

**Self-organisation is the first act of the revolution; it then becomes an obstacle which the revolution has to overcome.**

Autonomy, as a revolutionary perspective realising itself through self-organisation, is paradoxically inseparable from a stable working class, easily discernible at the very surface of the reproduction of capital, comfortable within its limits and its definition by this reproduction and recognised within it as a legitimate interlocutor. Autonomy is the practice, the theory and the revolutionary project of the epoch of "fordism". Its subject is the worker and it supposes that the communist revolution is his liberation, i.e. the liberation of productive labour. It supposes that struggles over immediate demands<sup>1</sup> are stepping stones to the revolution, and that capital reproduces and confirms a workers' identity within the relation of exploitation. All this has lost any foundation.

In fact it is just the opposite: in each of its struggles, the proletariat sees how its existence as a class is objectified in the reproduction of capital as something foreign to it and which in its struggle it can be led to put into question. In the activity of the proletariat, being a class becomes an exterior constraint objectified in capital. Being a class becomes the obstacle which its struggle as a class has to overcome; this obstacle possesses a reality which is clear and easily identifiable, it is *self-organisation* and *autonomy*.

### **The bitter victory of autonomy**

*Self-organisation everywhere, revolution nowhere*

We can only speak of *autonomy* if the working class is capable of relating to itself against capital and finding in this relationship to itself the basis of and the capacity for its affirmation as dominant class. Autonomy supposes that the definition of the working class is not a relation but is inherent to it. It was a question of the *formalisation of what we are in present society as basis for the new society, which is to be constructed as the liberation of what we are*.

From the end of the First World War up to the beginning of the 1970s, autonomy and self-organisation weren't simply the wildcat strike and a more or less conflicting relationship with the unions. Autonomy was the project of a revolutionary process extending from self-organisation to the affirmation of the proletariat as the dominant class of society, through the liberation and affirmation of labour as the organisation of society. In freeing up the "true situation" of the working class from its integration in the capitalist mode of production, an integration represented by all the political and union institutions, autonomy was the revolution under way, the *potential* revolution. If this was explicitly the agenda of the Ultra-Left, it wasn't only an ideology. Self-organisation, union power and the workers' movement belonged to the *same world* of revolution as affirmation of the class. The affirmation of the truly revolutionary being which manifested itself in autonomy couldn't have had the slightest hint of reality if it hadn't been the good, unalienated side of the same reality which resided in a powerful workers' movement "constraining" the class. The workers' movement was itself also the guarantee of the independence of the class which was ready to reorganise the world in its own image; it was sufficient to reveal the true nature of this power to itself, by de-bureaucratising it, disalienating it. It was not a rare occurrence that workers passed from the necessarily ephemeral constitution of autonomous organisations of struggle to the parallel universe of triumphant Stalinism or, in northern Europe, to the bosom of powerful unions. Autonomy and workers' movement nourished and comforted each other mutually. The Stalinist leader was perhaps the "workers' equivalent of the boss by divine right", but he was also the institutional counterpart of autonomy. *Self-organisation as a revolutionary theory made sense in exactly the same conditions as those which gave structure to the "old workers' movement"*. Self-organisation is the self-organised struggle *with its necessary extension* the self-organisation of the producers; in a word, liberated labour; in another word, value.

A little step backwards. Already in the Italy of 1969, the sectors of workers in struggle are incapable of creating an "assembly" connecting up the diverse forms of self-organisation and the movement is "recuperated" by the CGIL and its workshop committees. Still in Italy, in the self-convened movements of February-March 1984 on the production line, self-organisation is seen to be defensive, in the sense that it expresses the defence of an old composition and an old relation of the working class to capital, a relation which restructuring is in the process of abolishing. For the same reasons, in Spain the assemblies movement (1976, '77, '78) creates or revitalises union structures; likewise the Dutch "hot autumn" of 1983. This is equally the epoch in which all sorts of "autonomous unions" are formed. It is fundamentally a historical type of working class whose existence is put into question by the restructuring. At Renault, during the strikes of 1975, it is the factory of Le Mans, where labour power is the most stable and the rate of unionisation, at 40% is double the national average for Renault, that the strike is the hardest and sometimes has the air of an "autonomous struggle". At the beginning of the 1980s, when this process of streamlining "is completed" essentially by hitting the unskilled immigrant workforce, provoking an enormous wave of strikes in the car industry, the violence of the struggles is never formalised in attempts to set up autonomous organs. "They want to kill us, but we're already dead", such is the spirit of the struggles. If in 1983-84, it is equally difficult to qualify the miners' strike in Britain as an "autonomous, self-organised struggle", it is because it was in fact a strike without demands, without a programme, without perspectives. What it meant to be a class was now only defined in and through the adversary of that class, in the action against it. The decline and lost meaning of autonomy are not a simple product of the retreat of class struggles. The

---

<sup>1</sup> Les luttes revendicatives, which we have rendered throughout as "struggles over immediate demands", could mean depending on context struggles over wages and conditions, or for the defence of jobs, or other "everyday" struggles of the proletariat.

"struggle" is not a historical invariant constantly expressing the same class relation. The decline of autonomy is not the decline of the "struggle", it is the decline of a historical stage of class struggles.

In France, when self-organisation becomes the dominant form of all struggles, starting with co-ordination between the railway-workers in 1986, it no longer represents a rupture with all the mediations by which the class is a class of the mode of production (a rupture liberating the class' revolutionary nature); self-organisation loses its "revolutionary meaning": the overgrowth<sup>2</sup> between the self-organisation of the struggle and workers' control of production and society. Self-organisation is nothing other than a radical form of syndicalism. Any struggle over immediate demands of any amplitude or intensity is now self-organised and autonomous; self-organisation and autonomy have become a simple moment of syndicalism (here we mean syndicalism as opposed to the formal existence of trade unions). If the organisms of struggle which the Spanish dockers adopted in the 1980s attempt to guarantee their survival and change form, it is because they were nothing other than organisms for the defence of the proletarian condition. Therein lies the continuity which explains the transition of the one into the other. The *theoreticians* of autonomy would have it that as such the "autonomous organs" invent communism by remaining what they are: organs of the struggle over immediate demands. As such their *natural inclination* is permanence and thus their "transformation".

In all the current discourses on autonomy, it is remarkable to observe that it is the revolution which has disappeared. What was until the beginning of the 1970s the very *raison d'être* of the discourse on autonomy, namely its revolutionary perspective, has become almost unspeakable. The defence and valorisation of autonomy becomes an end in itself and care is taken not to articulate a revolutionary perspective there – the Italian workerists were the last to do that. Now people are content to repeat that the *existing* autonomy isn't the right one. But now it is the very capacity of the proletariat to find in its relation to capital the basis for constituting itself as an autonomous class *and* in a powerful workers' movement which has disappeared. Autonomy and self-organisation represented a historical moment of the history of the class struggle and not formal modalities of action. In all the current approaches, autonomy designates any activity where proletarians coordinate directly to do something together, a sort of ahistorical and general form of action on the condition that it is independent of institutions. The historicisation and periodisation of the class struggle vanish. We can only speak of autonomy if the class is capable of relating to itself against capital and finding in this relation to itself the basis and the capacity for its affirmation as dominant class (which in any case could only produce the counter-revolution which rendered this affirmation impossible).

Currently, anywhere that self-organisation and autonomy triumph, *dissatisfaction with them* is immediately manifested. Already in France in 1986, the co-ordination between railway workers provoked movements of great defiance, as did the attempt to constitute broader forms of co-ordination beyond the local collectives in 2003. Within the *current triumphant self-organisation*, it is what opposes it which prefigures the abolition of classes. It is not a question of a dissatisfaction with a "recuperated" autonomy, but with autonomy itself in the sense that it is no longer anything other than "recuperated" *by its very nature*. This nature, consisting of the liberation of the class following from its autonomous affirmation (having "broken" its capitalist social moorings), was the definition of the revolution in the previous cycle; it is now that through which self-organisation and autonomy exist and are consciously experienced as the limit of all current struggles. Everywhere, as soon as self-organisation is established (and currently you can hardly escape it), people are fed up with it; it weighs heavily on the movement. As soon as it is initiated, it "winds us up", because it reminds us bluntly what we are and what we no longer want to be. It is here, within self-organisation, against it, that the struggle of the proletariat as a class produces its own existence as a class as a limit to be surpassed. Autonomy is only ever the liberation of the worker as worker.

