

Utopia, Science, Action

From the 25 to 27 April, as announced in the Letter to comrades n. 35, a meeting was held at Rome in 1997 with a day dedicated to meeting our readers

Letter to Comrades #37 of Quinterna

Translated by Balance y Avante

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A general presentation on the nature of our activity preceded other concatenated presentations on the impossibility of separating revolutionary theory and practice. Focusing on the opening passage of the chapter Proletarians and Communists of Marx's Manifesto, the presentation sought to demonstrate how we must avoid the nefarious and unfortunately generalised practice that is always based on the attempt to reverse by one's own will the determinations that are the cause of the present situation.

A second presentation, which started from the demonstration of how even the classical utopias could not escape the material determinations due to the epoch in which they were produced, developed, around just two important quotations from Marx, the anti-utopian and materialist thesis that the militant of the communist revolution does not arouse but is part of the real movement of communism. Hence the consequent action in harmony with the historical party and the immense wealth of experience accumulated in the historical clash between classes. Again intending to demonstrate that adherence to the communist programme is practical work, the only work that can be defined as being in harmony with correct Marxist praxis, we then continued in the afternoon with two examples of the so-called analysis of situations.

The first, which we can consider as a contribution to the classic Left meetings on the course of capitalism, traced the dynamics of the geo-historical areas around which the activity of world capital is polarised. This study constitutes an initial framework of a broader work intended to define the 'state of health' and the lines of development of the economic, social and military contradictions of world imperialism.

The other dealt with a problem that is besetting the bourgeoisie and is commonly referred to as the 'end of work'. Since this is a summary of some meetings held earlier this year, some parts have been summarised, while we postpone the more extensive use of numerical examples and documentation to a later work. The report started from an investigation around the Marxist categories related to the increase in productivity (which is synonymous with the increase in the social productive force of labour) to the evidence of the maturity-necessity of communism.

Practical Work

This meeting has been called for readers who follow the work of the Internationalist Notebooks. We therefore consider it more useful to give a general overview of the characteristics of our work than to list what has been done over the years.

The first thing to stress here is that the Internationalist Notebooks reject the praxis that characterises most political groups. What is the praxis we are

referring to? The praxis according to which the will replaces the conditions that are lacking. Let us give some examples: the party disintegrates? Then it is immediately theorised that a new party must be created. Is there a lack of homogeneity among comrades? Then the comrades decide at the table that this homogeneity must be created. This is exactly the reverse of how things should be approached from a deterministic point of view. Linked to this problem, there are several factors. The first is what it means to found a party, to be a party, or what it means to work with a party method when the party itself is not there. Also, the relationship between repetition and elaboration; this is one of the central themes of the Communist Left. When one speaks of continuity, one also speaks, inextricably, of continuation. Repetition, in itself, is also done by parrots; it is not something that characterises the work of a political organ; elaboration from scratch is a current trait of all opportunists, of those who wake up one day and decide that they have done some genius thinking with respect to the revolution and its course. Both are clearly not suitable, not adequate for the tasks the revolution poses. In addressing this issue, let us go directly to the Naples Theses. In these Theses it is stated precisely, unequivocally that if in the physical world there is nothing firm, nothing immutable, let alone in the social field, in the field of revolution. In tune with what was stated in the Theses of Naples, Bordiga grasps, in the series of 136 articles called 'On the Thread of Time', the historical dynamic that binds all events together; explaining the present through the past and the future. We will return to this concept of historical dynamics several times because it is the only correct way to approach the analysis of capitalism and all scientific procedures in general.

The Communist Left was, without a shadow of a doubt, the one that systematised the path that led to the degeneration of the 3rd International, which provided a gigantic theoretical apparatus to explain what happened. In this sense, it can be said that the Communist Left has gone far beyond the results achieved by the Second Congress, which, in our opinion, remains the highest point so far expressed in the communist movement. Why the Italian Left and not the German Left or, more generally, the 'front' that opposed the degenerative process? We must, first of all, examine what kind of characteristics Italy has. It is the oldest capitalist country, a laboratory for experiments that had fertile ground here and then went on to establish themselves definitively wherever the situation allowed. It is no coincidence that it was in Italy where fascism was first established and where the Communist Left was born; fascism on the bourgeois side, the Communist Left on the proletarian side.

We were saying: why the Italian Left and not others? The Russian revolution had a dual character and was therefore easily mystified. It was a democratic revolution and at the same time proletarian, one could confuse language, tactics, etc.. The German revolution already had in it the germs of its own negation. It spoke of realising democracy instead of overcoming it; it spoke of the spontaneity of the masses instead of the centralised party as the organ of

revolution; it affirmed decentralised councils instead of vigorously supporting the proletarian state. In this panorama, the Communist Left is the one that, on the other hand, was born in perfect continuity with the historical experience that, starting with the Paris Commune, asserted itself not only as the experience of a revolution maturing in Europe, but as the theoretical and political synthesis of the errors that would lead to the degeneration of the 3rd International.

This degeneration is at the same time counterrevolution, but the latter is dialectically the other side of revolution. Counterrevolution exists against something that equally exists. The concept of the historical party is this: revolution always and in any case exists precisely because there is the real movement that goes progressively, albeit not linearly but in leaps and bounds, towards higher forms. The historical party, in the sense used by Marx, always exists to the extent that there is this real movement, but surely the militants are the physical instruments of revolution. Marx said that in certain situations the historical party can only be found in a library, but it is men who take these books out of the library and use them, it is men who make themselves the physical instruments of revolution. And on this, indeed on this too, Bordiga gave precise answers. In 1950 he replied to a comrade's letter explaining how he meant 'military'. He tells him that his problem is not so much that of being a soldier, something he has always done, but that of not 'generalising' on a troop that does not even have a sense of the gavetta and that the revolution will come - he continues - when the militants will get over the mania of the fatherless, when they will stop thinking that they have bought a ticket to the revolution. The true militant is the one who lets himself be used by the revolution, that is, who becomes an instrument of it. He is the one who understands its mechanism so that he does not think he is part of a grouping of people capable of moving things forward through action, but understands that he will be suited to the demands imposed by the revolution by immersing himself in it and going along with it. At least until there is a centralised political force charged with the authority provided by material facts capable of enforcing the political will of the proletariat as a class. This concept, which is extremely important, is not only not understood by many, but we have seen that a practice exactly contrary to what we are saying is the norm.

We must have a sense of measure, and realise what we are at the moment and therefore not be afraid to say that we (the communist movement in its generality) express almost absolute zero in the face of the tasks that the situation would demand. What we say does not mean surrender to resignation or waiting; it means, we say it again, trying to be as adequate as possible.

We have repeatedly criticised the party conception according to which, starting from an organised embryo, formal organisation develops into an adult body. This follows the biological conception of a living being that is born and develops according to a code that is imprinted in its genetic nature. Our

conception of the party is different. First of all, the formation and development of a social organism are much more complex: they result from a constant interaction that this organism has with its environment. In the article *Activism* Bordiga emphasises that the party and revolution, conceptually understood, can never be separated. Why? It is clearly stated: there is no revolutionary situation if there is no revolutionary party, you cannot call a situation revolutionary if there is no party. There are 'theories' we hear echoed every day, which argue: the objective conditions are ripe, the party is missing, there is a delay in the class struggle. Evidently, these 'theories' do not follow dialectics but the application of a pedestrian logic. This is a gradualist and mechanistic conception that does not accord with a global vision of historical becoming. We believe (and let it be said once again: there is nothing original in what we assert, we read reality according to the scientific theory that guides us, Marxism) that history unfolds differently, and social relations are difficult to fit into a given pattern. According to a general scheme, we know that there is an accumulation of continuous contradictions that express themselves in a discontinuous solution, hence in sudden social contrasts and, at the limit, according to the classical alternative: either revolution or war.

We said at the beginning: we work in a party method without being a party. This sounds like a somewhat abstruse formula, but in reality it is basically simple to understand what it is trying to summarise. It means that we do our work without putting our heads together. Or at least we try to. The risk of falling into individual or group personalism is an ever lurking danger, a generalised phenomenon in an age of putrescent capitalism. Against it, in addition to the doctrine that has always contemplated, from Marx onwards, a tough fight against the 'clappers', we need a good dose of collective common sense. We try to do our work as best we can, and we can know if and how much we succeed, in short to have the pulse of the situation, the more our readers, all comrades, follow us with their stimuli and criticism. We try to do our work aware of the limitations both ours and those imposed by the situation, in the conviction of all that we have said before.

Certainly, we do not do as others do, who think and behave 'as if'. As if they were a real party, as if they had connections with the masses, etc.. This kind of attitude damages not only those who take it on in the immediate term but - and this is what we care about most - the communist movement's chances of future expression.

Propaganda, proselytising, are not missionary activities and our word is not a religion for initiates. Marxism is a scientific theory of historical processes, it does not allow us to confront it with particular 'positions', which are then always opinions. Our work is not work for a 'cause'. We do not think of communism as an ideal goal to be achieved. We leave the ideal to anarchists and utopians. Communism is not a goal to be achieved, it is a real movement to overcome the

present state of affairs. Regarding this phrase that is often used as an advertising slogan in the orgy of trivialisations about communism, we would like to read a few sentences from the paragraph 'Proletarians and communists' from the 1848 Manifesto.

'What relation passes between communists and proletarians in general? Communists do not constitute a particular party in relation to the other workers' parties. They have no interests distinct from the interests of the proletariat as a whole. They do not erect particular principles on which they want to model the proletarian movement. Communists are distinguished from other proletarian parties only by the fact that, on the one hand, in the various national struggles of the proletariat, they emphasise and assert those common interests of the entire proletariat that are independent of nationality; on the other hand, by the fact that, in the various stages of development that the struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie goes through, they always represent the interest of the movement as a whole [...]. ...] The theoretical positions of the communists do not rest at all on ideas, on principles that have been invented or discovered by this or that renewer of the world. They are merely general expressions of the actual relations of a class struggle that already exists, of a historical movement unfolding before our eyes'.

Communists are part of a movement that already exists, that is independent of our will, that has a historical becoming that we can fully understand if, precisely, we see the whole series of facts from the past to the future. Let us take an example: in 1985, our first Notebook entitled *The Historical Crisis of Ageing Capitalism* was published. In the preface, we essentially wanted to address a question of method. The question of the party was not stated as a restatement of the need for organisation (a need that everyone has, we would miss it if it were not so!) but was addressed from the point of view of historical dynamics. This dynamic saw progressively (a term to be understood not as gradualism but as a series of discontinuous solutions proceeding by leaps and bounds) the first workers' associations, the League of Communists, the concept of the historical party in the meaning and synthesis given by Marx, the First, Second and Third Internationals, until arriving at the single world party and the organic centralism advocated by the Communist Left. But, mind you, organic centralism is not the new organisational idol, it is not a recipe, something we have in the cookbook for which we just have to weigh the necessary amount of ingredients to have a tasty dish. Organic centralism should be understood as a result of a material process that makes forms change towards higher organisational needs. Returning, we see, is the concept of adequacy, of the suitability of instruments for the needs of the revolution. This vision of organic centralism is set out precisely both in *Party and Class of 1921* and in *Outline of Form*.

In the introduction to the *Quaderno* cited above, again with regard to addressing issues by situating them in a historical dynamic, there is the famous example, which many of us will already be familiar with, of photography and

cinematography, which Bordiga uses in *Property and Capital*. Photography captures an aspect at a given moment but cannot, of course, capture the sequence of the event; cinematography progressively collects images in reciprocal interaction. The dynamics of capitalism understood as a mode of production that has an arrow in time, its emergence, its development, its survival crisis, expresses its transience, etc., implies that one studies not only the mechanism of accumulation and the troubles it causes, but also the attempt of the bourgeois class to cope with this kind of trouble. Closely linked to this attempt is the role of opportunism, especially in the West, the difficulty for the proletariat to shake off this tutelage, the phenomenon of the working class aristocracy, addressed by Lenin in *Imperialism*, which has deep roots. One cannot understand modern society unless one investigates the nature of these roots.

This is not a purely epistemological question. Knowledge of phenomena implies that the knowing subject abstracts from the too many complications that a very complex society throws in its way. Marxist science is all-encompassing, but it knows how to discern between fundamental 'invariants' and 'white noise', i.e. the chaotic jumble of the by-products of accumulation.

Any study of the course of world capitalism must therefore not start from a static view of events, as we have already said, but from a global vision that also implies the maturing of class relations. Obviously, there is a risk in this path of putting too much on the table and thus causing confusion. The way to try to avoid this is to start from the basis of our reference system, the law of value, and from there, by successive approximations (at an ever lower level of abstraction) arrive at what is called the minute chronicle but which is in fact the mirror of profound contradictions.

In the Letter to Comrades entitled *Il 18 brumaio del partito che non c'è* (The 18th Brumaire of the party that isn't there), Italian politics is addressed within the framework of the capitalist crisis and the measures the bourgeoisie is forced to take. There is no choice, there is a path that is already mapped out: the First World War produced Keynesianism, 1929 enforced it, the Second World War eliminated the unattractive aspects of fascism, the post-war period enshrined it in a new, more or less democratic fascism.

There is, therefore, the bourgeoisie's need to free the executive from all parliamentary dictates and codicils. Incidentally, the need is not new. Since the last century, the bourgeoisie has been trying to disengage the executive from parliamentary 'chatter', and Marx not only did not get indignant or whine about threatened democracy (which is all the rage today, especially on the left) but greeted it with the famous cry: well dug old mole!

There is no downward curve of capitalism. Its dynamic is constantly rising and that is precisely its deadly contradiction. There is no stopping the development of the productive forces because every capitalist does not give a damn if modernising his factory lowers the general profit rate: he has the problem of making money and thus increasing the scale of his production.

The rise of the productive forces has an immediate reflection on class relations. The liberal-democratic apparatus must give way to the most modern forms of fascism precisely because above individual capitalists the system as a whole no longer tolerates generalised individual initiative. Labour power must be regulated within this framework and trade unions must be the conduit of social consensus and regulation of the buying and selling of this labour power. This has been the demand of the bourgeoisie for more than a century and Marx addresses the same problem in his 18 Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte.

The maturation of capitalism knows no pause, class relations, on the other hand, must mature in a certain sense. We often speak of the apathy of the masses. This is undoubtedly the result of the passivity to which they have been accustomed for decades, but it probably also expresses the rejection of parliamentary practice.

We need to understand what effect the ongoing movement that will lead to the demise of capitalism has on things today. The revolution will not have 'constructive' but 'destructive' tasks. It is not a question of inventing, of building a new society, it is a question of freeing the productive forces from the chains in which they are harnessed. The foundations, the elements on which the new mode of production, the new social organisation is based, are already present in the present one. And it is on these bases that our praxis as communists is founded: if we forget them, there is no scientific basis for labour, there is no material for the communist programme, which, if we look closely, is synonymous with the project.

The revolution, therefore, must eliminate all obstacles to the unfolding of the forces crushed today by bourgeois society. Revolution as a political fact does not invent anything, it frees from the shackles, as Marx says, the forces responsible for the qualitative leap that, we repeat, are already present. This is the Left's main argument, found in practically all texts. This fundamental argument could not yet be taken up either by the Russians as they had not yet arrived at an unfolded capitalism, or by the Germans who were immersed in a young capitalism in which classes still in the vigour of their growth clashed.

