. The search for something « human » within wage labour anticipates communist social relations while also oiling the wheels of capitalist social relations. The aspiration towards a revolution which would free us from a work which is parasitic on life passes via these attitudes. Their essential contribution is to make it possible for people not to let themselves be used and to remain available for any opportunity to go further. An availability which is sometimes made use of by the enterprise which revives an interest in work. But a widespread instinctive rejection persists everywhere. It will be one of the starting points of the movement to come.

At the same time a new community is forming, waged and no longer working class. It is less and less rooted in work, but the classist counter-revolution is not the only form of counter-revolution. Once, the passivity of the majority of organised workers made possible the crushing of the revolutionary minority. All that Capital requires in a period of social confrontation is that inertia plays in its favour. Who can it count on from now on ? Millions of people find their work idiotic but they still do it every day, - and rediscover an interest in it by whatever means they can. The next counter-revolution (already quietly at work) will above all be waged and modern; alongside those democratic principles which are threatened by insurgents, who it will liken to totalitarians, it will put forward the values of leisure (as much if not more than work), of pleasure (and not of effort), of imagination (more than reality), of consumption (and not of production). All of these marvels, it will tell us, which we had so much difficulty attaining, and which we will make available to everybody, are put at risk by rioting. « Disorder » will not be denounced in the name of order, but of the pleasures that it will prevent. Military or police counter-revolution will play upon waged and consumerist inertia in order to isolate and neutralise subversion. In the rejection of work which is observable today, both revolution and counter-

revolution are present in embryo : the active part of this refusal, which seeks something else, something that is impossible today, will one day seek it in a revolutionary attempt; the passivity that is also and inevitably part of it, and which seeks to escape from constraint rather than discover a different form of life, this passivity will go through the troubled period without understanding it, or will see in it a danger, and allow order to re-establish itself. Of course, these two movements coexist inside the same individuals. There is only a single movement which contradictorily contains both of these « tendencies ».

The classist and modern forms of counter-revolution had already combined in 1920 : less in Germany, which was then impoverished, than in the USA which had won the war. After 1917, the way of life, the (mystified) emancipation of women, the partial liberation of mores and the expansion of popular capitalist leisure (the cinema) fought against the American communists just as much as the FBI, the bosses militias, the trade unions of the AFL and the reactionary leagues. If one wishes today a foretaste of the future counter-revolution, it is necessary to understand the reality of the FNAC-Forum [note] as well as that of the police barracks or the local trade union headquarters.

« From this point on what united Americans was less what they believed than what they consumed (...) Never in the past had so many men been united by so many material things (...) more and more, the communities to which man belonged were communities of the invisible. »

D Boorstin, *Histoire des Américains*. 3 : L'expérience démocratique, Colin, 1981, pp. 95, 96, 144.

In the 19th century the roots put down around work were geographical : the working class district, proximity to the factory, the suburbs or industrial towns separated from the « good districts ». Today, at any rate, the roots are no longer those of a separate place. The modern world is exploded into different spaces connected by motor vehicle traffic. Yet this artificial world maintains within itself a quest for nature, even canned or in spectacle : the image of Japanese middle-managers devoting a few hours of their rare days of holiday to a sauna installed in a cable-car cabin, dangling in space in the middle of a picture postcard landscape. The tremendous plasticity of Capital lies precisely in its capacity to offer men both artifice and « nature » simultaneously, to combine within its objects of consumption the ingredients which can serve as a substitute for community, for the multiplication of possibilities and for free activity.

Capitalised beings no longer recognise themselves in their membership of a class, nor in work, but in a lifestyle in which objects are the bearers of relations which provide the illusion of a certain mastery over life. Here lies the fertility of the society of consumption : it doesn't force feed, it restores a lost belonging. It is strong here where people would not think that it was : people say that it

individualises, and it does, but human beings re-socialise it in their own way, and this is its ultimate triumph. **It is this generalised social diversion (*détournement*) of all kinds of objects which creates the community of Capital – a contradictory community, like Capital itself.**

Modern housing embodies the insular life of the nuclear family, « social » housing symbolises life in separate dormitories, in which each family shuts itself off from the rest of the world. But public housing offers, in spite of itself, places for sociality. Do what you will, there will always be « common parts » in which the young and sometimes not so young will meet. That they are able to find themselves there, in this desert, testifies to the markets ability to restore, in spite of what it might wish, a satisfaction of the need to be together and to compensate for dispossession. The car is a private social space par excellence, devised for a family of no more than 4 to 6 people at most. But the car also serves a new sociality : people talk about them, meet together in order to tinker and fiddle with them, etc. In public housing the parking areas become places of life open onto the street. That the former treasurer of *Gauche Proletarienne* [note] is today charged by François Mitterand [note] with organising sociality within the big housing complexes illustrates the role that can be played by the reformism of details which was born from the most superficial tendencies of May 1968 : a role that is useful for Capital, but ultimately quite limited.

Even the television which constitutes a retreat as compared to the cinema in terms of emotional relations, is also an opportunity to create ties. With the video recorder is created the custom of watching tapes together, of lending them to one another, etc.

Capitalist society is cut up into slices which do not communicate very much, and each fragment is centred around an object : the TV, the moped, the car. The scission at the heart of their production (between the producer and his product) is also to be found in consumption. People talk of these objects, but only – nearly only – about them. The sociality for which these objects provides the opportunity remains centred upon them, and it contributes to focussing us on them. The sociality remains incidental and it is rare that it goes beyond its object.

Orwell imagined that in 1984 cameras would unceasingly monitor us in our homes. But it is not necessary to spy on us in order to know what we are doing. We all look at a screen.

In 1957, in *The Uses of Literacy*, Richard Hoggart [note] scornfully imagined a society in which workers would manufacture television sets all day before spending their evenings watching them. But this is an intellectual viewpoint. There is always necessarily a time and place in which beings meet together : in a

vacant lot, in a playground, in a pub... One cannot base a society on passivity alone. Any attempt to do so results in a social paralysis which slows down any dynamism, as in the Eastern Bloc countries, within which, however, being together discovers other outlets in order to exist. Without the parallel economy and the black market, the economy of State capitalism would collapse. There is never a direct submission of isolated individuals vis-a-vis Capital. The perpetual reforming of communities serves both as the basis of a communist movement and as a network of relations which maintain social inertia. To put it another way, the fact that Capital hasn't domesticated us and cannot do so, means that we are inside it and that it only lives through us.

The most simplified work preserves something of the « *general categories of human labour* ». His training sets in motion « *the general categories of human socialisation : controlled use of the body, disciplines of the uses of space and time, handling codes of communication (verbal and non-verbal, written and unwritten), assimilation of the norms of group sociality... This general art of the economy of the body : applying his effort, conserving his energy, selecting his gestures, coordinating them, associating them with their mechanical extensions and constantly managing the complex balance of object, means and labour power.* »

(Michel Verret, *Le Travail ouvrier*, Colin, 1982, pp. 43 and 44).

25. futile escape routes

The idea of the death of the proletariat is currently fashionable, along with the interpretation of Marx as an apostle of industrial development. Gorz [note] speaks of the transition of the working class into a « non-class of non-workers », made up of those « without status » and « without class ». The refutation of this sort of stupidity is all too easy. But it is not enough to show that there is undoubtedly something more to Marx than a eulogist for the productive forces, nor is it enough just to prove the permanence of the communist movement whose end thinkers have been announcing for 150 years. It is no longer a question of knowing whether or not it will succeed. But of understanding the forms it takes and will take.

