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The Tribe of Moles

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[A Note on Terminology: The categories of class analysis used by the sociology of the traditional working-class movement and by bourgeois sociology (petty bourgeoisie, middle class, lumpen- or sub-proletariat, lumpen-bourgeoisie etc) are used here only in their conventional historical usage. We consider the scientific value of these classifications - in present conditions, and given the assumptions underlying them - to be doubtful to say the least. They have only a conventional value, inasmuch as the concepts of capital and class composition are far better suited to define the dynamic of class relations today as relations of power, which is what concerns us.

The same applies to the category of income. It is used first in its conventional and distributionist sense, derived from bourgeois political economy and largely accepted by the official labour movement; and secondly in its scientific Marxist sense, as revenue - ie income immediately spendable in the sphere of circulation, money as money, which is not exchanged as capital.

But even this latter concept is not entirely satisfactory or adequate for contemporary analysis, insofar as it carries with it a precise historical connotation: it refers to a

particular separation between productive labour (exchanged with capital and producing surplus value) and unproductive labour (which, even if it takes a waged form, does not produce surplus value). This separation becomes merely a formal distinction, of little value in analysis of present-day conditions of a fully socialised capitalism.

These contradictions of language are an expression of the contemporary crisis of the traditional Marxist conceptual apparatus. They underline the need for a creative and political re-evaluation of analytical categories, a "rediscovery" of Marxism in the light of the contemporary class struggle. We can then overcome them in a positive way, confronting them dynamically, rather than allowing them to paralyse political analysis. This is why we have preferred a certain polyvalence of meaning (at the risk of confusion) to silence - let alone a biblical and literal exegesis of Marx!]

The Tribe of Moles

This article is a provisional attempt to trace the internal development of the autonomous class movement in Italy, which led to the explosive confrontation around the University occupations in Spring 1977. Such an analysis is only meaningful if it allows us to uncover the new class composition underlying these struggles, and to indicate the first elements of a programme to advance and further generalise the movement.

Here we analyse the movement primarily in its relation to the Italian political system and the changes it has undergone through the period of crisis since 1968. With the Historic Compromise strategy of the Italian Communist Party (PCI) since 1974, the form of the State has taken a new leap forwards - towards the organisation of a "party system" which no longer aims to mediate or represent conflicts in civil society, but is increasingly compact and counterposed against movements in civil society, and against the political programme of the new composition of the class.

The wartime anti-Fascist resistance in Italy laid the basis for a form of the State based on the "party system". The new regime inherited from Fascism fairly powerful

instruments for an independent political "interference" in the process of reproduction of classes (normally left to the development of productive relations and the real subsumption of labour to capital). These instruments were: credit; the State-controlled industries; and public spending.

The party system thus came to control the basic sectors of the economy and the important service sectors. Through this control, and within it that of the Christian Democrats (the hegemonic party from the crisis of the Parri Government in November 1945 to the Centre-Left coalitions of the 'sixties) it was able to negotiate with US imperialism and the multinationals, both domestic and foreign, regarding the international division of labour, the rate of increase of the working class, the type of working class to be promoted - in other words, to organise the dynamic of class relations in a way that corresponded to the plans for political stability. In certain regions of the northern "industrial triangle", the reproduction of social classes was left to the classic mechanisms of concentration-massification of labour-power in large-scale industry. In this sector it was left to productive capital - private and public - to bring about that "rational demographic composition", the lack of which (for Italy, in contrast to the USA) Gramsci had so

lamented in his Prison Notebooks (see the article Americanism and Fordism). Here, in other words, a society was to be developed made up entirely of producers, consisting solely of wage labour and capital.

It should be added that this mechanism of advanced capitalist development produced not only factory workers, but also a large proportion of tertiary workers, so that regions like Liguria, Lombardy or Veneto have a higher percentage of employees working in tertiary activities than some regions in the South. In these latter regions, however, the intervention of the "party system" in the mechanism of reshaping and reproducing the classes seemed to take place with greater autonomy from the movements of capital.

The Form of the State - Open or Latent

The political agreements established with large-scale European industry meanwhile permitted a large number of agricultural proletarians to be transferred abroad; the production of a factory working class was piloted with great care, according to the principle that the command of fixed capital should always be overpowering. At the same time, support was given to all forms of agricultural production that maintained irrational demographic relations; there was a flow of subsidising finance aimed

to "congeal" non-productive relations and social strata, and a flow of revenue - "money as money" - acquired through employment in the public administration. All these had the effect of reproducing a disproportionately large small-to-middle bourgeoisie, based on income as revenue, which represented the social base necessary for the stability of the Christian Democrat regime.

In the long term, the effects of this policy for the reproduction of the classes blunted the revolutionary effects of the real subjection of labour to capital, offsetting the growth of the working class with a disproportionate growth of small-to-middle bourgeoisie, in receipt of revenue; not hostile to the working class, but passive, not anti-Union but "autonomous", not productive but saving, and hence allowing a social recycling of the income received by it. But this first class dynamic was shattered and thrown off course, first by the working-class offensive at the end of the 1960s, and then, a few years later, by the violent effects of the crisis - which we shall examine later.

The form of the State under the post-War "party system" is a latent form: what normally appears on the surface is a method of mediating and representing conflicts. On the one side are the governing parties that dominate the bureaucratic-repressive apparatus of the State, and on

the other the opposition parties, which are the receptacles for mediating the drives and contradictions of civil society. The form of the State comes out in the open in certain historical moments, when the crisis of the preceding regime and the development of a new class composition risk escaping from the control of the dialectic between Government and opposition. This happened in 1945-46, after the armed struggle against Fascism. The parties chose to replace their relations with the classes, with the masses, by mutual relations among themselves; and the Communist Party chose to prioritise its relations with the other parties that backed the constitution of the Republic, rather than its relations with the class and the armed movement. In a similar way, in this latest period, and playing on a similar "state of emergency" in order to overcome the present crisis (as with the post-War "Reconstruction"), ever since it chose the path of the Historic Compromise (and more vigorously since the Elections of June 1976), the Communist Party has privileged the strengthening of its link with the other parties - and in particular with the Christian Democrats. This was in order to "resolve the crisis of the State", to redefine the "party system" in terms of concord rather than conflict. By now, the unity of the parties at a political and programmatic level is being concluded like a steel dome erected over the

needs of the working class. The "party system" no longer aims to represent conflicts, nor to mediate or organise them: it delegates them to "economic interests" and poses itself as the specific form of the State, separate from and hostile to movements in society. The political system becomes more rigid, more frantically counterposed to civil society. The party system no longer "receives" the thrusts from the base; it controls and represses them.

The Concretisation of the New Form of the State

This race among the parties (above all the PCI) to arrive at ever-tighter links, this new edition of the constitutional pact signed during the Resistance and then violated by the Christian Democrats, is happening today under the banner of the ideology of the crisis and the imposition of austerity. The connective chain which simultaneously binds the parties within the new constitutional pact, and counterposes them as a machine hostile to civil society, to the society which expresses new needs, to the class composition, is represented by the ideology of the crisis. The form of the State is now becoming open and explicit through the consolidation of the pact within the "party system". It does not, in other

words, depend on the strengthening of the military-repressive apparatus: the latter is subordinate to the level of homogeneity of the "party system".

This process is a complex one, and has met with a thousand obstacles: but by now it is clearly the only way if the present power equilibria are to be maintained. Since the student uprisings in 1977, the movement towards an all-party coalition to confront the crisis has accelerated (Editor's note: The formalisation of the "party system" in an emergency "government of the majority parties" marks the completion of this process since this article was written. The new Government, based on an agreed programme to confront the crisis, includes the PCI as an ex officio participant: a coalition in all but name. This agreement was rushed through at the time of the Moro kidnapping in March 1978).

But if the form of the State, which is becoming explicit, cannot be reduced simply to the strengthening of its repressive apparatus, how then is it concretised? So far, at least, it has been concretised through a system of values, of political norms, unwritten rules governing all parties in the democratic arena, which de facto decide what is legitimate, what is legal or illegal, what is productive or unproductive, etc. Since the framework for this consensus is provided by a precise ideology of crisis,

a certain type of intellectual has assumed major importance as a propagator or exponent of the "collective consciousness" in this period.