We referred earlier to those moralising, vindicating conceptions of communism. What are they? Those theorisations that speak of the 'undiminished fruit of labour', that cry scandal because there is no social justice, because there is exploitation, and so on. In our view, these theorisations kill Marxism as much

and perhaps worse than Stalinism did, paralysing Marxism and reducing it to a vindictive, syndicalist, moralistic movement. The party becomes an ammunition of the defence of something that should have been its rightful claim. Marx, already in the Manuscripts, ripped apart this legal conception of the class struggle.

We pose the question of militant labour, of organisation in the light of what has just been stated. Propaganda against the rich, the revolution becoming a kind of proletarian coup d'état, communism understood, depending on the moment, as the proletarian paradise or as the nemesis of the victorious proletariat, arguments that, although used in the propaganda of primitive socialism, are not scientifically acceptable and must be banished.

Another formula of the Left is: one does not make parties and revolutions but one directs parties and revolutions. That is, one acts on phenomena that are placed on the agenda by material facts. In this sense, one does not prepare the revolution (reduced to the status of a meeting) but one orients and directs the forces capable of overthrowing capitalism. Revolution and organisation are results of the action of all classes. The class boundaries are indefinite and only at certain moments (the discontinuous solution mentioned earlier) do they polarise into two blocs with absolutely opposing interests to defend, making social confrontation inevitable. In this situation, one class tries to defend the existing order, the other tries to subvert it. In this way, the proletariat no longer acts in defence of a particular but general interest. The bourgeoisie, in carrying out its revolution, acted in the name of all classes; the proletariat will be the last class in history and will act in the name of all humanity.

One last point before closing. We have mentioned invariance several times. From a political point of view (let us omit the other scientific properties of the term here), invariance nails us to the laws discovered by Marx on the functioning of the capitalist mode of production and their validity as long as capitalism exists. Immediately as a consequence of this, invariance is an instrument of political struggle against the updaters, the deniers, the revisionists. Another aspect of invariance is the link that prevents the separation of the repetition of Marxist concepts from the elaboration on them. If one wants to make good use of materialism, one must be able to handle the same formula that is repeated in the calculation of - say - the volume of a cube that, although it changes size under the effect of forces over time, always remains itself. We dwelt at the beginning of this speech on the relationship that indissolubly binds, for the Left, these two elements of communist praxis, and with this we close it. We metaphorically close the circle, where each part is inextricably linked to the whole and cannot be analysed in its essence except in relation to the other elements that make up this whole. Organicity is the key to understanding all Marxist theory, and the Left has shown throughout its history that it has exactly understood and applied it.

Utopia, Science and Action

We will divide this report¹ into two parts, each based on a quotation from Marx. These are only two references, but we consider them important to explain from a very 'practical' point of view what happens in a revolutionary process. So the real theme will be the praxis of revolutionaries in the actual process of revolution as Marx describes it. With this we are of course speaking out against the too many loose interpretations that have come after him.

Since the communist revolution is not the only one in human history, we will deal with the invariance between revolutions and in revolutions, the latter sometimes referred to as the revolutionary tradition. We will therefore speak of tradition, which is conservation, at the same time as we will speak of rupture, which is revolution.

Part One: From Utopia to Science

Conservation and Destruction

Everyone knows that the Left has been accused of making great theory but of failing to connect this theory to practice. Of being wait-and-see, in short. And since we take the Left's heritage as equals and make it our own, we naturally inherit the accusation as well without getting too upset at this giant nonsense. We, in the invariance of Marxism and criticism of it, have consciously immersed ourselves; and it is for this reason that we gladly deal with it. Certain attitudes that humanity takes towards its problems are constant throughout history. They are certainly transformed by the passage of time, but always perfectly recognisable through materialist observation. This is because materialism makes it possible to see behind the attitudes of men the physical drives, the structure of behaviour. And every physical drive derives from the actual development of society, from the development of productive forces. In this development lie the aspects that interest us, those that tend to break the old forms when they become an intolerable hindrance.

Earlier the comrade quoted probably the most important passage from Marx's Manifesto, where he says that communists represent the real movement that abolishes the present state of affairs. Not 'probably', but without a shadow of a doubt, this passage has not been understood by the communist movement in general. Paraphrasing a famous phrase, we can say that in the mid-nineteenth century Marx shouted so loudly that all his followers went deaf. Thus Marx became an icon to be worshipped without anyone knowing anymore, after Engels and Lenin died, what exactly he had said. The practical work of the Left consisted in the immense effort to put back on its feet what opportunism had destroyed. If anyone thinks that this has meant a kind of abdication from

¹ For reasons of space some parts of this report are summarized from the original, but overall it is reproduced in full.

concrete tasks, they should first look at the political battle fought by the Left over sixty years and then compare it with what both Marx, Engels and Lenin did throughout their lives.

If we pay attention, the passage already read by Marx does not provide any particular recipes to apply. Instead, he speaks of a dynamic of material change that communists tune into. They therefore do not fight a battle of ideas, but a real battle. In studying the question, the Left has produced a text, of all others, that reframes the question precisely from a dynamic point of view, and that is the text *Property and Capital*. It deals with the maturity of capitalist forms and thereby addresses the question of the transition from an old form to a new form. The attitudes men hold in this transition are consequential.

Humanity is not revolutionary because at some point it takes on revolutionary ideas. Humanity, from an ideal point of view, is conservative, i.e. it tends to preserve the old forms, those that made it possible to achieve results that it no longer wants to give up. The quotation on which we will base this first part of the meeting - and which we will read at the end by way of conclusion - is from Marx, from 1846, and is taken from a letter he wrote before being forced to respond to Proudhon's enormous written output. Before writing *The Misery of Philosophy*, Marx wrote this letter to Annenkov where he explains in a few lines what the fundamental concept of revolution is, a concept that Proudhon had evidently not understood. Since Proudhon represents one of those invariants mentioned earlier, this is rather interesting for us. From the point of view of understanding processes, if we want to deal with the dynamic we have been talking about, we have to see what happened in the history of modes of production, because that is the dynamic we are interested in. History comes before the discovery of its laws by men, that is trivial. Apart from the fact that to discover in history a dynamic based on the periods marked by a certain mode of production already means to know, to know. In a certain sense, it is through the discovery of a fundamental law that one discovers all the other laws that move nature.

Marx is 19 years old when he writes to his father that he has made this first discovery. He already defines - we are in 1837 - what his path will be and says: I fell ill with philosophy, in the sense that I had to call the doctor and have him send me to the country; after the indigestion I got better - he still uses this somewhat poetic language of youth - I saw the light and realised that all ideal questions, that is, those that concern the heads of men, can be treated according to the methods of the science of nature. I took the gods from heaven and threw them into the centre of the earth. From there on, Marx does nothing but develop this concept.

In dealing with Proudhon's theses in his letter to Annenkov, Marx continues his fight against the ideas swirling around in men's heads and takes an absolutely concrete attitude, i.e. foreign to a mere opinion poll. They are all stories, he says; indeed, humanity as a sum of individuals intends to preserve - mind you, verb preserve - its achievements. But it is precisely in order to conserve its achievements that it is forced to break the old forms that have enabled these achievements. This is the step we consider absolutely fundamental. The practical demonstration of the fact that the power of ideas is not the engine of the world must be made from the point of view of what has happened in history and what may happen tomorrow on the basis of the changes taking place. Those taking place in the material process, not those that the thinking individual would like.

Utopia, Science and Action is a chapter in the text Property and Capital, the last one. Closing its enquiry into the historical and irreversible maturing of forms of property, it comes to the defence of the need to observe the process as a whole. It is here that the concept of dynamics overcoming photographic statics is introduced. We have no hesitation in asserting that those who fail to do so exclude themselves from Marxism and even from science in general. As far as we are concerned, the dynamics of capitalist becoming is what we must observe through the results achieved, those that humanity will not want to give up so easily. When is capitalism born? When there is sufficient capital to trigger the production of surplus value through wage labour. What are its first obvious manifestations? The emergence of two distinct and antagonistic classes: capital holders and wage earners. All other manifestations of ownership and exploitation, although historical invariants of class societies, do not fall under capitalism unless they undergo this transformation: the relationship between antagonistic classes through the existence of surplus value. It is from this point that utopia is born. But it is also from this point that utopia, at the same time, begins to transform itself into science by linking itself to reality. Not even utopia is exempt from historical determinations, hence it is never equal to itself, reproducing in its manifestations the actual development of the productive forces.

Men, in their tendency towards the preservation of their achievements, do not feel the advent of the capitalist form at all, but that does not mean they do not experience it. That is to say, they fail to give theoretical accommodation to the experience, but they record its results in some form. This form is what was called Utopia after the happy island imagined by Thomas More.

We therefore begin with him the cinematography that will take us up to the present day to define the link between science and revolutionary praxis.

Utopia by Thomas More

Thomas More wrote his *Utopia* in 1516. It is not a fictional book but a denunciation of English society of the time. The narrator speaks of this strange country discovered, not surprisingly, during Amerigo Vespucci's expedition. The discovery of the Americas and the revolutionary whiplash that this entails on the entire society therefore has its effects. In denouncing English society, the narrator says that sheep are eating men; that is, that rising capitalism leads the big agrarians to invest in property and thus to fence off common land. Hence the dispossession and immiseration of peasants, hence vagrancy, hence free labour for capitalist exploitation, hence, finally, Henry VIII's vagrancy laws, forced labour houses and the first demands of a vast foreign market. Obviously the author cannot give theoretical accommodation to all this, but one thing he does have the narrator say towards the end of the first book: the cause of all evil is the property relationship. So in the second book, a society free of property and money is described.

The text is to be enjoyed in both the critical and the 'utopian' parts. They cannot be separated. On the island of Utopia, a kind of communism prevails and, based on what we have just said, every Marxist reader understands well that this kind of society is not the product of a real process but of an ideal aspiration of the author. The real process is not yet even capitalism which already produces its own critique. So communism does not lie in Utopia, but in the critique of nascent capitalism. Perfect, we are in line with Marx: communism is not an ideal society but the process that destroys the present one. Capitalism is not yet born that already triggers its own process of destruction. Thomas More criticises the revolutionary closure of pastures, so he would like to preserve the freedom of common access typical of feudalism. His attempt to preserve a result in the presence of disruptive development leads him to break through the limits of contradiction: his pre-scientific Utopia is a hybrid of communism and feudalism.

In the happy island there are many of the categories present in feudal society with something extra that is due to the overlapping of the critique of capitalism with an ideal conception of society. In the island of Utopia there is no longer property, but there is the family, there is war, there are even slaves, which in 16th-century England had long since disappeared, while their market was still flourishing in other areas by the Venetians and Portuguese. In short, everything that the author could see in the society of his time is reproduced in Utopia, minus the evils that flowed from it all. In our eyes, therefore, it is not communism that appears, but the society of the 16th century whose defects are removed in an entirely mental operation. There is no overcoming of form, everything is limited to an operation of ideal creation of a model. But it remains detached from the real historical process.

We are careful not to criticise Thomas More for this, even if the greatness of his construction is consistent with his conflict with the king. He did not

understand the explosive needs of the emerging social form, entered into political contradiction with it and was beheaded by the king, while the old form made him a saint of the Church.

We cannot claim from Thomas More a theoretical accommodation of his communist model. He could not go as far as a radical critique of a society that was only then coming into being and therefore had not yet expressed its full potential. An epoch could not be skipped, the bourgeois revolution was still two and a half centuries away. Only when one glimpses the potential of the next form can one pass judgement on the one in which one lives. Therefore, even the value of the ideal model can only be thoroughly investigated a posteriori. Marx insists on this point. To actually understand the reality of a certain type of social form, it is not enough to start from that reality, one must go to the higher form. But this cannot be done if the higher form does not already produce visible material manifestations. For Marx, communism already produced visible manifestations in its time. Our field of investigation should therefore be more mature than it was then, our task made easier.

Communism is for example the socialisation of production. In the capitalism of Marx's time this was visible. Lenin called it transitional capitalism. We have to say something about that, if another seventy years and more have passed since Lenin. Thomas More could not have been the forerunner of communism, as many like to imagine, but the forerunner of capitalism through criticising its early misdeeds. The greatness of Utopia does not consist in its semblance of communism, but in its defence of the achievements of a dying society, to maintain which one could only break the mould that held back the further impetus of the productive forces. We read an example of this in a direct description:

*'If the population grows more than normal throughout the island then citizens of all ages are chosen to send them to form a colony governed by the same laws on the nearest continent, wherever the natives have land in superabundance and do not cultivate it. [They make their laws and techniques available for the benefit of all]. Instead, they drive back beyond the boundaries they assign to themselves, those who do not agree to live according to their laws, and if they resist, they make war on them. They consider it a just cause for war that a people should possess land and not make use of it, but rather leave it barren and unused without allowing others to use and possess it who, by right of nature, could make a living from it.'*²

This is a grandiose conception for feudal Europe of the time. The great Elizabeth had not yet been born, the English fleet did not yet dominate the seas, English colonialism would come after a couple of centuries. This is the true anticipation of Thomas More, because he is able to identify in feudal society all the nascent categories that will be characteristic of future capitalism; he

² Thomas More, *Utopia*, Book II, *On Relationships among the citizens*

develops them and transports them to a world without the constraints of the old society: property exists but it is impersonal; the family is there but its place in the scale of social values is demoted; war is waged, but no longer in favour of dynasties but to safeguard a mode of production deemed perfect; although prisoners are still made slaves, the diehards are put at the service of the community; finally, those who waste God's gift, the earth, are forced to accept certain laws because the waste of a good that must be common, of all humanity, is not permitted. And this is a true anticipation of bourgeois colonial justification: those who reach those heights of civilisation have the sacrosanct right to impose their law on those who waste nature's resources.

Speaking of civilisation, let us read another passage. Not only do the capitalist categories exist in Utopia, but when the author imagines something truly new and important there, he idealises a beautiful hospital where the sick can be happily treated:

'The greatest attention is paid to the sick who are treated in public hospitals. They have four per town, a little outside the walls, so large that they can be compared to small towns in their turn; first, so that however great the number of the sick may be, there will always be plenty of room for everyone, and secondly, so that those with contagious diseases may be isolated from others'³

It is clear to us that a true revolution consists in eliminating disease and not in curing masses of people who fall ill. Now, one of the economic indices of civilisation produced by bourgeois bulletins is the number of beds. While we can excuse Thomas More imagining for his era small, bright and healthy cities for the sick, we cannot admit the same parameter for our future society. In the most civilised country in the world, the United States, there is the largest number of beds in relation to inhabitants. For us, this is an index of social decadence, of disease subservient to profit (how on earth could the immense chemical-pharmaceutical-medical apparatus make money if there were no sick people?) and certainly not of social advancement. In the future society there will be few sick people and therefore few hospital places.

In the early 1500s capitalism could be anticipated because it was present and operating, communism could not. Thomas More is on the edge of the historical party because he gave his all. Others will come along who will fall short and Marx will treat them as adversaries.

But let us not anticipate. All this is very interesting, but it does not yet take us to the terrain useful for understanding the path from utopia to the science of communism. It takes at least two utopias for us to see the difference, and it takes several utopias over time to distinguish any one dynamic.

