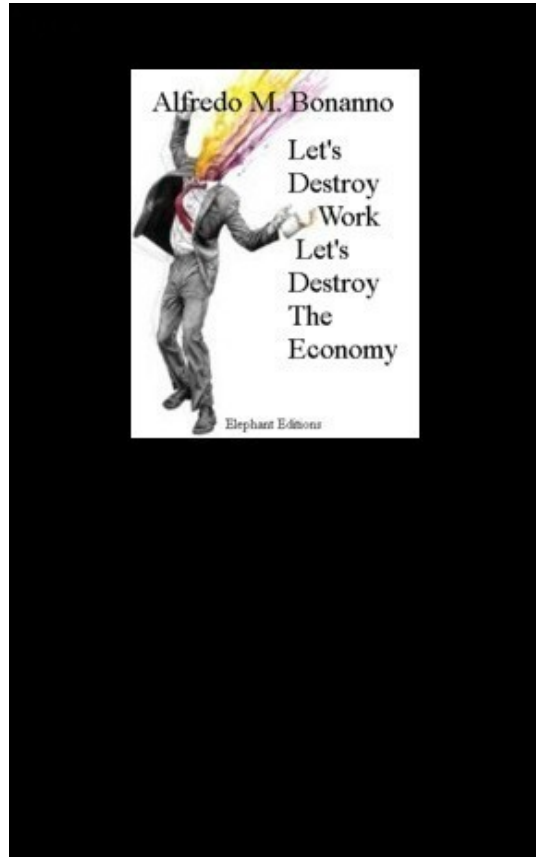


# Let's Destroy Work, Let's Destroy the Economy

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# Contents

Original titles . . . . .	3
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Let’s Destroy Work</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Let’s keep our feet on the ground, please</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Space and capital</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Self-management</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Involuntary aspects of voluntary work</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Restructuring capital and new democracy</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>No more crises</b>	<b>21</b>
A glance at some of the old certainties . . . . .	21
The complexity of the problem of “crisis” . . . . .	21
A double mistake . . . . .	22
Towards a cohabitation with disorder . . . . .	22
The theoretical effort . . . . .	23
The ‘new’ enterprise is emerging from this unique melting pot. . . . .	24
Revolutionaries . . . . .	24
<b>Quality and the factory</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>Streamlined production</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>A little man in Singapore</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>The ethical bank</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>Unemployment in Italy—how come everything doesn’t explode?</b>	<b>32</b>
Unemployment in Italy today . . . . .	32
Ways of putting a brake on things . . . . .	32
But why doesn’t everything explode? . . . . .	33
<b>A million jobs</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>Farewell to claiming</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>The significance of an insignificant event</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>World domination in a few words</b>	<b>38</b>

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# Introduction

The old work ethic has disappeared along with the massive obsolete structures of capital which required a permanent army of producers, yet work still has far more implications than mere survival. Millions of people still compete for the privilege of turning up day after day, year after year, to surrender body and soul in exchange for a wage. The alternative: to encounter one's real desires and create the means required to realise them, could present some surprises and lead to undreamed choices. A job, boring or arduous as it might be, is the easy way out. It gives structure to our day and puts order in our expectations, giving us just enough in our pockets to acquire instant sublimation and quell any sudden surge of hatred towards what is stealing our time and our lives.

The pernicious mixture of hatred and dependency at the basis of the work relationship atrophies the individual, reducing life to a question of accountancy. 'Free time', a mere negative quantity ranging from a few hours between days at work, to months or even years between jobs, can be survived by performing a number of rituals. Shopping, watching TV, doing voluntary work or going on adventure holidays to far away places can fill gaps and prevent any feelings of anguish which might lead to putting the whole setup in question. If all else fails, capital's white-coated auxiliaries are always on hand to prescribe the latest psychotropic fix tailored to produce a dim glow of indifference.

Technological 'progress' once deformed human beings into ragged, starving labourers (still a reality for the millions who produce the global economy's primary requirements) then into skilled workers with access to consumer goods, and now uprooted, flexible 'human resources' with access to McDonald's, flexitime, credit cards, even a mortgage and shares in the company. The essence of this new slavery is that life itself has been mortgaged to the interests of capital. Anyone harbouring doubts about the ethics of this reality can find solace in some of its 'alternative' manifestations. Voluntary work, 'alternative' banks and 'self-managed' enterprises now exist alongside famine, genocide and the destruction of the planet, all equally indispensable components of post-industrial capital.

Remunerated non-work (dole), dismal production of social peace, is also a job and an essential part of this whole system where the increase in 'free time' (always obscured by the shadow of work) is tainted with restricted freedom of movement (lack of money and status). Even robbing banks or reappropriating goods remains within the logic of capital if the individual perpetrator of the deed does not already have their own project in motion. The appropriation of our lives (our time, our space), once snatched here and there through sabotage and absenteeism, now requires the invention of a new, creative project starting from the destruction of work, both subjectively and objectively. *We need time to reflect on what we want to do with our lives, and space to find the necessary means to bring this about, through both individual and collective experimentation.* Life unbridled, a venture into the *absolute other*, requires the total destruction not only of 'my' work, but of the very concept of work and economy as the basis of human relations.

Now, if we eliminate work as a reality, it follows that we implicitly reject the industrial working class as a privileged component in the revolutionary struggle against exploitation and domestication. Reduced in number, abandoned by the unions and dismembered as a class due to mobility and the new technologies, the survivors are prey to devious forms of control of their actions and their minds. Access to credit and consumerism have also played their part in constructing the anteroom of existential redundancy for the proletariat.

Along with the disappearance of the working class as a defining force in the struggle against capital we are also witnessing the disappearance of the concept of the crisis, once considered to be a precise moment in the future where economic collapse and disorder were to herald in the revolution. There was the belief, even among many anarchists, that one day this would occur, it was only a question of time, so all that we had to do was to spread anarchist ideas and propaganda whilst awaiting the great event. We now know that crises do not exist, *not because the world is in perfect order but because, on the contrary, it is in complete disorder.* And if capital is surviving by adapting to the chaos of economic reality, we cannot talk about programming or economic 'laws', or think of the class struggle as something that has 'alternate phases'. There are moments of greater or lesser intensity in the struggle between exploiters and exploited, but there is no way to measure expectation. *We must conclude that the time is always ripe for attack, it is only the means we choose and the surrounding conditions that change.*

A closer look at such questions can enhance our destructive project and give it focus. In fact, the analyses presented here in the form of a collection of essays were originally a contribution to the lively debate that was going on in Italy at

the time they were written. The leading article, 'Let's Destroy Work' was first produced in leaflet form as a contribution to an eponymous meeting in Turin which was attended by many anarchists from Italy and beyond.

We see in this first analysis how in the recent past the struggle against work was contained within the parameters of capital, where workers 'stole time' from the bosses inside the factory. Alternative forms of production were also experimented, and attempts at self-management were the order of the day. However, everyone acted within the quantitative dimension, remaining enclosed within the restrictive work environment. The new technologies are now causing the disintegration of the old worker identity and many of the strategies once applied by workers in the struggle against their conditions are being implemented by the bosses themselves. The discourse must therefore turn itself *against* work to become a qualitative, destructive project for the immediate transformation of life. Mere *doing* will then give way to *free action*, where everything is yet to be invented and experimented.

The supporting articles, which tackle aspects of the present economy mentioned above, give considerable insight and help to demystify these new forms.

It is therefore my conviction that the following analyses deserve careful consideration, and I am well aware that this will require a certain effort due to their complexity, unaided by the limitations of translation. Nevertheless, the effort could well be rewarded with the acquisition of greater clarity, especially concerning areas of activity which claim to be 'alternative' choices and merely serve to confuse the issue.

There can no longer be room for doubt concerning the question of work. It is time to joyously begin to destroy the *cops in our heads* along with everything else that revolts us, recklessly making and breaking our own rules in the *urgent task of demolition*.

Jean Weir

# Let's Destroy Work

Work is a subject that is coming back into fashion in a big way in newspapers, academic lectures, papal sermons, electoral speeches and even articles and pamphlets produced by anarchists.

The main questions raised are: what can we do about growing unemployment? How can we give meaning to lost professionalism in jobs that are undergoing the effects of neo-industrial development? What alternatives can be found to replace traditional work? And, finally, and this is the way many anarchists think, how can we abolish work or reduce it to the indispensable minimum?

Let us make it clear right away that none of these problems interests us. We are not concerned with the political problems of those who see unemployment as a danger to democracy and order. We do not feel any nostalgia for lost professionalism. We are even less interested in elaborating libertarian alternatives to grim factory work or intellectual labour, which are unwittingly doing nothing but toe the line of the advanced post-industrial project. Nor are we for the abolition of work or its reduction to the minimum required for a meaningful happy life. Behind all this there is always the hand of those who want to regulate our lives, think for us, or politely suggest that we think as they do.

We are for the destruction of work and, as we will try to demonstrate, that is quite a different matter. But let us proceed in an orderly fashion.

The post-industrial society, which we will come to later, has resolved the problem of unemployment, at least within certain limits, by dispersing the work force into flexible sectors which are easy to manoeuvre and control. In actual fact the social threat of growing unemployment is more theoretical than practical, and is being used as a political deterrent to dissuade wide social strata from attempting to organise in ways that might question the choices of neo-liberalism, especially at international level. So, precisely because workers are much easier to control when they are skilled and attached to the workplace with career prospects in the production unit, there is insistence everywhere—even among the ecclesiastical hierarchies—on the need to give people work and thereby reduce unemployment. Not because the latter constitutes a risk from the point of view of production, but because the danger could come from precisely that flexibility which is now indispensable to the organisation of production today. The fact that the worker has been robbed of a precise identity could lead to social disintegration, making control more difficult in the medium term. That is what all the institutional fuss about unemployment is really about.

In the same way, the productive process no longer requires a high level of professional training, at least for the majority of workers. The need for skilled labour has been replaced by a demand for flexibility, i.e., an adaptability to do tasks that are constantly being changed, and willingness to move from one firm to the other. In short, they must adapt to a life of change in accordance with the bosses' needs. This is now being programmed from school onwards, where the institutional cultural elements that once constituted the basic technical knowledge from which the world of work built real professionalism, are no longer provided. Not that there is no longer a need for a high level of professionalism. But this now only applies to a few thousand individuals who are trained in postgraduate courses often funded by the big companies themselves in their attempt to secure people suitable for indoctrination and conditioning.

Until recently the world of work was permeated with an iron discipline: the assembly line, strict controls by white collar workers, to the point of secret files and sacking for any deviation from the norm. Holding on to a job meant submission, acquiring a military-style mentality, learning procedures that were sometimes complex, sometimes simple, and applying them, identifying with them. It meant considering one's self, one's whole way of life and everything that mattered in the world including one's ideas and social relations, to be summed up in them. The worker spent most of his time in the factory, made friends with his workmates, talked about problems at work during his time off. He used recreational facilities provided by the company and when the holidays came round he ended up going away with his workmates and their families. To complete the picture the large companies held social events and organised periodical outings to bring families together. Their children went to the same schools, and one of them usually inherited his father's job when he retired. In this way work went full circle, affecting not only the worker's whole personality but also that of his family, thereby creating complete identification with the company. Just think of the tens of thousands of Fiat workers in Turin who supported the Juventus football team owned by Fiat boss, Agnelli, for example. This world has now disappeared for good. Even though some residue of it still exists, most of it has disappeared along with its projectual uniformity. A provisional, uncertain work relationship has replaced it. Insecurity about the future is a

fundamental element, and lack of skill means the lack of a base on which to plan one's life as a worker, now left with no project beyond earning enough to make ends meet or pay a mortgage.

In the past, escape from work took the form of searching for alternative ways of producing so as to reappropriate the creativity extorted by the capitalist mechanism. The model applied was the refusal of discipline and sabotage of the production lines in order to slow down the work pace and get time off—even if only minutes—free from alienation. In this way the time stolen from meticulous factory supervision had a value as something alternative. Just for a moment, one breathed free from the prison-like atmosphere of the factory or the office. As we can see, such a world has almost ceased to exist, and will go further along this road in the near future.

More than that. The old conditions did not differ all that much from the primitive factory structures—the textile works set up with the British capital that had been accumulated over two centuries of piracy—where the work force fleeing from the English and Scottish countryside literally came to be enclosed en masse. But under these conditions, the taste of regained time was soon poisoned by the inability to give it any meaning beyond the work environment. In other words, time was regained in terms of reducing physical fatigue, not because one had the knowledge or desire to do something *different*. And this was also due to the fact that one had become part of one's job, espoused it for life. Even the revolutionary theories of anarcho-syndicalism did not contradict this basic condition. Instead they gave it a libertarian qualification, giving the syndicalist organisation the task of building the free society of the future, starting off from the work categories that already existed.

So, up until a few years ago, abolishing work simply meant reducing fatigue, creating enjoyable alternative work or, in the most advanced and in some ways most utopian and fanciful instances, substituting it with a game, an absorbing game with its own rules capable of giving the individual an identity as a player. One might argue that the game as a logical category has gone far beyond the regulated version (e.g., chess), and taken to its logical conclusion as ludic, individual behaviour: play as the expression of the senses, as eroticism or sexuality, as free self-expression in the field of gesture, manual dexterity, art, thought, or all these elements put together. This had already been theorised of course, starting with Fourier's genial intuition, similar to Bentham's theory that the pursuit of personal interest indirectly and involuntarily leads to greater collective interest. The fact that the good travelling salesman Fourier made a treasure of his individual experience in order to weave an incredible web of social relations based on affinity, is not devoid of interest. Nevertheless, none of that escapes the essential rules of work seen in terms of the global organisation of control, even if it is not exactly production in the capitalist sense of the word.