Self-organisation, autonomy, in fact what we are as a class, have become objects of regular critique in the concrete course of struggles. It is a case of grasping the theoretical and practical discrepancy within self-organisation between what self-organisation is now as a necessary form of the class struggle, and the practical and theoretical critique that is engendered within itself, even as it is put into practice. However we have to take into account as a characteristic of this cycle of struggles the fact that the battle against "bad" self-organisation is waged in the name of "good" self-organisation. Currently, it is only within this battle in the name of "good" self-organisation that the battle against self-organisation itself manifests itself, i.e. only here does the perspective of the revolution appear as something which is no longer of the order of the affirmation of the class and which as a result can no longer be radically of the order of self-organisation or of autonomy.

As long as class confrontation fails to positively initiate the communisation of relations between individuals as class action against capital, self-organisation will remain *the only available form of class action*. The search for "true" self-organisation is not an "error", the "error" itself constantly indicates that self-organisation is to be superseded, by constantly taking as its target really existing self-organisation. This critique of really existing self-organisation in the name of an ideal self-organisation, *in which it constitutes a process without end*, creates a tension within self-organisation; it indicates the content of that which is to be superseded: the impasse of self-organisation, i.e. of its content, the affirmation, the revelation to itself of the proletariat.

---

<sup>2</sup> Transcroissance or overgrowth is a term Trotsky used to describe the way he thought the bourgeois revolution in Russia or other less developed areas could grow into the proletarian revolution, an analysis that has not been borne out by experience. Théorie Communiste also use it to refer to the more general (and for them equally mistaken) idea that the everyday class struggle, wage struggles and defence of jobs etc. can simply generalise into revolutionary struggle. This conception is for them part and parcel of programmatism (i.e. the programme based on the liberation of labour). Adapted from Aufheben no.12, p37 footnote 6.

The supersession of really existing self-organisation will not be accomplished by the production of the "true", the "right", the "good" self-organisation, it will be achieved against really existing self-organisation, but within it, from it.

In the current struggles, the proletariat recognises capital as its *raison d'être*, its existence against itself, *as the only necessity of its own existence*. In its struggles, the proletariat adopts all the necessary forms of organisation for its action. But when the proletariat adopts the necessary forms of organisation for its immediate goals (its abolition will equally be an immediate goal), it does not exist for itself as *autonomous* class. Self-organisation and autonomy were only possible on the basis of the constitution of a workers' identity, a constitution which has been swept away by the restructuring. What is left now for these proletarians to self-organise?

If autonomy disappears as a perspective, it is because the revolution can no longer have any other content than the communisation of society, which means for the proletariat its own abolition. With such a content, it becomes inappropriate to talk of autonomy and it is unlikely that such a programme would entail what is commonly understood as "autonomous organisation". The proletariat can only be revolutionary by recognising itself as a class, and it recognises itself as such in every conflict and even more so in a context where its existence as a class is the situation that it has to confront in the reproduction of capital. We should not mistake the content of this "recognition". To recognise itself as a class won't be a "return to itself" but a total extroversion through its *self-recognition as a category of the capitalist mode of production*. What we are as a class is immediately nothing other than our relation to capital. This "recognition" will in fact be a practical knowledge, in the conflict, not of the class for itself, but of capital.

#### *On self-organisation in the current struggles*

"The English system of shop-stewards which was born in the course of the First World War engendered a specific organisation of the factory, which was given the name of *mutualism*, in which the content of work-tasks and the rhythm of work were fixed by managers in agreement with the workers concerned through the intermediary of these elected delegates. This system was swept away by all the restructuring, even before the era of Thatcherism. In the course of the 1970s, numerous conflicts arose around this power of the shop-floor delegates; the swan-song of this system was on the one hand the proposals to transform production by the shop-stewards' committees, notably in the weapons factories, and on the other it was the restarting of production by the workers when firms closed. All this combined to produce a movement around the notions of workers' control and self-management, a British flavoured self-managementism which surpassed in terms of practice and ideas any French developments along these lines. Today, after the decimation of British industry, this current no longer represents anything at all." (*Échanges*, no.99, p23)

"A complex autonomous movement developed over more than 30 years, a kind of hybrid which combined the system of elected shop-floor delegates (the shop-stewards) and the utilisation of base union structures (often reinforced by widespread use of the "closed shop", i.e. enforced unionisation in a firm – in other words the management by the unions of the hiring of employees. A development of "wildcat strikes" was seen which on repeated occasions threatened governments which had decided to "impose themselves by force". (...) The crisis which was brewing in this situation culminated in the Winter of 1978-79 – *the Winter of discontent* – in the course of which the country was plunged into a total chaos with no other perspective than the immobilism of this bloc of resistance".

The Thatcher government swept all that away through the destruction of the industrial apparatus, privatisation, globalisation, increasing the orientation towards finance of the economy, the generalisation of flexibility, workers' precariousness and massive unemployment.

"The balance of forces underlying the autonomous movement was undermined; but it could only be (provisionally) overturned after fierce disputes in the key areas of workers' autonomy: the docks, the steelworks, the car factories, the printers and above all the mines." (*Échanges*, no.107, Oct-Nov 2003)

Returning to the current period to draw out the lessons from the *strike of the British postal workers*, the text concludes: "The foundations of the struggle, if they mark a break by workers on the shop-floor from the union leadership, also demonstrate the persistence of certain notions in labour relations and in the utilisation of base union structures, the very notions which the "bringing to heel" of the autonomy of struggles at the beginning of the 1980s had attempted to eradicate, but which are resurgent. (...) All the same, we have to consider that the Royal Mail is practically one of the only national industries in the UK which has not been dismantled, for various reasons, including the intervention of class struggle (it is one of the principal British employers, with 160,000 workers, whose numbers give them an obvious power). Also the shop-floor practices in labour relations, *which were common previously in industry but eliminated in the 1980s, are alive and well here*" (my emphasis). We could not be any clearer than this.

Currently, in numerous disputes like that of the *longshoremen of the West coast of the US*, the bosses are attempting to break the unions for the same reasons that they break workers' autonomy when it manifests itself, because both of them belong to the same epoch, the same logic of capitalist reproduction. This is a point which should exercise the minds of the advocates of the now secular ideology of workers' self-organisation. In our times, in the post office in Britain or the ports of the West coast of the US, the autonomous struggle of workers becomes indistinguishable

in its content to the defence of the large union institutions, not for reasons of the temporary utilisation of unions by workers, but for what they are: large institutions regulating the autonomy of labour-power.

On the evening of Friday July 18th, a wildcat strike breaks out at the Heathrow airport against flexibility and the annualisation of work-time. After three days' strike by ticket staff and baggage-handlers, they return to work with the announcement of the opening of talks between the unions and management.

Similarly, in *Spain*, during the shipbuilders' strike in Jan-Feb 2004, it is the renewal of the collective bargain and increased flexibility which is at stake. On the 30th of January, the union demonstration ends up with barricades, cars set on fire, the police use rubber bullets. On the 5th February, in *Puerto Real*, "a base organisation attempts to co-ordinate the struggle if necessary" (*Échanges*, no.109, p23); on the 12th, after renewed battles, a general assembly of the workers decides to hold another demonstration in town which causes further trouble; on the 13th talks between unions and management resume. As usual, the wildcat strike, even when accompanied by the formation of autonomous organisations, is merely a substitute for or an accompaniment to union action. It has become impossible to expect anything else from it, or to hope for an internal dynamic which would constitute its supersession from its own basis and not *against itself*.

On the 2nd June 2003, the IG Metall union calls for a strike in the *metal-workers' industry in 5 regions of the former GDR*. The splits which have appeared between workers in the "West" and workers in the "East" partially explain the failure of the strike. The increasing number of conflicts in different workplaces, the multiplication of sub-contracting and other measures to reduce the costs of production are fragmenting sites of exploitation, with the corollary that global struggles by professional branches of an industry have almost completely disappeared. It is the question of the unity of the proletariat on the basis of struggles over immediate demands which is posed.

Furthermore it has become obvious that the proletariat cannot be united for itself as a revolutionary class by the wage, in the framework of its position as seller of labour-power, everything proves more and more the contrary and this is so obvious that it almost jumps out and hits us round the head.

In *Italy*, in December 2003, the strike movement of the *autoferrotramvieri* fails to lead to any formal organisation between depots. If the "disease of the wildcat strike hit very hard", "the union anti-strike mechanism worked perfectly" (*Lettre de Mouvement Communiste*). The delegate from the drivers' co-ordination committee in Brescia, a member of the national co-ordinating committee, is content to say that the illegal strike was "the only weapon available to the workers" and that "if the unions have taken up our demand for 106 euros, it's because they are listening to the rank-and-file"; he adds that the strike is not aimed against the unions". Finally the tram drivers of Milan resume the wildcat strike with the slogan: "*we are the union*". The "base unions" played to the full their role as outlet for the anger of the employees, i.e. let's make no bones about it, the employees fully accepted that they should play this role.