³ Ibid

Thomasso Campanella and the Basics of Ownership

If all utopias were equal, the argument we are making would fall apart. Let us leave England, then, and come to Italy. At first glance, despite almost a century having passed, there is not much difference between Tommaso Campanella's City of the Sun and Moro's Utopia. Campanella too projects into his ideal society all the categories present in the one he lives in, eliminating its defects. But unlike Moro he links the existence of property to the existence of a very precise material factor. We are in 1602 in Italy, a country quite different from England. The latter is more advanced as a power: in the space of a few years it will become a world maritime power and will thus be able to bring about a development of capitalism as a system, in the sense that maritime trade will actually represent a push towards a real, concrete future, a development for other countries as well. Italy is the one that loses this advantage with the discovery of the Americas and this affects its national set-up, but at that time Naples is much larger than London and more tonnage still passes through its port⁴. However, since Italy is a transit area for all races and all powers with their armies, it is also an incubation zone for all social experiments. This is where the Renaissance and Machiavelli were born, this is where capitalism was born, this is where it first reached its fascist phase, this is where communism had its very precise punctuation between the degeneration of the Second International, the birth of the Third and the degeneration of the latter as well. We take the liberty of thinking that Thomasso Campanella, a contemporary of Galileo (he writes an apologia for him), does not by chance express a different utopia from that of Thomas More. What is the fundamental basis on which life in the City of the Sun is set? Whereas in Moro the family is still the nucleus of society, with the power of the husband over the wife and of both over the children, in Campanella this disappears. The family simply does not exist and the children belong to the whole of society. It is already an indication of good materialism to say that the origin of all the troubles of civilisation lies in the fact that the family is the support of private property. We are already beyond the mere representation of a generalised reality. This is not communism either, but there is already the identification of a point that is fundamental for us, the same point that Engels would develop in quite another context. But let us read:

'All property arises from making one's own home and one's own children and one's own wife, whence arises self-love - egoism - for in order to sublimate one's son to riches or dignity or to leave him an heir, each one becomes a public rapacious person if he has no fear of being powerful, or miserly, insidious and hypocritical if he is powerless. When self-love is lost, the commune alone remains⁵

⁴ Before the plague of 1656 which halved the population, Naples had around 400,000 inhabitants and was second in size only in Paris. London city had 25,000 inhabitants at the time of Thomas More and 75,000 at the time *The City of the Sun* was written

⁵ Tommaso Campanella, *The City of the Sun*, ed. Demeter, p. 22

Whereas in the rustic London of the 16th century, Moro was concerned about sheep eating men, in the overcrowded, urban Naples of the 17th century, Campanella is concerned about men eating men. His 'communist' society derives from the elimination, first of all, of the causes that generate misery in a developed urban environment, where the king and the bank rule, where industry produces wealth but does not distribute it, where the crumbs of this wealth break the 'ecological' balance of the population, which ends up growing disproportionately in a miserable condition. This is why one can already think of the elimination of the family and private property. It is obvious that, like Moro, Campanella could not yet address the economic, material nexus, the law operating behind the production-wealth-population relationship. Even in early 17th century Italy, capitalism had not yet developed to the point where a theory of its critique was possible, i.e. it could not yet project men towards a higher system so that from that higher vantage point they could judge what was going on. But the fact that Campanella records the family-ownership nexus is remarkable. We are not simply faced with the elimination of an undesirable social defect, but with the identification of its causes and the description of the only consequence that can result from it. Certainly no communist today would think that the family is the cause of private property. But this is because today capitalism is so mature that the potential presence of the new form allows the question to be reversed: it is not private property that exists because of the existence of the family, but it is the family that survives because private property exists. We no longer need to eliminate the family in order to eliminate private property, Campanella does. For us, the family, without property will become extinct, like the state, like the last class in history. Campanella was still forced to create an ideal model in which to eliminate a real obstacle. For the rest, he still maintains, like Moro, that the inhabitants of his communist city wage war to 'wound the rebellious enemy of reason, who does not deserve to be a man'. And they subjugate him, i.e. they put his possessions in common and impose their orders on him, hurrying 'in a single day' to demolish his defences and kill his leaders, so that no time is wasted and they begin to devote themselves 'to his good'. This means integrating the former enemy, exploiting the land in every corner, centrally planning production (which of course still resembles the arts and crafts system) according to everyone's needs. In the Solari system, there is still currency, though only for external exchange, and there are still slaves.

Francis Bacon and Social Productivity

In the meantime, history goes on while we are still operating the camera. Let's go back to England: if you want the precise date is 1624, but the time is that of the maritime explosion, which also occurred with the help of the great 'institutional' privateers Drake and Raleigh. The Renaissance moves to the island, the Enlightenment is not yet on the horizon, but scientific thought influences philosophy (and production). In this situation another utopian, Francis Bacon, writes another utopia. Well, actually Bacon was not exactly a utopian, like the other characters mentioned. Marx says of him:

*'The true progenitor of English materialism and of all modern experimental science is Bacon. The science of nature constitutes for him the true science and sensitive physics the main part of the science of nature [...] In Bacon, as its first creator, materialism contains within itself, in a still naive way, the germs of an omnilateral development. Matter, in its poetically sensitive splendour, smiles upon the whole man'*⁶

While Galileo at that time was isolated by the Counter-Reformation, Bacon was free to circulate his results, and his work was therefore known throughout Europe. In the New Atlantis (this is the title of Bacon's utopia) we find ourselves, as always, faced with projections of known societies whose flaws and contradictions are eliminated; there is no real leap in quality, because we are always in the presence of aspects of the fantastic communism typical of ideal models. From this point of view, the main characteristics of Utopia, the City of the Sun and Bacon's New Atlantis are practically the same, but there is a dozen pages that from our point of view represent a formidable event. It is a catalogue of the scientific achievements of that civilisation. At a certain point the traveller is taken to a structure that from our point of view, that is, for us who have already achieved certain results through Marxism, is certainly the Party of that society. It is the House of Solomon, where the scientists who hold knowledge are gathered. Knowledge of sorts, never esoteric, the domain of the few, secret or the subject of wonder. Because the law of the New Atlantis dictates that science must be divulged and those who treat scientific fact, even the most astounding, as a phenomenon of magic or a freak show must be punished. Because there must be no wonder in a phenomenon of nature, it is something that must be studied and used for the good of all. There is a break here not only with the practice of the time but also with current practice. The main purpose of the scientific institution of Atlantis, of this social structure of sorts, is to disseminate knowledge as widely as possible in all fields, to free it from the constraints of the individual. Those who make it the subject of specific heritage are prosecuted.

Very nice, but so far nothing really extraordinary. Agreed, it is already a far cry from the previous utopias, where the marvellous and the extraordinary are still used to amaze the reader, but we are faced with a traditional family, property, money. There are commodities and merchants, there are wars.

The most interesting thing about Bacon's utopia is that everything revolves around science, and references to social structure are either non-existent or barely hinted at, sometimes indirectly. There is no mention of how the economy is organised, but it is very clear that all the descriptions concerning agriculture, technology and the exploitation of resources and knowledge lead to a 'happy environment' through lack of need, through abundance due to the enormous social productive force. All the wealth produced by this society is evidently the result of its scientific and centralised organisation,

⁶ K. Marx, *The Holy Family*

where there are even people to coordinate knowledge so that specialisation does not cause breakdowns. Ultimately, need is overcome no longer through goodwill or social rules but through the material power of socialised production. Thus, the Baconian catalogue of knowledge in New Atlantis is the anticipation of the power of science, that is, the prediction of what it could do if it were applied to production and if this production were socialised.

This was neither in Campanella nor in More. For the first time in a utopian-philosophical text, the science of production is identified as the motor of a society free of need and therefore of particular nagging. This fact induces the author not to worry too much about the aspects that worried the previous utopians; hence the survival of money, commodities or property is absolutely secondary in the New Atlantis. So much so that social molecules are no longer undifferentiated, but organically inserted in different functions with different characteristics, and participate in the whole with characteristics of harmony, whereby individuality, no longer denied or exalted but placed at the service of the species, becomes a collective force.

Moro, Campanella and Bacon were not writing or acting to overthrow the society of the time. Rather, their actions were aimed at preserving and improving it. Thomas More was not sentenced to death because he wrote Utopia, but because he rejected schism with the Church. Campanella, who is persecuted for an attempted anti-Spanish and anti-clerical revolt, can write the City of the Sun and all his own works precisely because he is in prison. It is significant that none of the great utopians mentioned speak of the future society but merely imagine a present society in fictional places. It was not yet the time for a conception of change in terms of increasing social force. That is why we cannot take a condescending attitude towards them. Woe betide those who say: toh, nice communism, here there are slaves, there is the currency, there is still the family, and patriarchal to boot.

Evidently communism is not to be found in the model but in the dynamic that produces different models depending on the material basis on which they are built. In such a dynamic, for example, the slave appears because one does not know what to do with the enemy who does not submit to the superior order. The idealistic construction does not foresee social complexity, so much so that it has no nuances, it is always very clear-cut, the enemy is the enemy, either he integrates or he disappears, dead or slave. Campanella, for example, imagines that the inhabitants of the City of the Sun conquer a city, explain their laws, and then, if the conquered are irreducible and do not understand the advantage of the new situation, the city must be destroyed, the leaders must be annihilated, and the inhabitants must be subjected to these laws. Because they will be better off, not because there is a will to conquer. The City of the Sun is self-sufficient in a closed system, it does not need expansion. A mental model does not need a dynamic of struggle to reach its realisation. It is enough for all men to agree.

But if they do not agree? Just kill them, it is very simple. Or make them slaves, who will then be freed, because all inhabitants of the happy society are naturally good and follow the path of righteousness.

Charles Fourier and the Anticipation of Possibilities

Now let us take a leap back in history and come to things closer to us. Let's see what happens in utopias, which we can only hardly call them that any more, that matured in the age of capitalism. Those of the last century are practically those analysed by Engels in the Antidüehring. A 'utopianist' like Fourier no longer imagines a City of the Sun, an island of Utopia or a New Atlantis contemporary with him. On the contrary, he reveals that contemporary is the level reached by the productive forces and the resulting society of the 'civilised', while the future envisages liberation from chaos and 'immediate entry into the epoch of universal harmony'. What should enable this transition is the generalised understanding of his Theory of the Four Movements: the Social, the Animal, the Organic and the Material. We note in passing that utopia is still present in the order of importance in which these Movements are placed. Our camera could never film them in that order but in reverse. In history, the first frame would film matter and the last, provisional one would be a zoom on society as it is.

In any case, Fourier's society can hardly be called a model to be achieved, but a destructive critique of the current 'civilised' society.

'I was very far from thinking of research into Destinies; I shared the general opinion that considers them impenetrable, and that relegates to the visions of astrologers and magicians any reasoning on that subject; the study that initiated me into these researches concerned only industrial or political problems [...] I applied myself to seeking the good only in matters that had no relation to administration or the priesthood, and that were based only on industrial and domestic measures, compatible with all sorts of government without needing their intervention'⁷.

At the basis of Fourier's world, with its phalansteries, which were understood as proposals for utopias (and some even tried to realise them), lies a theory that serves as support for the critique of present society:

'I, who had no party to support, could adopt Absolute Doubt, and apply it first of all to Civilisation and its most inveterate prejudices'⁸

Fourier creates a system through which he succeeds in making a fierce critique of today's society, from the world of philosophy to that of production, from the relations between people to the institution of the family. In his model, the categories of society no longer exist. We no longer have a society rewritten

⁷ Charles Fourier, *Theory of the Four Movements*, page 8 and 11

⁸ Ibid, page 11

the same but with the caveat of avoiding its contradictions. Those who saw in Fourier a suggestion of models to be realised - and, as we have said, some have attempted it - got it all wrong. Even Fourier, before Marx, had shouted so loudly that his followers had gone deaf. In fact they went on to constitute phalansteries without realising that their father was first destroyer than builder. Fourier cries out against capitalist society. Oh sure, he still shouts against injustice, prejudice and the commonplace, but he uses such a fierce satire that there is no longer any doubt that we are now at the destruction of chains, no longer at the construction of utopias. Just as Saint-Simon dreamed of gathering the government of the world under the sign of Newton, so Fourier proclaims the total separation of Philosophy, which he calls Uncertain Science, from Fixed Science. Philosophers are the worst propagators of prejudice even as they strive to fight it, while the science of industry is the solution. Science will be the solution, and every inhabitant of Harmony will be able to count on cheap abundance rather than cheap narrowness⁹.

Fourier's 'crazy' disquisitions on love, children, gastronomy and the mode of production have been variously interpreted. Was he crazy? Was he mocking the reader? Or was he criticising a society whose burden he could no longer bear? Marx appreciated his poetry of satire, Engels went further by fighting against Dühring, who had despised him, and called him a great satirist on the miseries of the much vaunted civilisation. Both, therefore, do not underestimate him at all. If we also do not want to underestimate him, we must agree that Fourier is the first who is concerned with a central plan of production and distribution aimed at guaranteeing quality and differentiation according to the taste of the user¹⁰. Put another way, he is the first who, in poetic form, describes in detail a plan for the reproduction of species; he is the first who directly refutes the commonplace according to which communism equates to a flattened life among indistinct human molecules. Fourier conveys the joy of production but above all the joy of the end of that production, namely the satisfaction of human needs. The survival of the buying and selling of products becomes absolutely secondary, as does a certain social graduation within Harmony. One only has to read chapters such as *The Deceptions of Foiled Melons*, or the prodigies of *Serial Composite Gastronomy*, or *The Harmonic Transactions*, or the *Triumph of the Leathery Chickens*, a problem of bi-composite gastronomy, to realise that the humanity represented by the average Frenchman of the time can do without the regulation soup of onion or cabbage washed down with the equally regulation cheap sour wine of the Midi. It is enough to free oneself from civilisation to

⁹ Fourier demonstrates in a tasty chapter that the series statistics allows a large Harmonica community to enjoy 144 at the table quality cheese in the best conditions (i.e. cut fresh from the seasoned form) while a poor king of the Civilized will have to be satisfied with three qualities.

¹⁰ Italo Calvino, introducing Fourier's work for Einaudi, underlines that " *the alliance of the marvelous with arithmetic* " (title of a paragraph) implied in the Falansterio, it resembles a gigantic computer, a cybernetic regulatory system production-needs, a processing system to make the perfect organic assortment of *series*

automatically eliminate degradation and greyness, vacuity and sadness. If there are gradations of income in Harmony, they are cancelled out by the end of all activity: the individual and social enjoyment of use values. Exchange values are thereby eliminated: if communism is not in the writer's pen, it emerges forcefully from what he denies.

For Fourier, it is not so much a question of changing Man as of changing Civilisation, and his descriptions illustrate a glittering realm of the possible, not an idea. Rid the world of Civilisation and you can afford to be fools of abundance and not ascetics of the single plate dear to the ancient Spartans, communists of misery.