So we see that work cannot be abolished progressively: we need to approach the problem in a destructive manner. Let us see why.

In the first place, capitalism itself has now dismantled its obsolete apparatus, at the same time depriving the individual worker of his identity as such. It has made him 'alternative' without realising it, and is now preparing to plant in him all the seeds of the external aspects of formal freedom. Freedom of speech and in ways of dressing, a variety of jobs to choose from, not much intellectual effort, standardised safety procedures explained in simple manuals, a slowing down of the work pace, robotisation of basic procedures, progressive separation between the different aspects of work—all going towards building a different model which does not correspond to that of the past.

To insist on reappropriating stolen time implies inventing a unit of measure along with all the other discretionary units relative to the suspension of work, a notion which the worker would have difficulty grasping. Rather than acquire the capacity to envisage a project that is an alternative to working for a third party, he could develop a growing feeling of panic. The fact that far less work is necessary than that required to earn a living wage has already been clearly illustrated by revolutionary theoreticians in the past. This analyses is now being used by post-industrial capital itself, and is often brought up in conferences and meetings concerning the restructuring of production.

A reduction in labour would mean reducing work to the minimum required to produce only what is useful. We cannot accept this theory today as it is now being considered by capital itself. Only the time frame within which this is to come about differs, whereas nothing is said about the methods that would be used. To struggle for a reduction in working hours, even a considerable one of say twenty hours a week, means nothing in revolutionary terms as it would do no more than open the way to solving some of capital's problems, certainly not lead to the liberation of all. Unemployment as an element of pressure, no matter how slight now that it is finding a considerable outlet in the numerous versions of marginal work, seems to be the only factor pushing capitalist production to look for solutions to reduce working hours at the moment. But in a not too distant future the need to reduce production might become a reason for reducing working hours, especially since international military equilibrium no longer depends on two opposing superpowers.

Voluntary work (about which little has been said, although it is a question that deserves all our attention) acts as a safety valve which could, among other things, provide a solution to the problem of reducing working hours without

having to worry about how the masses, relieved of the control of a third of their day, might spend their new-found free time. So we see that unemployment is no longer the most serious crisis capital is having to face today, but it is still one that is constitutionally linked to it. It can become institutionalised, then recuperated as the projectual use of free time by the same companies in structures created for this purpose. So post-industrial capitalism is a homogeneous system within which the concept of a crisis in unemployment no longer exists, the latter having become one of the elements of the productive process itself.

The 'alternative' ideal of a life based on the art of 'getting by' is also disappearing. Small-scale handicrafts, little self-produced undertakings, the street selling of objects, the necklaces... Infinite human tragedies have unrolled in dingy, airless shops over the past twenty years. Much really revolutionary strength has been trapped in illusions that required not a normal amount of work, but super-exploitation, all the greater because it was tied to the individual's will to keep things going and show that it was possible to do without the factory. Now, with the restructuring of capital and the new conditions resulting from it, we can see how this 'alternative' model is exactly what is being suggested at an institutional level to get through this moment. As always, they see the way the wind is blowing. Other potentially revolutionary forces are now shutting themselves up in electronic laboratories and burdening themselves with work in dark, stuffy little premises, demonstrating that capital has won over them yet again.

If we were to sum up the problem in a simple formula, we could say that if work once gave a social identity, that of the worker to be exact, which along with that of the citizen came to form the perfect subject, any escape from that was a truly revolutionary attempt to break out of this suffocation. Today, where capital no longer gives the worker a specific social identity but tries to use him in a generic differentiated way, with no prospects and no future, the only struggle left against work is that of destroying it, thus procuring one's own projectuality, one's own future, and a new social identity in opposition to the attempts at annihilation put into action by post-industrial capital.

Most of the strategies that self-aware workers have used over past decades against brutal, immediate exploitation—about which hundreds of pages could be written—have now become normal procedures for capital itself. It is capital that is now suggesting—when it does not impose—the breaking up of work units, reduced flexible hours, self-defined projects, participation in decision-making, deciding on particular aspects of production, autonomous work islands that become each other's customers, quality competition and everything else. All the paraphernalia taking the place of the old, monolithic uniformity of work has now reached levels that are no longer controllable by individual conscience in the narrow sense of the word. That is to say, the single worker is constantly faced with the possibility of being pulled into a trap where he ends up bartering his own combativeness (now only potential) in exchange for a few concessions. And if these were once self-determined and could be considered part of the great movement of struggle against work, today, being conceded, they are simply another aspect of work, moreover the one which contains most characteristics of recuperation and control.

If we are to play with our lives and during our lives, we must learn how to do so and set the rules of the game ourselves, doing it in such a way that these are clear to us and incomprehensible labyrinths to others. We cannot just say that a game with rules is still work (which is so, as we have already said), and that if the rules are abandoned the game becomes free, therefore libertarian. The absence of rules is not synonymous with freedom. Rules that are imposed through control and sanctions are slavery. And work has been this and could never be anything else, for all the reasons we have just seen and all those we have forgotten to mention. But the absence of rules could become a different, perhaps worse, form of tyranny. If free agreement is a rule, I intend to follow it and I expect others, my comrades in the agreement, to follow it too. Especially when it concerns the game of my life, and my life is at stake. The absence of rules would leave me in the clutches of the tyranny of uncertainty, which might provide a thrilling dose of adrenaline today, but might not agree with me in the future, or rather certainly won't agree with me.

Furthermore, freely chosen rules not only build my identity, my being with others, but also my individual knowledge of myself and my desire to open up to others, to live in a world populated with other free—vitaly free—beings capable of deciding for themselves. All the more so at a time when there is a move towards the illusory freedom of the absence of rigid rules, at least in the world of production. In order not to be taken in by reduced, flexible working hours and exotic paid holidays, or to be beguiled by wage increases, early pensioning or free financing of individual enterprises, it is necessary to devise one's own project for the destruction of work. It is not sufficient to simply limit the damage.

Here, a few ideas that seemed to have seen their day have become topical again.

A mentality cannot be destroyed. In fact, the professional mentality as expressed even in party and trades union organisations—including the anarcho-sindicalist forms—cannot be destroyed from the outside. Not even by sabotage. When sabotage was used it was only as a means to intimidate the bosses, a hint of something beyond the strike, a way of making it known that one was more determined than others, but was nevertheless ready to suspend the attack as soon as the claim was accepted.



But sabotage is still destructive. It does not affect profit indirectly like the strike but hits the structure directly, either the means of production or the end product, it makes no difference. That means that it acts beyond the work situation. It does not strike to obtain something specific but also, and I would say principally, to destroy. And the object to be destroyed, although it is property, is still work when you think about it, as it concerns something that has been obtained through work, whether it be the means of production or the finished product. We can now understand the horror many workers once felt before acts of sabotage. Here I mean workers whose lives of total dependence had given them a social identity that could not easily be eradicated. I have seen men in tears in front of their factory after it had been attacked and partly destroyed, because they saw a considerable part of their own lives also being attacked and destroyed. And that life, poor and miserable as it might have been, was the only one they had, the only one they had any experience of.

Of course, in order to attack one must have a project, an identity that has been worked out projectually, an idea of what one wants to do even, perhaps all the more so when one considers this to be a game and lives it like a game. And sabotage is a fascinating game, but it cannot be the only game one wants to play. We must have a multitude of games at our disposal, games that are varied and often in contrast with each other, aimed at avoiding the monotony of the rules becoming just another boring, repetitive job. Making love is also a game, but you can't play it from morning till night without banalising it, without feeling wrapped up in a drowsiness which, although it gives a pleasurable sensation of well being, also dulls us, makes us feel useless.

Taking money from where it is to be found is also a game, one that has its own rules and which could degenerate into professionalism as an end in itself, thereby becoming a full-time job with everything that that implies. But it is an interesting—and useful—game if seen in the perspective of a mature consciousness which refuses to fall into the contradictions of a consumerism that is forever ready to swallow up what one has managed to snatch from the economy as a whole. Once again it is necessary to overcome the moral barriers they have built into us. It is necessary to put ourselves beyond the problem. Reaching out and taking other people's property is something that is full of risks, even for a revolutionary. Not just legal risks in the narrow sense of the word, but in the first place moral ones. Clarity on this question is important, as it is a question of overcoming the same obstacles that made the old worker shed tears in front of the damaged factory. The idea that property is sacred has been instilled in us since birth and it is not easy to free ourselves from it. We prefer to prostitute ourselves to a boss for a lifetime but have a clear conscience at the end of the day. We feel we have done our duty and contributed in our own small way to producing the national income—which naturally ends up in the outstretched hands of the politicians with the nation's destiny in mind, who got rid of any scruples about taking what we have accumulated with fatigue long ago.

But the essential part of any project to destroy work is creativity taken to the maximum possible degree. What could we do with all the money of all the banks we were able to rob put together, if the only thing we can think of doing is buying a fast car, a big house, going to nightclubs, or filling our lives with thousands of useless needs and boring ourselves to death until the time comes to rob the next bank? That is something many of the bank robbers I have met in prison systematically do. If all the comrades who have never had any money in their lives think this is the way to satisfy some of their whims, let them go ahead. They will find the same disillusion as they would in any other kind of job that is perhaps less remunerative in the short term, but is certainly less dangerous in the long one.

To imagine the refusal of work to be no more than the listless acceptance of non-activity is a result of the mistaken idea that work-slaves have about those who have never worked in their lives. The latter, the so-called privileged from birth, the heirs to the great fortunes, are nearly always indefatigable workers who dedicate all their strength and imagination to exploiting others and accumulating even more wealth and prestige than they already have. Even if we were to limit ourselves to the great squanderers of inheritances that the tabloid gossip columns take great pains to portray, we would still have to admit that this horrible race are also eternally busy at their daily grind, occupied by their tedious social relations or by fears of falling victim to aggression or kidnapping. This is also work, carried out according to all the rules of obligatory activity. It becomes a true job, where the boss of these exploiters is often their own lust or fear.

But I do not think many of us can consider the refusal of work simply to be an acceptance of the deadly boredom of doing nothing while we keep on the lookout for traps set by others who might try to convince us to do something through solicitations or flattery, perhaps in the name of an ideal, or personal affection or friendship, or who knows what other devilry capable of threatening our condition of complete inertia. Such a situation would be pointless.

On the contrary, I think that the refusal of work can be seen in the first place as a desire to do what one enjoys most, that is to say of transforming obligatory *doing* into free *action*. I wrote a long article about this many years ago in *Pantagruel*, which is still valid today in many respects. But this condition, free *action*, is not mapped out once and for all. It is not part of a situation that exists beyond ourselves, nor does it rain down on us like an inheritance or the

spoils of a ransacked bank. Such incidents could be an occasion, an accident, sought or not, desired or not, to enhance a project that is already in course, it is certainly not the condition that determines it or carries it out. If we have no project in terms of life, projectuality in the full meaning of the word, no amount of money will ever free us from the need to work, to be *doing* at all costs, pushed by a new kind of necessity, not poverty this time but boredom or to acquire social status.

The dilemma can only be resolved by inventing one's own creative project or, to put it differently, by reflecting upon what one wants to do with one's life and finding the necessary means to realise it, without working. If we want to destroy work we must build roads of individual and collective experimentation which take no account of work except to cancel it from the reality of what is possible.

# Let's keep our feet on the ground, please

If you endorse the idea of the destruction of work, you will always find someone, even among anarchists, who replies, 'And tomorrow? If we don't work, what will we eat tomorrow?'

So, if you get this response it means you are talking to a pragmatic anarchist, or rather to one who has his feet firmly on the ground. One of those who, when you ask him if he still considers the role of the working class to be significant in the clash between dominated and dominators, replies 'Absolutely!'

But don't risk asking him what being realistic or pragmatic means. His reply might upset your dreams for a long time to come.

He will tell you that you need to respect the conditions of the class struggle, not put yourself ideologically above people's heads so as not to become a vanguard of the proletariat—adding fairly persuasively that this is not due to a need for efficiency in the struggle or getting immediate results, but because it is necessary to continue to support the exploited at the place where they show most capacity to respond to capitalist exploitation, i.e., the workplace.

Of course you will feel like saying (which I advise you to keep to yourself), 'But isn't that camouflaged ideology, in other words ideas that have lost all contact with reality?' And you will want to say that the working class no longer exist, that they have been broken up by capital's historic encounter with the new technologies, so all reformist practice such as making claims or defending past gains simply support this strategy of dominion and annihilation. But in my opinion it would be pointless. Realism, or political pragmatism, is a pernicious illness. It insinuates itself into the practice of those who only see things in causal, schematic terms. They cannot escape them. In fact, gradualism can be extremely convincing. At least it is comforting concerning what could happen in the short term, and puts off fear of the future. In this way our pragmatic, realistic comrade tells us that an essential point of the struggle is making sure that we don't repeat the mistakes of the past. Fascism, never again! And looking back to the old forms of fascism they miss seeing the new ones that in no way resemble those of the past, but are perhaps even worse. This comrade, knowingly retorting that if you don't work you can't eat, and that it is hazardous and unrealistic to insist on the destruction of work, is supporting a thesis that remains locked in the reality of the present which he ends up justifying without realising it. He is not interested in discussing ideas or questions of method. All he wants to know about are results, which he can only gauge from a quantitative point of view: men and things to be counted, elements of reality to coincide with projects, social dynamics to be understood. These are the ideas and methods that gave results in the past. There can be no such thing as critical reflection or anything that might put them in doubt.