People have often pointed out (for example at one time the *Bulletin Communiste* of Aix [note]) that the definition of the proletariat oscillates between two poles : the « philosophical » and the « sociological ». Sometimes people give a concrete content to the concept of proletariat-as-social-negative by going back to the actions of proletarians. They produce mass psychology or working class sociology and they move away from the central question : the production of communism by capitalism. Sometimes, faced with the anti-establishment but non-communist (or barely communist) practise of these self-same proletarians, they explain that they will undoubtedly end up by acting according to their fundamental being. They ceaselessly move from the worker to the proletarian, from industrial disputes to communist subversion, from the concrete but hardly satisfying to an attractive but non-existent abstraction, without ever producing a theoretical synthesis of these things. Perhaps because we do not know how to see the beginnings of the synthesis that is sketched out in the deeds and actions of these proletarians.

« The current crisis of international capitalism hasn't produced a revolutionary movement again, paradoxically it has only aggravated the crisis of modern revolutionary theory. »

(L'Internationale Inconnue, *La Guerre civile en Pologne*, 1976)

The inability to grasp the phenomenon of the « proletariat » underlies the origins of a whole set of temptations and deliriums. Forgetting the nature of the proletariat and the constant dialectic between integration and negation, is to conceive of a proletariat which « deep down » has remained pure, *beneath* the bureaucratic labour movement, to imagine that it is the Communist Party, the CGT, etc., which are the primary obstacles to a revolutionary ascent, and to concentrate efforts on them. From which comes the Stalinophobia of some ultra-lefts and the anti-trade unionism of some autonomes. From here proceed those « strategies » aimed at forcing an imaginary « lock » through violence or

through scandal etc.

Instead of calling into question the current view of a progression from demands to revolution, people may be seduced by the idea of selecting demands that are supposed to be radical. For example, a considerable reduction in hours of work and 100% of wages for the unemployed and people who have been laid off. « (...) the reduction in hours of work and guaranteed wages are objectives which presuppose a necessary confrontation with the bosses and the bourgeois State » (*Le Communiste*, organ of the International Communist Group (GCI), no. 9 February 1981, p. 25 [note]). However as the Communist Party of Italy put it in its Rome Theses, quoted in this same journal : either reforms are achieved to the benefit of Capital; or else they are not achieved. There is no magic demand.

No revolutionary organisation will be based on the factory. Communist action and regroupment will only be done around a global project which is not internal to the enterprise but opposed to it. A global demand cannot be grafted onto a partial demand which contains nothing « universal ». A partial struggle may very well create the conditions for a global demand, but revolutionaries do not provoke that transformation. Their contact with the social movement only takes place if the latter already contains a more wide-ranging demand, a general refusal, a critique of the totality, even one that is summed up in the simplest gesture. There is no gradual progression from industrial disputes to revolution : revolutionary action does not consist of « radicalising » struggles. Perhaps communist workers will meet one another through struggles over wage demands but groups of communist workers will form themselves in opposition to those demands.

Proletarians no longer mobilise on the basis of a programme of changing their condition within capitalism. But whether one likes it or not they conduct struggles in which the encounter with the reformist dead end gives rise to informal radical kernels. The initiatives by groups of young workers played a key role in triggering off the strikes of 1968. It is up to us to contribute to the activity of such kernels, when this possibility exists. But it is futile to incite reformist acts confined within capitalism to go further, while insisting on the « unity of the class », for it is reformist activity itself which divides it. The demand will always be that of one category as distinct from the others.

Revolutionaries don't have to bring organisation to proletarians. Until now all movements (including the Communist Left) have wanted to organise human beings and to find a means of uniting them in order to act. The only durable organisation today is that of Capital. The networks of factory cells or workers' committees which have attempted to form themselves in various countries such as Italy, condemn themselves in advance because they pose the revolutionary problem on the basis of the workers' condition instead of criticising the workers' condition on the basis of a refusal of a way of life and of capitalist

production.

26. a question as old as the working class

The question of the link between demand struggles and communism has never ceased being debated. According to the *Communist Manifesto*, the real success of workers' struggle lies « not in the immediate result, but in the ever expanding union of the workers » [note]. Bordiga cited this passage in 1913 in order to justify the traditional position [note]. However at that time workers struggles developed the trade union apparatuses as much as they did the unity of workers : they thus played both for and against revolutionary proletarian experience at the same time.

From inside the Kautskyite thesis of consciousness being brought to the masses, Lenin, in his way, had a presentiment that *revolution is not the continuation of reform by other means*. From the start, the Mensheviks and Trotsky, and later on Korsch, denounced the illusory and « anti-materialist » nature of a split between a reformist « labour movement » and a « socialism » which one would introduce into it. But their refutation neglected the reality of the problem which had been raised but not resolved by Lenin, and which initiated what he himself in 1911 termed « a grave crisis inside Marxism ». [note]

The German Left took up the question, especially with the ebbing of the revolutionary wave, by implicating, not just the reformist organisations, but even the reformist activity of proletarians. Gorter commented thus on the split in the KAPD « *The Essen tendency is correct in theory when they say : when it is certain that an action is not revolutionary and cannot become revolutionary the Union [note[b2]] and the K.A.P.D do not take part in it.* » [note]

For their part, the anarchists before 1914 made a severe critique of trade unionism, not for its failures, but for its successes. Malatesta, who in 1914 took an internationalist position, declared in 1907 :

« *For me the labour movement is only a means - the best means obviously (...)* This means, I refuse to take it as a goal, and I would no longer want it, even, if it were to make us lose sight of the whole of our anarchist conceptions. » [note]

However, just like Marxism, anarchism would seek a place in which the worker is radical : the trade union, in which anarchists would play a large part. Leninist party or so-called revolutionary trade union, a social space in which « the class » was truly itself was always deemed necessary. Henceforth this self-contained, protected place is an archaic utopia.

27. what centrality ?

It is no longer on the basis of work that a critique of the world can be made, but on the basis of a critique of work. Both in the enterprise and elsewhere.

The communist revolution is an explosion of activities. Far from just folding their arms, men will appropriate within their districts, their regions and across the seas, those immense reserves of food, energy, clothing and so on, which have been accumulated by Capital, and will begin to make them circulate communally. They will dismantle the big industrial combinations, cause the means of production thus diverted from their capitalist use to circulate within society, destroy *the raising of veal calves in stalls*, etc. They will restart forms of production, but certainly not within the preserved framework of the factory or the enterprise. The communist revolution will destroy the unit of « enterprise ». The enumeration of all these tasks is not programmatism, an abstract utopia detached from a movement, but a statement of the necessities inscribed within the capitalist contradictions which are at work today.

The communist revolution starts when workers and non-workers begin to abolish the division of labour, and thus the identification of individuals with a function. The fact still remains that the welder is more capable of *immediately* criticising the function of « welding » than is a professor of music. Admittedly, this immediacy will have to be rapidly gone beyond, on pain of eroding the movement. But not to see the need for this initial moment is to refuse to wonder about the question of the movement itself in order to see only the goal.

The welder in a big company is more capable of acting on society than the professor of music. But a difference also separates the radio technician, whose expertise can be decisive for the propagation of a movement, from the nuclear power worker who will have to destroy his own company. These « obvious facts » depend on a fixity of social functions which Capital already tends to decrease. In countries such as the United States where social mobility is greater, the same individual can more easily be in turn a professor of music, then a welder and then a nuclear power worker. Occupational experiences are less rigid, more assimilable and more interchangeable than a hierarchical capitalist society would have one believe. This process, which is already at work, would obviously be multiplied tenfold by a revolution which shakes up skills and causes to emerge, as in any historic breakdown such as a war, an unsuspected wealth of inventiveness.

Nonetheless the critique of the work of the welder contains a critique of the work of the professor of music, rather more than the reverse. For it is on the model of the simplest work done by workers that all human activities are reshaped by Capital. The true central crux is thus the critique of work itself,

which freezes the respective qualifications and statuses, thereby dividing categories and groups from one another. The critique of work is the critique of determination in relation to production, and thus a critique of classism.