Robert Owen and the Action

Owen started as a labourer in a cotton mill. In his twenties he was manager of a spinning mill in Manchester. In his thirties he co-owned a textile factory in New Lanark and turned it into a model production site. In his fifties he succeeded in passing a law restricting the work of women and children. In his sixties he presided over the founding congress of the world's first general trade union. Throughout his life he devoted himself to the development of the workers' cooperative movement. To categorise Owen among utopians is certainly a stretch, but it is certain that he was the last to pursue a social model based on ideas and morals. In the United States, he founded a community based on social production and consumption (New Harmony, 1826).

The main characteristic of Owen's utopianism was praxis. He first organised men, then drew lessons from them and wanted to give the whole thing a social theory guise. He imagined that something could and should be done to overcome the problems of capitalist society. He tried to bring together real forces that could achieve practical results. He provided evidence, evidently not on his own but with the help of elements in English society at the time, that capitalist society could be overcome. His defeat was in fact due exclusively to three elements: the immaturity of the situation; the struggle that bourgeois society waged against him; the impossibility of linking the trade union movement to a revolutionary political movement. Owen was always opposed to class confrontation despite being a product of it.

What interests us about Owen is that he can no longer construct an exclusively mental model, while his criticism of society does not allow him to remain at the level of satire. The England of his time demanded action, while in Germany theory was in the making and in France politics. Owen understood very well that with the surplus value extorted from the workers, the problems of destitution of the entire population could be overcome. He knows that a planned increase in agricultural and industrial production through the generalised use of machines is possible. He knows that controlled production means abundance and

he knows this because he proved it by running a factory of 2,500 workers and offering their families social welfare for the first time.

The liberating potential that Bacon saw in science and social production still to come, for Owen was something that could be touched, already realised. All that was needed was to solve the problem of product distribution and productive anarchy. New Lanark could not have existed if social work had not already been developed. And the foundation of the Trade Unions was a consequence.

From this point of view the most interesting thing was not the realisation of New Lanark and New Harmony but their failure. The first expressions of the class struggle had shown that the realisation of socialist demands could not pass through models. However concrete rather than imaginary they were, they were still models and could not represent islands of a new social order in a capitalist sea just as proletarian movements were abandoning Luddism and primitive forms to become mass movements, even political ones like Chartism. It was materially inevitable for a consistent character like Owen to move from the failure of the productive and social experience to the class struggle and the founding of the general union.

We are not interested in syndicating Owen's conception of the union as an element in the gradual transformation of society at this time. What is important is to note how in every revolution the constructive element is defeated and the destructive one takes over. This is how it must be, even if men would like constructive and therefore conservative attitudes better. But how does revolutionary destruction take place that is at the same time construction?

Marx and the Phenomenal Forms of Revolution

We, who are always accused of being theorists, contradict everyone and this time we want to be practical. Engels, who was a practical man, exhorted: stop making idle enunciations and proclamations, when you launch a watchword you must say, immediately afterwards, how the hell you want to realise it, with what instruments and with whom. To 'make' a revolution, as they say, you need forces. Who does it? Marx was still small when Owen tried his experiments and had not yet theoretically settled the fact that, through a real movement, the revolution is 'made' by one particular class against another. Our problem this morning in relation to the utopia-science-action trinomial is: but how does this class 'make' the revolution? Recall that for Marx, the proletariat initially manifests its revolutionary potential by attempting to preserve the existing. Generalising the terms of the question: humanity tends to conserve the conquests it has achieved. And it is only in attempting to conserve these achievements that it realises it must break certain forms within which they apply and operate. The working class has always behaved exactly like this, without

knowing it, without anyone theorising it, long before Marx gave a materialist explanation in 1847 against Proudhon.

The workers who first saw their jobs threatened by machines first smashed the machines themselves, regardless of whether or not they were a representation of the revolutionary development of the productive forces. Thus the English miners a few years ago, faced with the closure of the world's worst pits, fought to keep them open without thinking that the same revolutionary development of the productive forces had decreed their closure.

So let us return to Engels. If we were to say: defence of the workplace, how would we be placed? How would we demonstrate 'how it is done'? Do we smash the machines that produce too much? Or do we occupy the factories that close down? In the first case we would return to the late 1700s; in the second we would screw ourselves. But let us move on to answer the practical question of what to do at certain junctures. We have travelled the road of utopia, we have seen that this too was conditioned by the dynamics of the development of the productive forces, and now we must move on to science, i.e. the understanding of phenomena and the concrete solution to problems. We said 'concrete solution', make our critics happy. Of course we could 'do' great things if there was a trade union life of the proletariat, if there was its political organisation.... Instead, humanity defends the conquests it has achieved, as a true reactionary, despite our revolutionary proclamations. And the proletarians are not to be outdone, they even fight to be able to keep their jobs at lower conditions than those achieved. Let us not even mention the bourgeoisie. There is no leftist who has avoided lamenting the rightward swerve of western governments, who has not cried about the attack on the working class, the elimination of the welfare state, the privatisation of the economy, etc. Yet in no western country has there been any substantial change in this respect. And moreover, the general tendency is to send left-wing parties to deal with the crisis caused by the 'globalisation' of the economy.

It is at this point that our traditional critic, who is also a traditional activist, no longer understands anything and despairs, he feels betrayed of his expectations. Hadn't he read that the working class is the revolutionary class? And where is he? That the bourgeois are right about the death of communism? In the face of this we cannot vague 'forms of struggle' that are not there. We can't make a Luddite critique of the robot, nor can we shut ourselves up like rats in a trap inside closed mines or failed factories to defend a job that's gone.

The comrade said earlier that our work has twofold aspects: we are closed with regard to fundamental issues and at the same time open in discussion with those who approach us; we have no party-founding ambitions but try to work in a party method; we see things from the most general point of view possible but we need to identify the particular problem. We are abstract, schematic, dogmatic

and even sectarian, as the title of one of our Letters puts it, but we have no intention of hovering in the stratosphere and losing touch with earthly reality. The fact is that abstraction and the ability to schematise is linked to the possibility of solving practical problems.

If Marx at 19 had identified the problem by basing his analysis of social phenomena on the methods used by the science of physical nature, it is clear that we cannot go back and base our action on subjective interpretations of reality as everyone does. If we talk about revolution, about social movements, we must adopt the same processes of abstraction as those adopted by mathematics, physics, information science. But one cannot accuse those who adopt these methods of 'abstractionism' or 'schematism' when they are adopted because practical problems cannot be solved otherwise. Lenin, who was far more practical than all the Leninist practitioners, was a master of abstraction. At the station in Finland, holding flowers offered to him by the provisional government, he jumps into the armoured car and salutes the vanguard of the world revolution. Those present take him for a fool. But the proletarian revolution in Russia could not have been 'made' if the subject had been handled from the point of view of Russian affairs.

It is not the purpose of this meeting to demolish all the things that have been said against our current and against us. But if we are here to talk about revolution, if we are to make sense of our future existence, if we are convinced that we are going down a road that has already been mapped out, we must certainly do 'didactic' work, because the extent of the destruction that has occurred even within our own ranks is great, as anyone who is not insane can see. Of course, also with regard to ourselves. It is the revolution that teaches us: poor that fool who imagines he is teaching the revolution. It is normal that, being involved in so many things, we sometimes fail to keep the thread going, because the forces are certainly not those of a developed party. The important thing is to keep an eye on the compass, to base ourselves on those points that our history has already identified as fundamental, the only ones that guarantee solutions.

Let us end for now with an extension of that one quote from Marx on which we have built a little history of the revolutionary process. We summarised it first, now let us read it in full:

'Proudhon confuses ideas with things. Men never renounce what they have conquered, but this does not mean that they never renounce the social form in which they have acquired certain productive forces. Quite the contrary. In order not to be deprived of what they have gained, men are forced to change all their traditional social forms as soon as the

mode of their trade [of production and reproduction] no longer corresponds to the productive forces they have acquired'¹¹

The long transition from utopia to science shows that even the utopians were not mere ramblers after all. They tended to preserve the best things in history by projecting them into abstract systems drawn on paper. But they could not preserve the best without destroying 'traditional social forms' that no longer corresponded to the development of the productive forces. The utopians were therefore chain-destroyers. Marx begins his critique of political economy by showing that destroying chains is exactly what needs to be done to free the productive forces. He concludes the Manifesto of the Communist Party with the same concept of liberation applied to the working class: proletarians, you have only your chains to lose. Before that, he had said that even philosophy could not be realised without destroying itself. His concept of philosophy is well known: it had the task of interpreting the world; it is now a matter of changing it, so philosophy too is a chain that must be destroyed. We have set ourselves a task that is both modest and great at the same time: that of preserving a great theoretical heritage and practical teaching. We have realised that, in order to do this, we too in our small way are forced to destroy chains, suffocating shells in which this heritage has been enclosed.

Part Two: Action

"Proudhonism Resurgent and Tenacious"

The quoted phrase is used by Marx against Proudhon. The latter presents himself as a revolutionary and is convinced that he is the spokesman for a concrete policy to solve concrete problems. He therefore invents a political and economic system that everyone should adopt because, according to him, it is so universal that it can withstand any test. Marx, as soon as he analyses Proudhon's work, immediately ranks him further behind Owen, Fourier and the utopians. Because, once the human sciences have arrived at new methods to clarify certain processes, it no longer makes sense to return to earlier methods. In this, Proudhon is a remnant of the past: in the sense that he certainly does not work to preserve in order to destroy present forms. He does not want to break the limits, the chains of the present in order to project himself into the future. He does conservation work in order to preserve what is there. Insofar as he 'wants' a future, he thereby freezes the camera, making it a mere witness to the past. Indeed, the past is in the film, the camera is no longer needed.

The dialectic implicit in Marx's concept is not, after all, an incomprehensible abstruseness. Let us take an example. Yesterday we were in the square, on the sidelines of an anti-fascist demonstration. Obviously it was completely unfamiliar to us, yet we were glad to have seen and heard it,

¹¹ K. Marx, *Letter to Annenkov*, 28 December 1846

because you can never learn enough. Today, anti-fascism is a bit disoriented, being in government and having to apply fascist policies; but who cares, in the end it turned out to be a demonstration with a few thousand people. Clearly molecular movements persist, preventing the thermal death of society. At least as far as young people were concerned, 25 April seemed to be a pretext, but the events in Peru had provided a democratic lowest common denominator. In one corner, Rifondazione's official commemorators were holding rallies: a fine example of conservation for conservation's sake, yet another confirmation of the ultrareaction of certain elements who still dare to refer to communism.

Marx's observation has a practical disruptive power; the facts from which it springs are as diffuse as the air we breathe. The speaker (in this case a speaker), after having made his fine whimper about the regulation partisan gravestone smeared with the regulation fascist paint, issued a cry of pain at the fall of moral values in this materialist society, values now monopolised by the Catholic Church with the consequent vacuum on the left, a vacuum that had to be filled. Just as the Catholics were successful in appropriating those values, so the left had to pick up the banner of solidarity, of the social state in the process of destruction. We were reminded of Togliatti, but we were even on a lower rung. In fact, the good Palmiro had merely argued that the Resistance represented the new Risorgimento for Italy, whose flag had been dropped in the mud by the bourgeoisie, and the PCI's task was to pick up the tricolour from the mud and bring it back to popular honours. We thought it was the ultimate, but here in Rome, in 1997, we verified that for opportunism the bottom does not exist. On its downward precipice it never reaches it. And so we heard emotional shouts: 'We must be the proponents of a new secular religion!' Applause.

It will be a small example. It will be an individual gaffe. But how can we not think that there is instead consistency? Togliatti had paved the way, and before him Stalin with the Great Patriotic War. And before that those who condemned the Left in the name of socialism in one country. There is no limit to *dégringolade*¹², as Amadeo called it. But think of it, religion. Catholic or secular, it doesn't matter: this is the concept that settles in the minds of those who begin to think communism is a mission. Fortunately, the individual individual preserves in order to preserve, but humanity as a whole must destroy in order to preserve its achievements and go further.

Now, in the second part of this report we will see, starting precisely with the attitude of the working class, that this dialectic of conserve-to-destroy actually works. And it can also help us understand what action is for communists, i.e. what they must 'do'. Some will recall that we criticised in one of our letters the mania of asking the question: what to do? and then giving an

¹² Ruzzolone, collapse. In the article of the same name Bordiga plays on the sound of the word that recalls the shelling of a bunch, to make the idea of continuous defections and betrayals

answer that everyone (or each group) works out in their own way. One echoes Lenin, we said, but one interprets him badly. Lenin knew very well what to do. It was the immediatists of the time who did not know.

Every communist, based on the experience of a century and a half of organised class struggle, of the communist movement, of that dynamic subjected to our camera should know what to do and tell those who do not yet know. However, since the dégringolade has been there, and it is not over, it is inevitable that we will go into these things.

Proudhon and *tout-court* Conservation

How is one consistently revolutionary in a conservative world? How does one feel the shift from conservation to trying to maintain achievements that cannot be maintained without destroying the old social form? In order not to be wishful thinkers who exchange their desires for reality, we must start with the things that the world makes available to us. However much they make us turn up our noses.

And so we put together the quote from earlier with the one from the Manifesto read by the companion during the presentation, where Marx says that communists are not based on the ideas of some world-renewer but on the general manifestations of actual class relations, those existing today and not tomorrow, those of the historical movement unfolding before our eyes, as it is. Here then we armour ourselves against the forces that drag us towards idealistic ground and set ourselves on a soil on which it is difficult for the plant of new secular religions to grow.

We took concepts from a text of the Left (Property and Capital) and linked them to a text by Engels (Socialism from Utopia to Science). Then we made a further connection with Marx, who shows that utopia dies as pre-science but survives as opportunism. With Proudhon we actually have the true exponent and representative of conservation disguised as a revolutionary. Henceforth opportunism represents the ideology of the ruling class infiltrated, as a material factor acting through men and organisations, within the proletarian ranks. As a result of this phenomenon, the revolutionary movement will be defeated not so much by the weapons of the adversary as by the presence of the latter's ideology within the proletarian organisations.

Marx shows that Proudhon no longer has any excuse to invent ideal models. Given the development of the productive forces, given the results achieved, it is no longer permissible for those who believe themselves to be in the ranks of the revolution to fabricate hybrids between the old form and the new. Proudhon knows that there has been a succession of social forms, and he writes this; he is aware that there has been progress in the productive forces, and he writes this; he also knows that men are not an indistinct mass, at most

divided between those who have power and those who do not, between rich and poor or the like; he knows that humanity is divided according to antagonistic classes, and he also records this in his writings; he even knows that men have not been conscious of their material becoming and that it is material forces that move them rather than ideas, and he also writes this. But in the end he appeals to universal consciousness to change society. For Proudhon, men must 'want' the new society and 'reject' the old. As he is the hybrid product of an epoch of transition from utopia to science, his socialism has a veneer of materialism, and Marx can only demolish this veneer to expose the true petty-bourgeois substance.

For us, the conclusion is that since all this is already well known, studied, dissected in a thousand anatomies from Marx onwards, it is no longer permitted for today's militant to appeal to universal consciousness, innate ideas, justice or categories of law.