Any idea that might threaten his search for the consensus of the exploited or that might in some way present anarchist revolutionaries as subverters of the constituted order, including the legitimate expropriation of the means of production, must be isolated, otherwise goodbye to expropriation, and goodbye to the peaceful passage to the free society of the future. Experimentation can only be carried out in small groups, this comrade in his enlightened, pragmatic vision of the struggle will say, and these are meaningless from the point of view of the class struggle.

This mentality has a number of other characteristics. First, it corresponds to a vision of reality that depends on certain conditions, an evolution one assists simply by providing occasions for improvements. The function of the *absolutely other* is not taken into consideration. What started off as a point of view will quickly become condemnation and taking a distance if experimentation in that direction takes on any significant form and consistency. Secondly, it accepts technology as the main element in any civil cohabitation, so can only imagine the future society as starting off from an alternative use of today's technology. Third, it cannot free itself from its own institutional task, that of exorcising fear of the unknown. Any attempt to speed this gradualism up encounters insurmountable problems, making the unknown appear the enemy and the known (i.e. the conservation of the existent) something to be protected from falling into the hands of the barbarians. To reply to them with our theses on the *absolutely other* is often a complete waste of time. Every era, right from the obscure beginnings of history, has been traversed by the long shadow of the bureaucrats. Something else is required.

# Space and capital

No single part of physical space can be isolated from the interference of capital, be it outer space or the ocean depths, mountains or rivers, seas or deserts, the great metropoli or the tiniest, most out-of-the-way village. A whole series of relationships intersect and overlap: seemingly unrelated elements are linked by the common matrix of exploitation. One might try to deceive oneself by going somewhere far away, out of this world as they say, only to discover that the mechanisms of capital still reach us and function perfectly. That explains why we are against ecologism, just as we are against any other 'alternative' proposal that claims to do something against exploitation by isolating one part of reality from the rest. Of course, we also start off from specific points in our interventions, but we do not fool ourselves that we can really attack the enemy by remaining within that 'part'. In order to move to attack we must overcome the fragmentation which at a certain point becomes a necessary choice, but is essentially a strategy that has been imposed on us by capital.

Now, the most serious pillage carried out by exploitation, the one laden with the greatest consequences, is the theft of time and space. These two thefts are substantially linked. Capital steals our time by obliging us to work and by conditioning our lives, infesting them with clocks, commitments, deadlines and so on, right down to the smallest detail. By stealing our time it prevents us from understanding ourselves. It alienates us. Without time we would not even notice the theft of space. We need time in order to become aware of the very presence of space. To think, to listen, to dream, to desire. By living space in terms of distance, kilometres to be covered, moving from one place to another, we lose sight of our relationship with things, nature, the world.

Capital stole time from us (it needed it for production)—then came the system of control and repression, and, finally, the generalisation of consensus. Now we are faced with the need to move to the appropriation of *our* time and space. Our attack cannot fail to cause damage and ruin. That is in the logic of things, the logic of the class war. The project of power is global. It cannot permit the existence of 'empty spaces'. Our project of liberation is also global, for the opposite reason. It cannot allow 'free spaces' not to exist. If we were to allow capital to achieve global domination, we would be dead for good.

Fortunately the road power will need to cover in order to reach globalization is still a long one. As well as embezzling space (and time) at a global level, capital is beginning to divide reality into two separate parts. It is no longer a question of the old fragmentation but of a net division, a real wall, between *included* and *excluded*. The first will be guaranteed a condition of privilege, domination, high cultural levels, projectuality and creativity; the second, a condition of survival, consensus, subcultures, supine acceptance, lack of stimulation and perhaps even of needs. In this perspective capital and the State require complete availability of social space. Nothing must escape their control.

And that is not all. Capital now has technologies at its disposal that allow it not so much the possession of space as its actual production. Think of its capacity to communicate in 'real time' between two distinct points thousands of kilometres apart. That does not only change the productive order (variety, creativity, stocks, etc.) but also, and principally, the human order of social relations (which are also economic).

So capital is actually producing space on the basis of its project of exploitation and domination. It is transforming and destroying nature, modifying cities and the land, destroying seas, rivers and lakes, submitting stellar distances to its militaristic logic. The space produced in this way then serves to channel individuals. So we find ourselves in huge traffic jams, speeding along motorways, standing in queues in the supermarket. We are afflicted with traffic chaos, appointments we must not miss, fictitious interests that make us feel bad, obliging us to be continuously and senselessly on the move. We move in spaces that have been programmed for us but which we imagine we have 'chosen' ourselves. Our houses are full of useless harmful objects. Space has become restricted or rather has changed according to the needs of capitalist production which needs to sell television sets, fridges, washing machines, furniture and built-in kitchens.

So, almost without noticing it, our time is disappearing and our space is reducing itself to relationships with objects that bear witness to capital's power to convince. In this way we are being educated to repetition. We carry out the same gestures, as everyone knows (but systematically forgets), in the anteroom to consensus.

For its part capital is obliged to take space from us because it cannot leave any available for our creativity, our capacity for tinkering with things, our desire for innovation (which is the first stimulus to finding solutions that turn

out to be incredible endowments of spontaneity and wealth). If capital were to leave space to such individual forces it would not be able to reach the pace of repetition that is indispensable to production. The latter, we must not forget, is only such on the condition that it is also reproduction. Think of the efforts (helped by electronic technique) that capital is making to realise everyone's desires with the maximum (centralised and codified) diversification. The big names in fashion, the fast food chains, the advertising that highlights individual taste within mass production, are no more than attempts to block various roads that might still be travelled today.

Although the space that is produced and reproduced is based on consensus, it contains a considerable amount of purely repressive aspects, in the policing sense of the term. Control regulates movement in every way. Raw materials and men, ideas and machines, money and desires. Everything is coordinated because everything has been preventively homogenised. Differences are no more than that, they are not radical diversities. They have been reduced to the rank of appearances and in this new capacity are praised to the heavens as the reign of freedom.

So the strategy of power is therefore that of controlling 'all' space in the same way as it controls 'all' time. It is not just a question of police control, but mainly of control based on consensus and the acceptance of models of behaviour and scales of values that are those of the capitalist technocrats.

What to do? Go in search of lost time? Lost space?

Not in the sense of a nostalgic journey, of going back in time. Nothing in life goes backwards, just as nothing presents itself again in an identical (or in an absolutely different) way.

The old relationship with space left the sign of a physical place. The sign of man and his things. A road, a square, a country crossroads, a river, the sea and the sky, woods and mountains, were in open discourse with the individuals who knew how (and wanted) to listen to them. And affinity with other individuals led men to the same places, animated their feelings, spurred them to action and reflection. One found oneself as an individual, whereas one now hides as part of a whole, of a crowd. Once we were open, also often unprepared and vulnerable. Now we are all protected by uniformity, repetitiveness. We feel more secure because we belong to the flock. Everything is being produced and reproduced. Everything is about to become a commodity.

In this perspective the struggle for social space becomes a struggle for the reappropriation of all 'territory' beyond and against the rules of control and consensus.

# Self-management

The points that follow are addressed to the part of the movement for self-management that claims to exist within the anarchist movement. Personally, I do not believe that it exists at all. In fact, in areas where traces of an embryo of it might seem to exist, they turn out to be quite the opposite. Of course, this could be considered to be quite an arbitrary assumption, but a moment of reflection should help to clarify the matter.

It is not enough for anarchists to build some kind of structure, be it a squat, a libertarian school, an alternative bank, or a food or services coop, for the latter to be considered self-managed. It must also have a libertarian basis. And this essential element cannot be a simple declaration of principles or a symbol. In other words it is not enough for a social centre simply to call itself anarchist in order for it really to be such. Two more elements are required.

The first is that, in order really to be anarchist, the activity the structure tends towards must be irreducibly aimed at attacking power in all its forms.

The second is that the structure itself must remain quite decisively separate from power. In other words, never come to any agreement in order to receive financing, facilities or anything else.

This is no idle question. We are not talking of the sex of angels, but of something quite practical.

If a structure is against all institutions it cannot strike up an agreement with any of them. If it did, it would cease to be against them, that is to say, cease to be revolutionary or anarchist.

The same goes for the whole movement for 'self-management'.

So what is this movement based on? It is based on a political phenomenon which is becoming more and more evident each day. Power does not just need humiliated, oppressed servants. It also needs people who, believing themselves to be free, unwittingly contribute to the management of society.

Think of the important role played by voluntary associations today. Areas of recuperation in terms of the maintenance and management of power are widening through structures that are in harmony with the institutions, in spite of their alternative critique of society.

If these interests were to change, or if the action of self-managed structures were really to become a threat, the agreements would disintegrate in a flash and power would revert to its last card: brute repression.

But what would these comrades, disarmed for years by their chatter, agreements and absurd fantasies about living in common, have at their disposal to struggle against such repression?

On the other hand, the projects of the structures managed by various Marxist and non-Marxist fringes who label themselves the 'area of Autonomy' are quite different. Here recognition of the institutions and an open, programmed dialogue with the latter corresponds to a strategy in the medium and long term, a strategy that is essentially political and covers the whole of social reality. This (in spite of its theoretical stupidity) at least has the value of being consistent with the (quite out of reach) objective they want to reach, that of taking over and managing political power.

But what has all that got to do with anarchists?

# Involuntary aspects of voluntary work

In a climate such as that which prevails at the present time, with its general disenchantment and restoration of the absolute values of competition and capitalist efficientism, the demonstration of voluntary workers that took place in Rome recently shows, if nothing else, that there are still people around who represent the values of solidarity and equality. It is precisely this aspect, utopian in the better sense of the word, that attracts many young people to an involvement which if, on the one hand makes them feel better as it gives them a 'different' projectuality, on the other involuntarily makes them the accomplices of an overall project of power which needs them in order to complete itself in every aspect.

Let us explain.

Communities, coops, small shops, alternative groups who dedicate themselves to sectors of solidarity and social cooperation, are the main elements with which the economic and political system softens the blows of social injustice, precisely among strata where this is acute and risks exploding.

This sector has stemmed the flood of a whole generation of 'revolutionaries' who, since losing father party and mother ideology, now find themselves without ideas or leaders. And voluntary work has helped them get their feet back on the ground, preventing them from looking beyond their noses or risking finding themselves moving towards a new practice of social transformation that is really revolutionary this time. And as more and more violent and irreparable contradictions explode, this sector is acting as a stopgap, sometimes even intervening directly to manage the most extreme situations, using the same repressive methods as the State. Evidence of their institutional function is to be found in the fact that voluntary workers apply for funding through the legal framework of associationism: utopians, yes, but not stupid ones.

Voluntary work supplies a very important product: the feeling of doing something useful. So, to all those who feel bad because of the shameful injustice that continues to reign throughout a world where half the population are dying of hunger, buying original products in 'alternative' shops at an 'honest' price can let them feel at peace with their conscience.

It is precisely this sector that has spread the inauspicious solution of 'copping out', of considering oneself to be absolved from any destructive involvement by simply singling out a sector that is supposedly free from capitalist pollution. One deceives oneself that by investing one's money in 'alternative' banks one is not speculating on the lives of millions of people, or fools oneself into believing that by buying in 'alternative' shops one is boycotting world capitalist production, using a channel that is exempt from involvement in genocide.

For anyone who has even the slightest notion of how the economy works as a whole, the fact of acquiring products at higher and therefore uncompetitive prices in the so-called third world does not in any way prevent the sale of the same products to the multinationals. On the contrary it favours them because the producers, having a slight increase in their profit margin (which is still minimal when you consider the number of alternative orders), can bargain with the multinationals and get better prices, which makes little difference to the latter's huge profit margins in any case as such increases are minimal. On the other hand, the politics of higher revenue by both the alternative buyers and the multinationals cannot fail to produce locally a class who are better off and who inevitably end up improving conditions, not for everyone in the area, but for a restricted number of nouveau riche.

The above conclusions are not dictated by the logic of 'the worse the better', but by two assumptions: first, that it is not possible to speak of solidarity and equality within the capitalist system and, secondly, one does not help the third world by increasing its profits. The first is based on the fact that the capitalist system is a closed system with one logic that extends all over the world; any semblance of another is merely a means of integrating and recuperating particular phases of imbalance. The second assertion is based on the fact that a country with a very low pro capita income does not increase this (except from the statistical point of view) through a simple increase in exports. In fact there will always be a privileged class managing economic and political power who gain more and keep the rest of the population in the same poverty-stricken situation as before.

For these reasons, and others which we will have occasion to mention later, voluntary work is one of the most important outlets today for perpetrating the scourge of social injustice produced by capital at a global level.