In order to succeed, the critique must be that of everything which, to the point of absurdity, turns around work. The decisive moment lies in the transition to a different activity, that breaks down the frontier between work and non-work and between the enterprise and everything else, which amongst other things means free access to material and machines, and a circulation of beings and goods which dissolves the place and time called « work » in order to exercise it in different settings, not separated from other vital functions. The communist revolution is thus at the furthest pole from the withdrawal of personnel into the enterprises, closed places which will only be visited on « open days », as could still be seen in 1968.

Today a communist movement can no longer be mediated by production. It is necessarily a break with it, in the sense that the production of the means of existence ceases to be a specialised activity, regulated by an abstract general equivalent. **This is why the proletariat is not just defined by dispossession but also by the inevitably collective attempt to re-appropriate what it has been dispossessed of.** The proletariat is inseparably defined in relation to capitalism and also in relation to communism.

The revolution will be made neither by modern young people nor by proles who are proud to be such. Any more than will it be made by the disintegrated and the disaffected. A universe entirely formed of the dispossessed would be barbarism. The revolution will be made people who even inside capitalism endeavour to do something different, and to weave relations other than capitalist relations. The insurgents will not have in mind a project for an ideal society, but projects about what they intend to do in this or that field, which will be born in the movement, and whose convergent, but not necessarily immediately harmonious realisation will be the communist revolution.

True positivity lies here and not in work or in technical expertise. On the contrary technical capacity and the ability to learn how to make new things, depend on this availability, on this *capability to join together* in order to practise these activities. It is thus not pessimism which causes people to act. Desperate people don't make a revolution. The insurgents will not be annihilated people. They will be people who are dissatisfied, but whose dissatisfaction bears on the absence of a wealth which they will try to produce. Capitalism by contrast produces an empty dissatisfaction, closed in upon itself and without an object. The proletariat will be made up of individuals in search of their humanity. Their past experience, collective and individual like all experience, including that of the worker, will contribute to this search. **The basis of proletarian community can therefore not be lack or emptiness, but a beginning - obviously miniscule**

in the pre-revolutionary period – of the practical and associated re-appropriation of the conditions of life.

The proletarian will deny himself. Does this mean that radical workers *must* leave the factory? In any event, certainly not in order to leave it to reform. In 1968 the extremists, too few in number in the enterprise, were obliged to meet elsewhere. Rather than leave the enterprise, revolutionary workers will do something with it, beginning by opening it to the rest of the population. Within machines there is a concentrate of human life which is not always to be rejected. In a good many cases one will shut them down or abandon part of them. Sometimes proletarians will destroy them as the remains of a hated past. But it is obvious and beyond any speculation that workers will be necessary if only to destroy harmful forms of production! It is also obvious that they will be useful in many other ways. Those who handle metals will have a role to play. But if they act as metalworkers only, or as such, they will not handle them in order to remove from the installations and workshops their quality of being Capital. A movement of producers which preserves its determination in relation to production has an anti-revolutionary role. The revolution is dis-accumulation. It is a matter of reconstructing a life within which people will perhaps realise that the professor of music has, amongst other dimensions still to be discovered, an unsuspected taste and talent for welding.

There is no social group invested with a mission to save the world. Unlike the bourgeois revolution, the communist revolution is not the emergence of a class in the socio-occupational sense, although the revolution must be capable of overthrowing the economy in order to suppress it, which presupposes that it takes on the economy. Some workers are better capable than others of turning their function against Capital and revolutionising it.

The workers of LIP [note] traversed France without ever leaving the limits of their enterprise. The enterprise is one of the technical centres of the communist revolution, not its social centre of gravity. On the contrary it is necessary to radically change this centre of gravity of capitalist society. The existence of the enterprise includes that of the school, of leisure, of private life and all of the dividing up of life. The revolution will not be an *inter-enterprise*.

Hence the insufficiency, if not the harmfulness, of any struggle centred solely against exploitation. That we are exploited to the benefit of a minority, and above all of an impersonal entity, is a dreadful reality, one to which the revolution will put an end. But ever since he has existed, the proletarian has undergone a much greater wrong, one which incorporates exploitation. He is expropriated of himself, of the possibility of acting and of doing; here is the fundamental wrong of which exploitation or theft is only an effect. If one gave the proletarian his wage without obliging him to come to work, the exploitation

would not remain any less, it would even be aggravated : one would have transformed him into a consumer condemned to a free and empty activity, an eternal game without anything at stake. [b1] **The proletarian is expropriated of his doing, in other words, of his being. It is this that the revolution must take on.**

[b1] This is the capitalist utopia pursued by guaranteeism.

28. work and exclusion from work

The inessentiality of work also results in an increasingly blurred boundary between those who work and the rest, and between those who have stable employment and the rest, in short between work and non-work. In West Germany, for example, they succeeded in preserving the sociological basis of the trade unions until 1980. But from that date the skilled workers in some large enterprises began to experience unemployment, and in 1981-2 the real income of wage workers decreased. The deal struck between Capital and a privileged fraction of workers - a guarantee of employment in exchange for accepting a fall in income - ceased being respected as in the past. This is the moment to note that the use of statistics makes it possible to convey an idea of things but it must always be accompanied by a questioning of the very nature of statistics. Not just because the expert is always at somebody's service, as the militant would say, but equally and especially because the very concept of statistics, the idea of measuring social facts, is an historical capitalist concept, and the so-called « facts » are themselves historic realities. In creating wage labour, Capital creates at the same time the category of those excluded from wage labour : the « unemployed ». The unemployed person may be someone who doesn't work but he is above all someone who isn't paid. What the experts call work is full-time, productive and profitable work. When this idea is applied to the third world, we are led to measure the pre-capitalist vestiges with a capitalist yardstick. According to the ILO, nearly half the adult African population is unemployed. However a final separation between work and rest of the activity has still not taken place in Africa. Does the capitalist expert consider that the African who supervises his goats while chatting before making a detour in order to give his wife a hand in the house, « works » ?

It's no longer necessary to believe that we had to wait until now in order for a theory of the excluded to appear. After 1870, Bakunin considered the Italian proletariat to be the « proletariat in rags » of which Marx and Engels spoke, despised he said, by the Social Democrats, and to which he opposed « a class of privileged workers who, thanks to their considerable earnings, prided themselves on the literary education which they had acquired » and who differentiated themselves from the bourgeoisie « by their situation but not at all by their spirit » (cited by Sergent and Harmel p. 413) [note]. For Bakunin, « only the proletariat in rags is inspired by the spirit and the force of the next social revolution, not at all the bourgeois layer of the working masses. » (ibid p. 414)

Some anarchists like Sebastien Faure [note] counted on the *déclassés* and not on the trade unionised workers, who were characterised as the « worst enemies of the revolution » which would be made by the « the dark mass, the mass of the unemployed and the starving, who must serve as the point of departure for

anarchist demands » (text of 1896-97, cited by Maitron, *Le mouvement anarchiste en France*, Maspero p. 275). [note]

« *The unskilled, the unemployed, tramps, the downtrodden [pilons ?], prostitutes, déclassés, are the revolutionaries of tomorrow. By representing the unemployed, individualist and anti-trade union anarchism will have an economic base and will possess social significance.* » (1907) [note]

At the beginning of the (20th) century, in his critique of intellectuals, J. Makhaiski [note] sometimes included peasants and the lumpenproletariat in the proletariat, but he excluded from it those workers who left their class and became intellectuals or privileged wage workers. In the same way he refused to condemn « what the bourgeoisie and the trade unions call "hooliganism" » (text of 1907 in *Le Socialisme des Intellectuals*. Le Seuil, 1979, p. 29).