Treason of the Intellectuals, Liberalisation of access to education, and the world of revenue
the front-line responsibility for providing the basic arguments behind the ideology of crisis clearly lies with the profession of economists. This applies not only to the high priests of the regime. It includes young economists who have taken up university posts, backed by Cambridge or Harvard promotion, and very often open to links with the trade unions. Faced with the alternatives of working-class commitment or bourgeois-academic economic science, they have invariably, more or less explicitly, opted for the latter. In certain cases, precisely through a differing interpretation of the dominant ideology of the crisis, they have contributed to it, and have helped to "close the circle". Such can be said, to give just one example, of the "New Left" economists of the Modena faculty: this could have become a centre for rigorous and well-documented counter-information to dismantle the false arguments behind the ideology of the crisis. Instead they preferred to keep quiet, or provided more lessons to the working class on prudence... how to be reasonable... how to surrender. This is only one

example of the more general "treason of the intellectuals" of the 1968 generation, which has been one of the main factors allowing the task of Restoration to take place in the Universities in recent years, and has contributed to creating the radical culture gap between the movement of '68 and the movement of '77.

If the Italian political system has been able to interfere autonomously in the process of reproduction of classes via various sorts of State provision, one of the most important of these has clearly been the liberalisation of access to Universities since 1969. Some interpret this move as a means of eroding the working-class hegemony that matured in the wave of struggles in the late 'sixties, isolating it by promoting upward social mobility. If a project of this sort was ever formulated explicitly, we are not aware of it. Let us examine the mechanism. The liberalisation of access to Universities, at least on paper, favours social promotion. A working-class youth can escape the path of the previous generation, can avoid the necessity of factory or manual work. This operation is financed by distribution in the form of presalari (grants) - the University of Padova alone accounts for over #1,000,000 a year: and by an increase of teaching staff and supplementary part-time staff.

At this point the high priests of our economy begin to complain that the criteria for financing this social mobility determine in advance the class that will emerge from the liberalised University system: a lower-middle bourgeoisie which is subsidised and "living off welfare" rather than productive or disposed to work. They complain, in other words, that the prospect of jobs that differ from factory work is not a sufficient incentive to productive labour, but rather acts as a signpost towards receipt of income in the sphere of circulation, towards the world of revenue (money as money, removed from the circuit of productive capital). At this point the whole "party system" joins in the great debate on the reproduction of classes in Italy, its distortions, imbalances etc., the general conclusion being that it is not sufficient to reproduce a lower-to-middle bourgeoisie in an anti-working-class role, if this then becomes an unproductive class in receipt of revenue!

And so the scapegoat mythology of "Hunt the Parasite" - the lynchpin of the crisis ideology - comes to the fore. Backed by the "scientific" revelations of Sylos Labini, Gorreri, etc, this new game starts in earnest. A sort of vague egalitarianism emerges, which scrutinises the income of the clerical worker, the student and the tertiary worker, and says nothing, for example, about the

transformation of capital-which-is-productive to capital-which-is-productive-of-interest: in its most shameful form, this egalitarianism assumes tones of worker chauvinism. It appears that it is no longer capital that exploits the worker, but the postman, the milkman and the student. These are the first shots in that "class analysis" which will later become the official ideology and the preferred argument of the super-paid editorial writers of the Regime's press. It is a crude and effective ideology. The liberalisation of University access is made to coincide with the crisis, with youth unemployment, with the reduction of the productive base, with the enlargement of the area of State subsidy. But most of all, to it is traced the radical new phase of the political behaviour of the masses. The circle closes: what was previously defined as "youth desperation", as "marginality" - in other words, as a perverse effect, created by the crisis, of a mechanism which had been created and conceived as a means of stabilising the system and acting (though this is now quietly forgotten) in an anti-worker function!

Blocking Working Class Autonomy and Occupying the Political Spaces

It is not easy to untangle the mass of lies and half-truths which are contained in this distorted version of the class dynamic. The best answer is to return to the roots where it all began - the cycle of struggle of 1968-69. The problem for the "party system" at that stage was not only that of blocking and marginalising a working class social hegemony which had shown itself in Italy for the first time since the Second World War. It was the problem, rather of uprooting the political forms in which this hegemony had manifested itself - the political form of autonomy.

One answer lay in the technological-type provisions that were introduced in order to break up the central nucleus of the class (the change in organic composition, etc). But less obvious was the process by which the "party system" began the conquest of the terrain of working-class autonomy, presenting itself for the first time in the form of explicit State power.

This occurred in the factory itself, with the gradual removal of effective power from the delegates (shop stewards) in the factory Councils, and above all with the

manipulation of the Workers' Assemblies, their gradual destruction as organs of independent working-class initiative and choice. The factories, which had been free from traditional party politics for more than a decade, and in which the organisation of autonomy from "politics" in the established sense was won in the cycle of mass struggles from the late 'sixties onwards, now once again became a political terrain of manipulation by the "party system". All the forms and instances of class autonomy, through which a real space for independent class politics had been conquered (even those related to trade-union mediation, such as shop steward organisation), were taken over and allowed to atrophy - and meanwhile restructuration rooted out and scattered the most homogeneous and militant groups in the plants. The "party system" took control of the organisational forms that remained, such as the Works Councils, turning them into parliamentary talking-shops.

At the same time, the extra-parliamentary groups began their suicidal retreat from the factory, and in general ceased to give much attention to problems of class composition. This has led to a situation where, today, the factory and the working class are almost unknown entities.

The larger the political space conquered by the extra-institutional movements, and the wider the cultural territory and the system of values and behaviour that these impose on decisive sections of the class, the more the form of the State as "party system" becomes increasingly open and aggressive.

But the form of the State cannot live only as a power that is hostile to extra-institutional movements: it needs a basic legitimation - namely the legitimation of its coincidence with the laws of capitalist accumulation. By making itself the interpreter of the ideology of the crisis, by organising the new constraint-to-work and the policy of austerity and sacrifice, the State-form of the "party system" arrives at the highest point of integration within the system of capital, by a process of gradual abandonment of its autonomy. But what, then, are we to make of the claim by certain heirs of Togliatti that there exists an "autonomy of the political"? Where is this autonomy? Even where this autonomy had the greatest substance - in the process of reproduction of classes - the violence of the crisis has brought everything under the iron rule of the laws of capital.

Levels and Distribution of Income and Class Composition

Despite all the talk about the effects of public intervention via the growth of public spending, all the most recent surveys (for example, the Bank of Italy's Bulletin for Oct-Dec 1976) show that in Italy there has been no change in the distribution of income, nor any substantial alteration in its composition.

Levels of income have not diminished, despite the crisis. Even the level of consumption of consumer durables has not fallen (in fact HP forms of payment have fallen). To discover how the proletariat, and in particular the working class, have not allowed themselves to be pushed to the brink of poverty by the crisis but have succeeded in increasing their needs and the means of satisfying them, would already tell us a great deal about the new class composition.

If consumption has not fallen, neither has the level of savings: and this point is significant for analysis of the "petty bourgeoisie" and (as we are led to believe) the mushroom growth of the "tertiary sector". Italian families have one of the highest rates of saving in the world: this would seem to confirm the hypothesis that the

propensity to saving in the form of banking liquidity is a symptom of the "tertiary" disproportion of Italian society and its insufficient productive base.

And yet not only does the Bulletin show that savings of lower to middle income groups have increased (1973-76 - ie in a period of savage inflation and devaluation of the lira) in the form of bank deposits, current accounts and post office savings; but also that this is a factor of equilibrium, recycling income through credit institutions, invested in the form of money capital in enterprises, public and private, and in Treasury Bonds financing public spending, services etc. The myth of the hypertrophy of the tertiary sector - the common theme of the ideology of the crisis, from the Right to the "New" Left - has no foundation. The OECD figures show that employment in the tertiary sector in Italy is among the lowest among advanced industrial countries: Italy 45%; USA 64%; Canada 62%; UK 54% - only Federal Germany has a lower percentage. Moreover, the ISTAT statistics show tertiary employment to be concentrated mainly in the industrial North.

According to the schema presented by the prevalent propaganda of the crisis, we would expect a flow of credit to promote an unproductive revenue-based layer of society - the lower-to-middle bourgeoisie, as a prop of

political stability - and a disproportionate flow of resources to the tertiary sector. Not so! The special credit institutions (promoted by the State), according to the Bulletin, direct more financing towards industry (a three-times higher proportion), or to transport and communications (one and a half times higher) than to commerce, services and public administration. Housing alone - a remarkable fact - takes up double the investment on the whole tertiary sector put together!