If a militant who calls himself a revolutionary registers once and for all that social movements occur through material drives and on the basis of the development of the productive forces, he can no longer think that his own action is aimed at the realisation of ideas. This is the fundamental critique contained in Marx's *The Misery of Philosophy* versus Proudhon: today's militant can no longer turn back without falling into opportunism. We warmly invite comrades to study Marx's letter to Annenkov on Proudhon. Don't be surprised by our insistence, but the Manifesto is based on this original construction and Marx's entire critique of capitalism is based on this fact, as the passage we will read from the *Grundrisse* in a moment shows, and which holds up this second part of the report. All of Marx's work tends to show that it is the real movement we are interested in, not a model to be achieved. But go and ask what communism actually is to a thousand militants who call themselves communists, if you can find them, and see how many will give you some updated version of the story of Moses and the Promised Land!

From what we have said so far, it takes little to understand that we advocate the need to base all our work of so-called analysis of the situation on the real movement understood as the work of communism today and not as the agitation of groups, parties and blocs. Action, as we shall see, can only be consequential. All those who have participated in the activity of struggle in demonstrations of strength or weakness of the proletarian movement know that this is the eternal question on which the immediatists slaughter each other: the infamous analysis of the concrete situation from which action should derive. It is no coincidence that Bordiga, who knew well the material roots of the Left's critique, entitled the chapter we mentioned earlier *Utopia, Science and Action*. Three elements placed in sequence as if separated by time, but dialectically intertwined. Utopia was the product of reality and at the same time an expedient for ideally eliminating its defects; science overcame utopia by integrating it,

since it too is the product of reality; having reached a certain historical phase, utopia and philosophy become confused and must be overcome by science. But both utopia and philosophy (and to a certain extent also religion) are science in times past. Nothing is resolved by a juxtaposition, by clear-cut separations between these epochs of human society: our conception of the world eschews the breaking up of reality when it comes to observing it in its becoming. Even today, since according to Marx we have not passed the prehistory of mankind, religion, philosophy, the science of nature and the social sciences are separated to the same extent that they are mixed together. Certainly we pollute the science of nature with mysticism, more than we overcome mysticism with the science of nature.

On the other hand, we can resort to arbitrary separations when necessary, as long as we know exactly what we are doing. Science could not arrive at more and more certain results if it were unable to construct abstract models, thus isolated from the complexity in which the phenomena under investigation occur. All this is to say that there is no way to make the formula work: theory is a guide to action. Or the other: action precedes theory. The eternal debates on the relationship theory-action, programme-tactics are for the most part hot air, a sterile search for the priority of the chicken or the egg.

Think of physics: no physicist today would waste time debating the tactics of the production process. The bourgeois world has overtaken philosophy where it served its praxis. With science, the bourgeoisie changed the world, built machines and incorporated them into the production and reproduction process of the species. Science served to know the physical world but also to produce objects, systems of objects and organised information: science is thus an element of production, just as language, which served to give science a structure of communication, is an element of production. Within this integrated system of knowledge, the bourgeoisie no longer argues about what the appropriate tactic might be: it uses the results it has achieved and refines them. If with Marx we say that within socialised production there is a flow of objects and information that does not need to be based on value categories, this result is already something we no longer question either. We are thus in the presence of a realised theory-practice unity, perfectly compatible with communism understood as a process and not as a model.

Lenin Against Amateurism

If communists today had the chance to join a generalised school of thought and action, i.e. the revolutionary party, they would not be arguing about the theory-practice relationship: they would simply be working towards future results. This is why we insist so much on the fact that it is not the 'debate' that moves us forward, but the common work on precise themes carried out on the basis of a recognised heritage. Action is the result of the physical and practical application of the results achieved. These results must first be defended, and

this is perhaps 90 per cent of our work today, but we have seen that Marx teaches us to go further: it is in the defence of these results that we discover the way to go beyond what has been achieved. It is the work that brings new results, not the chatter nor the wandering around looking for what to do. Chit-chat only needs two cogitating individuals and two tongues in motion, whereas work needs a structure of several men coordinating and organic communication. Take Lenin, study his conception of the party, see how he understands its structure, analyse what the work site is for him with the newspaper as the main instrument of communication in every sense, and you will have an idea of what can be learned from communism as a real movement. You don't even need to read between the lines, because Lenin is explicit: learn from the factory and produce professional revolutionaries.

The revolutionary Lenin speaks of is certainly not a salaried official who learns only despotic corporatism and suffocating bureaucracy from the factory. He is a comrade who works to achieve future results on the basis of past ones. If there is not yet a generalised working structure, a school, a current, he does not think of going directly to move the masses who, excuse me, are not even aware of his presence. The first thing the coherent revolutionary asks himself is why we are in this situation, why the counter-revolutionary beating persists, whether by chance there are not profound material reasons and whether by chance there have not also been political errors. Here then, a study - for example - of the distribution of surplus value in society and past political errors is no longer an academic exercise or premise for debate, but work like that of the engineer preparing to build a bridge. The study of errors is at the same time the study of antidotes to them.

Of course, social facts are so much more complicated than building a bridge that the example would need a bunch of additions. For example, revolutions and parties are not built but directed. For example, the time factor is not known, i.e. you do not know when you can raise the rebar and pour the concrete. Nevertheless, Amadeo uses this concept to describe the tasks of the party in the revolution. The party is designed by the tasks it will have to perform in the future. A party of lawyers in the sentence is a non-party, the future needs a party of engineers¹³.

This is not in contradiction with the everyday actions of men, who do not 'make' the revolution in order to conquer their paradise or their promised land on the instructions of some bible or gospel, but, immersed in their problems, in the exchange of their products, in production and in the attempt to live better or

¹³ Bordiga uses the example of the party as a structure drawn from his future tasks in *Party and class action*, del 1921, now in the volume *Party and class*; the example of lawyers and engineers is in *The Nature of the Communist Party*, 1925, now in the volume *The Communist Left and the Committee of Understanding*. Both volumes are available at the Quaderni Internazionalisti

defend what is endangered in millions of more or less individual microcosms, participate in that real moment as it destroys the present state of affairs, Marx calls communism. No one individually 'thinks' of 'making' revolution in defending the general achievements of humanity. Yet it is precisely the mundane everyday life that contains the germs of the social polarisation envisaged by Marx that will lead to the destruction of the old constraints on the power of social production.

All this can only be understood if we manage not to separate the elements that make up the theory-praxis pair: there is no immanent theory, separate from everyday praxis, that anyone can apply. There is a praxis of men for their reproduction, from which a theory arises, which evidently has a reflection on the praxis of the future. When will people ever realise that in a cinematography the present is a moving point? It is in the dynamic towards the future that we must see the usefulness and suitability of our work. Why do we insist so much on the dynamic? It is simple: the theory of the present, a passing point, is pure existentialism, it is indifference to results. Seize the fleeting moment and you will be catapulted into the circle of opportunists, because the definition of opportunism is just that: sacrificing possible future results to the success of one day. But why does everyone claim to be a Leninist and learn nothing from Lenin?

The comrade mentioned earlier our fundamental concept that parties and revolutions are not made, but directed. This means that the same process that leads to revolution also leads to the formation and development of the party that will lead the revolution. It is only through this process that the decisive phenomenon that has been called the 'reversal of praxis' takes place, so well understood by bourgeois scholars of catastrophic processes in nature and utterly undigested by most militants of the various more or less communist groups and parties.

As we can see, it is not a question of making yet another analysis of the situation in order to draw practical conclusions from it, at least not in the current sense of the term. Instead, it is a matter, in line with all the work set out by Marx, of overcoming the philosophical, advocacy or missionary conception of the world. It is neither a question of interpreting it, nor of haranguing it, nor of moralising it in order to convert it.

Once we understand how the world is changing on the basis of the development of the productive forces in which we are immersed, it is a matter of giving comrades - those who are driven to action by the revolution - the appropriate tools to face the future. And since tools cannot be invented but those that the world makes available are used, evidently the manner of their use cannot be chosen but is determined. Theory is not enough. The library containing it is overloaded. Humanity has produced thousands of volumes on the preparation of its revolutions, their course and the balances that followed. A compass is needed so that the militant does not get lost. But the compass does

not offer a tabulation of books to read and those to put on the index. This is a Catholic inquisition method, right after comes the burning of books followed closely by the burning of men.

Since we are past the burning of books, we must agree that the compass can only be practical work in an organically functioning collective structure. Even the search for a common thread in books is practical work that enables us to make useful connections for action. But this has nothing to do with the application of recipes. Almost nothing is applicable here, today, of what Lenin wrote about the Russian revolution. Yet we can read Lenin with the utmost confidence, if we can understand that time passes, that history advances, that the camera rolls. But then we can also read the Bible or medieval mysticism: we will not find recipes, but we will refine our compass. We can also not read at all, as long as we are immersed in organically distributed work, which therefore allows for the existence of an environment incompatible with the categories of bourgeois thought and praxis. In this environment, practical work will take place, the effects of which will also affect the surrounding world. This is the Marxist concept of praxis, and nothing else Lenin demanded for his workshop in which the practitioners of revolution worked. That is why he resented the amateurs, the improvisers, the chatterers.

Marx and Practice in the Revolutionary Process

We investigate what it means to 'change things', especially when we have a compass to show us in which direction we should move in order to really change them. In short, we are not interested, from a materialist and scientific point of view, in all those actions that have no consequences for the reality in which we are immersed.

If, as Marx says, communism is not a model but an ongoing process, there is no point in being communist only in terms of the end. If we say that the instruments appropriate to the end and the roads to get there are determined, we deny at the same time the freedom of choice on both the instruments and the roads. So the infamous analysis of the situation must consist of identifying what exists in the world as it is, not the world as we would like it to be. If communism is a becoming, it includes ourselves. When one speaks of a process, one is always talking about something that leads to some result: no one is given to being outside this process, even if within it one is given to being out of one's mind and imagining to move masses with proclamations written in a small newspaper that four cats locked in a room read.

The most common criticism levelled at the Left is that of being outside things, the exact opposite of what the Left has always done. Precisely because it was able to be inside things the Left has always been able to hold consistent attitudes. Bordiga according to his critics would have been a brilliant scientist of revolution, but when it came to putting theory into practice he would have been

wrong. Now, this way of setting up an argument is truly ridiculous from a materialist point of view. Not even for a god of contradiction is there a possibility of being on the right track in theory and then being wrong in practice. Only those who imagine that theory is something different from practice can make such an argument. It is truly a way of proceeding that is far below that of the utopians who had the ability to intelligently represent the processes that were before their eyes.

It is just not possible to tune in on this wavelength. If we want proof that the critics of the Left are mistaken, we find it in the fact that they make that separation between theory and praxis that they attribute to others. By putting theory before praxis and imagining the latter as an application of theory, they operate a kind of biblical creation: in the beginning was theory and on the first day the world was created.

The superiority of our camera over the camera is not only in its ability to film 360 degrees horizontally and vertically. Our instrument is capable of filming in four dimensions because it films in time. And the time of revolutions tells us that we cannot accept divine Big Bang theories.

Marx continually uses time lags and continuously moves from the past to the future, from observations on ancient economics, to the critique of vulgar economics, to what could be in a society without an economy, in which there is only production and distribution in physical quantities for the satisfaction of human needs. We will never be able to understand what needs to be done at a given moment simply by analysing the immediate situation, i.e. by flashing on the fleeting moment. Analysis is a big word. It involves investigating what has happened before, how things have unfolded in history, how problems were solved in the past (or how they were not solved and why), what is the goal to be achieved. On the basis of all this, one determines which is the road to take, which is then the one already mapped out by the material dynamics of the phenomena, with all the signposts in place, already installed by those who came before us. The difficulty lies in cleaning up the signposts, because the dominant ideology, or, if you like, 'resurgent and tenacious Proudhonism'¹⁴, has sown there a heap of traps, of false signals. Only the aforementioned compass can point you in the right direction, while at the same time functioning as a detector to spot the fakes and get them out of the way so that you can travel safely. As you can see, it would be quite a presumption if we wanted to do all this ourselves. Fortunately we have a lot of work already done and if we sometimes mention Bordiga a little too much we will be excused, after all we are merely using a mnemonic reference for very concrete work, as we do with Marx and Lenin.

¹⁴ Title of a chapter of the text *The foundations of revolutionary communism*, now in the small volume *Tracciato d'enziale*, and. Quad. Int.

This brings us to the second quotation from Marx on which we are basing this part of the meeting. In the Grundrisse, criticising a certain conception of markets and financial movements, Marx states that a model of society (here again the link with utopian procedures) that derived solely from human thought and the aspirations of the individual would now be nonsense. But the importance of the passage we shall now read goes beyond a criticism of Proudhonism. Here, consideration is given to the fact that a given social form does not quietly go its own way. There is thus a precise reference to the necessity of the revolution's destructive action. But what kind of destructive action it will be and where it will come from is a matter of theory. This excludes the possibility of 'making' revolution on the basis of the existence of men, even well-organised and determined men, who want to make it:

'Within bourgeois society founded on exchange value, relations of traffic and production are generated which are as many mines to blow it up. A mass of antithetical forms of social unity, whose antithetical character, however, can never be exploded by means of a quiet metamorphosis. On the other hand, if we did not already find hidden in society as it is, the material conditions of production and the traffic relations corresponding to them, appropriate to a classless society, all attempts to blow it up would be quixotic'¹⁵

We would take the liberty of quibbling. If we assume that we want to achieve a certain result without taking into account what the society we live in really is, we would be doing the wrong thing. But the analysis of the situation is not simply about what the bourgeois do or what the proletarians do or even what the communists do, at least not until the revolution is upon us. If there were no elements of the future society within the present society, such as it is, underlined twice, any action to change it would be nothing more than pure Proudhonian wishful thinking, an attempt by ridiculous donchisciottes to tilt at windmills.

For Establishing Who is Really in the Clouds

Let us be on our mettle: we have seen the value of ancient utopia up to Owen who is already forced to act; we have seen moralising socialism disguised as science while it is but a caricature of utopia (the serious one); we have seen that communism is a real process and not a social model to be achieved; now Marx asks us not to be donchisciottes and leave the windmills behind. What distinguishes the true Marxist from the rest? That he is part of the communist process taking place in capitalist society as it is. He differs from the mass of the proletariat not because he advocates brilliant ideas but because he anticipates the future unfolding of things that already exist around him (Manifesto).

The Left has also said something about this way of seeing the revolutionary process. For example, it has fought against indifferentism, which

¹⁵ K. Marx, *Grundrisse*

has a Manichean view of the class struggle. The indifferentist says: we are in the epoch of mature capitalism, therefore in the epoch of pure proletarian revolution. And so far so good. But then he adds: economic struggles, national revolts, peasant uprisings, imperialist wars, and hybrid and complex phenomena must be brought back to the proletarian revolution. The Manichaeian vision lies in this: on the one hand, evil, oppressor capitalism in continuous aggression against the world working class; on the other hand, good, the proletarian revolution, to which unions, oppressed masses, even wars, which should have no other destiny than to be transformed into proletarian revolution, should bow.

All right, Lenin said it. So if it happens, for example, that the Gulf War breaks out, we open an 'internationalist' newspaper and read in it: 1) that it's a war between big and small imperialisms, a. for oil, b. for supremacy in the area; 2) that it's the task of the proletariat to turn it into civil war; 2a) or that it's the task of the oppressed masses to unite and fight against imperialism.