Unfortunately no-one grasped for themselves the offensive political significance of the struggle of the *autoferrotramvieri* nor the permanent task of its organisation at the workplace, right up to the very last of the depots taken over by the movement. The base unions tried without great success to exploit the situation in order to reinforce themselves to the detriment of the large official union confederations, but they refused to facilitate the independent organisation of the struggle." (ibid). No-one grasped this, *not even the workers themselves*.

In a flash of lucidity this *Lettre* concludes: "It is as if defensive struggles no longer functioned as *the school of communism*, as if they no longer engendered their own political supersession."

"After the strikes of the railway cleaners, after the strikes in public transport, it is now the turn of the metal-workers. In each case we are dealing with extremely fierce struggles which develop outside and against the unions, *properly autonomous struggles*" (my emphasis) (*Échanges*, no.109, p19). This is simply wrong. At Melfi, the struggle of the FIAT workers in May 2004 started with strikes called by the unions over the payment of days of down-time due to technical problems; rapidly the workers go beyond this framework and add to these demands the organisation of working time and wages (these additions were accepted by the unions). The strike was controlled from top to bottom by the FIOM (union of the CGIL), including the blockading of the factory; the workers delegated the attempts to extend the struggle to the other FIAT sites and also the conduct of negotiations. When an agreement ("not a bad one" according to the estimation of *Échanges* no.109) is reached, the attempt to contest this agreement by Cobas<sup>3</sup> fails. The workers didn't constitute a single autonomous organisation, a fact which doesn't prevent the ideologues of self-organisation to conclude, for this struggle as well as for that of the *autoferrotramvieri*: "with the struggle of the workers of Melfi, workers' autonomy has gone on to a new stage in Italy". Autonomy is only deployed and only goes on to a new stage in the heads of militants who have remained fixated by their dream of Mirafiori: a factory "fallen into the hands of the workers". What would they have done with it?

Pathetic depths are plumbed by the conclusion of the *Échanges* text on the Melfi strike. This conclusion reports the declaration of Roberto Maroni, Italian Minister of Social Affairs, in an interview published in *Corriere della Sera*. The minister states: "When the unions agree in talks with the government to get the blockades lifted (he is referring to Melfi, but also to the strikes at Alitalia and in public transport, as noted by *Échanges*) and don't manage to do this, a problem of representation is posed. The current system is in danger of not being capable of managing disputes." *Échanges* comment: "he added that the moment had arrived to involve the autonomous organisations in the accords as well, because they are more present and active among the workers. Maroni's speech is interesting not because of what he proposes, but because he demonstrates that radical and autonomous forms of struggle are constantly being thrown up and are beginning to pose a problem in certain strata of the government and the state." The struggles of the workers pose a problem for sure, but Maroni's speech is evidently interesting above all *for what he proposes*; not only

---

<sup>3</sup> Cobas is an Italian base union.

is it interesting, but it is also true. Maroni recognises something that should gladden the heart of any militant of autonomy: the autonomous forms of struggle adopted by the workers are representative. This is "recuperation", "manipulation" the ideologues will say, but no. Maroni is much more lucid: the syndicalism of struggles over immediate demands is mediated by autonomous organisations; "let's recognise these organisations as interlocutors" says the minister.

The capacity for struggle which Italian workers seem to be demonstrating these days opens up vast perspectives for the future when, constrained by the situation and the course of struggles, Italian workers and those elsewhere will confront their situation of being workers which autonomy formalises today as the advanced form of syndicalism. Already autonomy, as it has really manifested itself at Melfi, has revealed itself to be incapable by its very nature of expressing the revolt against work which is so present in the struggle of these workers. It is now *within* self-organisation and autonomy, *against* them, that the dynamic of this cycle of struggles is produced as a divergence within the class struggle in general and self-organisation in particular, i.e. as a divergence within action taken as a class.

The self-organisation of struggles is a crucial moment of the revolutionary supersession of struggles over immediate demands. To carry on the struggle over immediate demands intransigently and to the very end cannot be achieved by unions, but by self-organisation and workers' autonomy. To carry on the struggle over immediate demands through workers' autonomy on the basis of irreconcilable interests is to effect a change of level in the social reality of the capitalist mode of production. The struggle over immediate demands is no longer situated at the level of profit and all the elements of the process of production which combine to produce it, but at the level of labour as productive of value, of which surplus-value is a part.

In the struggle over immediate demands, self-organisation formalises the irreconcilability of interests between the working class and the capitalist class, and it constitutes in this way the necessary moment of the appearance of class belonging as an exterior constraint; self-organisation is also the form in which the communisation of relations between individuals will get under way, *against it*.

## Struggles over immediate demands/revolution

### A rupture

If self-organisation, as a revolutionary process, has become obsolete, it is because the relation between struggles over immediate demands and revolution has become problematic. Self-organisation was the most radical form of relation between them as long as this relation was understood as an overgrowth. Then, Pannekoek could tell us that after a long historical period of struggles, the working-class was becoming the dominant power in a society based on councils, Negri that capital's history was equivalent to the history of workers' activity and Georges Marchais was writing a common program for the Left. All of them are dead now.

A revolutionary struggle emerges from a conflict of immediate interests between proletarians and capitalists and from the fact that these interests are irreconcilable. It is, so to speak, anchored in these conflicts, but if at a moment of the struggle over immediate demands, the proletarians, compelled by their conflict with the capitalist class, don't lift the anchor, their struggle will stay a struggle over immediate demands and will, *as such*, lead to victory or unfortunately most of the time to defeat.

On the contrary, if they fight against market relations, seize goods and the means of production while integrating into communal production those that wage-labour can't integrate, make everything free, get rid of the factory framework as the origin of products, go beyond the division of labour, abolish all autonomous spheres (and in the first place the economy), dissolve their autonomy to integrate in non-market relations all the impoverished and even a large part of the middle class, reduced to poverty by their movement; in this case, it is precisely their own previous existence and association as a class that they go beyond as well as (this is then a detail) their economic demands. The only way to fight against exchange and the dictatorship of value is by undertaking communisation.

To defend the proletariat's sacrosanct autonomy is to retreat into the categories of the capitalist mode of production; it is to prevent oneself from thinking that the content of the communist revolution is the abolition of the proletariat, not thanks to a simple logical equivalence (which would say that the abolition of capitalist relations is, by definition, the abolition of the proletariat ) but thanks to precise revolutionary practices. The proletariat abolishes value, exchange and all market relations in the war that sets it against capital, and this is its decisive weapon.

It integrates by some measures of communization the largest part of the impoverished, of those previously excluded, of the middle-classes and of the peasantry of the Third World (on this issue too it would be important to reflect on the example of the struggles in Argentina, not to defend interclassism but rather the abolition of classes).

The ever untarnished "autonomy of struggles" as a faculty for transition from a struggle over immediate demands to a revolutionary struggle is a construction that is not interested in the context of this transition. It remains a formal approach to class struggles. If the content of this transition is put aside, it is because autonomy prevents us from understanding this transition as a rupture, a qualitative leap. The "transition" is only an affirmation and a revelation of the true nature of what exists. The proletariat self-organizes, it breaks with its previous situation, but if this rupture is only its "liberation", the reorganization of what it is, of its activity, without capital, rather than the destruction of its previous situation, that is to say if it remains self-organized, if it doesn't go beyond this stage, it will automatically be defeated.

To assume that any struggle about wages contains a revolt against wage-labour is to assume that these two elements exist one inside the other rather than that the second term is a contradictory supersession of the first. Such a view can now, in practice, only lead to *radical democratism*. Fifty years ago, it was possible to understand things that way and this conception led to the power of the Councils or to "Real Socialism". The "citizens' movement", alternative globalization, or, more accurately, radical democratism represent without doubt the project of completion of the struggles over immediate demands, and, *as such*, they can't have any other projects now.

In the radical democratic perspective the evolution of labour time ought to bring emancipation in leisure time; benefits for all ought to become a progressive transition to an activity beneficial to the individual and to society, that is to say the abolition of exploitation within wage-labour; wage demands would become the sharing of wealth; the critique of globalisation and finance would become more important than the critique of that which has been globalised (capital); liberalism and globalisation would be the cause of exploitation. Anybody involved in recent struggles or keeping a close eye on them knows very well that this language has become theirs, and not only in the "public services".