The Monetary Crisis the Property Market and its effect on Class Stratification

There is a specific relation between the property market and the monetary crisis. Property is the first refuge for the security of the savings of the "petty bourgeoisie" - but also for the investment of petro-dollars, the basis of the empire of real-estate investment trusts, insurance companies, pension funds etc, including the most adventurous kinds of speculative activity. According to the US Federal Reserve, at the end of 1975, about a quarter of the credits of US banks were in housing. While between 1971-74 "land and land development loans" (above all for suburban development) tripled, commercial bank credits to real estate trusts and mortgage companies more than doubled. [Note A]

In this way the prices of suburban areas have increased, making it more productive for capital to develop suburban housing, and distancing social strata with higher incomes away from city centres, while at the same time depriving those city centres of rates, taxes etc, and setting in motion the mechanism of "fiscal crisis" of public spending, which is by now a well-observed fact. However, we are only at the start of this process, because the acquisition of suburban areas has not been followed by an equally large movement of construction; while the race was on to capture land, the actual construction of housing saw a dramatic decline: if we add single-family and multi-family housing, we see a big increase in the period 1971-72, and then a sudden drop in January 1973 to December 1974. When construction began to lift off again, it was in the single-family sector, and was very weak indeed in the multi-family sector.

[Note B]

Hence vast tracts of suburban landscape are waiting to be built on, in order to make productive the capital that has been "fixed" there. In the metropolitan centres, which have become the privileged zones for the petrification of capital, the mechanism differs: in order to get this capital moving, to give it once again the form of commodity and exchange value, a specific financial

structure has been created - a series of special speculative institutions, invented through the crisis, which have increased the rhythm of transfer of property deeds and have given a considerable impulse to the velocity of circulation of money, without it passing through a process of production. In the United States too - and probably more so than in Italy - the "construction interest" has used the crisis in order to subtract resources from productive capital. Thus, there has not been a "shortage of capital" as some people have maintained: companies' risk capital has been furnished in large measure by private pension funds, which, according to Peter Drucker, today hold one third of all share capital in the USA. [Note C] Thus it would appear that productive capital has been financed by the contributions of workers, while the institutional investors - and particularly the banks which control them - have preferred to take the path of speculation in property or in exchange rates.

The huge drain of financial resources on the part of real estate and property capital brings us back to the question of the "party system". The powers conferred on local administrations are as yet uncertain, but there is no doubt that in Italy the "party system" represents the most important conditioning factor in the property

market. Large controllers of territory (the DC and the PCI) can, through planning controls, force a bargaining process onto the "construction interest", can force it to make pay-offs (which, however, are insignificant compared with the powers that the "construction interest" confers onto the "party system", as regards the directing and control of class dynamics). As some more intelligent analyses have shown, the construction cycle in Italy has functioned as a pump to drain away income from workers and redistribute it to the middle classes on the one hand, and to the "construction interest" on the other. [Note D]

The attack on incomes via the cost of housing has a direct effect on class stratifications, and is a factor of violent proletarianisation; the enforced shift towards badly-served peripheral urban areas is a powerful factor of emargination. The classes, redrawn through this process, take on the typical mixed characteristics of a period of crisis. The waged worker who, through the guarantees of trade unionism, manages to maintain his income levels, but who, for reasons of housing problems, lives in a marginalised area, produces economic, social and political patterns of behaviour that stand halfway between the "guaranteed" working class and the sub-

proletariat even if the actual status of his job might otherwise place him in the lower-to-middle bourgeoisie.

A considerable part of the political behaviour of the young proletariat during the recent struggles should be understood starting from town as a space of intervention in class dynamics. The mythical "reconquest of the city centres" is a reaction to the marginalising threat which the unholy alliance of the "construction lobby" and the "party system" is bringing about. Within this "reconquest of the city centres" there is the desire to count as a political subject, to break the institutional balances, to interfere once again in the internal relations of the "party system", a refusal to be classified as an "area of culture", and that's all.

The Total Subordination of the Party System to the Politics of Crisis

To conclude: inflation and the mechanisms of the crisis have considerably eroded the power of the "party system" to intervene autonomously in the process of reproduction of classes in Italy. The relative autonomy of the political distribution of income has been greatly narrowed. The possibility of creating status differences via income differentials, dispensing cash through

transfers of income, supplementing incomes in the public services etc has been diminished. The question of "rational demographic composition" (to which Gramsci referred in the 1930s) is now coming to depend primarily on capitalist development alone, on the organic composition of aggregate capital. Even the process of tertiary growth or creation of unproductive sectors now depends more on the development of fixed capital than on any autonomous intervention on the part of the political elites.

Nobody would deny that the "party system" had the power in past years to interfere with some independence in this process - via economic controls over credit and distribution of cash as revenue, or through export of the proletariat. But at the same time, the "distorting effect" of these choices is deliberately exaggerated by the PCI and the official labour movement. Their result overall does not seem especially different (for example in the case of the growth of tertiary activity) from the developments in other industrial countries. Nor have they resulted, at least until recently, in any significant change in the distribution of income.

If anything, they have created a social and industrial structure acutely sensitive to the problem of savings -

permitting a centralisation of unproductive incomes and their recycling in the form of money capital and public spending. The powers that the "party system" does still deploy, no longer over the reproduction of classes, but over the new class aggregation that has been formed through the crisis, are located at a different level, (ie in externalised forms of control at the socio-territorial level to disaggregate and disintegrate the unity of the class, and in perverse relations with specific sectors of speculative capital such as the property market.)

It is from within these narrow limits that the new form of the State is derived. This is not to be seen as the concluding phase of the much-vaunted "autonomy of the political" vis-a-vis "economic" development, but rather as an entirely opposite process: that of the total subordination of the "party system" to the politics of the crisis.

The reproduction of classes has become a problem of political legitimation rather than material intervention: a question of social and cultural identity, of acceptance or refusal to accept the norms of social behaviour required and laid down by the form of the State. Classes have tended to lose their "objective" characteristics and become defined in terms of political subjectivity. But in this process the major force of redefinition has come

from below: in the continuous reproduction and invention of systems of counter-culture and struggle in the sphere of everyday living, which become ever more "illegal". The liberation of this area of autonomy outside and against official social institutions, is stronger than the system of values the "party system" seeks to impose.

Hence the new form of the State, or rather its unmasking, already finds itself in a critically weak condition. To turn to the bureaucratic-repressive apparatus, to a "power-State" pure and simple, would mean the end of the "party system" itself, as established for more than thirty years.

What we have witnessed in the crisis is the subjection of the political system on the part of capital, the destruction of its "autonomy". This cannot be properly understood unless we see it in relation to the centralisation of capitalist command which defines the politics of the crisis for all parties (ie the area of "politics" itself). This centralisation is formally represented in monetary institutions, from central banks to the IMF.

For the past three years, we in Primo Maggio have been pointing out a fact which is now generally accepted: economic policy choices - and hence also the criteria upon which class relations in national states are being

conditioned - are no longer the result of negotiation or bargaining between parties, unions and so on (in other words mediated relations of force between classes and interests, but are laid down by external constraints determined by (in the last instance) the International Monetary Fund.

It is this new institutional reality of power on an international scale that provides the basic guidelines for the logic of current ideology of the crisis and scarcity, and hence also the propaganda for austerity measures. The Carter Administration has developed this particular aspect of money as capitalist command as the basis of US global policy. The relaunching of US hegemony depends in addition on results already acquired, which allow the USA control over scarcity, especially in the key sectors of food and energy internationally. ("The US have emerged as the key source of global nutritional stability" - Secretary Brzezinski, in Foreign Policy No. 23). Every "national" choice in the area of basic energy and food must come up against an international division of labour that the USA intends to have respected. The technology of food processing will be as jealously defended as petroleum or uranium. Today it is command over wage commodities above all that regulates the relations between the USA and the rest of the world. Since the PCI

victory in the 1976 elections and its acceptance of Italy's membership of NATO, followed by the recent DC electoral revival, the Carter Administration, while cautious, has come round to the realistic recognition that the only solution for political management of the crisis in Italy is the reinforcement of the pact binding together the "party system" and a "government of majority parties", including the PCI: as the sole condition, in other words, for the implementation of "austerity by consent".

The Recomposition of the Working Class in the Period Since the Late 1960's

So far we have concentrated on the recomposition of capitalist command in the crisis and the unfolding of the State form through rigidification of the "party system". We must now turn to the other side - class recomposition. To take the factory or the University as a starting point is not a problem, in that both are enclaves of resistance and recovery of an alternative class politics - either starting point would serve us just as well. If we take the subjective development of the movement through the period since the cycle of class offensive in the late 'sixties, we can distinguish two main phases of struggle. In the first, from 1969 to the oil crisis of 1973-74, the attack on the central militant core of the working

class by means of restructuration, reorganisation of production etc, was combined with the "strategy of tension" (terroristic use of secret services, clandestine proto-Fascist activity backed by the State, with considerable use of Fascist personnel). The most recent generation of militants formed around the movement of 1968-69 was consumed in the response to this attack: following the "parenthesis" of the workers' offensive, they returned to the classic schemas of the party form - the tight relation between programme and organisation, and a perspective on the struggle for power articulated according to the tactics of a militant anti-Fascist movement, combined with the conquest of the formal, electoral level of politics. During this first phase the "party system" was not yet "congealed" into the form of the State: it was divided in a sharp opposition between an executive, which mobilised the clandestine levels of the State (from the secret services to the magistracy), and an opposition which revived the democratic values and traditions of the anti-Fascist Resistance. This was, in other words, a phase of partial re-absorption of the preceding forms of class autonomy by the "party system", a recovery of the ideological and organisational traditions of the official working-class movement: a certain "introjection" of the "party system" within the revolutionary movement itself.