Point 1) we also read in the bourgeois newspapers; the other points are proclamations by the classic fly who believes, resting on the horn of the buffalo, that he is leading the whole herd in a stampede. In both cases, Marx's method has been betrayed: by not starting from the material determinations of events, a concretist analysis of the situation has been made without taking into account bourgeois society as it is, i.e. its contradictions based on productive forces that push and a mode of production that shackles them. This has lost sight of the general problem of the production of surplus value, its distribution in the world, the determinations that weigh on the profit rate, the impact on the latter by the oil rent, and so on. A long chain that leads to the root of wars and the actions of men, whether they are aware or not of the existence of a law on the profit rate. If we were to identify this chain as the linear result of a series of cause-effects, we would be mechanists. In this case the bourgeoisie would also see the same. But this chain is confused into millions of events that would be absolutely incomprehensible if they were not analysed according to the knowledge of precise laws. Marxism gives us this possibility. To do without it leads to saying any number of things about events, things that arise from individual thinking.

To give practical, concrete examples: even a movement of oppressed non-proletarian masses of the backward world, or a western movement of classes that have nothing proletarian about them and even represent some remnant of barbarism within this society can represent - says the Left - '*one of the bullets of the revolution that must overwhelm it*'¹⁶. We have had before our eyes good demonstrations of what results from the accumulation of events around the determinations of the law of value: the collapse of the East, the so-called bread riots following the measures 'suggested' by the International Monetary Fund, the strikes in Korea. Each event has very specific immediate

¹⁶ '*Racial*' pressure from the peasantry, classist pressure of colored peoples , now in the volume *Factors of Race and nation* , ed. Quad. Int.

causes, but the concatenation we make on the basis of Marx's laws shows us that the immediate cause may not be the fundamental one, let alone the explanations the protagonists give for their own actions.

This is what our non-indifferentism must be rooted in when faced with the infamous analysis of concrete situations; we are not interested in whether it is peasants, or proletarians, or other forces within this society such as the petty bourgeoisie that trigger events. It does not matter what sporadic form the criticism of the present state of affairs takes, because the overall movement is communism, and any radical criticism that arises from the contradictions of capitalism is objectively against it, even if it were to force it into fascist-type restructurings, as Marx points out in 18 Brumaire.

Otherwise one would not understand the meaning of another important statement of the Left: one cannot speak of revolution without speaking of counter-revolution and vice versa. The two terms are dialectical elements of the same problem, they are complementary. Everyone agrees that we are in a counter-revolutionary period. Counter-revolution against what? Why does the bourgeoisie have the need to reiterate its 18 brumaire, to strengthen its executive, to reinforce certain mechanisms of its society? On the one hand, because with the development of the productive forces, the control of economic factors must be intensified; on the other hand, because, as we will try to demonstrate with this afternoon's report, the control of economic factors cannot be separated from the control of an ever-increasing proportion of the population that is no longer needed in productive activities. As the bourgeoisie themselves are observing, the enormous amount of surplus value produced needs to be distributed in a society of non-producers. The trouble for them is that this provokes social reactions primarily among the capitalists and the middle classes. This means that in the end they will not be able to distribute the surplus-value as it would benefit them to do, and then this will provoke reactions in the part of society that Marx calls relative overpopulation.

For Not Absorbing the Doctrines and Will of Others

Counterrevolution, after all, is revolution¹⁷. At this point in capitalist development, if the maturity of the productive forces is communism on the march, as Marx puts it, and if the manifestations of this maturity are visible as the armouring of bourgeois interventionism in the economy (control of the mass of the population, especially the proletariat), then the two terms are identified. The bourgeoisie knows this very well and occasionally says so through the mouths of some of its representatives, as we highlighted in the last Letter on the fetish of markets. The bourgeoisie also has class-consciousness in its own way.

¹⁷ See the text *Lessons of the counterrevolutions*, and. Quad. Int. page 16: "*Marxism is not the doctrine of revolutions, but that of counterrevolutions: everyone knows how to direct themselves when they it affirms victory, but few know how to do it when it arrives, becomes complicated and persists the defeat*"

Any material movement is infinitely more universal than a movement of ideas, says the usual Marx. As can be seen, we are not cut out to invent new classes. Our not being indifferent to anything that happens in the world stems from this very fact, because any movement that tends towards the destruction of the present state of affairs is at the same time... we were about to say, like true concretists, 'a movement towards communism'. Marx is more radical. He does not say that every movement etc. towards communism is revolutionary. He says he calls every real movement that overcomes the present state of affairs communism. Even in language it is easy to slip into clichés. And anyone who thinks that communism is a certain type of society to be achieved will end up acting outside the material determinants, relying on commonplaces borrowed from past degenerations of communism, refusing to adhere to forces that emanate from society and thus aligning themselves with ideas that do not represent the already observed conservation-revolution dialectic. If this dialectic is missing (quoting Marx versus Proudhon), all that remains is conservation. It is no coincidence that in the text we mentioned earlier, Property and Capital, the chapter Utopia, Science and Action is emphasised:

'Prophesying a future or wanting to realise a future are both inadequate positions for communists. This is replaced by the history of the class struggle seen as a unitary course, of which at each contingent moment only one part has already been played out, and the other is awaited. The data of the subsequent course is just as fundamental and indispensable as that of the past course [...] The problem of party praxis is not to know the future, which would be little, nor to want the future, which would be too much, but to preserve the line of the future of one's own class [...] The communist movement is not a question of pure doctrine; it is not a question of pure will; however, the defect of doctrine paralyses it, the defect of will paralyses it. And defect means absorption of other doctrines, of other wills'.

The defect of doctrine can lead either to an overestimation or an underestimation of the will. Are we going to look for the right middle way? Not a chance. In this we are extremists: since we are communists and communists are by definition those who represent the future, i.e. the possibility of the overthrow of praxis, which is the expression of the maximum of will, we remain firm in reaffirming that the communist is always the representative of the maximum of will. On one condition: that he is truly in harmony with the historical party. In this case he will be aware of the fact that it is material conditions that determine what the maximum of will can be expressed in different historical epochs. It therefore does not depend on us.

It is not up to communists to create the formal party; they must not adopt the attitude of those who have bought a ticket to the spectacle of revolution and want a place in the grandstand. There is an inflation of self-styled communists who feel they have a marshal's baton in their pocket and don't even know what

the gavetta is. Perhaps the proletariat will be able to achieve its first results after this counter-revolutionary wave when it begins to kick the shit out of every little person who believes himself to be the godfather, creator of parties and revolutions. We do not think it is difficult to understand that today the maximum amount of will that can be expressed by communists may be the minimum compared to other situations.

We have mentioned the birth of the modern proletarian struggle through formulas of conservation. We have seen that the latter represented at the same time, dialectically, forms of negation of the present society; we have seen how Owen was the first representative of the synthesis of this material process which, in the passage from the ideal model to revolutionary praxis, forces the man, the fighter Owen to the foundation of the workers' union organisation. Inevitable: the purpose gives itself the appropriate instruments, and the only instrument that enables workers to fight as a class against the opposing class is the trade union. Then comes the party. That is the story. And today? Trade union and party are familiar tools. They were born, degenerated, resurrected or caged in the logic of Capital. In short, there has been and there will still be 'movement' to have this society as it is and - according to Marx's formulation, which starts from there to establish that communism is to be identified in that process and not elsewhere - at the same time to change it.

Perhaps we are beginning to get a glimpse that the catch-phrase 'doing the analysis of the concrete situation' has somewhat deeper implications than is normally believed by the petty father-creators of parties and situations. On the one hand, we certainly cannot get an idea of the material course of events by just reading the newspapers or watching TV: the bourgeoisie offer the representation of their world through an analysis of the situation based on their ideology, interests and struggles within their class. This happens not only because their journalists are paid to say what they say. The whole mechanism of communication is a superstructure and, together with the development of the productive forces and the mode of production that are holding them back, it offers us a mirror of the bourgeois world as it is. On the other hand, we can only investigate, we have seen, just the world as it is. And so there are no saints: to see what we need in this blessed concrete analysis of the situation, we have to treat 'things' and 'thoughts' at a higher level of abstraction than bourgeois newspapers and television can offer us.

We do not, however, start from scratch. We know that Marx teaches us to think in terms of the specific, concrete properties of capitalism. If we were talking about dinosaurs, perhaps (maybe) the law of value would not be needed,

but if we were talking about capitalist society, yes¹⁸. So we say: at the basis of all present society, such as it is, is the law of value. Nice statement. Our critics rub their hands together: here are the abstractionists, they say; easy, eh? but once you have said this, then what do you do?

Some Very "Concrete" Numbers

We do not flinch at all. If we were to descend to the level of vulgar conceptions about society, we too would say, with the old popular proverb, that 'from saying to doing there is a sea in between'. But we are calling our comrades to work on a terrain that is not of this world, neither folk wisdom nor the everyday treatment of vulgar economics helps us.

If one has to interpret the current situation, one cannot just interpret what one sees, otherwise we would be philosophers and everyone would have a different answer. Science, on the other hand, is characterised by the fact that it gives valid answers for everyone and shuts up anyone who cannot prove otherwise. However, since laboratory experiments cannot be performed with society, proof must come from past experience and present conditions. We do not need philosophical interpretation, which is subjective, we need real change in society as it was and as it is today, we need data of the objective situation. In this we are therefore sure to be more concrete than all the concretists.

We open the newspaper and turn on the television. We read and see nothing but men talking about themselves and their relations with other men. In Albania there are men who move, who shoot, who hold up governments and who go on more or less military missions. In Africa there are millions of men moving around driven by conflicts that are difficult to qualify and quantify. In Italy, everyone has their say on parameters, stalwarts, new constitutional arrangements and ridiculous secessions.

Let us stop in Italy. What does the law of value have to do with the opposing declarations of a Fossa, a Fazio, a Prodi or a Bossi?¹⁹ To do our operation we have little data because the bourgeoisie does not give us the pleasure of providing the figures we would like; and to quantify some of our categories on the basis of bourgeois data would be truly arduous. Obtaining the amount of constant capital in a cycle is practically impossible: we immediately get lost in the figures on depreciation, investments, assets, etc. The same applies to variable capital: we would have to separate productive labour from

¹⁸ It is not at all obvious that the law of value exists irrelevant with respect to the study of phenomena extraneous to capitalism. A mentality linked to the strenuous search for conditions of economic equilibrium in an inherently highly dynamic system such as capitalism can influence also the study of the ecological dynamics underlying the extinction of large animals reptiles, exhaustive in itself without the need to resort to theories on "external" causes such as that of the asteroid.

¹⁹ For foreign comrades and readers: respectively president of Confindustria, governor of the Bank of Italy, head of the government and leader of a secessionist party.

unproductive labour, to analyse within the productive sectors themselves what the boundaries are between sterile services and those useful to production, between production proper and administration, and so on.

But we do have some basic data. One of these data is the so-called Gross Domestic Product or National Income or, if we want to put it in our terms, quantity of value produced ex novo in a cycle; since the bourgeoisie makes its calculations every year, we will say that it is the quantity of value produced ex novo in a year. In order to make a concrete analysis of the concrete Italian situation, we can start from this certain datum. Obviously it is expressed in prices and not in value, but we know that at the level of this great aggregate the sum of prices is equal to the sum of values²⁰.

Good. Those who have bought this week's Economic World have seen that there is an insert on the national budget, from which we read the following figures for '95. Rounding off the figures, we have a value produced ex novo of 1,700,000 billion lire, which is divided into 1,000,000 billion lire that went to profit and 700,000 billion lire that went to labour-power. From the latter figure, we subtract what statistics classify as the wages of the non-market service workers, i.e. teachers, military personnel, policemen, administrative staff, etc. It would be necessary, as we have said, to subtract more, but we do not have sufficient data and so we make do, assuming that the income of the workers employed in the hidden productive economy is equivalent to the income of the unproductive nested in industry. However arbitrary this operation may be, we will see that the results are still useful for our little demonstration.

Let us then remove the income of the unproductive ones from the total number of employees: 200,000 billion, to be added to the profit share (surplus value) as this is a simple distribution of wealth. With this shift, which we need in order to arrive at a delimitation according to our rules, we thus have: 1,200,000 billion of surplus-value-profit versus 500,000 billion. Total surplus-value divided by the total value of the productive labour force, equals the rate of exploitation, equals 240%. In Italy, therefore, a productive worker works, out of eight hours, 5 hours and 40 minutes for capital and 2 hours and 20 minutes for himself.

What does this have to do with analysing the concrete situation? A little patience. For now, we have come to the conclusion that the general exploitation essay in Italy has roughly risen historically by two and a half times the essay

²⁰ In the report here a digression was made which for brevity we summarize like this: the bourgeoisie has always denied the law of value, but it uses it to make its national accounts quantifiable. When in the past the very different national criteria made a comparison impossible between economies, it was decided to adopt a method that yielded quantitatively the statistical and accounting criteria are homogeneous. In fact it could only be done on the basis of Marx's rejected theory of value, and this represents a of the most blatant bourgeois ideological capitulations to Marxism.

taken as a model by Marx. In more than a century of development of the productive forces, this would be nothing extraordinary.

Let us now move on from the general example to a particular one, so as to please all those who like to 'go into specifics'. A small company that we know well because we had to do the accounts in its pocket, had a turnover of 42 billion and 130 employees who cost, all in all, not even 4 billion. Between raw materials, components, supplier expenses, advertising and building rent it spent another 4 billion. Fixed assets a pittance: desks, cabinets, shelves, some thirty computers and their software: a hundred million in annual depreciation. Warehouse input-output managed by the just-in-time method, so minimal stocks and zero finished products. Taking into account that this company was offloading profits onto a couple of fictitious foreign subsidiaries (three others were, however, in strong surplus) we are at 400% profit ratio (32/8). Subtracting 4 billion in constant capital we arrive at an 800% exploitation rate (32/4). This company, which touted itself as a jewel of new technology, was not one of the most efficient in its field and was crushed by the competition after only a few years²¹. This proves that there are companies that are even more 'competitive', hence higher productivity, hence higher exploitation rates. We know that Benetton inaugurated a fully automatic factory last year, bringing back to Italy the processes it had scattered abroad. The group has a turnover of 7,000 billion lire: what will be the 'united colours' exploitation essay? The same for Luxottica (eyewear), again in the same area, for Panto (doors and windows) and other highly automated factories that now produce for the whole world²².

To "Go Into Specifics"

Now, however, the Left teaches us that one cannot make a brutally statistical analysis of the whole of society to draw particular conclusions. On the other hand, it teaches us that one cannot make a count in the pocket of an individual capitalist to draw general conclusions. One must make a class account. That is: take the figures but use them according to our own categories, not simply according to bourgeois categories. That is, we need to do another small operation: to actually understand what is happening within the entire proletarian class. As far as the bourgeoisie is concerned, the thing is quite simple. Whoever receives surplus value directly, we can safely classify him in the bourgeois class. As far as the other classes are concerned, it is more nuanced. If we delimited the sets representing the proletariat, the half classes and the under-proletariat, we would have overlaps between the pure sets. However, we are not so much interested in the details of the nuances as in the fact that these nuances exist. If

²¹ We have replaced this example with that of report, where Benetton was spoken of generically, because the structure of that clothing industry is too complex and we failed to obtain certain data after the construction of the new factory completely automated in Veneto.