Nobody would deny that the revolutionary struggle originates within a struggle over immediate demands or even that it is produced by it. The question is the nature of the transition. The only "deeply anticapitalist" content confronting the capitalist logic that a struggle could have consists in targeting the capitalist relations of production (that is to say, for the proletariat, targeting its own existence), the reproduction of exploitation and of classes. A struggle over immediate demands that targets this is not a struggle over immediate demands any more, or only if the takeover of the proletariat on society, the proletariat as the dominant class, is what we mean by revolutionary struggle.

### *The question of class unity.*

The proletariat has not disappeared, nor has it become a pure negativity. However, exploitation doesn't produce a homogeneous social entity of the working class any more, a prevailing entity, with a key role, able to be conscious of itself as a social subject, in the sense habitually given to this, that is to say able to have a consciousness of itself as a relation to itself, facing capital.

Integrated in another totality, having lost its centrality as a principle organizing the totality of the labour process, the big factory which gathered a large number of workers together has not disappeared, but it is not the principle organizing the labour process and the valorisation process any more, as they are now a lot more diffuse. It has become a part in an organizing principle that it doesn't grasp. In the contradiction between proletariat and capital, there isn't anything sociologically given *a priori* (as was the "mass-worker" of the big factory) any more.

The diffuse, segmented, fragmented, corporate characteristic of conflicts is the necessary lot of a contradiction between classes situated at the level of the reproduction of capital. But it is because these conflicts are not a sum of juxtaposed elements but rather a diffusion produced from a historical modality of the contradiction between proletariat and capital, that a specific conflict, because of its characteristics, because of the period and the conditions in which it takes place, is able to polarize the totality of the antagonism that until then seemed irremediably diverse and diffuse.

To unite, workers must break the relation by which capital "brings them together". One of the most common signs that their struggles are going beyond the framework of a struggle over immediate demands and that workers are beginning to unite for themselves (that is to say begin to target their own condition) is the fact that they subvert and *détourne* the productive, urban, geographical and social frameworks of their "unity" for capital, as in 1982 and 1984 in La Pointe du Givet (in the French Ardennes) or, more recently, in Argentina.

One can't simultaneously want the unity of the proletariat and the communist revolution, i.e. this unity as a condition or *precondition* for revolution. There won't be any unity other than in communisation and it is only communisation, by targeting exchange and wage-labour, that can unite the proletariat, i.e. there will only be a unity of the proletariat in the very movement of its abolition. The hagiographers of struggles over immediate demands can only speculate about "unity", and they can't specify in any way the concrete form it takes, unless it is the formal unity of politics or of forms of organisation come to smooth over divisions which however remain within the struggle. This unity is always something to be *added* to the struggle.

Workers forge themselves into the revolutionary class in revolutionising social relations, that is everything that they are in the categories of exchange and wage labour. Within struggles over wages, they don't see the appearance of 'power' or 'project', but the impossibility of unifying without attacking their very existence as class within the division of labour and all the divisions of the wage relation and of exchange. That is, without putting class itself into question, without a revolutionary practice. The only unification of the proletariat is the one it realises in abolishing itself, which means that this has to be the unification of humanity. Measures of communisation starting from whatever point of the capitalist world (it will have to be from a multitude of points pretty much simultaneously) will have this effect of rapid communisation or will be crushed.

Under the cover of ideas of self-organisation and autonomy we can say whatever we like, that strikes 'are revolutionary', that they are so 'potentially', that they have 'something revolutionary', that they carry the 'seeds' of revolution, etc. All this has only one function, to fail to recognise the leap, the negation, the rupture and to avoid *critiquing* wage struggles. This leads to a gradualist and mechanistic conception of the passage of struggles over immediate demands to revolutionary struggles; and to abandoning the understanding that the class is the subject of its communist activity in coming into conflict with its previous situation. Marx, like all revolutionaries, saw a leap, a negation, but the difference with today is that before the permanent association of the class made it possible to envisage an organised continuity between one phase and to the other. Currently, the militants of autonomy seek in the defence of the price of labour power or in other struggles a 'something', a 'seed', a 'potentiality' of revolution. In this attitude of

waiting on the dynamic of struggles over immediate demands, the very struggle itself is supposed to engender another. But the 'struggles' are only moments of activity of proletarians that they go beyond and negate, not a chain of phenomena that gradually link together – one struggle carrying the seed of another. In short, the link between 'struggles', is the subject transforming himself negatively. The link is not 'evolutionary'.

In the course of struggle, what was once the subject of autonomy transforms itself and casts off its old clothes, so that it can no longer recognise itself as existing other than within the existence of capitalism. It is the exact opposite of autonomy and of self-organisation which, by their very nature, have as their meaning only the liberation of the proletariat, its affirmation and, why not, (for the nostalgic among us), its dictatorship. We can talk of the 'dynamic' of struggles only to reach an impasse over the self-transformation of the subject. It is to be blind to the fact that in this 'dynamic', what is abolished is the self-organised subject; and that this 'dynamic' exists only as abolition of the subject that self-organises. As long as the proletariat self-organises, it can only do it on the basis of what it is within the categories of capital. The point isn't to make a normative condemnation of self-organisation, but to state what it is and to say that the revolution is not a dynamic that it contains and which simply needs to blossom.

There is a qualitative leap when the workers unite against their existence as wage labourers, when they integrate the destitute and smash market mechanisms; not when one strike 'transforms' itself into a 'challenge' to power. The change is a rupture. The question is not the definition of self-organisation or autonomy, we should understand it as a social process; a process of rupture in the class struggle, the self-transformation of a subject that abolishes what defines it. Those who speak unceasingly of the 'dynamic' of struggles miss completely what is the essential moment: the proletariat as revolutionary subject abolishes itself as subject of autonomy.

Those who hold to the discourse of the 'dynamic' of struggles think that the workers, as they increasingly come into conflict with the state in their struggles over immediate demands, will realise that to win their demands they will have to rise to qualitatively superior forms of struggle. They will have to accede to the political or organisational means adequate to their demands. Once more, we fall into the same distortion: the end is the same, only the means are different. All forms of practice have a goal and use means adequate to reaching this goal. If they change, then the goals change. The end is not exterior to the means, it is its result. We are not concerned with violence, the 'means', or the 'councils' in themselves. What we ask is: why do the workers confront the state? For the sake of sectional or national 'interests'? To chuck immigrants out? Against the Americans? Or because the state stands as the defender of market relations, and so of all of the divisions of sector, of nation, of specific demands – against their communist movement?

### The rupture prefigured

From struggles over immediate demands to revolution, there can only be a rupture, a qualitative leap. But this rupture isn't a miracle. Neither is it the realisation by the proletariat that there is nothing left to do but the revolution, after the defeat of everything else. "Revolution is the only solution" is just as inept as talk of the revolutionary 'dynamic' of struggles. This rupture is produced positively by the unfolding of the cycle of struggles which precedes it, and we can say that it still forms a part of it. This rupture is prefigured in the multiplication of gaps within the struggle between on the one hand the proletariat's questioning of its existence as a class in its contradiction with capital, and on the other hand, the reproduction of capital which implies this existence as class. As is empirically verifiable, this gap is the dynamic of this cycle of struggles.

We can point to aspects of the Argentinian social movement which, starting from the defence of a proletarian condition and within this defence, went all the way to putting it into question; or of 'suicidal' struggles; or of the exteriority in relation to the Kabyl struggles of *their* self-organisation in the *aarchs*; or of the wild kids' activity in factories; of collectives; of the failure of autonomy; of the unemployed demanding the de-essentialisation of work; of the direct action movement; of the dissatisfaction that self-organisation contains within itself as it exists truly only as it opposes itself to capital in ratifying the existence of the proletariat as a class of the capitalist mode of production; finally, of all the forms of practice within struggles which produce the unity of the class as an exterior unity and an objective constraint.

Two essential points describe the essence of the current cycle of struggles:

The disappearance of a proletarian identity reaffirmed within the reproduction of capital. It is the end of the workers movement and the concomitant failure of self-organisation and of autonomy as a revolutionary perspective.

With the restructuring of the capitalist mode of production, the contradiction between the classes is found at the level of their respective reproduction. In its contradiction with capital, the proletariat puts itself into question.

Struggles display characteristics which were unthinkable thirty years ago. In the strikes of December 95 in France, in the struggles of the *sans-papiers*, of the unemployed, of the Liverpool dockers, of Cellatex, Alstom, Lu, of Marks & Spencer, in the Argentinian movement, in the Algerian rising; the specific characteristic of the struggle appears – in the course of the struggle itself – as a limit in that this very specific characteristic (whether it is the public sector, demands for jobs, defending the means of labour, fighting delocalisation, factory occupations, self-organisation etc.), against which the movement collides often in the tensions and the internal confrontations of its decline – always comes down to the fact of being a class and of remaining so.