As regards the relation between subjectivity and models of organisation on the revolutionary Left, this first period, from the State-Fascist bombing provocation of Piazza Fontana (Milan, December 1969) to the eventual defeat of the "strategy of tension" (even if its ramifications continued up to the June 1976 Election), was marked by a general rejection of the creative hypotheses of the movement of 1968-69. This was accompanied by the rebirth in the movement of ultra-Bolshevik models of organisation, or - in the case of groups like the MLS (Workers' Socialist Movement, based on the Milan student movement), Manifesto, Avanguardia Operaia and PDUP - of traditional historical Togliattian models, embellished, at most, with Maoism. There was, in other words, a certain revival of the historic organisational; epoch of the Italian Communist Party and movement, from Gramsci to the Resistance.

This revival drastically marginalised the classic "workerist" area of autonomy inherited from the worker-student movement of 1968-69, as well as the anarchist, situationist, and more intransigent Marxist-Leninist groups.

The central nucleus of the "workers' autonomy" tendency, represented by Potere Operaio (Workers' Power) and Collettivo Politico Metropolitano

(Metropolitan Political Collective), having come up against the institutional-political limits of a strategy based on the political potential of factory wage struggles, made a dramatic choice in favour of fighting for the militarisation of the movement. This similarly involved slogans like "overcoming the spontaneity of the autonomous mass movement" and "building the armed party". It involved staking everything on levels of organised militancy, professional cadres etc. This was to be a losing battle. But the main problem now is to grasp how and why the margins of the "movement" were so drastically curtailed, deprived of political space, while only hypotheses of party organisation survived in this period.

The Political Problems of the Movement and the Developing 'Partyist' Conceptions

In general we can say that historical models were taken up uncritically and assumed an a priori normative validity and importance. Following the wave of new political hypotheses that went well beyond the communist historical tradition, in 1968-69, we then saw a wholesale recovery and revival of Third Internationalist models and perspectives. The central problem was State terrorism; the problem of power, seen as the smashing of the State

machine, further accentuated the classic Leninist features of organisation. This is true especially of the struggle to overthrow the Right-wing Andreotti-Malagodi Government up to 1972, which led to the maximum degree of convergence between the organisational strategy of the revolutionary Left groups and the institutional forces of anti-Fascism. The groups were in this process absorbed into the "party system", to the extent of "crossing the parliamentary-electoral threshold"; leading to the creation of organisations such as DP (Democrazia Proletaria), or tactics of electoral support for the PCI, like Lotta Continua. But this already takes us into the second, post-1973 phase, which we shall be examining later.

A sort of imperfect Togliattian system was in operation in this first period: on the one hand, a strong presence in the streets, militant anti-Fascism, mass campaigns and demonstrations promoted by the groups; on the other, parliamentary pressure, but above all through institutions and the Press, by the PCI and PSI, to overthrow the terroristic blackmail of the DC Government and its allies. Even the initiatives of the Red Brigades (BR) in this period maintain an objective ambivalence between extreme forms of militant anti-Fascism (viewed with considerable tolerance by certain

sectors of ex-partisans, veterans of the armed Resistance of the 1940s) and the building of an armed party, derived from within the "post-workerist" and insurrectionist perspectives of the "workers' autonomy" current we have already referred to.

We can therefore distinguish the characteristics of the average type of militant formed in this phase of the struggle: a party cadre, with considerable organisational ability, activism and presence at all necessary levels, who developed certainly from his or her own situation of struggle, but who received an overall political framework from the "party school" and the myths of the organisation. It would be unfair to say simply that this implies the formation of alienated militants, expropriated of their own subjectivity. The positive characteristics of this period, the unceasing rhythm of campaigns and mobilisations, sometimes blind, but no less effective in the long run; the new, calculated, organised use of "direct action" in the street demonstrations and confrontations; the prompt response to provocations of the Right - all these activities established and imposed a terrain of mass political practice, which became a social structure, a class composition, even if the signs of its fragility became apparent in the second period.

The transition to this second period of the struggle must be first understood in terms of the changed relation between the revolutionary Left and the factory. This was not only due to the increased emphasis on territorial-community activism (see Take Over the City and similar slogans and projects of this phase). It was rather that the restoration of Third Internationalist models meant that the scientific Marxist concepts of the factory and the working class were lost sight of. The relation between revolutionary politics and the reality of the working class was mediated by one over-riding theme - that of restructuration. In other words, a defensive terrain, which not only accepted as given the fragmentation of the "mass worker" - the driving force of the class in the previous workers' offensive - but made this fragmentation the key point of departure for organisation., This was a confusing period. The Left groups had no factory strategy; their militants were purged from the plants, either sacked (often for absenteeism), by leaving of their own accord, or taking shelter within the Unions. In some of the large working-class concentrations of the North, only a clandestine fraction was left to maintain a slender organisational network.

Not that the period 1969-73 was one of standstill as far as workers' demands were concerned - far from it. It was marked by intensive collective bargaining activity - probably the most intense since the War. Few were aware of the reconquest by the "party system" in the factories, precisely because this process was covered up by the pressure of Union bargaining. In some sectors, labour costs rose by 25% a year, not to mention the Union pressure for the inquadramento unico (unification of grading systems for workers and white collar staff) and on working conditions and environment. But this continuous bargaining activity tended to have a fragmenting effect politically: it tended to dissolve the political identity of the class, reducing it to its lowest common denominator as mere labour-power. It would be quite wrong to say that the presence of workers' political problems "diminished" in this period at all levels. The reality of the situation was rather that all the properties of the class which unify and define it as a political subject were now transferred to the organisations. The class remained as a subaltern element, as "material" for the party, in other words as labour-power. The spectre of the old separation between "economic" and "political" struggle returned to the scene. This meant a severe setback for the autonomy of

the working class: a defeat of working-class science, of revolutionary theory.

A New Political Cycle of Struggles: The Generalisation of the Political Behaviour of the Mass Worker

But if the identity of the mass worker as political subject was now dead - long live the mass worker! A political cycle of struggles as deeply rooted and powerful as that which led from the mass confrontation of Piazza Statuto (Turin, 1961) to the generalised offensive of the Hot Autumn (1969) - throughout which the mass worker of large-scale industry had acted as the central driving force - could hardly be expected to disappear without a trace! It was bound to set in motion a whole series of secondary effects and irreversible mechanisms, imposing its specific hegemony on the composition of the entire class.

In fact there were plenty of signs of this. Besides the network of smaller factories which began to explode one after another, the rest of the labour force at all levels took the cue and began to organise and struggle along the same lines as the workers of the big factories. Apart from the affirmation of a similar model of political-trade

union activity, we find parallel forms of collective behaviour and practices of struggle. The hegemony of the workers over salaried employees can be seen in the mass picketing by bank employees, including violent confrontations with the police and scabs (the police were by now being used regularly against pickets); or in the "internal marches" (characteristic form of mobilisation at FIAT) by Government employees at the Ministries. Not to mention certain more specific effects, such as the workers' use of labour tribunals. This began to provide certain levels of the magistracy with a platform to break away from the impasse of a purely juridical-formal battle for respect of labour codes and guarantees against the illegal practices of the judiciary - hence the emergence of a new working-class practice in jurisprudence.

Further, the struggle over health and safety at work provided a platform for doctors to break away from the corporate interests of the medical profession: hence the beginning of mass criticism of the medical profession and the medical-pharmaceutical power-bloc, which has been one of the major conquests of working-class hegemony at the institutional level. Class resistance to restructuration and technological innovation in the plants led engineers and technicians also to a critique of the organisation of machinery and plants from a working-

class viewpoint. Finally, there was the unification of grading systems for staff and workers (staff status), together with the conquest of the "150 Hours" (workers' paid study-leave) conceded in the engineering workers' contract of 1972 and subsequently generalised.

Autonomous and distinct from both professional work-retraining schemes and trade union training courses, this latter victory reimposed a working-class, factory presence in the State schools and universities.