More recently, Italian workerism (*operaismo*) has supported the thesis of two societies within the working class, which can also be found outlined in Karl-Heinz Roth's book on « *The Other Workers Movement in Germany* » [note]. Immigrants are often used as the basis for a theorisation of exclusion.

However there has always been exclusion and all that has changed today is the form which it adopts. Marginalisation, marginalism and the refusal of work are not new but henceforth they express themselves far more *inside* a capitalism which has included everything. In the 19th century it was very often work which refused the worker (45% of the population of Paris was supposedly touched by unemployment in 1846-8) whereas today the worker sometimes refuses work. And this refusal can even be expressed *within work*, through the choice of temporary employment, « odd jobs », etc. The same kind of movement has taken place in the school : « obligatory » schooling to the age of twelve (1884) was only achieved around 1910. In Paris at the start of the (20th) century, of 200,000 school age children 45,000 didn't attend. Today the refusal of school is no longer primarily truancy but expresses itself *inside* the institution.

There is also fluidity - in the most modern countries - between different professional activities and between the phases of work and unemployment. The bourgeoisie has occupied itself in conducting an entire propaganda in order to « de-dramatise » the situation of the unemployed, and unemployment is more and more seen as a break, not always dreadful, between two jobs, just one moment in a working life. In the Third World there are still extreme cases such as at the time of the Chilean strike in which the owners dismissed 5,000 workers in order to immediately hire 5,000 others. It is perhaps in the old capitalist countries, like France, that fluidity is least strong, as compared to the US on the one hand or the not very industrialised countries on the other.

According to the ILO, « black » work involves nearly 10% of the working

population of the industrialised countries, in which it is sometimes more important, numerically, than unemployment. It affects between 3 and 5% of the active population in France, between 8 and 12% in West Germany and between 13 and 14% in Sweden.

« (...) it is hard to imagine the functioning of a society in which a large number of citizens carry on illegal and undeclared activities » (ILO Report, *le Monde*, 18th August 1983).

There is thus no particular reason to theorise the excluded who are no more excluded from themselves than is the worker on his assembly line. In the big movements after 1917, strata which were completely integrated into production could be seen rising up. Sociological explanation has its limits. Especially in a period in which the excluded gravitate around work while the worker himself can with difficulty be summed up through a work he knows to be precarious. Between stability and unemployment there is thus an infinite number of more or less graduated variants.

One should not seek among those excluded from work a more radical critique of work than among those who have a job. While it is true that the worker can reveal himself to be conservative through fear of losing his job, it is no less true that the excluded can show themselves to be just as conservative through the desire to find or regain one.

It is useless to seek a « real » proletariat in order to replace the worker, who is supposedly integrated in to Capital. We have said that total dispossession breaks and renders people apathetic - unfit to carry out any social change. In this society the most crushed and the most excluded are the « underclass » the number of which varies according to the criteria used in order to estimate it. People speak of 500,000 adults in France (plus their families) - 20% of them unemployed, 20% sick or disabled, 60% in intermittent or irregular work. These people have the greatest difficulty in opposing society because they are crushed by their exclusion and withdraw into the ties of family, clan and neighbourhood.

29. the universalisation of capital as of the proletariat

We can illustrate the worldwide expansion of the proletarian experience and its contradictions through two convergent examples. The Gambian revolt in 1981, a radical and unrestrained movement, which faded away because it did not have a specific demand to put forward, and because it took on the entire world order. And the strike which, for eighteen months as this is written, has opposed 250,000 workers in Bombay to the textile bosses (*le Monde*, 17-18 April 1983). These two examples seem to be at opposite poles to one another. On one side a radical and anonymous riot, close to a *jacquerie*. [note] On the other, a massively supported strike, conducted by a populist leader. But they demonstrate that the geographical expansion of the proletariat by means of industrialisation also reflects the contradictions of the proletarian movement across the globe.

Marx was mistaken in foreseeing an inexorable march of industry across the world. Despite what he knew about the fundamental inequality of capitalist development, he believed, in the case of India for example, that industry begets industry, whatever the will of the metropolises. He underestimated the possibilities for the great capitalist powers to freeze the economic development of the *less developed* countries. Inside even the most modern countries, as in the backward countries, Capital itself creates backward zones and zones of over-development. The total reign of Capital over the world does not proceed through the transformation of all men into wage workers and of all objects into commodities, even in the most advanced countries (American agriculture).

But, above all, Marx lent weight to the idea of going beyond the limitations of the revolutionary movement through its extension to the whole world by means of industrialisation. Amongst other things he believed in the withering away of the nationalism of the workers when Capital became fully internationalised. We have seen what became of that idea. Following Marx, we tended to underestimate Capital's capacity to create a community, and to become a community itself. It is obvious that Marx at least partly shared the bourgeois idea of a kind of global unification which would simplify problems by eliminating part of their ambiguity. This cannot be explained without a belief, on his part, in the positive virtue of industrialisation, forcing proletarians to unite, to see opposed to the community their condition on every continent, and to act accordingly.

The support which Marx gave to the liberal bourgeoisie, from the *Neue Rheinische Gazette* in 1848-9 to his support for Lincoln, had no other motive than to accelerate matters. In the same way his support for working class

leaders and organisations who were in no way revolutionary, had its origin in the belief that through dominating everything Capital itself would clarify things, by purifying the workers organisations and leaving no other choice than a revolution which might even be peaceful, because the strength and scale of the movement would force the bourgeoisie into it.

30. the communist movement is that which tends towards going beyond capital

The communist movement proceeds from the critique of what all the variants of the proletarian condition have in common. In order for the proletariat to exist in the sense that we give this word, i.e. in its two-fold aspect, both capitalist and communist at the same time, a revolt is necessary against that which is common to its conditions of life, a revolt, therefore, against the work of the secure worker, of the insecure (*précaire*) worker, of the unemployed person and of the person who doesn't work because they are too young or too old, etc. The organisation and disorganisation of work is thus one of the privileged sites of the appearance and the activity of the proletariat.

Its collective, or violent, or massive, or anti-institutional, or even anti-market character is not enough to make a movement a communist movement. On the one hand there are certain kinds of depredations which in no way prepare the revolution, and on the other, strikes which contribute to the appearance of a communist aspiration can emerge from minor or apparently banal causes.

It is not the fact that it is content to assert hostility to Capital in principle, or to tackle one of its aspects, which makes something communist, but rather that it contains, in tendency, a different social relation to that of Capital. For example one of those strikes characterised as « anthropological revolts » because they take on the reduction of work to gestures separated from their intelligence, detaching hand from brain. But in this kind of strike there is only such a *tendency* on condition that there is *confrontation* (violent or not), in other words an opposition between what Capital offers, even as improved through job enrichment or through rights or through a workshop collective etc., and another solution so different that it is not acceptable to Capital. Which will not prevent Capital from reabsorbing this communist impetus if necessary. Nothing is radical in itself, everything is the site of a contradiction.

Conversely, a struggle against Capital which simply asserts an opposition, even if it sabotages the economy, only puts it into crisis without leading anywhere. We do not have to be particularly delighted by something which limits itself to amplifying the crisis of Capital without outlining the contours of a new world. Social struggles are important for communism when they cause a search for a different sociality to that of capitalism to emerge. Thus the sole criteria is not that they are against capitalism but that they head beyond it without believing themselves to be there already.

Four years of Polish social struggles have ended in a balance sheet in which

there is nothing for revolutionaries to rejoice over. There can hardly be any doubt that to date the counter-revolution has triumphed, including inside the working class, because the scale of the struggle still didn't bring out the initial forms of a different life. No more than its size, the violence of a movement doesn't constitute a decisive criteria. Working class combativity is not incompatible, for example, with membership of Stalinist parties. American workers have conducted fierce strikes, guns in hand, while supporting racist and chauvinist trade union leaderships.