Most of the time, the movements are not expressed by ringing declarations or radical action, but by all the practices of 'flight', or of denial by proletarians of their own conditions. In the 'suicidal' struggles of Cellatex, in the strike at Vilvoorde and many others it is evident that the proletariat is nothing if it is separated from capital and cannot remain this nothing (that the proletariat demands to be reunited with capital does not close the abyss that the struggle opens – the recognition and refusal of the proletariat of itself as that abyss). It is the de-essentialisation of labour which

becomes the activity of the proletariat, both in a tragic manner in its struggles without immediate perspectives (suicidal struggles) and in its self-destructive activities, and also in the demands for this de-essentialisation as for example in the struggle of the French unemployed and precarious workers in the Winter of '98. When it becomes evident (as it did in the Italian transport strikes or of the Fiat plant at Melfi), that autonomy and self-organisation have no perspective, this is the point at which the dynamic of this cycle of struggles is constituted and the ground is prepared for the process of the supersession of the struggle over immediate demands on its own basis. *The proletariat comes face to face with its own definition as a class which becomes autonomous in relation to it, which becomes foreign to it.* The practices of self-organisation and their fate are clear examples of this.

The proliferations of collectives and the recurrence of intermittent strikes (like Spring '03 in France, or the English postal workers) make palpable in defining themselves against it, that class unity is an objectification within capital. We shouldn't judge these phenomena with a normative measure, which sees in them only an unaccomplished project of class unification which is the antecedent to its affirmation. In these struggles, it is the exteriorisation of class belonging which is revealed as the present nature of struggle as a class. In all these movements, seeing the segmentation of the class as a weakness to be overcome in a unity, is to ask a formal question and to answer it with a formal question. The spread of these movements, their diversity, their discontinuity is their very dynamic and what is interesting in them. 'Going further' is not to overcome segmentation in unity – that is a formal answer to a problem which is probably obsolete. The point isn't to lose that segmentation, the differences. 'Going further', is, in other circumstances, the contradiction between these struggles in their diversity and the unity of the class objectified within capital. The point isn't to say the more the class is divided the better, but that a *generalization* of a strike movement is not synonymous with its unity, i.e. with an overcoming of differences which are seen as purely accidental and formal. The point is to understand what is at play in these segmented, diffuse and discontinuous movements: *the growth of a discrepancy within this 'substantial' unity objectified within capital.* This extreme diversity which is conserved and maybe even deepened in a more widespread movement (in contradiction with capital and this objective unity which it represents), is perhaps a condition of the articulation of these immediate struggles and communisation. These facts are now an unavoidable determination of the class struggle. The unity of the class can no longer base itself on the basis of the wage and the struggle over immediate demands as a prelude to its revolutionary activity. The unity of the proletariat can only be the activity in which it abolishes itself in abolishing everything that divides it. It is a fraction of the proletariat which in overcoming the demand based nature of its struggle will take communising measures and which will begin the process of the unification of the proletariat which will not be different from the unification of humanity, i.e. its creation as the totality of social relations that individuals establish between themselves in their singularity.

In recent times we have seen how unemployment and precariousness have been placed at the heart of the wage relation; we have seen how the situation of the clandestine worker has been defined as the generalised situation of labour-power; we have seen how the immediacy of the social individual has been posed as the already existing foundation of opposition to capital (as is done by the direct action movement); we have seen how suicidal strikes have broken out as at Cellatex and others in the Spring and Summer of 2000 (Metaleurop – with reservations – Adeshoffen, la Societe Francaise Industrielle de Controle et D'Equipements, Bertrand Faure, Mossley, Bata, Moulinex, Daewoo-Orion, ACT – ex Bull); and we have seen how class unity has been posited as an objectivity constituted within capital. It is the content of each of these particular struggles that produces the dynamic of this cycle *within and in the course* of these struggles. The revolutionary dynamic of this cycle of struggles appears in most of today's struggles as the tendency for the class to produce its existence as class within capital, and so to put class itself into question (the class no longer has a relation to itself). This dynamic has its intrinsic limit in what defines it as a dynamic – acting as a class. As theorists we are the spies and promoters of this gulf, which is the class putting its own existence as class into question within the class struggle, and in practice, we are also its actors when we are immediately involved. We exist in this rupture.

I will now develop some of these points in relation to some recent struggles.

### *Collectives*

The underlying dynamic behind the creation of collectives – which no longer imply self-organisation or autonomy – within each strike of any importance and length is testament to the end of working class identity. These formations are not, as autonomy, a better organisation/existence of the class than those institutionalised representative forms, leaving to them what belongs to them, (leave to the unions what belongs to them), but the creation of a distance towards these forms which has as its content *the distance of the class to itself.* A distance established against a class unity existing as something objective within the reproduction of capital. Those nostalgic for the Great Class Party and the unity of the battalions of the working class are kidding themselves if they think that the segmentation of the class is merely suffered – more often it is willed, constructed and demanded. *The nature of the segmentation and the collectives is the proletariat making extraneous its own definition as a class within the class struggle.* How then could a 'unity' that isn't one, that is an inter-activity, be constructed within a wider class movement? I do not know... but the class struggle has often shown its infinite inventiveness. We see as an extremely positive sign that the characteristics of the new cycle of struggles are given to us in the course of ordinary everyday struggles.



## Activities which produce the objectivisation of the existence and unity of the class

This class unity, even in the form of the general strike, (in the 'classical' conception) has entered the era of doubt. When the strikers of the spring of 2003 in France called for a general strike, they didn't ask of the unions what they themselves were not doing but would have wanted to do, *they demanded something else than they were doing*. Here we have a 'spontaneous', 'basic', 'self-organised' movement which sees as a way forward a call for a general strike from the very unions which they distance themselves from on a day to day basis. There is not necessarily a contradiction there (this is after all how things transpired), but it is difficult to present the demand that the unions call a general strike as a simple continuation of the movement. Strangely, this movement doesn't call for the general strike when it is on the rise, but rather when it is in decline, which gives a strange hue to the nature of the general strike. It is the strikers' own action which dominates the strikers, which was not the case fifteen days earlier when it was the continuous thread of activity and opposition through which the class exists in itself as distinction in relation to its unity and its objectified existence in the reproduction of capital. Class unity is still alive and well, it is an objective unity in the reproduction of capital, to appeal to the unions was simply to recognise the level at which this unity exists, as a hypostasised unity.

### *The "wild kids"*

Here we are talking about the rejection of the entire order of the capitalist system of production by important sections of young workers. This rejection has no time for the seductions or sanctions of integration or for the ideologies of self-management. This situation has nothing in common with what we saw in the 1970s in Europe and America.

The 'collateral victims' of the wild kids are the fables around cooperation tying the workers together, (for themselves), as a stepping stone to revolutionary self organisation and autonomy.

### *Argentina: a class struggle against autonomy.*

We can talk about 'self management of misery', but then we ignore the main thrust of the problem of the very nature of self-management, self-organisation and autonomy. It is just as easy to say that there is no possibility of self-management within the capitalist system – but generalised self-management having abolished the state and capitalist domination will in the end be nothing more than the management of businesses (of all businesses) and of their connections, *their exchanges*. It would inevitably lead to the re-establishment of value and of the state. The historic period of autonomous struggles in Argentina – the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s – is over not simply because empirically we don't encounter similar struggles, but as a result of the transformation of the mode of exploitation, of the composition of the working class, in the modalities of its reproduction. The 'Rodrigazo' of 1975, with its area councils, is revealed as the swansong of this period and this era of class struggle. Even during this period, autonomy resulted only in formulating nationalist programmes, economic planning or renewed trade union strength.

At the moment, for the militants of autonomy, what's important is the denial of actually existing autonomy, because they are stuck in an insurmountable contradiction. On the one hand, autonomy and self-organisation are the route travelled by the revolution in progress, or they constitute the potential revolution. On the other hand, the present expressions of autonomy are in a massive and recurrent way the confirmation of the class as class of the capitalist mode of production. The autonomous Argentinian movements declare – 'we have done the work of the political parties, the NGOs, the government'. The only perspective, the only dynamic which emerges is the one which is opened up by everything that runs counter to this autonomy. We can be purists of self-management and autonomy if we like, in the end self-organisation are the factories run by the workers *themselves* and the management of the *planes trabajar* by the *piqueteros* themselves, (even working time is now regulated within the movement). Since the *piquetero* organisations have won the right to manage these work plans, their allocation has itself become a huge question, that is, not just in relation to the government, but within the movement itself.