# Restructuring capital and new democracy

Contemplating ruins is an activity that is well suited to intellectuals. Sitting in what remains of Catalus's drawing room, they look around bewilderedly asking themselves what on earth went wrong. First of all we need to clarify the idea of crisis. I have been examining all the interesting implications of this concept for some years. In actual fact crises do not exist. They never have done. Every now and then periods of change are called crises in order to favour particular political strategies or to justify their shortcomings. As we can see, it is not simply a question of terminology. The concept of crisis implies the existence of a linear process that suddenly suffers a rebound, as though forces that are either external or intrinsic to it suddenly cease to function.

That explains the great science of predicting such moments, at times replaced by devoted expectancy or by the more or less sanguinary efforts of the mole that keeps clawing away. Unfortunately these friendly little creatures do not work for us. A linear process only exists in the dreams of economists and revolutionaries who want to attest their power, or that to which they aspire at some time in the future. It might be instead that everything simply gropes about in a jungle of relations, giving rise to a situation that is quite illogical as opposed to one that is simply of a logic devoid of order and progress. In such a varied, contradictory context we find atrocities and barbarity one believed disappeared centuries ago flourishing alongside technological discoveries of a future that is already present. So just as it is ridiculous to talk of progress, the idea of crises—the product of such a concept—also falls.

It is also extraordinary how all those who have been threatening and deafening us for years with their arguments about the relation between infrastructure and superstructure are now awkwardly keeping quiet. Many of them, and I don't mean those who made this about-turn lightly, are facing the same problems that politics and power have done in recent years, minus the intellectual operation (that's just a manner of speaking, of course): the productive conditions of this political system are now well beyond the old knee-jerk dialectics which cannot be eliminated simply because this method of analysis has fallen into disrepute, precipitated into a vacuum along with the domes of the Kremlin.

It would be a further mystification to ask what the visible, but not always comprehensible, process of restructuring taking place within the political system means today without linking it to the restructuring of production. That would be equivalent to saying that all the evil lies in the egotistical management of a few swindlers, and that once they are removed from the scene everything will return to normal. We need to work out two lines of thought here. The first in order to better see the interests of the power groups who are intensifying their blame on the political class in power in countries such as Italy. This is aimed at diverting attention away from mechanisms that make any effective improvement in political management possible.

The second in order to show how post-industrial politics work, through a request for the fictitious participation of individuals in the management of public spending. In actual fact the restructuring of the political system is related to the growing demands of the new economic and social formations in countries where capital is most advanced. This is accompanied by a transformation of democracy, as it requires the participation of individuals in fictitious mechanisms that are capable of swallowing up, therefore nullifying, the ideas of each one of us.

Excluded from any effective participation in decision-making except for those in the stubbornly backward areas still tied to obsolete forms of trade union and party economism now devoid of any significance, the great masses are experiencing a new kind of democratic participation. This has not happened by chance. The demand has existed for almost two decades now, induced by the media through the complex system of control comprised of TV, telephone and computer. We are still in the initial phase, but there is already a direct, constant dialogue in process between the periphery and the centres of communication. People ring up, interact with television, codify themselves and fix the protocol for a further, increasingly detailed way of life. That allows for greater control of the mass of *excluded* on the one hand, at least of the regular majority, so to speak.

On the other, it allows their opinions to be catalogued and even piloted, drawing them into various interactive syntheses. As we all know, this is leading to a proliferation of cultural poverty in terms of taste and choices, a uniformity of demands and desires resulting in an even greater possibility to catalogue apparently free spontaneous participation. Then there is the flight from any possible diversity. Today it is codification that makes the man: the way one dresses, uses the same objects, looks for the same labels. One qualifies oneself through this uniformity, making the same gestures, moving, eating, loving, thinking and dreaming the same way as everybody else. This is the way the democracy



of the future is being built. Soon politics will be born in and among people, but not before the latter have been levelled to the lowest common denominator in order to produce the flexibility necessary for post-industrial production.

The 'old' (in the true sense of the word) industrial world has disappeared, and with it a political system based on associationism, parties and movements as well as trades unions, which were all linked to the massive dimension of the factory and the idea of so-called (sometimes real) improvements in the workers' conditions. The fact that some such structures continue to persist beyond the historical context that produced them is simply due to the classical viscosity of all social structures which are not prepared to disappear simply because new social conditions make them obsolete. This persistence has made these structures even more rigid, their only aim now being that of enriching themselves in order to continue to exist, and vice versa. And this function is in contrast to the new conditions of production and their need to develop more varied exploitative aspects. As post-industrial restructuring makes the old economic and productive formation obsolete, they are more prone to accepting blackmail and extortion, as evidently the service supplied by normal political pressure is less and less adequate for their requirements.

This is not just happening in Italy, but in nearly all the advanced capitalist countries. In Spain, the old unions of the democratic centre which succeeded Franco created the conditions, then things developed in a decade of socialist rule. All the parties in Spain have had recourse to illegal forms of financing. The best known case is the Guerra one, where a brother of the Spanish Vice-President contracted favours from businessmen for the PSOE. The same thing happened with the main Spanish opposition, the Popular Party, where the Baseiro case caused the biggest scandals related to the rake-offs. The autonomous governments of Catalonia and the Basque countries have also had their scandals. The main case in the news at the moment is the Filesa affair involving the PSOE again, with illicit funding obtained through exorbitant invoicing for largely nonexistent services, reports and studies.

In Germany, cases of corrupt politicians, rake-offs and illegal trafficking with organised crime are the order of the day. The biggest scandals concern Siemens of Monaco and Flick of Frankfurt. There is a trial going on concerning the considerable amount of tax-relief (which could turn out to be more than three million marks) granted to Flick and allocated to party funding. The same thing is happening in Hamburg and Bremen, and even in Berlin where once 'in the red' Filz is now 'in the black', but things have not changed. Corruption is still rampant.

France also has its scandals in the field of political corruption. From the Luchaire case where interests concerning arms sales to Iraq have emerged, to the Urba one involving the occult financing of the Socialist Party, to the case of Bérégovoy, a character who received a million francs from a not-exactly-impeccable financier. A timely amnesty has blocked new scandals from emerging, making judicial procedures pointless.

The list could be extended to Great Britain, the United States, Poland and many other countries that have not reached such levels of post-industrial capitalism. And the same situation would be apparent: a political system no longer suited to the economic transformation in process, which is fast becoming a gangsterist system of extortion and blackmail.

But let us look at the problem from another angle.

Not by chance some idiotic 'intellectuals of the moment' have talked of 'revolution'. Without knowing or wanting it, and for reasons quite different to those I am about to describe, they have actually got something right. At this moment in fact a true revolution, different of course to the one of which we dream (and which is not in any way political), is taking place. It would certainly not be possible to trace this revolution through the coding we used for such events in the past. Why then do we think it is possible to talk of 'revolution', even if only in political terms? There are two reasons for this. The first is that a political system, within which capital has undergone a fast and profound restructuring, has exploded. It has turned out to be incapable of representing the interests of a new managerial class. Secondly, because a strong movement of opinion has been set into motion which, although codified in terms of the processes of control and participation discussed above, has also shown, underneath the uniformity, the existence of a spreading feeling of resentment, a desire for liberation, an atavistic feeling of aversion to all who command and dominate. As far as the first reason is concerned, the process that led to the Great French Revolution comes to mind. This was due precisely to the fact that the king and the nobility, by not allowing the development of commerce and industry, were no longer able to guarantee the interests of the bourgeois class. But, as is clear even from those events that are now as far off in time as they are from our possibility of understanding them, a dominant structure does not surrender simply because it is no longer useful to the system that produced it and once protected and stimulated it.

As far as the second reason is concerned, something more is necessary, I would say. What is happening underneath all the attempts to deviate or nullify dissent? This phenomenon holds a wealth of instruction for revolutionaries as well as for politicians whose aims are diametrically opposed to ours. First of all, it is surprising to see how a seemingly formidable political structure such as the Christian Democratic Party has crumbled in a few months. This balances the just as unexpected and strange collapse of the Soviet political structure. The two events are obviously not unconnected: they both concern the needs of the vast restructuring of economic power that is taking place at world level. The fact

remains that nothing seems so firmly rooted as to defy the unpredictable development of events any longer. And this uncertainty has entered the bloodstream of us all. It has become a positive element that restructuring had tried to realise by peddling the idea that nothing can be guaranteed unless it is agreed on the basis of common interests—obviously managed by the ruling class—with the fictitious participation of all. The fact remains that uncertainty has become a part of all of us. It makes people uneasy, wakes them up, gives rise to the most desperate adventures, making them more difficult to control (this, yes), or at least rendering this control just as uncertain as all the rest of reality. As far as revolutionaries are concerned, this element is positive and of no small importance. Then, the hatred that has emerged, which could easily be diverted into a reformist, but none the less significant, dimension (i.e. demands for changes in social rules), given that it has shown itself to have a considerable capacity for ‘movement’, resuscitating the old evils of leaderism and the delegation (for example, good judges leading the revolt of the humble).

But we will have to examine this problem elsewhere. It is indispensable to be aware of the conditions that are affecting the reality we are operating in when we act, especially now as they are so different to the classical formulae that once explained things in deterministic terms.

One of the main problems facing the restructuring of power today is that of making political management adapt to the world process of transformation in production. It is now clear to all that post-industrial capitalism has taken on a global dimension, distributing itself differently according to local situations, but referring back to a common management. The telematic structure of the economic and productive setup allows elements that were once irremediably separate to be linked in time and space. It has become an instrument that attempts to rationalise discrepancies in the demand for work at world level. This is putting great pressure—which will continue to grow—on the economic conditions of the advanced capitalist states today. The old dichotomy development/underdevelopment has exploded, or is about to. The transitional phase was marked in the mid-Eighties by a spreading leopard-spot pattern, both in developed and underdeveloped countries. Eastern Europe’s entry onto the chess board of post-industrial capitalism has multiplied these leopard spots. This development prevents a net differentiation and is producing considerable complications for power concerning the control and recuperation of the areas with a high risk of subversion, in the first place in the great metropoli which are becoming time bombs that no one has the key to deactivate.

At this point all high-handed arguments as to whether there is any real difference between ‘right’ and ‘left’ become ridiculous. The proof that this problem no longer bears any relation to the mechanisms of restructuring is given in the fact that a real ‘right’ no longer exists, at least at the institutional level. The xenophobic and executive aspirations of the dominant class, naturally despoiled of all the folklore that once characterised such expressions of political reaction, can be managed by any political formation. In fact, skinheads stand out today not just because of their lack of brains but also because of their adoption of an outdated folklore that reflects the dreams of a few madmen. They do not have the consensus of large numbers of people—who are not for that matter not racist, only they want their defence against the ‘different’ to come about anonymously through guaranteed jobs, not in discriminatory statements like ‘black people smell’.

The dismembering of society, the most evident aspect of which is the relationship between the individual (now practically at the mercy of transitory groupings) and the centres of communication, is a consequence of the transformation of production that is taking place. Struck at the workplace which, at least up until the beginning of the Eighties could lead to gaining individual, therefore class, consciousness, the individual has now been thrown headlong into a rapidly changing world. What was once far away is rapidly drawing closer and closer due to TV, telephones and integrated computer technology. And just as rapid a distancing of what was once close at hand is underway: associationism, the compactness of the traditional workplace, trades unions and factory, are disappearing. The workmate has become, if not an enemy, at least a stranger.

The break up of association was an indispensable premise for worker flexibility, and this could only be attained by abolishing the tyranny of absolute space and time. The substitution of letter-writing by the telephone and the advent of the real time of information technology systems has meant that individuals themselves have changed. Their memories have been dissipated, their human consciousness divided into sectors. This was rigid at first, then it became less and less consistent, to the point of mixing and producing a new agglomeration of sensations and value judgements that are forever being modified, at a greater and greater speed. The values of the past, the stored knowledge held in vast memory banks where it could lie for years, but still give a direct contribution when necessary in terms of both theoretical and practical knowledge of work processes, have disappeared.

Everything that led to the possibility of workers building a better world on and from the ruins of the old has now disappeared. It has all been ground down in the great race of accelerated procedures, the elimination of subject and object as distinct and opposing elements of a contradictory mechanism, which was nevertheless rich in prospects and vitality. In place of this mechanism we now have the domination of *passage*. The simple movement of something that

reaches the receiver and the transmitter simultaneously, in real time, unifying them in the ongoing capacity to respond to simple, fast, coded impulses of communication.

So everything seems to have been brought back to this concept of absolute flexibility. The whole of production, including the most traditional fixtures with their prison-style architecture, has all become flexible. Assembly lines are governed by robots. In turn they are governed by flexible programmes which skilfully modify commands, and thus the products produced by these chains. What once required millions of pounds of investment in fixed capital now takes place in real time. The worker has had to adapt to this flexibility. The quality required by the operator today is not professional skill but adaptability to face different situations coded with a certain number of alternatives, and to find optimal solutions in the shortest possible time.

The need for flexible conditions has put the traditional agricultural and industrial sectors into second place, subordinating them to the tertiary sector, which is producing and directing the mechanisms and logic for restructuring them. In the tertiary sector flexibility is obviously of central importance. However strange it might seem, there are no specialists here. Everyone is specialised in a few routine procedures. The same hallucinatory world where programmes produced for future projects are entrusted to telematics has been substantially reduced: fewer and fewer sophisticated programmes are capable of producing yet others and so on, to infinity. Proof of this generalised idiocy is given in the unease felt by the mathematicians who enter the world of computer programming.