Despite its size the movement of 1936 [the French Popular Front - translator] led to the integration of workers into the State. By contrast that of 1968 corresponded to a break. In order for an immediate movement to prepare the revolution it is necessary that there is something general in play. It is at the deepest level, that of a rejection of the facts of capitalist logic, that communist ties are established between proletarians.

31. nothing only exists as negation not even the proletariat

In order that the proletariat rises up and constitutes itself as a coherent force (which is the same thing) it is certainly necessary that it exists prior to its uprising, and that it exists at least in tendency within capitalism. Thus it exists, at least negatively.

However what is a negative existence ? Camatte had the merit of indicating the seriousness of the problem by stating that the theory of the proletariat was the theory of a absent. If the proletariat only has reality within a dynamic, and if it cannot be reduced to any statistically observable quantity, even so it still doesn't lead a purely negative existence. Like any social force, proletarians abhor a vacuum. People who no longer believe in anything, who are content to wait for communism, who do strictly nothing apart from earning their living, will become objects of Capital, forms ready to be filled with any capitalist content which presents itself as a break in the routine.

Previously one emphasised the positive : the revolution was supposed to free labour from Capital. But proletarians can no longer base themselves on anything which exists in this world. And nothing can just be based on a feeling of rejection of the world, or upon affinities on their own. If this were the case, we would not just suffer from a difficulty in being and in acting when the time comes, but quite simply from an impossibility of being. The real monster would be that chimerical entity : the proletariat. And the reality would be that of demand struggles and people ready to die for anything except for the revolution.

Two examples illustrate the difficulty of an existence which is neither exclusively positive nor exclusively negative. In 1974 during a four day strike in the car industry in America, [note] it was necessary to wait for three days before demands were formulated. The dismissal of four workers and a shop steward, which lay at the origin of the strike, was considered a mere pretext by the strikers. They did not recognise themselves in this cause alone and did not advance specific demands. The strike became widespread, and refused the routine of ritualised conflicts without rising to revolutionary acts. Thus it is with many conflicts which erupt in the vague hope of producing something different. People don't believe in obtaining tangible improvements through concessions by the bosses but despite everything they demand them. As the « something different » to which they aspire only makes sense at the level of the whole of society, something which everyone is conscious of, the strike dies by itself, sometimes through confrontation, sometimes through simple disaffection, and the trade unions obtain concessions. Such strikes could not

take place without the continuation of previous skirmishes during which the different demands are put forward. In the case of the strike by car workers referred to above, the workers managed without the trade unions and their movement was violently anti-trade union.

The English riots in the summer of 1981 themselves tended towards a universal, which, precisely because it was universal didn't manage to emerge, whereas the black American rioters in previous years could easily take refuge behind a programme which could be summed up as follows : us too! (for reformisms) and us! (for the fraction with radical pretensions). There was no « us » possible in the English streets in the summer of 1981 because the adherence of the participants was supplied directly by the actions themselves. The rioters were not there as members of a specific group. Their movement exhausted its strength in what it did. It was a clear refusal of everything, without any other perspective.

The aforementioned examples show that today communism doesn't necessarily differentiate itself from the rest of the movement of society by what it does. In every case it always distinguishes itself by the way in which it does it. It cannot give birth to any durable grouping which can organise struggles. Its overall critique is not born from nothing, it is based on the experience of the failures of the [adaptation](#) of Capital, but proletarians only forge communist links and act as communists *following* this experience.

Their meetings and their actions immediately position themselves at the level of the totality. These meetings and these actions, their power, form the proof that the proletariat exists. There is no other.

32. from communities to communities

Everything starts from the place where social ties are woven and unwoven. Capital has no more levelled everything in 1984 than it had in 1848. Communities have been destroyed and others have recreated themselves. Today, forms of organisation function without being formalised structures, and men and groups are connected by their participation in a spectacle, an ideology, a way of life. Even fascism didn't create a social void between the individual and the State. « Nothing in a State is more dangerous than uprooted men who have been deprived of their organisations of defence » (Ley, chief of the German Labour Front under Nazism).

Both the counter-revolution and liberalism criticised the bourgeoisie and its revolution for having eliminated counter-powers and intermediate structures. But Capital has produced others. It is a barbaric view which encourages us to believe that nothing exists between the individual and Capital. Society gives rise to intermediate communities and revitalises old ones.

Often, these communities function only within capitalism and at its service. Marx and Engels believed that the Irish, torn from a secular way of life and thrown into modern society, were radical since they no longer had anything to lose and everything to win through a revolution. But Irish identity was (and still is) both mythical and quite real. In the US, the Irish formed a lobby which, amongst other things, has occupied a position of strength in New York for decades. In the same way, the social question in Ireland was reabsorbed by the national question which was poorly understood by Marx and Engels.

Proletarian action rests on existing **social** ties, it doesn't emerge from nothing and it isn't the work of completely atomised beings who suddenly decide to unite. But this kind of communal or collective tie can also impede any widening of the action. The two million Indians of the *barriadas*, the shanty towns of Lima who represent half the population of the capital, rebuild relations of reciprocity and spheres of exchange - family, individual, etc. - with the countryside, communicating by means of mestizo truck drivers, and scrape a living from the traditional crafts which they exercise for the cities middle classes.

« *The Indian, cut-off from all roots and all territoriality, dies isolated in a *barriada*, but he dies an Indian and not a proletarian.* »
(*Le Monde diplomatique*, March 1982).

Immigrant workers in the big capitalist metropolises also reconstitute this kind of network. The million and a half Turks who live in West Germany form a parallel society of which certain features (nationalism, identity, the racket and the

internal market for consumption goods) are every bit as bad as the Social-Democratic or Stalinist counter-society.

If Japan appears to us so solid (perhaps wrongly), this is because it is ethnically very united (with the exception of 700,000 Koreans out of a total population of 120 million). Conversely, the United States is divided into a multiplicity of national or ethnic groups, but these groups are united into an American community. The film *The Deer Hunter* shows steelworkers who are Lithuanian before being workers, but who sing *God Bless America* when misfortune strikes them.

The only strata really cut-off from their local, linguistic and other roots are probably the new middle classes - the « middle-managers » (*cadres*) - and again, only on condition that one closes ones eyes to many survivals. They are naturally the most inclined to live shut up in their work and their family, communicating with the capitalist in-crowd by means of consumption and meeting others through market services and leisure - at the supermarket, while jogging, at [the high concentration of holiday clubs and camps](#), etc. In the other social strata, at both top and bottom of the social scale, one finds a host of collective ties despite the fact that capitalism tends to unify and homogenise everybody in the model of these new middle strata. Even when they have arrived at this stage, even when objects are at the centre of their life, men get together (as we saw with the example of the car, etc.). All consumption tends to become a place for meeting others.

From the point of view of communism, it is necessary to see how and in what ways some communities (but not all, far from it) are likely to break down under the effects of value and of modern work, and thus of the class struggle, while giving rise to something subversive. It is necessary to seek out those communities which can open onto others, can dissolve themselves while striving for the general, for the universal, into what revolutionaries consider as the proletariat - the pivotal group.