We cannot argue that because of the work plans the piqueteros are no longer autonomous and self-organised. If it is important to emphasise the autonomous and self-organised nature of the movements, it is not in order to show that they become degenerate or institutionalised, due to some sclerosis of self-organisation and autonomy; rather they are the clearest manifestation, the simple truth (neither good or bad), of what they are today: *a rejection of what we are in society which is nothing but our 'liberation'*.

The few cases of occupation with the resumption of production, asking the state to take control of the factory, are the real content of autonomy at the moment (the autonomy of the working class is labour and value). We imagine if we like *all* the factories taken over, this would change nothing. As long as the workers self-organise as workers (self-organisation is this by definition), the 'factories taken over' will be capitalist factories, never mind who runs them. *The essence of what has happened in Argentina, is that all the forms of self-organisation, autonomy, workers' control and assembly immediately encountered their limit in the form of opposition and an internal contradiction treating them like a perpetuation of capitalist society*. Abolishing capital is at the same time denying oneself as a worker and not self-organising as such, it's a movement of the abolition of businesses, of factories, of the 'product', of exchange (whatever its form). The proletariat as class and revolutionary subject abolishes itself as such in the abolition of capital. The

process of revolution is that of the abolition of what is self-organisable. *Self-organisation is the first act of the revolution, what follows is carried out against it.*

The content of this challenging of self-organisation within self-organisation is consciously articulated in Argentina around two themes: *subjectivity* and *labour*.

At the very heart of self-organised collective projects, the subjectivity and inter-individuality put forward is in opposition to the particularisation of an activity like labour which is the coincidence of the social and individual aspects of human activity outside itself; and is in opposition to the autonomisation of the conditions of production as economy. The capitalist mode of production is a mode of production not because it needs to pass through material production as such, but because its social relations need to pass through a form, a principle, which can only exist *objectively* – value. Communism is not a mode of production, because activity is not gathered as an exterior common norm that can only exist as production objectifying itself. In communism, relations between individuals are relations in which their singularity constitutes the reality of their relations. It is just as absurd to conceive communism as a form of organisation of production, which inevitably has in the end to be a form of account, a forcibly abstract equalisation of activities which can be quantified, as it would be to conceive it as a purely inter-subjective relation to which production is a mere accessory. In communism, each activity is an end in itself because there is no norm, there is no principle of equalisation or of a situation to reproduce.

The most important aspect of the Argentinian struggles is precisely the one scorned by the apologists of self-organisation. Not as they themselves would have it – the problem of autonomy within productive activity become sclerotic in institutionalisation 'facilitating the reproduction of an economy in crisis' (*Échanges*) – but because it is therein that autonomy truly lies and that it is brought into question. Revolution as communisation becomes credible within the modalities of productive activity because it enters into contradiction with self-organisation in the way in which its productive activities are implemented and in conflicts in which self-organisation itself becomes the target.

In the productive activities which developed during the social struggles in Argentina, something happened which was at first sight rather disconcerting: autonomy appeared clearly as what it is, the taking over and reproduction of its situation within capital by the working class. The defenders of "revolutionary" autonomy can say that this came about because it didn't triumph, but this was its real triumph. But, at the very moment when, in productive activities, autonomy appeared for what it was, it was the whole basis of autonomy and self-organisation which was overturned: the proletariat could not find in itself the capacity to create other inter-individual relations (I'm deliberately not talking about social relations), without overturning and negating what it is in this society, that is to say without entering into contradiction with the content of its autonomy. In the way that the productive activities have been carried out, in the effective details of their realisation, it is the determinations of the proletariat as a class of this society which have been effectively shaken: property, exchange, division of labour and, above all, work itself.

"If we create canteens only so the *compañeros* can eat, then we are dickheads. If we believe that producing on a farm is just about digging up beans so that so that the *compañeros* can eat, then we are really complete dickheads... If we don't know how to leave the farm and everything which the state throws at us, how to be the builders of a new social relation, of new values, of a new subjectivity, let's not bet on a new 19/20." (a militant from MTD Allen<sup>4</sup> – south of Argentina, *Macache*, p. 27). We want "to engender a new subjectivity, new values" (*ibid*). Elsewhere in an interview with an activist from MTD Solano, it appears that the aim of all these activities is not just to survive, but the main *raison d'être* is given as "developing new forms of life in common": division of labour; rotation of tasks; hierarchy; men-women relations; forms of apprenticeship; public/private relations; unskilled/skilled labour; going beyond relations of exchange etc. An important position is for example, in MTD Solano, the refusal (in so far as is possible) to take decisions by voting: "...the idea being to find the answer in which everyone recognises themselves". It is the question of "we" and "I" which is treated in a new way here. Without going so far as to talk about the social immediacy of the individual, in such an approach what is put in place is, beyond any mystical relation between the one and the general, the non-separation between the two which maintains their diversity. "When there is a vote, it gives the sensation of losers and winners, as if there were two groups". Here it is also necessary to insist again on the importance of territorial organisation which calls into question self-organisation as imprisonment in a particular situation (territorial unity is not socially homogenous). The occupied factory is no longer alone, it is part of a totality which includes it. Production, distribution thus pose problems which can no longer be solved in the categories which strictly define the proletarian condition and its reproduction. An activist of the MTD Allen (*Macache*) told how the question of surplus, of overproduction, of its distribution, was posed in an occupied factory, how for the Brukman workers taking over the factory and making it work again was part of a relation of force which included the liaison with the unemployed *piqueteros* movement. At that moment, we can say that what is lacking is "generalisation of self-organisation" or autonomy. But if so we do not understand that what is called a "generalisation" is not one, it is a destruction of the class as self-organising subject. This generalisation is a supersession by itself of the subject which previously found in its situation the capacity to self-organise. If we do not understand this "dynamic" as a rupture, we are stuck on the vision of a purely formal movement because its content eludes us, we are confusing the taking in hand of the conditions of survival and the abolition of the situation that one has been led to take in hand. If the proletariat abolishes itself, it does not self-organise. Calling for the self-organisation of the whole movement, is to be blind to its content.

We self-organise like the unemployed of Mosconi, the workers of Brukman, the inhabitants of the shanty towns..., but when we self-organise, we immediately come up against what it is that we are and which, in struggle,

---

<sup>4</sup> Movimiento de Trabajadores Desempleados - unemployed workers' movement.

becomes what must be superseded. Self-organisation as a general limit to supersession appears in conflicts between the self-organised sectors. What appears in these conflicts is that workers defend their present situation, remaining in the categories of the capitalist mode of production which define them. Unification is impossible without being precisely the abolition of self-organisation, without the unemployed person, the Zanon worker, the squatter no longer being able to be unemployed, a Zanon worker or a squatter. Whether there is unification, but then there is the abolition of the same which is self-organisable, or whether there is self-organisation but then unification, is a dream which is lost in the conflicts that the diversity of situations implies (cf. oppositions between the "neighbourhood committees" of El Alto and the associations of Santa Cruz in Bolivia concerned with the nationalisation of gas and oil).

In Argentina, self-organisation has not been surpassed, and it can only be surpassed in the final phase of a *communizing* insurrection. The social struggles in Argentina have announced this supersession. When it becomes manifest that it can no longer have autonomy as its content as a realisable project or a project already in the course of realisation, self-organisation becomes an *imprisonment within its own situation* which is precisely what the struggle against capital must go beyond. The class struggle remains trapped in the simple expression of the class situation. In the course of the relentless defence of its most immediate interests, the existence of the class becomes an exteriorised constraint within capital. In the defence of its immediate interests, the proletariat is led to abolish itself because its activity in the "occupied factory" can no longer be imprisoned in the "occupied factory", nor in the juxtaposition, the coordination, the unity of the "occupied factories", nor in everything which is self-organisable (cf. in *Macache* the testimony of a Brukman worker).

This means simply that the proletariat cannot struggle against capital without calling into question the causes which define itself in its involvement with capital. It is that which we can see peeping through the internal contradictions of the productive projects (self-organisation of the class all of whose effective practical details overturn all the terms defining the class) and in the conflicts between the self-organised structures.