The arrival of the "150 Hours" workers on study-leave in the universities meant a radical change. The effects of freeing entry to the universities became macroscopic. Two new elements threw the old elite and academic forms into crisis: students of proletarian background/students who had been proletarianised, and the worker-students. There was also the generational factor - the youth enrolling in universities have behind them a High School movement, both compact and tested in mass activism in the streets. Those arriving from technical and commercial or accountancy schools come from a background of struggles around the relation between education and employment. The mass meeting (assemblea) remains the basis of political formation, but the political structure of the militants comes from the servizio d'ordine (the organisation of stewards, the

"shock troops" at demonstrations), and from political organising in the community.

The Newly Defined Role of the University, and the Emergence of the Women's Movement

This new generation of entrants to the University found nothing new or superior in terms of culture and means of political expression, than what had already been conquered in the High Schools, or through activity in political groups. In comparison, the University appeared as a lifeless, squalid, bureaucratic structure, which offered little. The old academic elite, despite the student revolt of 1968, had succeeded in coopting a new generation of young opportunist teachers. The picturesque arrogance of the older academics was being replaced by a new generation of mercurial and spent individuals. The "New Left" intellectuals of the 1968 vintage, and those formed in the so-called minority groups of the 'sixties, if not openly "sold out", were either at the service of the Trade Union Left, or were practising a dual role of organisational militancy combined with "scientific" academicism. Any possibility of a new culture, a re-evaluation and relaunching of revolutionary theory and creation of new theoretical

weapons that the University could offer, were openly discouraged both by the groups and by Left journalism and publishing. Hence the University was taken for what it was: a bureaucratic filter of social mobility and nothing more. The contents of academic culture were not challenged: instead there was a wholesale desertion of lectures and seminars. The struggle against selection of intake, as in 1968, no longer made sense, since the State itself had imposed massification and free entry. Selection now took place at other levels - at the level of income and needs: no longer by the vote of academic functionaries, but by the structural inadequacy of services. The impact of the crisis and the rise in the cost of living played the decisive role here.

This account takes us to the end of 1973, and the Oil Crisis, which we take as the conventional date for the opening of the second phase. But before we go on, we must turn to the decisive event which began to transform the conditions of the movement from 1970-71, still in the earlier phase: the birth of the feminist movement. This immediately posed a question of hegemony over the whole social fabric, hence was analogous, in its dimension and its claims, to the hegemony of the mass worker. The specific, autonomous interests of women, organised by women, not only directly challenge family relations of production. They

also, by taking an autonomous political form as an independent feminist movement, involved a radical separation from the mediations of the "party system", from Trade Union representation, but also, above all, from the revolutionary Left groups themselves. With women's self-discovery and their claim to control their bodies, their own needs and desires, their subjectivity, we see the beginnings of a new critique of alienated militancy - one of the key themes of the movement in the second phase - but also, and more fundamentally, the starting point for the general thematic of needs within the movement.

All this remained a latent tendency, however, until the beginning of the acute phase of the crisis in 1974-75. At the institutional level, this coincided with the defeat of the "strategy of tension". Just at the point when the violence of the crisis against the composition of the class reached its apex, the Italian Left - including a large part of the extra-parliamentary groups - were celebrating their victory at the institutional level, considering their mission practically accomplished!

The Error of Mistaking the Appearance for the Substance of State Power

Here we see in striking form the precipitation of all the contradictions, above all the gap between "politics" and class reality, which marked the "imperfect Togliattian" situation we described above. The attention of the Left was focussed on the form of the State: but not the State form as measured or levelled against the autonomy of the working class. Rather, the State form was seen in itself, in its own autonomy, at the formal-political level only. The crisis of the Right-wing strategy of tension was mistakenly seen by the Left as the crisis of the State form. The forced abandonment by the DC Government of its underhand use of Fascist personnel and provocation was mistaken for the crisis of the regime. The temporary virulence of internal battles within the DC and the "separate bodies" of the State (secret services, security etc) was mistaken for a crisis of State command. This was to mistake the appearance for the substance of State power. Meanwhile, the real reconstruction of the "party system" proceeded from below; the form of the State had already penetrated the terrain of the factory, and by now only needed the ideology of the crisis to come out

into the open, as a machine directly polarised against the interests of the working class.

Hence there was a temporary crisis at Government level, but combined with gradual "stabilisation" in the factories. The application of tough measures in high places; revelation of scandals, and intimidating Mafia-style behaviour at the highest level, exhibited in public; the corruption of the elite and the bureaucracy crudely exposed for the first time - but all in such a way as to demonstrate provocatively the privilege of impunity of the "party system". Ministers, attorney generals, bankers, police chiefs, whose illegal and underhand practices were amply proved and discussed, never suffered any penalty in terms of loss of personal freedom or income. Thus the scandals of the regime (which the imbeciles of Democrazia Proletaria, along with others tied to the bangdwagon of the PCI, saw as the "definitive putrefaction of the system") only served in fact as an element of intimidation and hence reinforcement of the State form based on the party system.

Meanwhile "tough measures" were being adopted in the factory! From 1974 onwards, the tempo of factory closures, sackings and layoffs gathered pace, eased by systematic recourse to the cassa integrazione (the State-

employer fund to compensate for periods of layoff from work, in crisis-hit industries and sectors). The system of labour-contract legal guarantees, established thanks to the workers' offensive of 1969, was not broken and remained intact. In other words, it was allowed to survive as a juridical-contractual framework. But the reality of "guaranteeism", which does not depend on written statutes or labour contracts, but on the homogeneity and compactness of class organisation and the political network of class autonomy built in the factories in the preceding years - this was attacked by all means available.

As regards class subjectivity, which is our main focus in this article, a period of silence now sets in (apart from the well-known worsening of the conditions of work) - a silence in which we still find ourselves today. This occurred, in the absence of alternative political structures, with the decline of democratic trade union institutions. In the factory mass meetings, which became more and more infrequent, the workers no longer speak. They suffer in silence the continuous hammering-home of the official trade union line. ("Things could get worse"; "We have to accept the reality of the situation"; "We must tighten our belts, accept certain sacrifices" etc). They close themselves off into an attitude of non-

expression of their own needs, and stand by while vanguard militants are intimidated, purged or expelled from the factory with the open complicity - indeed active connivance - of union and party officials. While the purging of militants had previously been a creeping, silent process, with the transition to the second phase it becomes open and demonstrative: the political confrontation with the workers becomes a frontal attack, a determined effort by the "party system" to normalise the behaviour of the workers and their forms of struggle. Seen in this context, the advances made in the sphere of "civil rights" in this new phase must be seen as a diversion - although we should not underestimate their effects, in legitimating the women's movement (and hence allowing it to advance on a broader political front) and in precipitating the crisis of the military institutions. Despite these positive aspects, however, there is no doubt that the macroscopic element of the period 1974-76 remains the inability of the workers' struggle to break the equilibrium of the "party system" and destabilise its internal relations.

In this temporary blunting of the political impact of working-class struggle, a considerable role has been played by the decentralised political-administrative structure of regional governments and local authorities.

Increasingly they have intervened as mediators and arbitrators in factory confrontations.

A Developing Class Composition: The Role of the Small Factory and the Disseminated Worker

The smaller firms and plants have a special importance, for the class subjectivity and type of struggle that they engender. At this level, of piecemeal blow against counterblow, closures and occupations, it is precisely this war of position that gives rise to the recompositional processes of the working class. It is still difficult to establish, but probably the small factory has provided the best terrain, the "entry hole" through which the mole has started to dig once again. Of course, small factories are not homogeneous among themselves, and in fact exhibit sharp differences and contrasts. For example: differences between low technological levels, antiquated levels of organisation, and big innovative tendencies; between situations of total market paralysis and situations offering possibilities of fresh market penetration; locally-oriented factories, and factories serving only an international market; firms that are totally dependent on the stranglehold of credit, and firms like the cooperatives which are free from bankers' usury; from unionised firms

to others (far greater in number) with no trade union organisation; from firms with a labour force which is marginal and underpaid, to those where it is highly paid and skilled; and finally, varying-sized factories where all these elements are combined under one roof. Precisely this level of dis-homogeneity means that the small-to-medium factory worker does not express a majoritarian social reference point for the class, whose demands and forms of struggle can be taken up at the general level of political objectives: furthermore, we cannot expect to see the kind of relationship (as with the large-scale factory) of mass vanguards capable of pulling behind them the whole of the movement.

In other words, in this case there is a lack of these political mechanisms that had marked the cycle of struggles of the mass worker. But this does not mean that a general political potential does not exist: here we find instead a set of recompositional mechanisms that start, precisely, from a base of dis-homogeneity.