The conditions of production we have defined as post-industrial are spreading like leopard spots, in and beyond the industrially advanced countries. No areas can consider themselves safe from such processes of change. We must therefore avoid falling into the trap, useful to the management of the new democratic power, of considering that such analyses do not concern certain more 'backward' areas of capitalist development, leading one to believe that some of the old relations and new possibilities of struggle still exist. Everything fits in with everything else. There are no isolated conditions, only models of lesser intensity, i.e. conditions where models of 'flexible' management are less obvious than others.

Restructuring cannot content itself with a simple alternation of those in power, or with making possible more regular changeovers in the political class. It was necessary to make profound changes. And here we find a problem within a problem. Is it possible to single out a precise will, a precise moment in which decisions are made in this sense? I do not think so. I do not believe there is a specific minority in power capable of programming such changes. More than anything it is a question of processes that connect up, often inevitably. When the very first changes took place at the level of production, all they did was apply certain cybernetic systems to industry, in the same way that technology has always been applied to production. Yet the full potential of this technology was not understood. However, upon closer inspection it is apparent that this unknown quantity concerns all technology, particularly the interrelations that develop between single technical applications and the technical whole, where no one part is autonomous of the rest. No one could have foreseen the consequences that such applications were to have on the labour market, i.e. something similar to the restructuring that took place at the beginning of the Eighties. This reduced the cost of labour, but only after much hesitation were they able to put programmes of early pensions and mass sackings into effect as they feared a response in terms of social struggle, in spite of the Tarantelli/Modigliani theorem which had already clarified how such a response would probably not come about in the presence of a strong government. However, capital would almost certainly not have been capable of such a lively recovery were it not for the unforeseen effects of grafting the new technologies onto the old system of production. In a word, a series of causes and effects that could not be linked together, but which produced the conditions we could sum up today in the word flexibility.

So it is not possible to speak of a project that has been mapped out in all its parts. The adjustments of power are always approximate and tend to settle along the line of least resistance. Moreover, such movements can only develop to the point where the elements which comprise them reach their full potential. Today, the present disintegration upon which the new structures of power are being built must reach the extreme consequence in every aspect. That is, power cannot materially expand fully and leave an associative mentality and culture intact. Just as it cannot go ahead with a democratic mechanism based on past processes and values. They require new political forms to correspond to the new forms of production and social life.

So the project for a new kind of democracy is materialising, and that is the final point of these notes. Like all the projects of power this one is vague, but it bases itself on needs that already exist, are clearly visible, and could be summed up in a few essential points.

The main point is participation. The arrogance of the old political caste is not suitable for the changing conditions. The citizen must participate, not to make political life (which will always be a ghost in an artificial world) become real, but to make the decision-making mechanisms of power more effective.

The immediate consequence of democratic participation is the birth of the active citizen who has discarded his old disinterest and apathy toward politics, where men he considered superior were buried in the corridors of power, manipulating the lives of their subjects. The political sphere has been broken up into a myriad of possible openings for intervention. Voluntary work has been institutionalised. The monopoly of the professional politicians has given way to free political initiative where representation stays within precise credibility limits, even to the extent of certain circumscribed areas being controlled from the base. Politics begins at home. The leaflet, once an instrument exclusively in the hands of an active minority, is now commonly used as an instrument for voicing opinions. In this way everyone is under the illusion that they are reinventing the way to run public spending, by living inside and alongside the institutions rather than submitting to decisions that are made elsewhere. So democracy is widening and becoming rationalised. It is presenting itself as being equal for all in practice, not just in theory. The majority system no longer rebounds against those who use it, and a plurality of interventions makes knowledge of decisions possible.

This new pack of illusions produced itself almost spontaneously as soon as the old mechanisms of political groupings where delegates, charismatic party leaders, central committees with their dominant ideologies and the aims of liberation that imposed sacrifice and death, were all dismantled. All this has finally disappeared. What is left is flexible, objective disintegration that is clear for anyone who wants to see it, in that it comes from a process of development that is unequivocally ongoing: the process of production. So there are more ways to participate. The need for social justice, one of the fundamental aims of a movement that has responded to the putrefying old political world with total condemnation, immediately transferred itself, and it could not have done otherwise, to precisely the area of participation. This has been taken up by the new builders of ideology. It is they who are building the flexible ideology of future democracy. And this new dimension will give positive results. It will give greater possibilities to some and deny others any at all. It will guarantee the legality of political procedures of management, extend control, but make it seem as though it is being managed from the base, desired by the people, guaranteed by a plurality of opinions. It will allow greater security for the *included*, separating them from the *excluded*, building an unscalable wall around them, foreseeing new needs that are specific to the ruling class and are incomprehensible to the dominated. It will select the *excluded* on the basis of their possible participation, showing varying degrees of tolerance towards them according to their levels of participation. At the extreme limit, for the non-participants, the maladapted—the *excluded* excluded from everything—there will still be systems of segregation. Not so much the old-style prisons as new ones run by people in white coats.

These are the programmes for restructuring power and transforming democracy. Opposing oneself to all this is a part of the fascinating and indispensable revolutionary project that is perhaps still to be invented.

# No more crises

Present-day capitalism has changed the whole of economic reality. The old world regulated by laws and rigid rules where individual firms were able to make long-term programmes, has changed into one that is quite devoid of rules or laws, where in order to survive companies must develop their flexibility and adaptability to a maximum degree. Revolutionary structures, including anarchist ones, were also once modelled along the idea of a rigid economic reality. Now, at a time when profound technological changes have put production in a state approaching 'chaos', we are asking ourselves if these old revolutionary theories are still valid. I do not think we can say they are.

## A glance at some of the old certainties

One thing that can be understood from the few not very elaborate analyses in circulation, is the different role that is being ascribed to the concept of 'economic crisis' in the widest sense of the term.

Even in recent years there was a lot still being said in Marxist circles about an 'objective development of the crisis', and various strategies and organisations based themselves on this conviction. Not only did they foresee a revolutionary moment of truth with the class enemy, but they even went into the details, linking the strategic function of the revolutionary party and the 'winning' choice of generalised armed struggle to the course of the 'crisis' that was claimed to be objective.

We know that things do not work like that. But the events leading up to the aforementioned's current faltering do not seriously merit discussion. They could be summed up as an about-turn in perspective following a few banal problems of accountancy. Things didn't work out (but starting off on such a premise, how could they have?) so they reached the conclusion that the objective mechanism had not 'functioned' as it should have done. Others ended up denying the mechanism altogether in a conversion to collaborationism, revealing that the mental limitations of today are identical to those of the past, it is just that the latter were hidden by a mantle of slogans and prefabricated ideas.

## The complexity of the problem of "crisis"

It is a known fact that Marxists also made use of this concept as a form of consolation. At times, when conflict was at a low ebb and hearts were tepid, the determinist train kept chugging along. The crisis worked in place of revolutionaries, eroding away the heart of the economic and social structure, preparing the field for the contradictions of the future. In this way the militant who has sacrificed everything to revolutionary hope does not see the ground move under his feet and continues in his struggle, believing himself to have an ally concealed in the very nature of things.

In more contradictory times, when the level of the class struggle heightens, determinism halts, or rather, being of little use it is hidden behind the scenes. It is replaced by an opportunistic voluntarism that is capable (or hopeful) of bestriding the initiatives of the movement, the sudden outbreaks of destruction and the creative, spontaneous organisations.

But apart from the business of shop-keeping with which the supporters of revisioned power are still occupying themselves, the problem continues to exist in all its consistency.

In actual fact the course of the economic and social process is not homogenous either in the minutiae of specific situations or in the whole of the great international polarities. Periods of economic shakedown, constant levels of production, greater international equilibrium (both political and economic) alternate with periods wrought with contradictions where the whole system seems to be reaching a critical point.

Economists have often spoken of 'cycles', although they never agree as to how these should be identified or specified. It could be said that the discussion of cycles is one of the most astonishing aspects of this ridiculous science.

Will it ever be possible for capitalists to put order either in the economic setup as a whole, or in the individual structures that comprise it? The answer is a definite 'no'...

## A double mistake

All this does not mean that crises necessarily exist, so we can simply wait for events to take us to the revolutionary moment of their own accord.

On the contrary. Such 'revolutionary' theory goes hand in hand with the capitalist theory of 'planning' (Long Range Planning).

The mistake was the same in both cases. It was thought that the economic (and social) formation was a composite whole held together by intrinsic, well-ordered laws which a precise science (economics) and its chambermaid (sociology) studied and brought to light, allowing revolutionaries on the one hand and the capitalists on the other to draw certain conclusions in order for each to set out their long term strategies.

It is now understood that crises do not exist, not because the world is in perfect order but because, on the contrary, it is in complete disorder. It is continually at the mercy of turbulence that can either increase or decrease, but cannot be considered a 'crisis' in that it in no way corresponds to 'anomalous' situations but simply to the reality of the economic and social setup. For the capitalists Long Range Planning became obsolete at the beginning of the Seventies. One could say that the parallel concept of "crisis" still exists for some revolutionaries. The time-lapse, as we can see, is considerable.

It seems to me that it would be useful to look at the changed conditions of the economy—at least at the macroeconomic level—so as to try to understand the profound changes that are taking place in revolutionary analyses which once saw 'crises' as a borderline concept that made possible a better use of the instruments of rupture.

It is also beyond doubt that much anarchist analysis is also based on slow understanding, undeserved transfers and involuntary acceptance. For a long time it was thought that the economic analyses supplied by the Marxist church could be used by simply eliminating a few of the premises, and the conclusion. This has already caused enough problems. It would be well to look for a solution.

I do not believe that it is possible to use Marxist ideas in any way at all—except to purge them of the dialectically determinist premises which systematically end up transforming them into indigestible banalities.

## Towards a cohabitation with disorder

The need to conform to productivity forecasts based on a presumed economic order or economic laws made the situation of the capitalist firms (which constitute the main element of what we call "capital") very risky. In this way, any variation from forecasts was considered spurious and caused by unexpected situations, and as a result the durable, constant nature of occurrences that were claimed to be exceptional escaped them. Changes in levels of demand, oligopolist competition, corporate defence of markets, price levels, changes, costs, occupational norms, environmental conditioning: all these could no longer be considered 'elements of disturbance' that contradicted the 'certainties' of the only theory authorised to interpret reality.

So capital found itself faced with surprises at a strategic level. It faced continual changes in its forecasts, making it increasingly difficult to adjust to economic reality.

A suspicion that there might be a possibility of economic behaviour as a whole being 'irrational' began to spread.

State intervention, especially at the end of the Seventies, was undoubtedly one aspect that might contribute to a possible equilibrium, but that alone was not enough. State intervention, aimed at reducing the negative aspects of 'capitalist competition', turned out to concentrate too much on the institutional need for social control. Basically the State is an economic enterprise that tends to reduce the whole economic (and social) reality to the production of one single product: social peace.

Capital, seeing itself reflected in the deforming mirror of the Eastern European countries, is well aware that the State capitalist road to regeneration is an even worse evil. That road guarantees the persistence of power, but distorts the classical aspects of capitalism too much, domesticating it within the restricted confines of the institutional need for control.

Basically then, thinking about it, the whole phase of setting up the 'State' as a corrective variable, which in strictly economic terms came to an end in the early Eighties, has also aimed to have itself supported (at least as far as the advanced capitalist countries are concerned) by the greatest technological innovation in history: the electronic one. This in fact was the indispensable element for living with the monster. The solution lay in reaching the maximum flexibility in the shortest possible time.

## The theoretical effort

Economists have been working hard. Faced with the dangers of remaining closed within the schema of 'crisis', they pulled up their sleeves. First they criticised the neoclassical theory of business enterprise, then the managerial one. They tried to push this theory towards further research into 'uniformity', so as to put an end to uncertainties caused by the great multiplicity of phenomena.

Then a critique of 'crisis', seen as the passive acceptance of an anomalous situation which could be overcome, was put forward. The whole of the Seventies was characterised by economic research aimed at criticising, in the 'negative' sense, the unreliability of forecasts based on the economic theories of the past (both neoclassical and managerial, it makes no difference).

Finally, at the beginning of the Eighties, 'instability' and the relative complexity of phenomena came to be recognised as intrinsic to the economic setup, and the idea of the presence of contrasting forces which could be put in order was discarded for good.

Economists now talk of 'non-adjustability'. A particular situation—in the short or very short term—only becomes comprehensible to the company if economic reality is seen as a whole, without any centre or inborn capacity to instill order, but as a number of forces acting on the basis of decisions that cannot always be referred to as 'rational'.

The answer that economic theory came up with to solve this problem was clear. Capitalist enterprise can only face such a situation if it develops flexibility to a maximum degree. It is not a question of a 'new' situation, but of a 'new' way of seeing things. The firm must be flexible in decision-making, in the organisation of production, and in its capacity to adapt to the current changes as a whole.

So firms are decentralising, productive processes are no longer fixed, anomaly becomes the rule. Chaos is led into the reassuring canon of 'economic law'.

In reality, chaos has remained just that. What has been changed are the ways of looking at it. The capitalist is learning to bestride the monster. He has always nurtured few scruples and a certain pirate-style courage. Even more so today. There are no priests of economy left to sing consolatory lullabies to him. If he wants to survive, he must do so in the short term. The arms of plunder and violence are used increasingly in the short and medium term. The great planning projects—which were often echoed by blarney in the social field—have been put aside for good.