*Algeria: "When they talk to me about Aarouchs, I have the impression that they are talking about something foreign to me".*

The insurrectional social explosion beginning in the Kabylie region in spring 2001 also illustrates the dissatisfaction that self-organisation gives rise to as soon as it is put in place, not by its temporary shortcomings but by its very nature which confirms the existence of the proletariat defined as a class in the categories of the capitalist mode of production. This dissatisfaction that the insurrectional movement manifests vis-à-vis the forms of self-organisation *which it gives itself* at a certain point rests on two points: the extension of the movement and the question of demands. In this dissatisfaction and the two points on which it rests, what exists is the gap in the class struggle between the existence of the class as it formalises itself in self-organisation and the way that the continuation and deepening of its contradiction with capital leads to its being called into question. In this continuation and this deepening, in the absence of measures of communisation, the Kabylie insurrection was condemned to a headlong rush without formalisable objectives and/or to return to its existence recognised for itself, that is to say recognised by and for capital, that is to say finally to *negotiation* through its forms of self-organisation. The riots did not have a perspective of demands, or such a generality (the end of the *hogra*) that there could be one. They sometimes turned into confrontations (more or less manipulated by the police during the big Algerian demonstrations of June 2001) between rival gangs of looting demonstrators, which testifies to the impossibility of a class unification outside the revolutionary activity in which it abolishes itself.

The *aarchs* played two contradictory roles, in one way an expression of the movement, as its form of organisation, its place of debate, its voice; they were also a new emerging form of political representation: a substitute for the parties, a new political representation which confined the revolt. Finally, very rapidly, the *aarchs* revealed themselves not as a broad space of expression for the population, but as an arena for politicians old and new.

Right from the start the Algerian insurrection of Kabylie, despite or because of its great violence, limited itself to attacking all the institutions of the state, but left intact, because it was not its objective and it did not have the means to attack, all the relations of production, exchange and distribution (despite a few marginal modifications relevant to the solidarity or the mutual aid which marks any period where the habitual social framework is overturned). That insurrection had to self-organise. Its self-organisation was then only the sign that it did not overturn social relations, that it had only a limited aim: the liberation of society from a "corrupt" and "corrupting" state (from an unfree state) according to the terms which appeared from the beginning of the insurrection. It is its very limitation which gave birth to the forms of organisation that it gave itself, that is to say forms of *self-organisation*.

The continuation of attacks against the institutions of the state after June 2001 and the necessity of violence in these attacks are as much a rejection of the self-organised movement of the *aarchs* as they are attacks on the Algerian state. It is its own existence as a class that self-organisation formalises as an existence in and for capital and that, in struggle, the proletariat no longer recognises as its own. Its existence as a class is autonomised for it. To parody Marx in *The Class Struggles in France*: it is only by making appear from its own movement a compact, powerful self-organisation, making it into an adversary and fighting it that the party of subversion can finally become a truly revolutionary party.

That doesn't happen without organisation, as when proletarians take on various necessary tasks which impose themselves in the development of the struggle: the blocking of roads, laying siege to police stations, forcing shopkeepers to stop supplying the forces of order, the direct reappropriation of commodities which are necessary for them by looting or the control of stocks... This *organisation* is never the formalisation of what they are in existing society as the base or anchorage point of the new society to construct as the liberation of what they are, that is to say *it is not self-organisation*.

It does not formalise the existence of any preceding subject. The situation of proletarians is no longer something to organise, to defend and liberate, but something to abolish.

It is interesting to recall the simultaneously conflictual and integrative relations which are created between unemployed, employed proletarians, small shopkeepers, employees of administrations which are still in Algeria more or less involved in a relationship of political clientelism. No unity on the basis of demands can ever be realised. The struggle of the Algerian proletarians of Kabylie imposes itself by direct action, it expresses itself outside of any particular terrain (workplace, neighbourhood...), it negates the divisions maintained by the capitalist class, it tends to its generalisation and it bears a global rejection of the state, it develops itself in opposition to all the legalist, pacifist and electoral slogans.

These proletarians only very rarely assert the "class determinations" of their activity. It is true that this differs in comparison with the preceding cycle of struggles, where any action no matter how reformist was loudly proclaimed to be the mobilization of the global working class, proud of itself and its flat-cap. That the action of proletarians is no longer proclaimed to be class action does not mean it isn't class action. The questioning by the proletariat of its own existence as a class which objectifies itself against itself as a determination of the reproduction of capital, is a convulsive type of class action, as any self-organization confirms. It is no surprise that proletarians no longer affirm themselves as acting as a class when it is their adversaries who uphold the existence of the proletariat as a class as the dominant content of the counter-revolution facing it.

### *The Direct Action Movement (DAM)*

Because it proclaims the negation of classes as a lifestyle, and thereby, as a precondition for the class struggle, the DAM ends up in a series of dead ends: capital as domination and symbol, the *unsolvable* question of the DAM's own extension, its reference to needs, to pleasure, to desires, to an "authentic" human self. This dead end appears in the course of riots – their self-limitation (their self-referential character) – and in their "recuperation" in aims which are not their own, as in Quebec, in Prague and also in Genoa. However, this reciprocal exclusion which constitutes the DAM between being proletarian and producing other social relations has become *now*, in this cycle, the necessary form in which the dynamic of this cycle of struggles manifests itself. Even if the immediate relations of individuals in their singularity end up existing merely as an alternative, the DAM prefigures the content of the communist revolution: the proletariat's contestation, against capital, of its existence as class.

### *"Suicidal" struggles: the obsolescence of autonomy*

We have already evoked the struggle of Cellatex and those which followed. In December 2002–January 2003, the ACT strike in Angers (IT systems, subsidiary of Bull) is carried out in a contradictory fashion by an inter-union coordination committee and a strike committee "broadly open, emerging from the rank-and-file" (*Échanges* no.104). Three production lines are momentarily restarted, which does not prevent the rest of the products ending up being burned. It is interesting to review the chronology of the events. The factory is occupied following the announcement, on 20th December, of the definitive liquidation of the ACT (after multiple manouvres and dilatory discussions). *The factory is occupied, but no one knows why*. On 10th January the strike committee agrees to start the production of electronic cards destined for an Italian equipment supplier. On 22nd January, 200 cards are delivered, on the 23rd the occupants burn cards taken out of storage, and on the 24th the occupants are evicted without difficulty.

If Cellatex can teach us anything in terms of form (violence has a long history in class struggle), but also in terms of content, it is that the dynamic at work in this type of struggle resides in the fact that the proletariat is in itself nothing, but a nothing full of social relations: against capital, the proletariat has no prospect but its disappearance.

In the same period, the workers laid off by Moulinex, in setting fire to a factory building, inscribed themselves equally in the dynamic of this new cycle of struggles in which the proletariat's own existence as a class is the limit of its class action.

### **Communisation**

The ultimate limit of the struggle over wages and conditions can be defined as that in which the contradiction between the proletariat and capital comes to a head to such an extent that the definition of class becomes an external constraint, an exteriority simply there because capital is there. Class membership is exteriorised as a constraint. This is where we find the moment of a qualitative leap in class struggle. It is here that we find a *supersession* and not an overgrowing. It is here that we can pass from a change *in* the system to a change *of* system.

The ultimate point of the reciprocal implication between the classes is that in which the proletariat seizes the means of production. It seizes them, but it cannot *appropriate* them. An appropriation carried out by the proletariat is a contradiction in terms, because it could only be achieved through its own abolition as class, in a universal union of production in which it is stripped of all that remains of its previous social situation. In communism there is no longer a question of appropriation because it is the very notion of "product" which is abolished. Of course, there are objects (even the notions of objectivity and subjectivity are to be redefined) which are used to produce, others which are directly consumed, and others which are used for both. But to speak about products and to pose the question of their circulation, of their distribution, or of their "transfer", i.e. to conceive of a moment of appropriation presupposes places

of rupture, of “coagulation” of human activity: the market in market societies, the stockpiling and “stint or limit”<sup>5</sup> in certain visions of communism. The product is not a simple thing. To speak of the product is to suppose that a result of human activity appears as *finished* in relation to another result, or amongst other results. We should not proceed from the product, but from activity.

In communism, human activity is infinite because it is indivisible. It has concrete or abstract results, but these results are never “products”, for that would raise the question of their appropriation or of their transfer\* under some given mode. This *infinite human activity* synthesizes what one can say about communism. If we can speak of infinite human activity in communism, it is because the capitalist mode of production already allows us to see – albeit contradictorily and not as a “good side” – human activity as a continuous global social flux, and the “general intellect” or the “collective worker” as the dominant force of production. The social character of production does not prefigure anything: it merely renders the basis of value contradictory.