Going beyond the contradiction between positive and negative is possible at those points of contact in which modern capitalism encounters a capacity for resistance which precisely draws its strength from what has not been erected by Capital. The communist aspiration is therefore born as the end result of a capitalist modernity, on the one hand, which offers the advantage of socialising and of unifying the world, and thus of compelling a global view of things which prevents people from just being Corsican or Algerian in the first place, and of a community, on the other, that is still not entirely capitalised, which still doesn't really accept those obvious capitalist facts, commodities and work. The meeting of these two is necessary. Otherwise modernity, left to itself, gets lost in the capitalist dream, what universal potentiality it possesses is only the universal of global Capital and its images, and man falls back into a community of

consumption. As for the pre-capitalist vestiges, they withdraw into an attachment to the soil, to this culture and that tradition, however reactionary they may be, and anything is seen as good in order to escape from the capitalist universality whose emptiness they sense, and so that they do not leave the small insular community.

It is a question of considering the possibilities for a new sociability. How can men and women originating in this or that community leave it ? While avoiding falling into the trap of « lifestyle », one can undoubtedly propose that the communist proletarian will be someone who doesn't belong to one and only one quite precise and exclusive community, « his own », but that on the contrary he circulates between several - worker with his comrades on the railways, West Indian when he attends a concert, a little bit Italian in Italy, etc. This is the opposite of all the counter-societies, which present themselves every time as a haven, a refuge in the face of external dangers.

Revolutionaries do not leave capitalism through some magic operation, they circulate from one community to others, while considering none of them as final and, through this movement, they universalize themselves. This is the image given by the English riots in 1981. Unlike that in Brixton, in the spring, which had remained ethnic and directed against the police, and their presence in a district in which people wanted to remain with one another, the disorders of the summer went beyond these local and « racial » limitations. Their strength was the fusion of various collectivities each bringing their cohesion (people came to demonstrate and vandalise among friends) and their supercession : people were no longer young or adult, black or white, local or from elsewhere, workers or unemployed. This is a moment in the life of a wage worker in which he ceases to support Capital and to be « realistic » in order to become united in a group which is nothing other than humanity - and one can only support those who bring about this movement by realising this from the start, and by living in an electric and fraternal atmosphere similar to that which Orwell saw on his arrival in Catalonia, within which the revolution was present - if only to be murdered. A different solidarity begins to take shape, other ties are woven, even if accidental, even if provisional. The communist movement lies here - or it does not exist.

The communist revolution will be a phenomenon of this type of fusion, a phenomenon which, for reasons never again fully realised, ceases to be accidental and provisional in order to become widespread and carry the whole of society away in its momentum.

The proletarian community is necessarily born from something : from groups breaking with the narrow confines of their various communities of origin. Individuals never live a merely individual existence. If they associate together, to take Marx's expression « as individuals », their past and present existence was, and still necessarily remains, more than individual : **it is social**. Unless one is

envisaging a proletariat of monsters and psychotics.

Admittedly, in reaction against bourgeois individualism, people defined the revolution as the work and affirmation of the species, to such an extent that they often lapsed (and Bordiga much too often), into a metaphysics of the species conceived as a single being.

In history, the appearance of the individual was, perhaps paradoxically, one step towards the human community. It was the Renaissance which invented *Man*, a general - and generic - being, no longer dependent on a place, a blood or a group, and pre-existing these determinations. « *Each man bears the entire form of the human condition.* » (Montaigne) [note]

Each member of a pre-capitalist society didn't represent humanity, and did not contain all human potentialities. One was the man of a group, of a function. What exchange and the market equivalent have given us is this capacity to include within ourselves the universal - but in its capitalist form : alone, or supposed to be so, we are essentially reduced to atoms of value which only then enter into relation with the other atomised I's that try to join with us. After having uprooted us Capital itself replants us where it wishes and refuses us the ability to exist *simultaneously* as person and as humanity. But this first separation was essential in order that we could become, beyond the individual, the social man - at the same time an I and a being-together (*Gemeinwesen* in Marx's work). In the capitalist world the only means of access to universality are culture, art, thought, etc. at the threshold of which stands a formidable tollbooth : abstraction, and which today are themselves increasingly produced and diffused worldwide by a capitalist totality which dominates the essential networks of communication.

It should not be forgotten that this individualisation, which capitalism needed and continues to need, drew man from his oppressive community in order to confront him with himself. When Feuerbach [note] postulated man as a generic being, he was at the meeting point of two epochs. Stirner [note] took up this assertion and exacerbated it : the individual-man as opposed to all the others who put him in the shade. At the same time he reduced the share of the community-man that is within us according to Feuerbach. In this, Stirner was a product of the defeat of the movement which had given rise, around 1840, to Feuerbachian anthropology. **Communist man will be communal without, for all that, ceasing to be himself.**

The individual emerges from the undifferentiated community in order to break with the fate to which he is assigned. In this sense the proletarian movement undoubtedly has an individual dimension. But emancipation is not a return to oneself in the sense of an I to be carefully cultivated, it is a return to the real relationship in which one finds oneself, in order to radically criticise and change

it. It is not a question of « leaving » - a real departure presupposes that one has settled accounts with what one wishes to leave. It is a question of acting in common with those, thanks to whom, one has arrived at this initial break, in order to carry out others that are more decisive.

In order to emancipate himself, man must also emancipate himself from the individual yoke with its pathological panoply - the exaltation or negation of the self, paranoia, schizophrenia. Everything which was institutional in ancient society is interiorised in capitalist society which also imprisons man within himself. The individual is a capitalist reality, in the same way as wage labour.

« (...) democracy breaks that chain and severs every link of it. (...) Thus not only does democracy make every man forget his ancestors, but it hides his descendants and separates his contemporaries from him; it throws him back forever upon himself alone and threatens in the end to confine him entirely within the solitude of his own heart. » (Tocqueville) [\[note\]](#)

Democracy in America Vol. II. Section 2: Influence of Democracy on the Feelings of Americans. Chapter 2. Of Individualism In Democratic Countries.

Capital grants man an individual liberty whose use it immediately restricts by rendering it perfectly futile. The main highways which freely lead everywhere - to the ends of the earth - but which in reality conform to the schema of market logic, form a good metaphor for modern society.

No more than they discover themselves as producers, as women or as Berliners, proletarians do not (re)discover themselves as individuals in order to act together. While they free themselves from a previous kind of sociality, they also take advantage of social ties which they don't necessarily give up in order to enter into new relations.

Proletarians do not constitute the proletariat in order to create a personal lifestyle but in order to act on the basis of a practical critique of work and of all that revolves around it. In this sense, the proletariat, before denying itself in order to open the door to humanity, will be the negation of the individual who, by definition, absorbs and believes that humanity is confined and exhausted inside himself. Individualisation is an acquisition that is already outdated. Communist man, as Marx heralded in 1844, radiates all of his being towards others and receives back from them in exchange - from men, animals and things.

Individual and value are the two poles of Capital : isolation and trade are the two ends of the chain. It is necessary to constantly increase the speed of circulation of everything, of money as of cars, of trains and planes as of information, the better to connect those men who are cut off from one another as from themselves. Being neither the rule of the individual, nor the autocracy of the species, communism is beyond these obsessions and, as the interpenetration of

multiple and changing communities, is the shortest path from man to man.

33. the break at the most advanced point

The revolutionary movement emerges in every great social crisis but it can also allow itself to walk into the trap that is set by the crisis. For the contradictions which this reveals also presuppose an adaptation of Capital to conditions better capable of integrating the proletariat, which is obliged to adapt at the same time as Capital and, as a consequence, to stand up against it. Until now Capital and proletariat have been mutually involved in the same movement, capitalism and communism nourishing one another without either of them resolving their crisis for good. Every social movement corresponds both to the need for the self-reformation of society and for its supercession.

While the proletariat is formed in a period of crisis, it is itself a critical state for it simultaneously clings to Capital and to the negation of Capital of which it is the bearer.