Let's begin with age: precisely because the small factory tends to use marginal labour-power, the presence of minors and very young people, if not typical, is nevertheless very frequent, and it is from the small factories that perhaps the most solid wing of the

movement of proletarian youth has been recruited. At the same time, since the small factories employ a considerable number of women workers, they have also provided a recruiting ground for a sizeable wing of the women's movement, with a particular awareness of the problems of material needs. In addition there is the question of the workforce involved in precarious work (lavoro precario), work in the home, illegal work (lavoro nero), etc: the crisis has swept away the dividing partitions between the various "industrial formations" and has created the phenomenon of the "disseminated worker" (operaio disseminato) (which can also be found in other specific epochs in the history of the Italian proletariat). In other words, the conscious dispersion of the labour force within a territorial dimension, in an intermediate condition between formal and real subjection to capital. This is a precise plan, put into operation against the political aggregation of the class. But, leaving aside these structural aspects, the big changes are to be seen in the subjectivity of the workers in the small factory, inasmuch as it is hard for them to apply organisation models and forms of struggle which really only apply in large-scale industry. Here we see the crisis in the trade-unionist style of operating that characterised the struggles of workers in the large factories. The transition whereby labour power becomes

working class (a process which is guaranteed in the large factory by the very fact of massification) is a transition that the small-factory worker must win via political processes that are by no means "given". The practice of violence must make up for the lack of numbers and low level of massification. If the roots of direct-action armed workers' groups are to be found, historically, in the old "Stalingrads" of the working class, in political terms they are based on the standards of the small factory.

To sum up: the small factory has played a crucial role. It has provided a material terrain of recomposition for proletarian youth, for the women's movement, and for the struggle against overtime and illegal labour - and it has provided a channel of mediation between the behaviour of the disseminated worker and the behaviour of the workers based in the large industrial concentrations.

However, these positions regarding the small factory must not be taken in an "institutional" sense. In other words, the new class composition that emerges from the second phase has neither an institution to symbolise it, nor is it represented by a majority social figure. This becomes all the more evident if we examine the other large sector of recruitment - the service industries. Here we see familiar patterns repeating themselves. In all

capitalist societies in the past 30 years, employment has uniformly stagnated in manufacturing and has increased in the services. However, what is not uniform is the level of wages within the respective service sectors, and the huge differences in levels of organisation and efficiency. Here, however, the problem is one of a particular political conjuncture. Namely: the unclear demarcation between the area of receivers of revenue and the area of services; the launching of the trade unions' reform programme after the Hot Autumn with the intention of diverting workers' pressure on the factory wage onto the indirect wage; the decentralisation of the functions of State administration: all these contribute to making the service sector a focal point for a particular set of political tensions. This becomes explosive when the idea of a right to an income becomes widespread, alongside the emerging political reality of the "new needs".

The Changing Position of Local Authority and Para-State Workers

The dominant fact in this situation is the increasing political pressure on the service sector, on the firms and agencies within that sector, and on the political and administrative institutions. This has built up through a whole range of subjective and structural pressures, all of

which require a microscopic analysis. The fact of this pressure is the only element of homogeneity in the situation, because when we look at the levels of organisation, or the levels of organic composition of capital, we find radical differences. On the one hand there are the examples of firms like SIP and ENEL (petrochemicals and electricity). Here we find ourselves in an area of large-scale technological innovation, involving huge expenditure, backed by banks and finance institutions (SIP is far and away the most indebted of all Italian concerns), accompanied by phenomena of violent restructuring. We also find ourselves in one of the heartlands of the working class (Siemens, Fiat Standard, Ansaldo Meccanica, Breda, ex-Pellizzari), and at the same time in an area where sub-contracting has created a large pool of casual labour (forza-lavoro precario) (for example, SIP's travelling work-force). The workers' struggles and forms of organisation in these areas have followed the cycles of the wider class struggle, but the fact that these firms are at the centre of fundamental decisions regarding the so-called "model of development" (eg the question of energy policy) means that the workers' demands tend to slip out of the traditional channels of collective bargaining and into political debate tout court.

The situation is similar as regards the credit institutions. The fact that we are dealing here with workers who are often regarded as a privileged sector of the workforce because of their relatively high wages, has not prevented their struggle from spreading to the point where it has found precise points of contact with the political form of the autonomy of the mass worker. In these areas the interlock with overall class composition has also been facilitated by the large numbers of workers from the credit institutions and from the service sector in general who have enrolled in the Universities. The fact that they are employed by interest-producing capital has allowed bank workers to grasp the way in which capital is managing the crisis, and the function of money within the crisis. However, here we still find ourselves within a framework of trade union control of the workforce.

The situation alters radically when we look at hospital workers, local authority workers and social service workers. Here control of the workforce is exercised directly by the "party-system". Here the "party system" is not able to delegate the basically political choices to "economic interests". It has to take initiatives directly at the level of the organisation of hierarchies and the organisation of work, at the level of cutting jobs and cutting labour costs, but above all in dealing with the

growing demand for income and demand for services - ie dealing with the new class composition and the emerging system of "needs". This is the first test that the Communist Party has to face in its new role as the ruling party within local authorities. Certain institutions - the hospitals in particular - are exploding for the first time, uncovering conditions of work and wages that disappeared from industry years ago, as well as hierarchical structures that are inconceivable in this "age of egalitarianism". For the hospital workers in particular, CGIL leader Lama has reserved words even harsher than those he used on the students. The "party system" brought in the army to break their struggle. The logical sequence of clientelism - tertiary sector - subversion has been evoked to provide a basis whereby the institutional bloc can oppose the new types of struggles by the workers in the social services.

Transportation Workers, the Small Firm and Aspects of Decentralisation

The situation is similar in the case of the transport workers, the third big sector feeding into this new class composition. Once again the "party system" and the trade unions function as command over the labour force. The struggles of the railway workers were treated in the

same harsh manner as those of the hospital workers, but the fact that the trade union in question has a long (and some would say glorious) historical tradition made it all the more striking, the way this Union was rejected when it tried to take control of the workforce and impose the politics of austerity. Whether for good or ill, in the hospitals the autonomous struggle has also sparked a process of unionisation. On the railways, on the other hand, there has been a mass, conscious rejection of CGIL union membership. But here we are dealing with things that are well-known...

Less well-known, but infinitely more explosive, is the situation in road transport. Here we are faced with a mass of waged workers and independent operators equal to twenty Mirafioris rolled into one. The "objective" weight of this workforce is frightening, and it is perhaps the only section of the class today whose movements could paralyse the whole capitalist cycle. The strike of tanker drivers in the North-West gave a taste of this: the Communist Party, through the structure of the cooperatives, controls a fair slice of this sector. The tanker drivers' strike gave an indication of the possible levels of violence: 7-8,000 tyres slashed, according to trade union sources, within a very few days.

Here the "party system" (which, by the way, hurried to conclude the contract negotiations, despite the obvious desire of FIAT and the oil companies to provoke deadlock) made widespread use of the spectre of Chile, and once again repeated their operation of political marginalisation of the drivers' demands etc, in the same way as they had done for the railway workers, the hospital workers, and the social service and local authority workers.

Our account so far has left out the large number of workers in each of the above sectors who are employed by contractors and sub-contractors. Their numbers considerably increase the size of the workforce that is commanded either directly or indirectly by the "party system" (or, more precisely, by the Christian Democrats or the Communist Party). This network of contract labour brings us right to the heartlands of *lavoro nero* - in other words, that very wide area of waged labour where the system of trade union guarantees is either fragile or non-existent. But is this network only characteristic of the State, local authority and service sectors? Far from it. It is the structure of the firm itself (*impresa*) that is now being dissolved, as a means of producing commodities; the firm remains merely as chief clerk, as mere administration of decentralised labour; in fact, the firm dissolves itself as a

subject or protagonist of conflict, as an institution of the class struggle. The firm is the fulcrum of the processes of tertiarisation. How can we speak of rigidity of the labour-market outside of this institutional break-up? The chain of infinite decentralisation of production breaks the rigidities of age and sex, of geographical location, of social background etc, and all this is a weighty factor in fusing the new class composition.

This chain of infinite decentralisation is one of the more "progressive" elements of capitalism today; it is a far more powerful weapon of massification than the assembly line. The factory, as an institution that is increasingly "guaranteed" and "protected", was becoming socially and politically isolated. It did not allow entry to young people, to women, to students; it imposed its hierarchies and its compartmentalisations on the whole of society; it played a normative role as a complete, perfect social form. It has become necessary to encircle and envelop the factory, and this chain of infinite decentralisation offers us the material grounds for doing it. The process of decentralisation has created large numbers of openings into which the women, the young people, the students, the laid-off workers and the redundant workers have inserted themselves, taking on the aspect of waged workers. And in the meantime

thousands of waged workers have been flowing out of the factories and into the Universities, taking on the status of students. These are both movements in the area of political demography, because the status of the waged worker and the status of the student have a precise legitimation within the institutional conflict-system in our country. The whole mechanism of the reproduction of classes had the institution of the factory as its bedrock (with the development of a system of trade-union guarantees, a "working-class aristocracy" was supposed to be reproduced in the factory) and the University as an institution of social promotion (where an anti-worker middle class was supposed to be created) - but this mechanism has exploded.