²² The industry of the province of Treviso alone, with 1.3% of the population, covers 18% of all Italian exports.

we want to cut to the chase, since we need to analyse the concrete situation with concrete methods in order to know concretely what we want to do, we have to rough it out and understand what proletariat actually means from a general class point of view.

So, the Left helps us, in a couple of Threads of Time, to understand how to deal with the situation of fuzzy sets. We must define a particular class, the proletariat, according to its determinations to be opposed to Capital. This means first putting the productive workers in industry, trade and services all together. Then add the unemployed and those seeking their first job. Then the large ranks of the unemployed in general.

We can derive the figures directly from the data provided by the bourgeoisie. In Italy there are 57 million inhabitants. In terms of employment, this country is truly the most modern in the world: very few work and many live off the work of others. No other country has such a relative overpopulation. Out of a population of 57 million, only 22 million (38%) are employed, which is a very low percentage compared to the largest industrial countries, which instead have a share of the working population approaching and in some cases exceeding 50%.

The number of productive workers, according to the criterion we have adopted, corresponds to exactly half of the employed, i.e. 11 million. If we want to go into detail, we have: 4.9 million in industry, 0.6 million in agriculture, 5.5 million in 'saleable' services. We immediately see an interesting fact: the number of people employed in industry is much lower than in productive services, and we should take into account that within industry there are non-productive services that are not recorded in the statistics. If we took this into account, the results we want to achieve would be more pronounced. We are therefore making a demonstration with a large margin of safety. The mass of surplus-value produced in a cycle eventually turns out to come from very few who are engaged in productive activities and is distributed to too many who are beneficiaries.

The distribution of surplus value within Italian society is quite interesting and leads us to make a consideration. Those who have read our Notebook on Accumulation will at some point recall the figure in which the parabola of surplus value is plotted. This curve represents the magnitude of surplus value as a function of the workers employed, i.e. as a function of labour productivity. Historically, the increase in labour productivity results in a contradiction: while the surplus value extorted from a single worker increases, the possibility of extorting more surplus value from many workers decreases. This absolute decrease represented in the diagram is compensated for by the enlargement of the scale of production (enlarged reproduction) and thus there is a degree of indeterminacy with respect to the possibility of predicting 'when' and 'how' the mechanism might jam in a finite world that cannot know infinite capitalist

growth. The symmetry inherent in the shape of the curve, symmetry in the design and in the opposite meaning of the two zeros we find at the extremes, indicates to us that the apex of the parabola, i.e. the maximum of surplus value as a function of the number of workers, is when society expresses a surplus value essay of 100 per cent, or, put another way, when the average social working day of eight hours is divided into four hours of necessary labour and four of surplus labour. In the text we combine this fact, formally expressed, with the observation that at this precise point, the system reaches its maximum output.

The observation we make now is this: we have a production system that over time increases its strength, and increases the number of goods produced by putting more and more capital into motion with fewer and fewer men. So if we were to move a significant point on the parabola according to the passage of time, we should have a path, let us say historical, from zero surplus value represented by the maximum number of workers in a society that consumes everything it produces, to the zero surplus value represented by a society without workers that produces everything with robots.

If we assume a surplus-value rate of 240% as the one indicated for the Italian production system in 1996, we find ourselves faced with a considerable deviation from the peak of maximum output. That is, we find ourselves far towards the zero surplus value of the hypothetical limit point at which productivity is infinite, the mass of production being entirely obtained without workers.

Both our Notebook and the above-mentioned Threads of Time make it clear that our formalisations have a social character, i.e. they are an expression of the relationship between the bourgeoisie and the working class. Thus we can assume that the curve represents a social trend. In this regard, Marx notes that there are well-identified counter-trends that make the law of tendency reversible. One of these counter-trends is the development of branches of production with a low organic composition of capital, i.e. branches in which the tendency of high machinist productivity is reversed and high rates of exploitation with a conspicuous use of cheap labour-power are used instead. This is also necessary because, as Marx points out, in the great commodity-producing society there is also the problem of the great sale of commodities, otherwise surplus value remains in its potential state and cannot return in the form of capital to the next cycle. This is consistent with the fact that in the steps that determine the parabola of surplus-value, one of the fundamental factors is the mass of consumer goods (expressed in the text in dimensionless units of product) that go to reconstitute labour-power. The value of these consumer goods stands in inverse relation to labour productivity. This is why it is very important for capitalists to sell a very large quantity of commodities in order to

make up for the decrease in unit value; but this is incompatible with the formation of an ever-increasing unemployed humanity unable to consume.

Let us remember that we are following the thread through the theory of value in order to come to conclusions about certain social effects ascertainable in the daily news reported by newspapers and TV, news that in itself does not offer any enlightenment as to the reasons that provoke events in politics and the economy. Following the example of the aforementioned texts, we have tried to make, on the basis of the available data, what is called in them 'the class account'. The first question we want to answer is this: are we not, by chance, faced with a kind of antagonistic cause blocking the drop in output in the world of production? Let us base ourselves on a datum provided by Marx: the increase in productivity results in a plethora of capital, a direct consequence of the plethora of commodities. This plethora must be reabsorbed, otherwise we are faced with a catastrophic crisis. Faced with this phenomenon, the bourgeoisie has devised a series of expedients that generally go by the name of Keynesianism and which have represented, as we have said many times, therapies to reanimate the capitalist corpse. Lately, the bourgeoisie has realised that these expedients are no longer effective and is caught between the need to sustain production by cutting the costs of the old policies and, as Prodi says, the need to eliminate the economy's woes without killing it.

We Do Our "Class Account"

If, as mentioned, we make the 'class count', we must broadly incorporate into a large whole all those we call the 'unemployed'. These are the productive wage earners (11 million), the unproductive service workers (4.3 million), and the unemployed (2.7 million). In total, 18 million people of working age make up the large class set. Here again we round up and down, assuming that the 300,000 policemen, carabinieri and financiers are compensated by the same number of undeclared workers who do not appear in the statistics and who, according to an official assessment, would produce at least 25% of the GDP to be added to the national accounts figure. In any case, we are interested in orders of magnitude and not in exact figures that we will never be able to deduce statistically; in fact, we cannot start arguing about the position of an industrial manager who appears among the wage earners or about the unemployed person who sets up his own business by applying for a VAT number and thus appears among the professionals.

Compared to the total number of employed persons, which is 22 million, we have by difference 4 million members of the bourgeoisie and the small entrepreneurship of the middle classes. With this new subdivision to which we refer the figures in the usual national count, we now have that the four million 'bourgeoisie' receive an 'income' of 835,000 billion lire, almost exactly half of the total income (1,700,000 billion lire).

These few figures tell us that, if we do the maths in the productive sectors, we have an average exploitation essay of 240%, with peaks of even more than 800%, as shown in the example above; while if we do the maths from the point of view of the general relationship between classes, we have an average exploitation essay of 100%. This means that, within society, the bourgeoisie government has been forced to take measures to distribute surplus-value in order to avoid the total impoverishment of a large part of the population, with the associated collapse of production. As an immediate result, a bunch of bourgeois, taken individually, having had a part of their profits taken away from them without having a chance to understand that this was done in the general interest of their class, started a movement to recover the alleged ill-gotten gains. What does the individual capitalist care about the distribution of surplus value within society? Capitalism as a whole has created the need for it; but the individual capitalist doesn't want to know. It is enough for him that his goods reach the market and turn into cash, business profit, as soon as possible, and he does not care how others can have their pockets full of money to buy them.

If the bourgeois class were aware of capitalist mechanisms, this would result in the expression of strong governments capable of distributing surplus value more rationally and efficiently in society. This road has already been taken with the 'fascisms' of the 1920s and 1930s which, in various ways, from America to Russia via Europe, sought to socially reorganise the state. But the bourgeois class is made up of many capitalists who have no understanding of the need for the state to function as a collective capitalist in order to safeguard the general interests of capital, even if this means affecting particular interests. The anarchy of their mode of production is reflected in the heads of the individual bourgeois and they have no intention of giving up a large share of surplus value for purposes they cannot conceive of.

So, returning to the characters already named, the industrialists' representative Fossa will demand, on behalf of his members, an economic policy favourable to the non-division of surplus-value, while the head of the executive Prodi on the one hand will have to agree with him, coming into conflict with the needs of the system, and on the other will have to safeguard the needs of the system, coming into conflict with both the industrialists and the proletariat. The governor of the Bank of Italy, Fazio, will have to make it clear to everyone that anyone, once in government, will have to take the same measures, and the leader of the Lega Bossi will have to represent the interests of those who, squeezed between the big bourgeoisie and the proletariat, can no longer stand that any government has to do the same things over and over again.

As can be seen, there are symptoms of that preservation of achievements that cannot be defended except by blowing up the entire system. And there are also clear demonstrations that the material prepared by this society as it is more

than sufficient for the activity of revolutionary militants without setting out in search of windmills to assail. What we mean is that the preparation necessary for the formation and development of the proletarian party should at least begin with an understanding of what is really happening in the world, and that the action of revolutionaries should be in tune with what is really happening so as to be able to anticipate the future as Marx already demands in the Manifesto.

We cited a very concrete social situation, the one everyone is talking about today, North-Eastern Italy. Here we have an immediate perception of the individual or collective reaction of people who have achieved results and do not want to lose them. It is a good terrain for so-called situation analyses. We can represent concreteness through the mechanisms of the law of value and draw conclusions from it. Here the communists must say whether we are in the presence of material facts concerning the revolutionary movement.

We are not interested in whether Bossi takes the ampoule to the Po or makes his anti-Terrone rants by wrapping himself in Alberto da Giussano's flag. Nor are we interested in judging a movement by what that movement says about itself. We may well laugh about it, but in the meantime we have learnt from the Marxist method that there are concrete situations within society that can be represented through our schemata; it must be possible to make projections into the future on all this. We already have, therefore, an embryo of an answer as to what the phenomenon of the League may be and what it may represent. Perhaps the League as such will disappear shortly, but the material reasons that made it come into being, develop and act against the ties represented by the existing against the development of the productive forces will not disappear. The League is a crude stab at severing the bonds that Capital finds within itself, but mocking its distasteful manifestations is not a good indication of analytical ability. Maybe Bossi is ridiculous, he says stupid things, but looking through him we can easily see that it is increasingly difficult to preserve the existing without breaking something. Has it ever been seen before that an electioneering, populist parliamentary democratic party has thrown about 90 possible deputies overboard over a matter of principle? What forces drive the League to a bull in the china shop policy? Let us try to make a projection into the future, trying to understand what could happen in a country like Italy, if the State could not give an answer to the ghosts that agitate the Bossi, if the Executive were unable to make decisions nailed as it is to the numbers of electoral democracy, if the mechanisms that Marx identified once and for all in 18 Brumaire were once again set in motion. And Marx has already answered once and for all: 'Well dug up old mole!'. We should develop the issues surrounding all these 'what ifs' further and see if by chance they might not turn into 'when'. Of course, for those of us in this room, perhaps this discourse is understandable, but for almost all of us speaking Arabic. We know that the entire 'left' linked to civil society, millions of people, had only marched because Berlusconi had formed a 'right-wing' government. And we also see Bertinotti,

with Stalinists and Trotskyists, elegantly participating in a 'left' government that is doing worse than Berlusconi could have done. Even Bossi has shown that he is not tied to that fistful of lentils represented by the government cadre. It is not a moral judgement, ours; and, if as far as the aforementioned characters are concerned, the discourse is obvious, there are many 'leftists' who, in order to enter the movement, are eager to dish out tactical novelties, to be very concrete and not to be 'bypassed', as they say. The fact is that when one does not evaluate the facts according to the laws that Marx discovered, but according to the storm of ideas that is unleashed in the moments of emotions, every concept of tactics goes out the window and one adopts other people's theories, other people's wills, as mentioned. Haven't we seen the gritty and masochistic heroes of the social centres, those same ones who went to clash with the trade union 'traitors' at every demonstration, parading singing Bella Ciao against the fascist of Arcore arm in arm with their 'enemies'? This is the environment, this is what society as it is offers us on a daily basis. It is not our job to be agreeable to this society and its representatives. No communist should make the mistake of showing himself as what he is not just to 'make himself understood', to feel immersed in the so-called movement. We are inside the movement in another way, with our work, to act as a detector, as Amadeo called himself, to see if there are any communists who will come and work with us on the terrain of the Manifesto, a formidable demarcating shear between the devotees of this society and the anticipators of the future one. And that is action.

Anxious Search for New Utopias

Is the action that of the capitalist Fossa, who organises a demonstration, for now virtual but with thousands of other capitalists online, against capitalism that expropriates capitalists, not ours, aimed at wrenching militants out of the catchphrase, the commonplace? We well believe that Fossa is concerned. We do not know if the tax burden on corporate profits is really 70% as he says. But certainly if his company is one that has an 800% exploitation rate, he will certainly not like to be tied to a system that has a general rate of eight times less and that in the eyes of the individual takes without apparently offering anything. Especially if his market is north-central Europe, which pays in marks and does not ask for internal allocations of surplus value. But Fossa is a real capitalist, not like Bossi who plays the politician representing a middle class. Fossa doesn't break glassware, he goes to the notary to have the borders of the conquered territory cadastrated, because he wants to preserve his conquests. Only the notary (the collective capitalist state) wants the fee to ensure that all capitalists do not tear each other apart and destroy the economy. Moreover, it knows that every single capitalist is a competitor of every other and that the game of free competition has as its natural outlet the monopoly²³. It is obvious

²³ In the USA, anti-monopoly mechanisms have been in place for more than a century, yet a monster like AT&T had an absolute monopoly on telecommunications reaching one million employees (998,000 for precision) before being forcibly separated. Bill Gates' Microsoft has in practices a worldwide monopoly on basic software.

that in Italy every capitalist who is not part of the few families that count is penalised: even Agnelli, absolute monopolist of the automobile, wants to preserve his conquests. Fiat has more say than Fossa's little factory. The result is that the collective capitalist state, in distributing surplus value in society so that it continues to function, can only take away where there is abundance and put in where there is shortage. Thus it happens that Fiat, partly because it has a low profit rate, partly because it has influence, receives state subsidies instead of promising industries that would need them.

To the modern bourgeois observer, as to the old reformist overtaken by fascism, all this appears as a problem of a more just and rational distribution of surplus value within society. The Rifkin, Ruffolo, Debenedetti and Minc, to name but a few people we have studied, then appear, theorising a world no longer based on guarantees of employment and assistance, but on a total freedom granted to the islands of surplus-value production, which should be matched by a rational use of surplus-value in the rest of society, either by the state or by willing citizens devoted to non-profitable activities, ranging from caring for the elderly to managing the artistic heritage.

These new utopias, examples of which we have collected in past work, are ideologically further back than the old utopias with which we began this exhibition, for the simple reason that they aim at an impossible capitalism without contradictions. Old history, but equally interesting, because the call for this new utopianism, out of date twice over, has the merit of showing us precisely the need to break the constraints on the further development of the productive forces precisely in an attempt to preserve the system that creates and renews those constraints. Once again, we see that the action of communists cannot be marked by archaic representations of society, by Stalinist-brand socialist realism, even if it is anti-Stalinist. Rifkin and Ruffolo are telling us, without knowing it, that this society is over-ripe to fully explode the energy of its liberated productive forces and that a very small part of the social labour disbursed today can suffice to satisfy human needs, while the rest can vent itself in new fields unimaginable today.