Throughout history the social tie has been too limited for a communist affirmation : when the exploited rebelled they did not undertake the complete change which is the only kind possible. When they had produced their movement it remained isolated within itself, in other words communist relations were not enriched among the rebels themselves - and isolated from the rest of the world, communist relations experienced no geographical expansion. We see slaves giving themselves a kingdom and reproducing - only better - the very structures of their servitude (the revolt in Sicily in the Second Century BC), or then seeking to leave society in order to return to their country of origin (Spartacus). After the Peasants War, Munster's insurgents sank into a self-destructive dictatorship. In the 19th Century the Taiping reorganised the land and their labour, and brought about a great of change but without going further than the liberated zones. After an initial offensive phase on the military and social levels the rebels ceased to act, their movement collapsing internally, before being crushed externally.

Capital creates different conditions but, at the same time, it creates wage labour, and as we have said not just the inhumanity of this but equally its force of attraction (through the socialisation which it brings) confines proletarians within themselves. It is for this reason that a communist upheaval is more likely to come from a clash between a highly developed Capital and a nebula of collective relations which it has not succeeded in completely subjugating.

To say that the revolutionary centre of gravity lies in the most modern zones of Capital is not to make communism a question of industrial development. Vietnam or Cameroon are no further away from communism than the U.S. In many respects they are even closer because they have been less deeply penetrated

and less ravaged by Capital. Today, the whole world is capitalist. But while communism is not « industrial », those spaces which are still partially pre-capitalist do not produce, by themselves, the contradictions which ripen a communist revolution. It is thus not a question of inverting third-worldism and becoming obsessed with some hyper-developed countries.

In any case under-development exists everywhere, in the very heart of the US as in Africa, and the most advanced forms of Capital, the most grown, even artificially, are present in Hong Kong as in London or Sao Paulo. But only the most affected countries, invested throughout with the most modern aspects of Capital can cause their contradictions to explode in the sense that interests us. The backwardness (from a capitalist point of view) of the Brazilian hinterland would be enough to smother any communist insurrection which took place in San Paulo, and would condemn it to maintain the form adopted by the innumerable Third-World riots, ever more tough and violent, over the last ten years : it would be an explosion, a negative attack on commodity relations and not an attempt to create something different. Only a society « really » subjugated by Capital (from which arises the confusion in the mouths of those who talk today of « real domination »), in other words, in which Capital is not content to live *on* society but reproduces it according to its own logic, experiences and bears *within itself* the contradiction between Capital and human community at its highest possible point.

What is important is the place in which the specifically capitalist contradictions are most advanced, that place in which the artificiality of Capital appears at the same moment that it reveals a different possibility, and thus unleashes more than a scream, a gesture of rage, or a pure reaction that is little concerned to go towards the positive. It is not a question of seeking the most powerful or most wealthy countries. We are not in quest of a « centre » of world Capital, but of a set of conditions within which communist critique in deeds can be a true positive critique which takes on Capital and not just its shortcomings, takes on what it puts forward and not just what it does not provide, takes on work itself and not just its organisation - in short, takes on capitalist wealth and not just poverty. It is because of this that we perhaps watch Denmark more than India, because the nature of Danish social contradictions could be the origin of a communist maturation, of a creative revolt against the mode of existence.

« The old Poland is lost in any case and we would be the last to wish for its restoration. But it is not only the old Poland that is lost. The old Germany, the old France, the old England, the whole of the old society is lost. But the loss of the old society is no loss for those who have nothing to lose in the old society, and this is the case of the great majority in all countries (...)

Of all countries, England is the one where the contradiction between the

proletariat and the bourgeoisie is most highly developed. The victory of the English proletarians over the English bourgeoisie is, therefore, decisive for the victory of all the oppressed over their oppressors. Hence Poland must be liberated not in Poland but in England. So you Chartists must not simply express pious wishes for the liberation of nations. Defeat your own internal enemies and you will then be able to pride yourselves on having defeated the entire old society. »

(Marx, Speech on Poland, 29th November, 1847)

34. positive critique

Revolutionary theory is not denunciation, the negative critique of society. It reveals the reason for what exists, its origins, and the forces at work to overthrow it. It is necessary to go beyond the opposition between eschatology and social experimentation. People forecast barbarism or the end of the world (even both of them) should the revolution not take place, or else they throw themselves into the everyday.

In order to get beyond this sterile opposition, it is necessary to pass through the critique of the « revolutionary », or at least of the pathological revolutionary, the one who never realises his desires and lives in perpetual anticipation of something, deluding himself and deceiving others about the truly intolerable character of the situation. Breaking with this attitude means completely rejecting those religious behaviours of which militancy is only one aspect.

It is necessary that theory which wishes to be radical doesn't limit itself to perpetually posing an *equals* sign as soon as it tackles any subject :

capitalist democracy = capitalist dictatorship
freedom to work = enslavement to work
wage labour = slavery
capitalist paradise = a hell
leisure = mind numbing
money = alienation

In putting forward these radical seeming equations, one only responds to social order with pure and simple opposition, without going further, like those uprisings which destroy Capital without undertaking to construct something else, and which are soon subdued. It leaves to one side their roots and their real relations, and loses sight of the strength of democracy, of money and of wage labour, which supposedly only hang on because men are fools who don't understand where their real interests lie. Without yielding to the fascination of capitalism, it is necessary to decide to say why it hangs on and resists so well despite its horror, and to isolate both its historic vigour and the contradictions from which it may die.

To make a positive critique means speaking about communism differently than the general terms we have used here. It means discussing mores, biology, the city, agriculture, etc. In this regard the first issue of this journal was better balanced than the second and third, a result of the need to draw up a « balance sheet ». A revolutionary journal should devote at least as much effort to this

positive critique as to the obviously essential negative critique (it is necessary to know what is happening in Poland, what the prospects for war are, and so on). Clearing the ground is only of interest if it is in order to do something with it...

... from the esoteric to the universal ...

To be continued !

« During these long night hours, it becomes possible for the factory to be conceived for what it is : in each section between 100 and 120 workers are toiling away; the inspectors are having a bite to eat; a handful of bosses scurry around in the offices; and, at the gate, several security guards sit sleeping, their hands resting on their knees. What can possibly hold such an absurd system together ? That is the question I ask myself as my hands work on. »

M. Haraszti, *A Worker in a Worker's State*, Penguin, 1977, p. 85

Quotations

« Modern Europe was born from the struggle of various classes of society. Elsewhere, this struggle produced quite different results : in Asia, for example, one class triumphed completely, the regime of castes succeeded that of classes, and society fell into immobility. Nothing of the kind, thanks be to God, happened in Europe. None of the classes could overcome or subjugate the others; the struggle instead of becoming a principle of immobility, was the cause of progress; the relations of the various classes to one another, the need in which they found themselves to fight and to yield by turns, the variety of their interests and their passions, the need to conquer without being able to overcome, from this has come perhaps the most energetic and the most fertile principle of development of European civilisation. »

Guizot, 1828.

« (...) let us separate society into two classes of men and say to them : those who only live for themselves are egoists, since they live only to drink, eat and sleep like a beast; those who sacrifice their personal interest to that of society are the social men; and we say to them : to which of these two classes of men do you belong ? well, those who tell us they belong to the latter, we will accept in our ranks (...) With such elements we are certain to arrive at our goal. »

Extract from the speech by the cabinetmaker Olivier (died 1834) at the time of the formation of the Society of Cabinetmakers.

« (...) to achieve the separation of the classes (...) »

L'Exploite, Guesdiste newspaper in Nantes, 1882.

« The proletariat itself, if it seized power, would become in its turn a dominant and exploiting class. »

Congress of the AIT (anarchist) at Saint-Imier, 1872.

« The factory, to us it is our cathedral, the cathedral of the poor. »

A retired French worker.