The Decentralisation of the System of Struggles. The Politics of "Personal Life"

So far we have shown that the system of decentralisation has allowed a "mixed" labour force to be absorbed within the wage relation, and that the processes of tertiarisation of the firm have, in turn, driven thousands of waged workers to become students. Having shown that these drives have conferred a new political legitimation on all those involved, we need not list the thousand-and-one positions that the students have taken

up or can take up within the opportunities of wage labour that the system of decentralisation offers. These thousands of student-workers have brought a new political dimension to the condition of waged labour in which they find themselves, and it has proved possible to create a mutual strengthening of isolated struggles, even in situations where trade unionism is weak and where there are few situations of struggle. The University has been used as a focal point. Even this "squalid bureaucratic ante-chamber" has proved capable of becoming something different - a meeting point, an aggregation point for a system of struggles that is itself also infinitely decentralised. Meanwhile, after years of waiting, the old mole of the student struggle has also started digging again, on issues like canteens, housing, transport, and finally on course contents, exams, and voting rights. The proletarian (and proletarianised) student sectors were able to fuse themselves with the whole arc of struggles that the crisis was setting in motion.

But our analysis of these structural factors will be ineffective unless we can combine it with an analysis of the huge transformation taking place in the sphere of "personal life". This obviously starts from the breakdown of sexual relations brought on by feminism. It then

widens to involve all the problems of controlling one's own body and the structures of perceptions, emotions and desires. This is not just a problem of "youth culture". It has working-class antecedents in the cycle of struggles of 1968-69. The defence of one's own physical integrity against being slaughtered by line-speeds and machinery, against being poisoned by the environment etc, on the one hand is a way of resisting the depreciation of the exchange value of one's labour-power and the deterioration of its use value, but at the same time it is a way of re-appropriating one's own body, for the free enjoyment of bodily needs. Here too there is a homogeneity, not a separation, between the behaviour of the young people, the women and the workers.

The question of drugs now arises. Control of drug usage is being reappropriated by the institutions of the political cycle. No sooner have young people had a taste of soft drugs, giving them a first-hand taste of how much this society has robbed them of their perceptive potential, than the heroin multinational decides to step in and impose hard drugs. A space of political confrontation opens up, between use value (self-managed, within certain limits) and exchange value of drugs, and this involves organisation and instances of armed self-defence. Nor is the mechanism of the production of new

needs the exclusive prerogative of the "liberation movements"... it has its roots in the "We Want Everything" of the Mirafiori workers in the Summer of 1969. The "Italian Utopia" has a solid working-class stamp, which no theorists of an American-style "movement" - ghettoised and self-sufficient - will be able to erase.

The Crisis of Political Forms. The Meaning of the Area of Autonomy

As we have seen, the reconquest of "personal life" has also dealt a death-blow to the organisations of the revolutionary Left. But the roots of their organisational breakdown do not lie only in questions of sexual relations, of alienating hierarchies, the denial of subjectivity etc: they lie in precise, documentable errors of political choice, mistaken theories of organisation. For example, the current concept of power, which has been based on the old political cycle (struggle/party/transition/civil war/state power). In other words, a projection into the future, rather than a lived experience within the liberated spaces of the present. This error turns into parody when the groups all troop down into the electoral arena. The rotten institutional forms of politics, eaten away from the inside

and abandoned by the more aware elements, become a form of oppression.

However, it would be wrong to theorise on the one hand an irrational society made up of pure behaviours, opposing, on the other, a society structured by logical schemas. What we have are hidden circuits involving particular groups, which then evolve into particular sets of results; there is in fact a conscious practice of the irrational, as a destruction of the bridging elements of language, communication and mediation. In short, any separation between the "post-political" (the area of instinct, of the irrational, the personal and the private) and the political cycle is unacceptable. It is not possible to confine the new subjectivity within the terms of youth counterculture, or to consider it an exclusive prerogative of the women. Current attempts to create an opposition between the liberation movement and the political cycle are false - as false as the theory that defines the new class composition as being made up of the unemployed and the marginalised sectors. The reality is that politics as a form has undergone a critique, on the basis of a battle between political lines, and this in turn has allowed the emergence of new organisations, which have been politically legitimated by their presence within those class nuclei outlined above.

The explosion of 1977, with the occupation of University facilities, was a violent confrontation between the State-form and the new political class composition. For a while this new class composition met and based itself in the University, taking it as a material base where different needs, different class segments, social groups, political groups and disseminated groups could come together. The University as an institution became a struggle-base, capable of representing all the various partial programmes of the new class composition.

The new emergence of the women's movement and the youth movement deepens the split with the organisations making up Democrazia Proletaria (Proletarian Democracy), but the real origins of this split are to be found in the political disagreements voiced by the emerging forces of the organised area of autonomy (l'autonomia organizzata), in particular the groups representing Rome, the Po Valley and the Milano-Sesto-Bergamo axis. Now, if anything legitimated them as a "leading minority" in the very first phase of the occupation of the faculties, it was their relationship with the new class composition, with the service-sector proletariat in a big tertiary city like Rome, with the network of factory vanguards in the industrial zone between Milan and Bergamo, and with the needs of

proletarian students and geographically disseminated workers in the Po Valley. The fact that they understood and had subjectively anticipated mass behaviours that were not locatable in the schemas of the wave of contestation in 1968, nor in those of the Hot Autumn - that fact allowed the people of the "organise autonomy" - albeit for a brief period - to carry forward a programme that matched the developing class composition. The relation between these autonomist fractions and the wider movement was on a par with the relation between the anarchist groups and the masses in the Sorbonne in May '68. The ability to match class composition with the political programme means the ability to practise the art of politics (or, more often, plain good sense), in order to pull together the vanguard and the average, the organisation and the movement.

But instead, with incredible speed, the hoary old questions started coming out: should the organisation, with its programme and its plans, march over the corpse of the movement; should the programme be external to and counterposed to the class composition? The echoes of the clashes in Bologna had hardly died away when everyone whipped out their Lenin masks from behind their backs - in particular the Workers' Autonomy tendency (Autonomia Operaia) in the North.

Meanwhile, in the actual struggle, important things were happening. The current interpretations of them (both those of the DP tendency and those of the autonomy tendency) are either wrong, or only half right. Particularly as regards the internal mechanics of the events of Bologna.

The main problem bringing about this split between class composition and the programme is the question of the "combat party" (*partito combattente*). When some fractions of the "organised autonomy" decide to force the pace on this front (with considerable internal differences between those who base themselves on the need for self-defence, and those who argue for a qualitative advance in organisation), not only does the DP front rebuild itself (Milan provides one example of this), but we also find a widespread and increasing resistance on the part of those "libertarian" elements who do not accept a re-introduction of voluntarist practices.

It was no accident that it fell to fractions of the organised autonomy to lead the first phase of the struggle. Their initial hegemony over the movement derived from their having understood and anticipated the forms of political behaviour that were characteristic of the new class composition; from the ability to read parts of the

programme within the masses themselves; in other words, knowing how to present themselves not as a "private" thing, but as a "social" expression, a tendency of a growing movement, rather than a choice wholly confined within the logic of the self-reproduction of a political group. The developing critique of the traditional forms of politics (in particular of the "party form") has sharpened the sensibilities of comrades into an almost neurotic ability to intuit when particular choices and actions function "for all" and when they are only private and personal. Forcing the pace on the question of the "combat party" has set in motion all these mechanisms, and has opened up more contradictions within the movement than it has in the State apparatus! But then this is precisely the point: with this cycle of struggles, the State-form has undergone an evolution. It is perfectly clear that it has been proceeding full-tilt along the road of unifying the "party system" , and that law and order has been the main track along which this process of unification has passed. However, within the "party system" there have been different approaches (or perhaps a division of roles?) on how to proceed with a strengthening of the State-form.