The economic theory of the past is reaching a sticky end. The neoclassical model that theorised rational economic curves that clashed and found a natural equilibrium in the market have been discarded. The same goes for the managerial theory that was based exclusively on the firm's stability and its planning capacity.

These remnants of the past have been discarded in favour of the concept of proceeding by 'trial and error', which has now been completely taken over by cybernetics. Of course, these attempts are only possible if the firm has become highly flexible and is able to exercise sufficient control over the latter.

The new situation clearly presents the problem of how the firm should act in the face of its incapacity to control external variables and even a number of internal ones. The 'political' components of the firm, the technostructure as defined by the 'left wing' American economists of the Seventies, have become uncertain elements. At the level of macroanalysis, the State in particular and its influence on the economy lose the determination they exercised in the preceding hypothesis. At the level of microanalysis, individual firms lose their strategic capacity for planning.

The new reality is therefore characterised by the introduction of external instability into the firm itself, an end of stable relations between firms, changes in State regulatory functions (more accent on maintaining consensus), and an end to fixed procedures inside the firm, where the traditional capitalist concept of accumulation and a quantitative growth in production is disappearing.

The new methods are essentially based on speeded up decision-making and the many possibilities for substituting production factors. In this way the managerial aspect of the firm is changing considerably. The science of economic decision-making is disappearing forever and is being replaced by a practice (or if we prefer, an art) of empirical, eclectic decisions, skilfully and impudently aimed at instant profit.

Economists are elaborating the contingency theory, a theory of the circumstances that tie the firm to a particular external situation. This cannot be submitted to economic calculations based on laws, but only to observations in the very short term based on empirical considerations, the fruit of recent experiences that are also free from theories based on long term prediction.

Neo-capitalism's dreams have crumbled forever, and with them the big factory setup, which has seen its day. It becomes clear that analysis based on a rigid concept of organisation prevents seeing economic reality as it is, resulting in an inadequate productive capacity.

In order to understand the changes that are taking place it is necessary to turn our attention to a few essential points in the old economic analyses. For example, the productive cycle of the finished product, the curve of cost reduction related to the processes leading up to it, concentration (both of single companies and oligopolist sectorial groups), the size of the firm, the idea that the small firm represents the backward part of the economy, the function of State investment, the existence of advanced nuclei of investors at the technological level capable of influencing the economy of a whole area: these are some of the classical points in the traditional view. They are all gradually disappearing. The conclusion is therefore that it is not possible to elaborate a general theory but only approximations in order to limit the damage of contrasts between external reality and the firm.

## **The 'new' enterprise is emerging from this unique melting pot.**

This enterprise is no longer centralised and does not serve as a point of reference at an opposite pole to external functions and interests. Once research, manufacturing, commercial distribution, State demand (forced constant growth), the search for raw materials, the spread of property owning, growth in political power, etc., were all elements of planning based on the 'central' positivism of the factory.

The factory is no longer moving towards a dimension of continual expansion, nor does it consider itself to be one compact unit. It continues to develop, but in a different way.

It is important to understand this concept. The 'new growth' is based exclusively on the relations the factory has with the outside world. Agreements and projects are growing in tune with a common language and code. Not only with other enterprises (limited by natural borders), but with the environment as a whole, advanced technology and scientific research. This new system (with Japan in the lead, far ahead of the US) is transforming itself from a closed system into a situation-system or, as it has been called, a 'country system'. The situation-system supplies technology, work professionalism, services, a capacity to overcome and improve legal infrastructures as well as material, social and ideological behaviour. In a word, it produces a suitable environment. Not the objective one that the old firm related to by trying to reduce its need for order, but a re-elaborated environment that has been made to suit the new concept of development of the enterprise.

This concept should be borne in mind when we talk of the 'breaking up' of the factory. It is not one particular situation that is 'pulverised' so much as the whole situation in its complexity. In the first place this has become possible due to the presence of electronics technology which has abolished the confines of space, and consequently also time. Working in real time, the modern firm no longer requires warehouses and rigid provisions of parts. It no longer requires production units to be set up for long periods of time. It does not even need massive financial investment in order to bring about changes in production lines. Its flexibility is such that it is growing exponentially, especially since the key problem of manpower has been solved and the phantom of social struggle that accompanied it has disappeared.

The multinational as we knew it in the past has also changed. The great self-sufficient colossus no longer exists. There is no longer a centre capable of imposing its development on the State. The new multinational is linked to the environment with which it interacts, trying to turn external conditions to its own profit. It no longer dominates the technological circuits or controls the market. No one firm, no matter how big, can control the development of technology and decide on its application (or not) today. The multinational is tending to become a collective supranational undertaking. It is transforming itself into a huge complex of complementary firms linked by the conditions of production technology and the individual capacity to exploit.

## **Revolutionaries**

Although what we have described is only a sketch, it cannot fail to be of interest to revolutionaries.

If the 'end' of crises means capitalism is surviving by adapting to economic reality seen as chaos, we cannot talk about programming, predictability and economic 'laws'. We cannot talk of 'crises', meaning situations that will happen in our favour.

We cannot even think of the class struggle as something with alternate phases. Of course, the clash is not 'constant' throughout time, i.e. within it there are moments of greater or lesser intensity, but rather it is a question of qualitative and quantitative changes that cannot be traced back deterministically to simple economic causes. A vast interweaving of social relations is at the basis of the class struggle. No analysis can give us the true yardstick for measuring expect-



tation or the legitimization of behaviour. The time is always ripe for attack, even if the consequences might obviously differ considerably.

In this sense we must think about the possibility of revolutionary organisation corresponding to the reality of the class clash as it is today.

The organisational structuring of the past—from party to federated group, from trade unionism to workers' councils—more or less corresponded to an idea of economic reality that saw the capitalist enterprise as the centre, a concentration of power and capacity to exploit.

It was thought that an equally monolithic structure (union, party, federation) was the logical way to oppose it. Even in the past, when one swore by eternal economic laws, productive reality was in fact chaotic and one was systematically penalised whenever one approached it in the wrong way. Perhaps the very concepts of 'economic cycles' and 'crises' should be seen in this light.

So, we have changes in the reality of production, but above all we have a different way of looking at this reality. It is thus once more time to develop a different way of looking at reality from a revolutionary perspective. I say once more, because, especially for anarchists, a radical critique has never been lacking, especially when we opposed ourselves to the monolithic and quantitative concepts of anarcho-syndicalism and the quasi-political party infatuations of the great anarchist federations.

A different organisational structure is in large part still to be thought out and brought about, but certainly does not need to be discovered anew. Any attempt to resuscitate the corpses of past organisational processes should contain clarification as to how they stand in the face of an economic (and social) reality that is becoming easier to understand in terms of indeterminism, certainly not through rigid economic laws. Each time this explanation is attempted, each time revolutionary organisational proposals start off tied to images of the past (parties, federations, groups, syndicalism, etc.), we realise how the common conception of economic reality is linked to the assumption that more or less rigid laws exist. If these laws are taken for granted, or are timidly hidden between the lines, the faith in economic cycles of 'crises' comes to the fore. And this faith, just like any other one, turns out to be very convenient in times of hardship.

By submitting the economic models of the past to a radical critique, we cast further doubt upon the present (moreover, vacillating) convictions concerning the organisational structures of revolutionary movements generally and of the anarchist one in particular.

But, as we know, revolutionaries tend to be more conservative than the conservatives.

# Quality and the factory

The battle for quality in production, a reflex of the old ideology of the battle for the quality of life, is aimed at conquering wider areas of the market by proposing factory systems that were once considered to be futuristic.

Although this is apparently aimed at the conquest of new 'clients', it conceals another—perhaps many other—aspects that are not devoid of interest.

First of all, a battle for quality has always existed to a certain extent, in that quality controls have always existed in factories. It is just that management have now realised that computerised control of the end product is not only costly but pointless, as it limits itself to establishing lack of quality, putting a mediocre and often unacceptable product on the market.

The move to quality control, a true revolution in restructuring far beyond what it might seem at first sight, would have been impossible in the old assembly line system where the individual worker had to respect time according to the old taylorist model. The old system was based on speeding up the work pace and increasing output, while quality was only a marginal aspect of the technical side of production along with raw materials, the use of machinery, reduction of waste, and so on.

The advent of robotised production units in place of the old assembly lines has also changed things among the few workers who are left, those who take care of the non-automated aspects of finishing. This work force has now been drawn into the ideology of patronage, started in America and developed to its extreme consequences by Japanese industry.

This expedient is based on futuristic techniques that had been used by Volvo from the beginning of the Seventies, such as so-called production islands. The worker was considered to be the supplier of a hypothetical client in the same factory. For example, the worker assigned to finishing car door handles came to be considered a supplier to the worker finishing the car doors. He in turn is considered a supplier to the bodywork assembly controller, and so on up to the last client—not the buyer of the car, but the head of the production unit who controls the finished product. At each point, through rewards and incentives, each individual worker is pressured into denouncing any defects. Thus, if whoever fixes the handles lets faulty pieces go through, he is reported by his workmate at the door assembly stage when he notices that the handle does not work properly. This is done by placing a yellow card on a board. It does not lead to sanctions: such a thing would have met with real resistance because not everybody is willing to act the spy. The operator's indication only concerns the malfunctioning handle, it is not aimed at any other worker personally. It is as though a client were to make a claim to a manager, as though within one factory people were producing and supplying products to each other. The yellow cards are discussed at a meeting at sectorial level where the causes of the technical deficiency are discussed and remedies are found.

A few considerations can be made concerning this internal collaboration which is being requested of the old working class.

First of all, although it is an idea that comes fairly close to co-management, it is more secure as it takes the workers away from the level of decision-making and puts them in a conflictual relationship with one another at every level of production, something that wards off any ideas about self-management and eliminates the possibility of a growth in class consciousness.

In the second place these initiatives, which are not limited to the production line but permeate the whole new way of considering the productive setup (therefore also administration, research, sales and so on), have been made possible through the computer technology which has transferred all the tasks still linked to rates of production, therefore to time, to completely automated processes, i.e., they are carried out by robots.

Finally, the consequences of this way of proceeding should be pointed out: class disintegration at the workplace, artificial quality competition, professional competitiveness that has nothing real about it as it contains its own limited range of possible intervention, a reduced interest in making claims through the union, and the disappearance of any of the more advanced conflictuality that the unions often found themselves forced to tolerate and manage.

The benefit for capital is considerable and varied: avoiding quality controls, obtaining superior quality leading to greater competitiveness on the market, reducing costs, and controlling conflictuality by channelling it in the direction of simple market competition.

These are all instruments against which the unions are disarmed.

# Streamlined production

One of the main characteristics of the factory today is its failure to achieve complete automation due to a lack in the perspective and, if you like, aspiration to mass production.

The fact that the historic encounter between computerised production and the traditionally fixed model (rigid production lines which came to be partly automated by the use of robots) has not led to complete automation, is not due to technical causes but to problems of an economic nature and the related market conditions. The use of the technologies that have taken the place of manual labour has not reached saturation level. In fact new perspectives are continually opening up in this direction. What has been surpassed, and so become useless in terms of maximal profit, is the strategy of mass production.

The flexibility guaranteed by computer technology, which increased during the growing phase of post-industrial transformation, has led to such profound changes at a certain point in the market structure and demand as to make any perspective of complete automation pointless. Flexibility and streamlined production moved to the realm of the market instead, creating a flourish of new perspectives in demand which was to become diversified to an extent that was quite unthinkable up until even quite recently.

Now, as it is easy to see by reading the accounts of some of big industry's shareholders, automation is creating costs that are fast becoming uneconomic. Only a perspective of intense social upheaval could force them back along the path of total automation.

For this reason the cost of production is no longer reduced by simply lowering labour costs, as happened over the past twelve years with the almost complete substitution of the worker with computer technology, but also by a more considered management of so-called overproduction. In short, a ruthless analysis of waste in general, primarily from the production point of view. So, once again pressure is being put on the producer in flesh and blood, prompting an about-turn on the claim that computer technology was to alleviate all the suffering and exploitation that has always characterised waged work.

So reduction in waste is becoming the new aim of streamlined production based on flexibility and guaranteed productive potential. And the cost of this reduction in waste is falling entirely on the producer's shoulders. In fact, mathematical analysis through complex systems—which have been used by the big companies for some time now—can easily solve technical problems such as how to combine raw materials and machinery. But the solution of these problems would still be marginal to production as a whole, were it not now also able to control the rate of the latter.

Old-fashioned Taylorism is coming back into fashion, filtered through new psychology and information technology theories, the flexibility of the various components, and the myriad of small producers who support it. Labour in terms of time is therefore the basic unit of the new production: control of the latter, with no waste (but without any stupidly regressive exaggeration) is the indispensable connection between the old productive model and the new one.

The new forms of control are of a pervasive nature, i.e. they tend to penetrate the individual producer's mind, creating generic psychological conditions that take the place of the external controls that were set through strict production timetables. Self-control and self-prescription of hours and work-pace is gradually taking their place, but this is still ultimately decided upon by the management of the productive units. These decisions might come from democratic discussion at the base, from the single workers within the various production units, in order to root the process of self-determination even more deeply.