The necessity with which the communist revolution is faced consists not in modifying the share between wages and profit, but in abolishing the capitalist nature of the accumulated means of production. A struggle over wages and conditions can pass from the level of *conflict* to that of *contradiction*. The level of conflict is that of the share between wages and profit. It doesn’t matter if interests remain irreconcilable on this level: we remain in a zero sum game that is indefinitely reproducible, and as long as we remain on this level the pendulum will swing one way and then another, because we have not attacked the pendulum itself. The level of contradiction is that of surplus value and of *productive labour*, but one cannot demand to be a little less of a surplus-value producing worker, other than through demanding a slightly higher wage or slightly less hours of work, which brings us back to the questions of distribution and the conflict. It is the insufficiency of surplus-value in relation to accumulated capital which is at the heart of the crisis of exploitation. If at the centre of the *contradiction* between the proletariat and capital there were not the question of *surplus-value* producing labour; if there were only a problem of distribution and if all the conflicts over wages were not the existence of this contradiction, the revolution would remain a pious wish. It is thus not by attacking the nature of labour as productive of surplus-value that the struggle over wages is superseded (this would always bring us back to a problem of distribution), but by an attack on the means of production as capital. A self-organised struggle can take us to the point of rupture, but the attack on the means of production is its supersession.

The attack against the capitalist nature of the means of production is tantamount to their abolition as value absorbing labour in order to valorise itself; it is the extension of gratuity, the potentially physical destruction of certain means of production; their abolition as factories in which the product is defined as product, i.e. the frameworks of exchange and of commerce; it is the upheaval of relations between the sections of production which materialise exploitation and its rate; it is their definition, their setting in individual intersubjective relations; it is the abolition of the division of labour such as it is inscribed in the urban landscape, in the material configuration of buildings, in the separation between town and country, in the very existence of something which one calls a factory or a place of production. “Relations between individuals are fixed in things, because exchange value is by nature material” (Marx, *Grundrisse*...) The abolition of value is a concrete transformation of the landscape in which we live, it is a new geography. The abolition of social relations is a very material affair.

The production of new social relations between individuals are thus the communist measures, which are taken as a necessity of the struggle. The abolition of exchange and of value, of the division of labour, of property, is nothing but the art of class war: no more no less now than when Napoleon waged his war in Germany through the introduction of the Napoleonic Code. Previous social relations are dissolved in this social activity where one can’t distinguish between the activity of strikers and insurgents, and the creation of other relations between individuals; the creation of new relations, in which individuals only consider what is as a moment of an uninterrupted flow of production of human life.

The destruction of exchange: this means the workers attacking the banks which hold their accounts and those of other workers, thus making it necessary to manage without; this means the workers communicating their “products” to themselves and the community directly and without market; this means the homeless occupying homes, thus “obliging” construction workers to produce freely, the construction workers taking from the shops at liberty, obliging the whole class to organise to seek food in the sectors to be collectivised, etc. Let’s be clear about this. There is no measure which, in itself, taken separately, is “communism”. To distribute goods, to directly circulate means of production and raw materials, to use violence against the existing state: fractions of capital can achieve some of these things in certain circumstances. That which is communist is not “violence” in itself, nor “distribution” of the shit that we inherit from class society, nor “collectivisation” of surplus-value sucking machines: it is the nature of the movement which connects these actions, underlies them, renders them the moments of a process which can only communise ever further, or be crushed.

Military and social activities are indissoluble, simultaneous, and interpenetrating. A revolution cannot be carried out without taking communist measures, without dissolving wage labour, communising supplies, clothing, housing, taking all the weapons (destructive, but also telecommunications, foods, etc.), integrating the destitute (including those which we ourselves will have reduced to this state), the unemployed, the ruined peasants, rootless drop-out students. To speak of a revolution carried out by a “category” which accounts for 20% of the population and which “strikes” to ask of the state that it satisfies its “interests”: that is a joke.

---

<sup>5</sup> prise au tas: this is an economic term originating in Kropotkin’s “Conquest of Bread” Ch. 5: “no stint or limit to what the community possesses in abundance, but equal sharing and dividing of those commodities which are scarce or apt to run short”

From the moment in which we begin to consume freely, it is necessary to reproduce that which is consumed; for this we lack the primary materials, spare parts, and food (I avoid the unsatisfying concept of "use value" which is an intrinsic concept to the existence of the commodity). It is thus necessary to seize the means of transport, of telecommunications, and enter into contact with other sectors; in doing this one runs up against opposing armed groups. The confrontation with the state immediately poses the problem of armament, which can only be solved by setting up a distribution network to support combat in an almost infinite multiplicity of places (the constitution of a front or of determinate zones of combat is the death of the revolution). From the moment in which proletarians dismantle the laws of commodity relations, there is no turning back (even more so because, in doing this, capital is deprived of essential goods, and it counter-attacks). Every social deepening, every extension gives flesh and blood to new relations, and enables the integration of more and more non-proletarians to the communising class, which is in the process of constituting and dissolving itself simultaneously. It enables the reorganisation of the productive forces, abolishing to an ever greater extent all competition and division between proletarians, acquiring a military position, and making of this the content and the progress of its armed confrontation against those which the capitalist class can still mobilise, to integrate and reproduce in its social relations.

The capitalist class and its innumerable peripheral strata rest on a complicated tangle of financial connections, credits, and obligations, that is ridden with red-tape, bureaucratic, and vulnerable to the highest point. Without these connections its internal cohesion breaks down. This class is not a community founded on a material association; it is a conglomeration of competitors unified by exchange. Exchange is the abstract community (money). This is why all the measures of communisation will have to be a vigorous action for the dismantling of the connections which link our enemies and their material support: rapid destruction, without the possibility of return. Communisation is not the peaceful organisation of free goods and of a pleasant way of life amongst proletarians. The dictatorship of the social movement of communisation is the process of the integration of humanity to the disappearing proletariat. The strict definition of the proletariat in comparison with other strata – its fight against all commodity production – is at the same time a process which forces the strata of the salaried petit-bourgeoisie, of the "class of social containment", to join the communising class. It is thus definition, exclusion and, at the same time demarcation and opening, erasure of the borders and withering away of classes. This is not a paradox, but the reality of the movement in which the proletariat is defined in practice as the movement for the constitution of the human community. The social movement in Argentina was confronted by, and posed, the question of the relations between active proletarians (wage-earning), the unemployed, and the excluded and middle strata. It has only brought extremely fragmentary responses, of which the most interesting is without doubt that of its territorial organisation. In this situation, the radical sworn opponents of interclassism or the propagandists of national democratic unanimity are the militants of two different types of defeat. The revolution which in this cycle of struggles can no longer be anything but communisation, supersedes the dilemma between the Leninist or democratic class alliances and Gorter's "proletariat alone".

The only way of superseding the conflicts between the unemployed and those with jobs, between the qualified and the unqualified, is to carry out from the start, in the course of the armed struggle, the measures of communisation which remove the very basis of this division (this is something which the recuperated companies in Argentina, when confronted by this question, tried only very marginally, being generally satisfied (cf. Zanon) with some charitable redistribution to groups of *piqueteros*.) In the absence of this, capital will play on this fragmentation throughout the movement, and will find its Noske and Scheidemann amongst the self-organised.<sup>6</sup> The crises of the capitalist mode of production are not a guarantee of revolutionary process: the capitalist class knows perfectly well how to use them to decompose the working class. In fact, what the German revolution had already shown, is that it is a question of dissolving the middle strata while taking concrete communist measures which force them to begin to join the proletariat, i.e. to achieve their "proletarianisation". Nowadays in developed countries, the question is at the same time simpler and more dangerous. On the one hand a massive majority of the middle strata is salaried and thus no longer has a material base to its social position; its role of containment and of management of capitalist cooperation is essential but permanently being rendered precarious; and its social position depends upon the very fragile mechanism of the subtraction of fractions of surplus value. But on the other hand for these very same reasons, its formal proximity to the proletariat pushes it to present, in these struggles, national or democratic alternative managerial "solutions" which would preserve its own positions. It could be at ease in radical democratism expressing the limits of struggles. There will be no miracle solution because there is no unifying demand. The class only unifies itself through breaking the relation in which the demands have their meaning: the capitalist relation. The essential question which we will have to solve is to understand how we extend communism, before it is suffocated in the pincers of the commodity; how we integrate agriculture so as not to have to exchange with peasants; how we do away with the exchange-based relations of the opponent to impose on him the logic of the communisation of relations and of the seizure of goods; how, faced with the revolution, we dissolve the block of fear through the revolution.

The proletarians "are" not revolutionaries like the sky "is" blue, because they "are" salaried and exploited, nor "are" they the dissolution of existing conditions. In their self-transformation they constitute themselves *from what they are*, as a revolutionary class.

---

<sup>6</sup> Noske is known for brutally putting down communist uprisings in Germany 1919, Scheidemann proclaimed the Weimar Republic in 1918 to stave off a workers' revolution.