Practical Experiments in a New State-Form

The Christian Democrats have taken the crude line of polishing up existing privileges of the forces of law and order (police laws of arrest etc), as well as introducing new rules and regulations. The effect of this is to confer the whole operation of deterrence onto the repressive apparatus, with the intention that, having dealt with the "autonomists" they will then be able to move against the wider movement of opposition. Certainly the DC has still done this after due consultation with the other parties (ie, respecting the rules of their joint project, and accepting the inevitable delays and discussions arising), but nevertheless the DC still bases itself on the State as an apparatus: a separate machine, a "special body", to be used as a means of repression in given emergency circumstances, and in the meantime it leaves the "daily repression" to the capitalist form of command over the factory and over disseminated labour.

The Communist Party in Bologna, on the other hand, has developed and experimented practically with a more mature State-form, a form which is more in line with mass social-democracy in a period of transition. A State-form in which it is the masses themselves who act as judge and jury, judging who is deviant and who is not,

who is productive and who is not, what is socially dangerous and who is not. Now it is to be the factory mass meetings that expel the extremist; the mass tenants' meeting that decides to expel the young hooligan; and the college assembly to expel the "undesirable" student with his pistol and iron bar. Of course, the instances I am thinking of have been extreme cases - but the fact that this State-form is being tried out on the "autonomists" as guinea pigs does not lessen the marginalising potential of such a State-form within a framework of developing austerity, of the "politics of sacrifice" and of money being given hand over fist to capitalist enterprises. Once you have the collective acting as judge and jury, then the institutional forms of the law (wigs and robes etc) have only a ratifying function: they take delivery of the hostage, the tumour that has been driven out of the otherwise healthy body. The State-form appears as a kind of immunising process of civil society. This is a huge step forward - it is a moment of "socialisation of the State", which would be innovative were it not happening within a framework of a freezing of the class power balance, with a restoration of capitalist control at all levels, and a general amnesty for all the criminals, past and present, belonging to the apparatus of clientelism, corruption and repression. At the level of power-institutions it is undoubtedly a further

element contributing to the stickiness of the situation, but at the same time we must understand its "progressive" character. It transcends two aspects of the present State-form: its aspect as a "party system", and its aspect as a bureaucratic-repressive apparatus, both of which are separate from and hostile to civil society. It is an infinitely more advanced form, a form which, among other things, has no need to break up the present institutional apparatus or purge it by substituting more democratic personnel... This State-form does more than that. It overturns the relationship between civil society and the apparatus. It appropriates the qualitative function of the judiciary, and leaves the apparatus with the quantitative translation, in terms of the penalties to be imposed. Henceforth it is civil society, the collectivity, which fixes the norm and formulates the sentence; while the apparatus is left with the technical task of punishment.

All this presents enormous problems for the legitimation of political actions, inasmuch as organisation is obliged to measure itself day by day against the new class composition; and must find its political programme only in the behaviour of the class, and not in some set of statutes; and thus must practise not political clandestinity, but its opposite. Those who practise

technical clandestinity generally do not even see this State-form. They continue to relate to the State apparatuses, and by focussing all their attention on them, they then find themselves separated from the mass movement. On the other hand, those who choose political clandestinity - ie refuse to seek or create a base for criticism and legitimation of actions - not only undergo that same segregation from the mass movement, but are also smashed by the apparatus, because they do not have the defences and the weapons possessed by those in technical clandestinity.

Now, while it is true that the PCI has proposed (and in some instances put into effect) this new, more advanced form of the State, as an experiment, in actual fact it has oscillated between this type of "political prevention" of subversive behaviour, and a complete delegation of repression to the State apparatus. In my own opinion, the first option carried far more weight, and in this sense I find tiresome and also incorrect the references that are presently being made to "a new Prague" or "a new Chile". But what we must clarify is the extent to which this proposition of a "social" State-form has met and will meet resistance and refusal at the various levels of the present class composition.

Leaving aside the resistance that it has met even among particular sectors of the judiciary itself (ie in a fraction of the apparatus itself), it has not been allowed to pass at the average level of class composition (I underline average). Not only because it aims to transfer to civil society only some (incidentally, the most odious) prerogatives of the State, and not other more attractive ones (like control of resources, for example). But also because it deludes itself into imagining that it can inject people with an abstract sense of the State, whereas in fact the State that people understand is this State - ie a State of given power relations and value systems that the working class started to unhinge in 1969, and which the "party system", with the crisis, has not only succeeded in setting back on its feet, but has also taken over as its own. The State-form is not a juridical principle, nor an abstract norm, but a formation that is historically determinate.

Towards a Mobilisation of the Entire Mass of Disseminated Labour

The theory that the University has functioned as a point of aggregation for the movement runs alongside a theory regarding the figure of the unemployed intellectual (or rather the intellectual unemployed), who has been

taken, uncritically, as the most representative figure of the movement. The theory is that the exclusion of the intellectual unemployed from the labour market puts them on a par with other marginalised sectors, for whom the intellectual unemployed then act as a voice. I have already stated my complete disagreement with this kind of interpretation. The University was taken by the current class composition as a point of aggregation, more for reasons of the political forms of the struggle (ie for certain levels of violence and power) than for the fact that it is a factory producing unemployed intellectuals; it was taken up because it put an end to this process of the marginalisation of demands, subjective behaviours and organisation. But once again we must go beyond the University, both as a base for the movement and as a point of aggregation, in order to identify the channels that can bring about a mobilisation of the entire mass of disseminated labour - ie in order to provide a way into the factory that produces relative surplus value. For this reason I have taken pains to emphasise the question of precarious labour, together with the system of decentralisation of production, and that social area where the protected system of trade union "guarantees" of wages and conditions has entered into crisis. In order to make this transition it is vital that we first reject the "rhetoric of poverty" - moral protests on behalf of the

poor. Instead, we should once again ask ourselves whether it is possible to think in terms of "mass objectives" of the type which characterised the anti-authoritarianism of 1968 (the FIAT workers' demand for "Grade 2 for all", which led into the egalitarianism of the demands put forward in the Hot Autumn of 1969). Such a proposal cannot be simply written off as a step backwards in collective bargaining, that would prepare the ground for a new social contract between the Government and the unions. It would be absurd to reject it out of hand, for the simple reason that such new objectives would carry within them the representative weight of the infinite political creativity that has emerged in these past few years. Rather, the bigger problem is how we are going to find the point where such a project can be applied - in short, to choose the "new Mirafioris" out of all the various "driving sectors" of the so-called tertiary sector. More specifically, out of those sectors which function as a connecting link between the production of absolute surplus value and the production of relative surplus value - like, for example, the cycle of transportation. Moreover, even in the simple extension of the rigidity of labour (even in its form as a system of trade union guarantism) to lavoro nero, subcontracted work etc, would have the effect of forcing the factory struggle to take a leap forward. In short, we are looking

for the social channels whereby we could break the encirclement that is currently under way, and prevent the movement dispersing itself into a thousand decentralised moments of struggle - a new, long Purgatory of endemic struggles. We have to find something which can function in the same way as did the strikes over pensions and the strikes over wage-zones did, in relation to the workers' cycle of struggles in 1968-69.

This approach will be branded as "economism" and "collective bargaininism" by all and sundry. It will be accused of lack of imagination, in putting forward mechanisms that are dead and buried. But let's move gently. The State-form which presents itself today has its origins in the ideology of the crisis and in the austerity programme that this has brought about. The ideology has provided the grounds for establishing the new, tighter relations between the parties. It is the historical basis of the Historic Compromise. It is the justification of the parties' powers of marginalisation. To succeed in overthrowing all this would be no small matter. It would mean not a return to the old conflictual form of the mediations of the party system, but restoring the conflict between the "grass roots" and the new relationship between a socialised State-form and the production of

capital. All the more so, since Jimmy Carter's imperialism - unlike the obtuse accountants of the IMF - has understood that in Italy the system of values and behaviours to which the combination of austerity measures and law and order has to be applied, is stronger than it appears. And therefore it's a good investment to release huge amounts of money (this is Carter's current inclination), and inject huge amounts of "command-money" through the big, private, international banking system. Let us start to turn this command into money-as-money - to transform this measure of power-over-others'-labour into power-over-our-own-needs, power over our own spaces of organisation and culture, a driving-spring for the new development of a new class composition. It is time that we take back from the "party system" their residual powers over the reproduction of the classes, so that we can start to determine this reproduction from the base, in such a way as to guarantee the value-systems and the political behaviours that the new class composition has legitimated in the struggles of these past months.

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Notes

Note A: See H. Brand, "The Myth of the Capital Shortage", in Dissent, Summer 1976.

Note B: Federal Reserve Bank of New York Monthly Review, October 1976.

Note C: Peter Drucker, *The Unseen Revolution: How Pension Fund Socialism Came to America*, London, 1976.

Note D: See B. Secchi, *Il Problema delle Abitazioni, dalla Casa al Territorio*, Polytechnic Faculty of Architecture, Milan 1976-7.