In this way there is talk of a kind of 'adaptive synchronisation', brought about, not once and for all, but implemented periodically or for single campaigns or production lines. This aims to create a convergence of interests between workers and bosses, not only in the technical sphere of production but also indirectly, in the sphere of the market.

In fact it is precisely the market that is now linking these two tendencies in the new flexible form of production. The old factory saw itself as the centre of the world of production, it was the rigid element from which to start off to create more consumer demands, and satisfy them. That produced an ideology which saw the worker as central, managed by some party leader and aimed at organising the destiny of the proletariat and the whole factory system. The disappearance of this perspective cannot be more obvious today, not so much because of the collapse of actual socialism, but precisely due to the changes we have been talking about. There is no longer any distance between the rigidity of production and the chaotic flexibility and unpredictability of the market. Both aspects have been brought back under

the common denominator of variability and streamlining. The way to affect consumerism, by both anticipating and creating it, is to let it go back to the chaos of the market and an acceptable level of flexibility. At the same time, the rigid old world of production is moving into the new streamlined version. The two are meeting in this new dimension, where future economic and social power will be built.

# A little man in Singapore

Barings is a small commercial bank in London. It made the headlines the world over due to the collapse that resulted from disastrous operations carried out in the Tokyo Stock Exchange by one of its employees, Nick Leeson, their agent in the Singapore branch.

The news would not have attracted much attention had it not been for the amateurish, folkloristic quality of scandal journalism that reports certain economic events, reducing them almost to fiction, in the ambit of the powerful business families, high finance and industry.

But what really happened? The case indicates a speculative mentality that is spreading not only among the small banks, which are used to moving like rogue torpedoes in the increasingly stormy sea of the principles of the international stock exchanges, but also among the giants in the sector. The chance to make enormous profits is affecting not only the individual's disposition to risk and adventure, but can affect the projects of even the most astute and prudent bankers.

Men like Leeson are nothing exceptional. They are little more than ordinary employees who operate as intermediaries with the stock exchange. They transmit orders for buying and selling in the ambit of exchange and value. The resulting flux of fictitious money—which can be transformed into ready cash at the time of the periodical statements of accounts when they total up what has been bought and sold—is leading to limitless growth in the amounts being negotiated. Moreover, the computerisation of buying and selling contracts has made possible rapid variations that were once unthinkable.

This has led to various consequences. We will consider two of the more important ones here. Such speculations are making it possible to restore the equilibrium of the international market within certain limits (at least that of the dominant stock exchange). This allows time and the possibility for the giants of the world economy to run to the rescue, i.e. to deaden the blows they deal each other in the conquest of markets, the search for better orders, the choice of programmes and production lines, and the importation of new products and new ideas of consumerism. Whereas before, in the face of a risked collapse of the stock exchange, the strategy of the individual multinationals was more discreet and prudent, they have now become more aggressive. Insignificant shrimps like Leeson work like slaves locked up in their golden cages to make this telematic reality possible.

Second point. Banks have now assumed unprecedented importance. They are no longer merely tellers, but have become economic operators themselves. That is to say, they work on their own, making projects for and managing large chunks of the financial market. Finally, higher and higher stakes are created (such as those based on the so-called 'by-products', i.e. on the trends of the various world stock market indexes), where there is no longer any relationship with the concreteness, albeit it rarefied, of the individual companies.

Obviously, at the end of the day, there is a price to be paid for the collapse of one single bank and the coverage given by the others called to the rescue.

We leave it up to you to guess who pays it.

# The ethical bank

A bank that guarantees it will deal with money in an ethical way, in other words one that functions within a global project of justice, solidarity, autonomy and nonviolence.

Is such a thing possible? Some people believe so and dedicate their time to supporting this kind of initiative, i.e. to creating banks that, in their opinion, are capable of operating in the economic field with a social conscience and some criteria of solidarity, satisfying physical, cultural, emotional and spiritual needs rather than the simple profit-making that regulates commercial banks.

These ethical banks do not set profit as their goal, but have a social aim, in that they want to prevent marginalisation and favour cooperation between advanced capitalist societies and those that are considerably less so. To put it simply, they want to create harmony between ethics, politics and economy. Discussions about initiatives such as this, which see themselves as self-managed, merit further examination. Here we will limit ourselves to making a few points.

It is not possible to 'separate' one sector of the economy and manage it differently to the rest. No one can seriously believe it is possible to enter the world of finance and keep themselves rigorously separate from the financial system as a whole. That is impossible from the moment one goes beyond the threshold of meaning, i.e. as soon as the bank and alternative network becomes a point of reference for the offer of money. The fascination for the idea of alternative credit goes back to attempts to realise Proudhon's ideas, which were developed not from an ethical point of view, but as an instrument of struggle against the all pervasive power of capitalism. Those who examined the ethical problem of economic management—not only finance, but the economy as a whole—were economists of the Catholic school, Toniolo, then Vito and Parrillo, the latest to have worked out the problem in terms that were acceptable to capital. In fact, the Roman Catholic church has approached the problem on more than one occasion, with all due caution.

We are convinced that no such thing as an 'ethical' management of money is possible, just as there is no way to face capital and the economy as a whole that is not conflictual.

It is sufficient to read the list of principles that are defined as 'ethical-political' by the promoters themselves, to see what we mean:

1. my money must simply be an instrument, not a source of profit;
2. my money must not serve to finance the arms trade;
3. my money must not be mixed with 'escaping' capital;
4. my money must not support dictatorships;
5. my money must not speculate on poverty;
6. my money must not support activities involving laundered wealth derived from illegal activity.

That is all very well, so long as 'my money' remains 'mine' and so long as it pays me sufficient interest.

Do we really believe we can self-manage and 'humanise' capitalism?

I certainly don't.

# Unemployment in Italy—how come everything doesn't explode?

We often ask ourselves why nobody acts in a situation like the present. Why do so many unemployed not rebel? How does the economic and State system manage to appear to deal with everything so effortlessly? We will try to answer some of these questions. In doing so it will become clear how we need to 'go beyond' economy in the narrow sense of the word if we want to understand how exploitation works today.

## Unemployment in Italy today

The data available refers to 1987 and can be summed up in terms of two tendencies: more jobs in the tertiary (services) sector and a considerable fall in the industrial one, especially in the large enterprises.

We will look at changes that have been taking place in production over the past few years and the resultant modifications not only in revolutionary expectations but also concerning practices to be implemented.

It has been calculated that there are over 3,000,000 unemployed in Italy today. In the industrial sector between 1977 and 1987, workers decreased by 9,000, making it possible for industry to recuperate lost profits. In fact, following the initial fall between 1977-1980 there have been profit increases in the large firms from 674 billion lira in 1980 to 8,000 billion in 1987.

In the Italian industrial sector, where the greatest decline took place, productivity has increased by about 21 per cent since 1980, while job reduction stands at about 16 per cent.

This demonstrates beyond any doubt that unemployment in Italy is caused mainly by the productive sector's growing incapacity to provide work. Big industry has undergone restructuring, resulting in a drastic reduction of the work force. The turning point came around the beginning of the Eighties. It was realised then that short-term adjustments were not enough and that massive restructuring was necessary, far from the old and onerous contributions of fixed capital. Class conflict was at a low ebb at the time. The State, in response to solicitations by capital, had used all the means at its disposal, from the now collaborationist trade unions (at best limited to retrograde struggles), to the parading of the phenomenon of 'terrorism'.

The production crisis in the Eighties led to an under-use of plants, followed by a revision of labour costs: mass sackings, early pensions, recourse to layoffs and collateral contracts. The phenomenon was the reverse of the wage increases and reduction in productivity of the Seventies. The capitalists made it plain that one could only be employed after passing through an initial phase of unemployment.

Till then capitalists, being unable to touch the extremely rigid cost of labour, had only been able to modify prices in the sphere of what is known as the 'technical problem'. Now, with the collaboration of the unions and the CP, labour costs have gone down. Inflation is decreasing, productivity is rising, worker combativeness is at an all-time low. The working class is disintegrating.

## Ways of putting a brake on things

In a State that claims to have 'social' connotations, the forces which in theory should be defending the workers' interests are looking after those of capital. It has become common to seek alternative solutions for those excluded from work. The unions have taken on this, let us say, institutional task. The State wants to avoid disorder, capital wants to avoid a drop in demand. But this time State investment is not moving towards the huge fixed plants that served as poles of attraction for collateral activities. That period has gone for good. Now they are moving into the tertiary sector, the emerging sector which has more possibility of absorbing the work force. Here too interests coincide: capital needs services in order to restructure the primary sector, the State serves as regulator, and the unions see the solution as closer to their institutional task. The result is a reinforcing of the large industries, with lower set costs and greater



flexibility, a weakening of the working class which is reaching a point of disintegration that was absolutely unthinkable a few years ago, and a transformation of the role of the State—now moving towards becoming the direct contractor, no longer limiting itself to the role of simply regulating tension.

The solution as a whole is that of supporting demand, at least in the medium term (layoffs), containing inflation by reducing the level of real wages, and a reinforcing of the political role of the State (stronger and more durable government). This very complex mechanism has been set in motion in Italy and various other States. The US example—model and external variable of our economic system—has served as an important point of reference.

In the US there was a considerable recession in 1981 which lasted for more than two years. The State managed to come through it by setting up a model of economic and political intervention. It stopped fearing inflation with the result that there were considerable credit facilitation: investors all over the world poured funds into Wall Street. Investment nearly all went into the tertiary sector, a characteristic that is specific to the American market, even in the production of durable consumer goods. As always, the third world has paid the price by getting more and more into debt in order to buy these goods, paying for them in poor exports but also serving as the main investment for the great flow of money that has swollen the American economy. Here the American economy has set up a harder politic with a 'go and return' effect, to the benefit of both the international stability of the Atlantic military colossus, and the robbery economy towards the subjects of imperialism. For the same reasons that country will probably now be the first to pay the consequences of this 'brilliant' manoeuvre.

## But why doesn't everything explode?

This is a question that many are asking themselves. The recuperation of unemployment by the tertiary sector is not a sufficient explanation. Nor is the growth in productivity, control of inflation levels or the development of work flexibility and precarious work (black labour). Taken individually, these answers are probably all valid, but no single one of them can explain the problem, nor do they when they are taken together as a whole.

The early Eighties was undoubtedly a time of material difficulty for the whole economic system. The industrial sector was overloaded, inflation was on the increase, fear of the social consequences of reducing labour costs in the short term was strong, and the unions were insisting on the defence of jobs and real wage value. During these years something was demonstrated which had become clear to us at the end of 1977: a passage from material difficulty to an awakening of the workers' consciousness as a class, had not taken place. Was that a 'crisis'? It is impossible to answer that, if for no other reason than that we do not effectively know what a crisis is. The workers should have gone beyond the economic struggle—at least according to the Marxist analysis—and passed to the social one. This was initially to have come through the party and only through the unions in the second place. In other words, revolutionary subjectivity was to emerge from the crisis.

Nothing of the sort happened. Not only has there been no will to struggle arising from the determinism of the economic setup but, more importantly, there has been no real obstacle to the development and pick-up of capitalist recovery. Anything but the disappearance of the illusion of equal exchange announced by Marx. They simply changed the cards in their hands, just at the moment when the situation was threatening to become far more serious. In fact this did not happen, thanks also to the epochal intervention of information technology.

Today the conditions of the labour market could be summed up as capital's increased capacity to recuperate and manoeuvre the army of the unemployed. The capacity for invention in this field is illuminating, mainly consisting of initiatives of an 'alternative' nature which once set the usual three or four fools dreaming. The intelligence of capital is extraordinary: Marx would have said, exciting. It takes struggles over, using them against those who promoted them and against the main body of the working class. It singles out the most isolated instigators and interpreters, transforming them into 'criminals' and using them to scare others back into line. Then the new concept of quality is used to do up the facade. Politics are consolidated, as immoral behaviour readjusts into a more stable form, turning over a new leaf in some of its marginal aspects. It is not possible to speak of the 'failure' of the party or union as a function. In our opinion it is a question of a historical function reaching its natural conclusion. The end of an era. The end of a great illusion. Capital's work is immense, it permeates school, the family, the church and everything else. It leaves no space unfilled, as it pushes back all initiatives in terms of struggle. Its repressive system welcomes disgusting practices such as grassing and repentance to get to the bottom of some of its contradictions which, although marginal, could still create a certain imbalance. Instead, in order to reduce the dissent of the most radical and least instrumentalizable to silence, it employs pure and simple repression, that of special prisons and police bullets. It has demonstrated once

and for all that it is not true that revolt is more difficult in moments of material difficulty for the whole economic and social setup. And this was one of the canons of Marxism.

The fact is that the State and capital are far more efficient than one thinks and are far more interconnected than Marx could have imagined in his time. We must not underestimate the role of the State in this recuperation. Left to itself, the economic mechanism would almost certainly have tried to undermine plants, but the State-economy collaboration has made possible an incredible programme of restructuring instead.

Today we are faced with a situation we could practically define as corporative. No real political opposition exists, except as a formality, so the government can impose tough decisions that turn out to be to the benefit of the economy. That is why the system does not explode, that is why we can tolerate such a high rate of unemployment almost with resignation, and consider normal a fluctuating percentage of temporary or unstable work.

Class disintegration becomes the integration of the individual, a transformation of personal relations, a violent transformation of life for everyone. There is no longer one particular point of reference in the struggle. The collapse of the old myths is leading to an acceptance of life as continual collapse. And, against a situation we have learned to consider normal, we cannot rebel.