« (...) to enable the proletariat to develop economically and progressively set themselves up as the dominant class »

Algerian National Charter

« Let's go, brother (...) instead of humbly bowing the head while murmuring : I am a pariah, raise it rather with nobility and pride while saying : I am a worker »

La Fraternité de 1845.

« The means of recognising the enemy in all places is quite simple : his hands are his faith, and the honour of work is impregnated in his thought as in his speech. »

Anarchist brochure published between 1872 and 1874

« (...) the general strike, a peaceful weapon, [which is] however legal, and whose use would be the apotheosis of productive strength. »

Letter from F Pelloutier, organiser of the movement of *Bourses du Travail* to Jules Guesde, 1892.

« (...) we introduce creative joy into all mechanical labour, we bring people into closer kinship with machines, we foster new people. »

We, variant of a manifesto, written by Dziga Vertov around 1920 (1922)

« (...) communism is the Americanism of the 20th century (...) »

Earl Browder, leader of the American Communist Party, 1934.

« We know the main lines of this inevitable revolution, : the expulsion of the power of money, the suppression of the proletariat, the installation of a republic of labour and the formation and accession of new popular elites. »

E. Mounier, *Esprit*, December 1944.

« (...) all human activity hitherto has been labour - that is, industry - activity estranged from itself »

Marx, *1844 Manuscripts*

« As voluntary, productive activity is the highest enjoyment known to us, so is compulsory toil the most cruel, degrading punishment. Nothing is more terrible than being constrained to do some one thing every day from morning until night against one's will. And the more a man the worker feels himself, the more hateful must his work be to him, because he feels the constraint, the aimlessness of it for himself. »

Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, 1844-5.

« We are in favour of the principle of the scientific management of work, including the assembly line, including the production norm. This is something which corresponds to a stage of development of the capitalist regime. To try to hinder technological progress is to not be truly revolutionary; the revolutionaries know that the working class will be the successor to capitalism, and that this scientific organisation will make it possible to go much more quickly, at the moment of seizing power, in the construction of socialism. »

1Vth Congress of the Metalworkers Federation of the CGTU, 1927.

« The working class is closing ranks around its machines; it is creating its own

representative institutions based on labour, based on its newly won autonomy and its newly-won awareness of self-government. The Factory Council is the foundation for its positive experiences and its appropriation of the instruments of labour. It is the solid foundation for the process which must culminate in the workers' dictatorship and the conquest of State power (...) »

Antonio Gramsci, *Ordine Nuovo*, 14th February 1920.

« Do you want the television to be able to say that immigrants caused the closure of French factories ? Do you want to hand arguments to the fascists and to the racists of this country ?

- Racism exists everywhere, thunders an African » Nora passes the microphone to the translator. The boos redouble.

« In 1982 you coaxed us into going on strike », shouts a worker.

He again shows the CGT card in his wallet. His neighbours shouts : « C.G.T. assassin ! » Uproar. Nora, like a spring, again seizes the microphone. It howls in its turn, its notes carrying a bit far.

« Seventeen thousand layoffs, is that what you want ? » From one mouth then comes this terrible reply :

« The death of Talbot, who gives a damn, for us, it is already dead. »

le Monde, 5th January 1984

« The puddling furnace [puddling is the process of refining the iron leaving the top of the blast furnace to rid it of carbon] remained the bottleneck of the industry. Only men of remarkable strength and endurance could stand up to the heat for hours, turn and stir the thick porridge of liquescent metal, and draw off the blobs of pasty wrought iron. The puddlers were the aristocracy of the proletariat, proud, clannish, set apart by sweat and blood. Few of them lived past forty. [p. 218] (...) There was simply a limit to what flesh could stand, and after a while the only way to increase output was to train more men and build more hearths [p. 92] (...) Numerous efforts were made to mechanize the puddling furnace - in vain. Machines could be made to stir the bath, but only the human eye and touch could separate out the solidifying decarburized metal. [p. 218] (...) the imbalance was not corrected until Bessemer and his successors learned to make cheap steel. [p. 92] »

David Landes, *The Unbound Prometheus*, [Cambridge : CUP, 1969] p. 92, 218.

« The cycle of struggles which was completed at the end of the Seventies was born in the crisis of the 1920's, itself the pivotal crisis between the old and the new. This cycle of struggles was marked by the high point at the end of the 1950s and 1960s which through the struggle over wages and over hours, asserted hegemony in the factory, the control of the latter, [and] brought into play social relations and not just quantitative questions. The crisis at the end of the 1960s was the moment when the whole of the movement of the cycle of

struggles could have opened onto a project of social reorganisation (...) In an immediate way the characteristics of this cycle of struggles then developed as self-managementist aims, workers power, becoming hegemonic, the promotion of self-management, the development throughout society of the contradiction between leaders and led, taking their lives in their hands (...) This cycle of struggles whose content since the beginning of the 1960s has passed through the struggles of the unskilled as well as the struggles outside work or the refusal of work, has found its conclusion in what it is appropriate to call « autonomy ». »

Théorie Communiste, no. 5 May 1983.

« The assembling industries were the stronghold of skilled craftsmen, for in the period before gauges and automatic machine tools, only a deft hand could make components that were reasonably accurate or fit them together. These men were the aristocracy of the labour force. Masters of their techniques, able to maintain their tools as well as use them, they looked upon their equipment as their own even when it belonged to the firm. On the job they were effectively autonomous. Most of them paid their own assistants, and many played the role of subcontractors within the plant, negotiating the price of each job with management, engaging the men required, and organizing the work to their own taste and convenience. The best of them 'made' the firms they worked for. »

« Yet their independence was costly. (...) their skill and virtuosity were incompatible with the fundamental principle of industrial technology - the substitution of inanimate accuracy and tirelessness for human touch and effort. »

David Landes, *The Unbound Prometheus*, [Cambridge : CUP, 1969] pp. 306-7.

« England (...) is the demiurge of the bourgeois cosmos. On the continent the various phases of the cycle repeatedly experienced by bourgeois society assume a secondary and tertiary form (...) Hence when crises on the Continent produce revolutions there first, the bases for them are always laid in England. Violent outbreaks naturally erupt sooner at the extremities of the bourgeois body than in its heart, because in the latter the possibilities of accommodation are greater than in the former. On the other hand, the degree to which continental revolutions affect England is at the same time the thermometer that indicates to what extent these revolutions really put in question bourgeois life conditions, and to what extent they touch only their political formations. »

Marx, *The Class Struggles in France*, 1850.

The miners strike of 1963 : swan song of working class identity.

Moreover, since 1945 we have seen in the North a flight from the profession of miner : on several occasions the collieries were unable to fulfil their programme of execution for lack of personnel. This is why, since 1947, the company recruited foreign workers governed by fixed term contracts. In 1963, at least one third of underground miners were originally from neighbouring countries, from Poland, from Italy and from Morocco, whereas nearly all of the above ground workers were French. This is why, once wage demands were satisfied, the defence of the mine did not mobilise the population in the same way as with the iron and steel industry. Five years later, the strike of 1968 merged into the *cours national* [national trend ?], whereas the announcement of a new plan for recession accelerated the haemorrhage of young and skilled labour. As for the rest of the corporation the security won preceded by very little the hour of retirement.

The strike of 1963 initiated an identity crisis in the North which the region has not come out of. Decreed a « pilot-region » in 1959 by regional economic managers, at a time when textiles, coal and steel were no longer scarce goods, it became aware of its archaism : a region of primary industries and of under-educated, under-skilled and under-equipped emigration. Before the popularisation of the concept of « de-industrialisation », the coalfield became a land of rentiers. Eco-museums replaced factories, and schoolchildren travelled all over the terraced cottages, closes (*courées*) and housing estates in search of memories.

le Monde, August 1983.