# A million jobs

Whatever can such a promise mean, made as it was at the time of the collective illusions inspired by Berlusconi's electoral propaganda.

In practical terms, nothing. Not just because it is impossible, but because it goes against economic logic itself.

Let us explain.

For capitalism, work is a commodity, and because it is derived from activity carried out in exchange for a wage, man himself becomes a commodity. So a work market actually exists. Work has a price (wages), and there is a direct relationship between lack of work (unemployment) and the level of market prices.

Wages being the cost of one of the main elements of production (the work force), they also have an important effect on all the others, so (in abstract terms) the higher the level of unemployment, the lower the wages and the greater inflation, i.e. the whole range of market prices go down. All theory so far. Now, sticking to the theoretical model, the bosses—those who literally buy the workers' lives—might be tempted to reduce the possibility of employment, that is, not promise a million jobs, so pay fewer producers and earn more on each single item that leaves the factory.

But two things prevent this from happening. The first is that a reduction in employment would lead to a reduction in wages, with which the workers also buy goods, so sales would decrease. It follows that an increase in inflation (the result of a growth in unemployment) would reduce sales (there is no money left with which to buy) and a process of stagnation would set in which would begin to kill capital. The second element is that when they are unemployed (and consequently penniless), people become somewhat restless. First one 'gets by', then one rebels. And rebellion threatens social peace, puts the future of all production in danger, prevents investment, creates panic in buyers, and so on.

That is why jobs are promised. In the first place to sell more goods, in the second, to prevent rebellion.

But is this a reasonable promise? It is from a political point of view, but only up to a point. 'Artificial' work was invented long before the great scare of 1929. Workhouses existed as far back as the 18th century (in Britain of course, where else?), where the out of work were forced to build fortresses and roads for survival wages. Such a reduction to slavery is unthinkable today, but social security dulls people, putting them in a condition of permanent stupidity. Moreover, with increased production rates leading to more goods on the market and a greater need for sales by producers, assistance alone is no longer enough to support demand (it would not guarantee enough sales of all the goods produced). Something else is required, and capital in the 90s is still looking for it.

That is why they are talking about a million jobs in Italy alone. Even although does not correspond to reality. It serves a different purpose.

First, it serves to break down the defence lines of the old work aristocracy defined by skill. Flexibility and mobility are breaking up the old factory resistance even in terms of wage claims. That is leading to the disappearance of any capacity for opposition by the unions, now reduced to mere transmission belts for the bosses' wishes.

Secondly, it supports demand, and so allows for the full use of the technological capacity to diversify supply. What sense would there be in the new assembly lines where products (a car, for example), can be designed to personal requirements if there were no demand for these products? Social security stifled rebellious instincts, it was not able to open up new possibilities for production.

Third, these jobs are not 'new', but are to be found within the field of already existing ones through various procedures—from early pensions to reduced working hours, controlled overtime, tax reduction, government financing, and so on.

Finally, in a move away from the perspective of rebellion, people are projected into a labyrinth of mirrors and illusions.

There seem to be possibilities right or left, non-existent outlets. And this insane, continual wandering about leads not to a desire to break down the walls of the labyrinth, but to carrying on waiting for something to happen, as new illusions follow the old.

The only thing that might happen is for new, more attractive and more complex enigmas to appear which are increasingly difficult to resolve.

Or the destruction of everything.

## Farewell to claiming

Surly union representative Larizza (UIL) said it over ten years ago: align with the German unions, demand participation in decision-making. At the time Carniti, thinking of the fighting tradition of the Italian unions (in Germany there have been no strikes to speak of since 1956), smiled disparagingly. Today they all agree on the great move. The Italian unions want to transform themselves into holdings like their German colleagues, where they would acquire not only weight in the firm's decision-making processes, but also become shareholders, and so come to possess companies and real estate themselves.

CSIL leader D'Antonio once said that in a global economy competition and international competitiveness weaken wage demands. The factory needs to breathe, otherwise there would be a risk of returning to the conditions of the Fifties, as happened in the case of the English miners in their struggle against Thatcher. Conflict, he continued, still exists, but it has moved from the streets to the directors' offices in such a way that, through co-management, the weight of restructuring is being distributed more equally. Force must be abandoned in bargaining, Larizza states (according to whom the new participatory model should be widened from the factories to local institutions concerning the management of urban areas, investment in the South, etc.). Finally, CGIL leader Cofferati points out that it is necessary to avoid the dangers of the so-called Japanese solution: direct cooperation between employees and bosses. Participation, he says, must be filtered through the union.

As we can see, in spite of a few differences, the outline of the union is now quite compact. Any residue of struggle in the streets, any conflict based on strikes and consequent damage to the employer, however remote the probability, is to be abandoned for good. Participation means making decisions along with the owners, that is deciding on what is referred to as the 'company's technical problems', i.e. the ideal composition of the various components of production: capital, machinery, labour. The result, if not exactly identical to the German model of more or less complete social pacification, nevertheless tends in that direction.

Now an important question is emerging. So long as the three big confederate unions acted at the level of claiming, autonomous base unions such as Cobas whose slogan was direct struggle still had some reason to exist, as they represented a possibility for development in the field of direct action, sabotage and maximum damage to the bosses. Basically, the bosses were still afraid in the knowledge that, even within the framework of less serious clashes, this eventuality could not be altogether excluded. Such a function no longer makes sense today. In fact, now that the big union organisations are refusing to continue in the logic of claiming it is impossible for this to be maintained by the minority unions alone. They would end up using up all their potential for struggle simply in proposing claims.

Let me explain more clearly. If what once characterised these minor union structures was the *methods* they used, all that would remain would be the *objectives* (claims as opposed to participation), sadly confirming that making claims is now enough to be 'beyond', and consequently in contrast with the outlook of the three main unions.

So these minor unions seem destined to taking on the superfluous and insignificant role of claiming. Superfluous because that does not suit the evolution of the economy as a whole (as the unions intelligently understand); insignificant because the minority ones (with all their pseudo-revolutionary chatter) neither desire, nor would they be able to use, methods they could only reach in the presence of the considerable strength still held by the big mass organisations in spite of all their limitations.

And any structure that loses its function, even the squalid one of holding on to someone else's tail, tends to disappear.

# The significance of an insignificant event

One million or five million people come out into the streets. Numbers apart, is such an event of any importance? No, I don't think so at all.

Far from the old Sorelian myth, a general strike is not in itself a response by the exploited to the intentions of Power. It is far more likely to mean something else. Let us see what.

First of all it is a sign of the capacity of the personalist politics presently being regenerated to bring millions of people into the streets. An instrument of political pressure therefore, in the hands of possible new power bases to co-opt the old or take their place. Nothing would change. From the point of view of the management of public spending—by no means of secondary importance—there can be no solution other than that (moreover only provisional) of dipping into the coffers of the rich, and not just those of high profile, but also the ones who keep themselves hidden. Can a political class, no matter how new and alien to concessions from its own pockets, succeed in doing as much? No it can't. So what are these millions of people in the streets actually asking for? To what power games are they wittingly or unwittingly lending themselves?

It is clear that there is no real collective presence in the various regions in Italy that have been loosely united in a general strike, so we cannot talk as though it were related to one individual or a group of individuals. But something needs to be said all the same.

The main composition of this presence, although it is not uniform or homogenous, is that of the waged classes who are afraid of losing their jobs, those already excluded (and destined to perennial unemployment), the youth element (aspiring to guaranteed jobs, and which they will continue to do), pensioners (who see themselves as deprived of the few rights they had), in support of the unions and the parties of the left who are desperately seeking a place within the opposition, but to no avail. And the latter might get this possibility, with the good shopkeeping common sense of all those who believe that things can be put right (first with Berlusconi and now without him). And having brought Fini's fascists into government along with Bossi's idiots and Berlusconi's technocrats and image manipulators, they are now regretting it, and trying to apply pressure by demonstrating their dissent. That might all be useful to the new opposition when they manage to find their own identity. But how can it mean anything in terms of the reality of things which could, and yes, radically should, be changed?

By rendering service to politicians who have been thrown out, making out that they deserved so much fuss? Of course not. The means would have to be quite different.

Restricting the question to the streets, because that is what we are talking about, the outcome, or at least the preoccupations at government level, would have been quite different if they had found themselves faced with situations such as in the days of piazza Statuto, or Reggio Emilia [where demonstrations turned to rebellion, resulting in the police firing into the crowd]. Not that mass violence in itself—in the form of clashes with the police—were the main means, so the results were predictable even then. What we are saying is more complex. The message contains its own destiny. As a method, the demonstration on its own has no future, because it merely aims to put pressure on the government for a change in the political class in power. The direct clash is a different method altogether, even if it can also be blocked, recuperated or defeated with the guile of promises or brute repression. But that is another question, it opens up a different kind of rupture.

It would certainly be more difficult for the unspeakable Berlusconi to recuperate with a smile on his face.

He would have to roll his sleeves up. And then, one thing could lead to another, and so on...

# World domination in a few words

The era of opposing sides is over, we have now entered that of unification. We are all enlisted under the same flag. If once the world was orientated towards two opposing illusions, which on close inspection turned out to be anything but divergent, now everybody is being called to unite under the same common verb. Enough of the chatter! A few words, clear and unequivocal, will do. Everybody knows what they need to do and what they should be interested in.

So a formless, flabby whole has taken the place of the “strong” ideologies of yesterday. Possibilism and flexibility, uncertainty and doubt have taken the place of the ideological certainties that transformed themselves into various shades of the concentration camp, all equally destined to social orthopaedics, i.e. the creation, by the whip, of a humanity suited to the conditions imposed by production relations.

Now any idea that is even slightly different is swiftly brought back to meet the requirements of the market, wrapped up in multi-coloured cellophane and sold, first wholesale, then retail. The media experts direct thought-control and compete to produce opinion, grinding down any original ideas, any desire to be ‘really other’, into nothing. It is astounding that behind the possibilism one finds the ancient conceit intact: the arrogance of the doctrinaires, barons of nothingness, vassals within the limits of the hedge beyond which only fear of the unknown puts a brake on the thrust of the masses cut off from any possibility of intervening.

So, at world level, a small minority of privileged people are using their power as though they were closed up in a mediaeval castle, building a wall to defend their interests and economic power. A wall of linguistic and technological choices which claim to be universal, i.e. a basis for growth and common improvement, for the satisfaction of the universal interests of men, while in effect it is only a defensive rampart, an increasingly insurmountable barrier as the insiders, themselves slaves with golden chains always solidly fastened to the bosses’ interests, continue to grow in height and strength.

The real power centres today are the big international banks, the central issuing banks, the European Commission, the managers of general agreements on trading tariffs, the International Monetary Fund, etc. The means of information that keep this power together and transmit its directives, translating them into programmatic thought and action are: *The Economist*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Financial Times*, *Far Eastern Economic Review*, *les Echos*, Reuter Agency, etc. The men who work there, slaves themselves but enjoying particular conditions of privilege, find themselves being trooped into the universities where a sad brood of economists are prostituting themselves part-time; into newspapers and reviews, where ambivalent journalists good for any sauce spread ignorance and idiocy; into political parties and unions, where tired zombies are recycling slogans of days gone by, giving the great mass of spectators the idea that they can choose their own ideas according to their own interests.

Political economy seems to have become the queen of the sciences. Everywhere in the circles mentioned above political economists jabber forecasts and analyses, study trends and index numbers, analyse curves and equations. Every central bank director feels himself to be a great economist and, leaning on his own reserves, tries to lay down the law to other States in money matters as though that were possible—something that is simply absurd in economics, perhaps more than anywhere else. The ridicule that befell the discount tax manoeuvre can only be compared to the ridicule to which the concept of pro-capita income has always been prey. If capitalism is ‘the natural condition of society’, as Alain Minc recently stated without a shadow of irony, this ‘natural’ condition is one of ridicule.

Think for a moment about the concept of the market and you are left with nothing tangible. What corrects the market? What do its chimerical laws tend to resolve? How can we get to know the laws of the market and the market itself? Many years ago the doubts of the French economists were taught at school, and the teachers accepted various perplexities with an air of self-importance. Today there is no trace of these ancient and still valid doubts in the extremely sophisticated elaboration of the latest generation of economists.

Why on earth should competition improve people’s lives? Why on earth should it increase production and not simply favour the bigger and better organised firms? How on earth would free exchange be synonymous with freedom, be it only economic, if there were not, somewhere in the world, a vast majority of poor disposed to putting up with the consequences of this so-called freedom? Why on earth should the universalisation of the system of production improve workers’ conditions while parallel to it there is an emptying of any real class opposition? Why should a strong currency

be the foundation of economic stability? How does privatisation guarantee an improvement in social terms and not simply the interests directed by the dominant minority?

Now, undoubtedly no economic measure can guarantee anything to the whole of humanity. The rest must be able to adjust to the reduced, impoverished living conditions they are offered. Yet this ineluctable reality is covered up with the ideological mantle of contemporary economic and scientific theory: it is covered up and sold off as the way for getting out of all ideology and slavery.

Hard times are looming on the horizon, yet again.

Elephant Archives

Alfredo M. Bonanno  
Let's Destroy Work, Let's Destroy the Economy

Translated by Jean Weir

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