In recent days, a commemoration of the economist Federico Caffé has appeared in the newspapers. He was a humanist Keynesian, convinced that surplus value could be distributed within society using human methods, transforming capitalism from within. Some fifteen years ago he wrote an article in the *Manifesto* (no, it has nothing to do with Marx) entitled *La solitudine del riformista* (The Loneliness of the Reformist), in which he said he preferred the little to the whole and what was achievable rather than what was utopian. But when it comes to capitalism, it is precisely what seems attainable that is utopian. When Taylor at the turn of the century laid the foundations for the scientific organisation of labour, he envisaged a wonderful world made possible by mass production. Between the wars, Keynes was truly convinced that humanity had

found a way to live happily by producing and consuming. And the same was true in the 1960s, when the Kahn school spread honey milk in profusion with its theories of infinite exponential growth

Even political activists prefer the little to the whole and what is achievable to utopias. But they are so impractical that they learn nothing from trivial experience. What is realisable for them is never realised and it must be so frustrating to experience continual failure. Instead, the action of the Marxist revolutionary finds substantial confirmation in communism that changes the present state of affairs. For it is part of another school. Instead of the unhinged agitation of the fleeting moment, for him the inevitable revolt against the shackles to the development of the productive forces is fundamental - and therefore to be cherished. Agreed, we also do everything else, distribute leaflets, participate in or organise demonstrations and strikes where we are and can, etc. But from the general perspective of what is really going on. We ask ourselves: if it is true that humanity does not want to lose what it has achieved, is it not wriggling in the extreme contradiction of the union of opposites, conservation-destruction? Be that as it may, in this conservative-destructive action, men tend to unleash the productive forces, which find themselves even more enchained...

We have seen the transition from utopia to the science of prediction on material data. Of course, we have come to this using only an infinitesimal fragment of Marxist theory, but it should be enough for us to realise that consequent action, praxis, cannot be on a foreign plane. Even the praxis of revolutionaries is subject to historical processes. Marx in the Manifesto advanced a 10-point programme, many of which no longer make sense today: the highly progressive tax has long been law; state control, if not monopoly, of banks is a fact; transport and energy are public; free public education for children is there. The realisation of first revolutionary and then reformist demands is a historical fact and does not oblige Marxists to insist on it. Political campaigning is also subject to the same determinations: when Lenin warmly pushed the campaign to denounce tsarist society there was no television, and above all there was not the degenerate political struggle of today that uses denunciation campaigns in the war between bourgeois factions. Even the trade union struggle no longer involves any defence of the existing organisations, which are now fully integrated into the bourgeois machinery. We are forced to work in the world that is there and not in the one we would like, but that is not why we defend it: the importance of the trade union terrain is as valid for us as it was for Lenin, but certainly the bourgeoisie has also removed the trade union from the wide range of instruments available. It is not for the working class to complain because the bourgeoisie is eliminating the instruments of defence within this society one by one. Only Pannella wants more representative democracy, but for the proletariat it has not been a subject of claim for a century; no one today could mourn the destruction of these trade unions: the proletariat would set up others if they

were needed, or else be forced to dispense with immediate claims to make the leap into the political battle for power. For the communist to criticise the union makes no more sense than to criticise a bourgeois; only in front of the workers and for specific facts does it make sense to denounce the shenanigans, and our direct experiences prove that the opportunist the more he is the more he theorises that the 'workers don't understand'. All bullshit, the workers understand just fine.

But these are still small things compared to the immense task of the communists, that of representing an environment absolutely hostile to all that is capitalist, the only resource for not being homologated among the chains that bind the explosion of the social productive force towards a new form. It is from this environment that the overthrow of praxis will be possible when it is demanded by the revolutionary movement. A party that is organic to the movement for the destruction of the present may be organic to a mass movement, but to imagine the overthrow of praxis linked to the activism of individuals or groups is simply nonsense. With this kind of attitude many people think they are in line with the theory-practice relationship: let's do this and this so we will have these and these other results. As if links with the masses could be 'willed'. The Left has taught us that this fallacy is precisely what fools militants away from the possibility of the party.

There can be no overthrow of praxis when there is not the complete scheme of all the elements linked into a single reality: material drives, class relations, party formation and development, the reciprocal and contrary influence of bourgeois ideology and communism, etc. Anyone who would think of overthrowing the praxis with only the instrument of a small group and the will of a few militants without everything else being in place at the same time would not only be outside Marxism, but also a little sick with unconscious megalomania.

Hopefully our small contribution today will make it clear to comrades why Marx's theory, based on the law of value, is catastrophic. If we may borrow terms from the theory of catastrophes, a recent branch of bourgeois science, we would say that there will be no morphogenesis, i.e. birth of new form, as long as the structural stability of the old form is not affected. Now, this stability is guaranteed by only one factor, as our small example above confirms: the ever-increasing extortion of surplus value and its distribution to that part of society that consumes more and more of it without producing any. The Left called this phenomenon by the name of the greatest brake on the further impetus of Russia's productive forces in the Stalin era: kolkhosianism. The kolkhozniks were peasants bound to paltry interests, to the farmyard and henhouse economy. The distribution of existence guarantees to the unreserved in the most developed countries is industrial kolkhozianism. Much more than in the past, the struggle for the social distribution of surplus value is therefore the

basis of the coming social movements. The praxis? To exist, to make ourselves known, to make better use of these instruments of investigation, to involve other militants, etc., so that we do not one day capitulate, like the overwhelming majority, in the face of capital's demands, and perhaps demand in the face of a strong bourgeois executive, truly progressive, i.e. super-fascist, the 'defence of the democratic spaces' lost. Those who do not cling with all their might to Marxist analysis fuck up praxis and side with the adversary at decisive moments. We already know this, the history of the revolutionary movement is a teacher. Those who have a democratic view of revolution will defend democracy against revolution; those who have a pacifist view of the military question will go to war as soon as they are offered a just cause; those who believe they are making the revolution will do something else when the revolution is, unbeknownst to them; those who believe they are the most important individual in the world will be left by the revolution to be the individual and will be neglected by the coveted masses.

Now we are still at the small manifestations of episodes to which few attach importance. The power of recent technologies has not yet been fully expressed, just as the effects of the collapse of the East are not yet fully defined. A new generation faces our propaganda and is insensitive to the sclerotic language of old politics, while Marxism freed from degenerate encrustations presents itself loud and clear to ears that are not degenerate. We do not want to come to hasty conclusions, but we think we have identified a trend, a general tendency in today's capitalism, from which we expect, especially from young people, a greater understanding of Marxism as the science of society. And therefore we also expect a broadening of the organic work around these themes, which are mentioned today, the only way to achieve higher results.

Convulsions of Nations and Classes at the Margin and Center of European Capitalism in the Age of Globalisation

Globalisation and Historical Materialism

The truncated language of the bourgeoisie and those who preach all its novelties has, for some time now, adopted the term globalisation to indicate that complex network of commercial, productive, financial and political links that characterise the competitive relations between companies, economies, bourgeoisies and states (with all their propaganda apparatus, diplomatic and military apparatus) on a planetary scale and which for Marxists has always constituted, on the one hand, the normal unfolding of the development of capitalist relations of production in the age of imperialism and, on the other hand, once the relations between classes and between the different modes of production are added, that monistic interrelationship between social facts on an extended scale, in space and time, on which historical materialism is founded.

This is to immediately sweep away any element of alleged novelty with which one might possibly want to confuse a serious analysis of the current contradictory and conflicting relations for the partitioning of the world market (but be careful with this definition too, because this already existed in power in the 17th century!) between large, medium and small imperialists. Worse still, if such terms were to be used to endorse supposed novelties in the field of class relations and new developments in them within brand new spheres of conflict.

We need only refer once again to The Manifesto of the Communist Party which, in the chapter Bourgeois and Proletarians, stated thus:

'The discovery of America, the circumnavigation of Africa created a new terrain for the bourgeoisie source. The East India and Chinese market, the colonisation of America, the trade with the colonies, the increase in the means of exchange and goods in general gave trade, navigation and industry a hitherto unknown impetus, and thereby impressed a rapid development on the revolutionary element within the disintegrating feudal society. (...) The bourgeoisie cannot exist without continually revolutionising the instruments of production, the relations of production, and thus all social relations. (...) The continual revolution of production, the uninterrupted shaking up of all social situations, the eternal uncertainty and movement distinguish the epoch of the bourgeoisie from all previous epochs. (...) With the exploitation of the world market, the bourgeoisie has given a cosmopolitan imprint to production and consumption in all countries. It has pulled industry out from under the feet of its national terrain, much to the chagrin of reactionaries.(...) It is forcing all nations to adopt the bourgeois system of production if they do not want to go to ruin, it is forcing them to introduce so-called civilisation at home, i.e. to become bourgeois.(...)) It has created huge cities, it has increased on a grand scale the figure of the urban population in comparison to the rural population, thus wrenching a considerable part of the population away from the idiotism of rural life.(...)The bourgeoisie increasingly eliminates the dispersion of the means of production, property and population. It has agglomerated the population, centralised the means of production and concentrated property in a few hands. Political centralisation has been a necessary consequence of this'²⁴

Geopolitics or Geohistorical Areas?

Another term back in vogue, after decades of enforced oblivion, in journalistic and political parlance is instead: Geopolitics.

This term, which originated more or less in the years when modern imperialism took hold, i.e. at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, indicates in political, diplomatic and military language an area of strategic interests, both economically and militarily, vital for a given country or, to put it more accurately, national capitalism.

²⁴ K. Marx - F. Engels, *Manifesto of Communist Party*

It is useless to trace its history and architects here; what is certain is that this vision of the dislocation of interests, borders and alliances was also born planetary.

It carried and was in itself, yesterday as today, a manifestation of the need for each individual capital and/or national capitalism to expand as much as possible, concentrating and centralising along historically given lines and to the detriment of all possible competitors. From 'The Thread of Time' The Planet is Small is worth quoting:

*'A so-called recent science, Geopolitics, is in fashion. It wants to study the geography of the planet in its incessant changes due to the stay and work of man. It is a branch of science that has understood that the laws of historical facts are not discovered in the traces they have left in the individual's brain but in the actual physics of ponderable objects. Americans, Russians, Germans, if they cook it up according to the orders of their superiors, nevertheless refer to a master who wrote around 1919, the English geographer Mackinder. 'Today,' he wrote, 'the map of the earth is completely drawn, there are no more white spots on the globe. The physical, economic, political and military factors now form a co-ordinated system'. The bourgeois learn from Marxism, the alleged proletarian exponents throw it out! [highlighted by us]*²⁵

Sometimes the term Geoeconomics, particularly used in Italy by the Agnelli Foundation brain trust, is preferred, but little changes the underlying meaning and purpose of its use.

Here too, once freed from useless trappings and bourgeois ideological embellishments, Marxists recognise, under another term, a particularly important concept from their theoretical baggage or, for the more refined palates, from their 'philosophical dictionary': we are talking about Geohistorical Areas, i.e. territorial spaces in which the evolution of the productive forces and their underlying relations of production has created the basis for a unitary revolutionary transformation that transcends the narrow and petty spaces and timescales of the orbiting bourgeois conception of the nation state.

In Russia and Revolution in Marxist Theory we find:

'In many previous treatises this term of area has been used, perhaps insufficiently, but one cannot see a better one. Area is a purely geometric concept, to measure an extension of surface enclosed by a contour; it is hardly used as a geophysical concept, and less so as a geanthropic one. However, we cannot use the term nation, because our fields can encompass several nations; we cannot use the term state, because for us state is defined only for one factor by territory, and for the other by class relations, as well as for the same reason

²⁵ A. Bordiga, "The planet is small", now in *O revolution or war*, Quaderni Internazionalisti

that the fields considered are also of several states. Today, diplomats use the term region in the sense not of part of a state but of a group of states, when they speak of 'regional' agreements; but the term is too closely related to the sense of 'part of a nation'. the term country is not suitable, because it is used for territories both large and small and very small. As for the term zone, it is suitable for geophysical use, little for geopolitical use. We will therefore continue to use the term area, which the Americans have introduced to designate parts of the inhabited world in which there is an economy, a currency, a political influence, although the expression 'historical field' would be less displeasing. It is in fact each time a question of linking a determined geographical perimeter to a determined chronological interval [This last emphasis is ours].(...) It is clear that revolutionary areas are not watertight compartments: on the contrary, if one moves, even on social postulates of its own, it generally triggers revolutionary movements in all the others, even if they are of a different degree of development²⁶

Here, it must be understood, we are talking about all modes of production, of all the revolutions that have followed one another, even with different modes and results, on the globe.

Petty and ideological is still the imperialist vision of geopolitics, clustered around national interest or a clique of gangsters in double-breasted or camouflage uniform.

Underneath, however, the old mole is digging, and so, even if political revolutions are slow in coming, distant territories are brought closer, outdated barriers are abolished, archaic covens, classes and forms of production are shattered and rendered obsolete by facts, idols are shattered and altars are toppled so that what in the eyes of the petty-bourgeois may seem an irreparable defeat in the eyes of the revolutionary will shine as a sign of future victory.

The "Historical" Concentration of Capitalism

These premises were necessary in order to introduce the question of the current state of world imperialism and the implications that its contradictions are beginning to have in central areas or close to one of its centres.

Apparently, the Balkan question, as it has been redelineated since 1991 up to the most recent events in Albania, and the manoeuvres to speed up or slow down the process of European economic unification would seem to belong to different spheres, in contact with each other only for reasons of propaganda or instrumental 'political' and humanitarian fanfare.

In reality, and this will be demonstrated here, the deep forces behind this are closely intertwined and destined to be of interest, this strategic interest, to

²⁶ A. Bordiga, *Russia and revolution in theory Marxist*, ed. The Communist Program

revolutionaries. Provided, of course, that we reject all kinds of blinkers and instrumentation not traceable to the Marxist armoury.

To begin with, one cannot help but define the vast geo-historical area pivoting on the Rhine axis, or rather on that portion of European territory gravitating from south to north on the territories bordering the course of the Rhine river.

Here, roughly from north-central Italy to the Netherlands, from the Mediterranean to the North Sea and the Baltic Sea, taking into account not only the Alpine passes and the important transversal communication axes formed by the Po Valley or the canals linking the Rhine to the Danube to the east and the Marne and the Atlantic to the west, but also of the dense network of roads still winding along the ancient Roman road axes, the most ancient heart of capitalism has developed and pulsates, and at the same time, taking into account the territorial contiguity between city and city, between industrial and financial areas and the immense concentration of capital and labour force, the largest megalopolis on the planet has formed.

This geo-historical area encompasses the south-north expansion axis of the Roman Empire and that of the medieval Holy Roman Empire, the areas of influence of Genoa, Venice, Florence and Milan of the heroic age of the Italian municipal bourgeoisie, the territory of the contested Burgundian state the textile and mercantile centres of Flanders for which the kings of France and England were already at each other's throats for a hundred years, the German cities of the Hanseatic League and the first fully bourgeois oceanic power (that of 17th century Holland), roughly correspond to what is commonly referred to as Western Europe. Figures from the early 1990s, in a ranking that divided the world into ten major pan-regions (for us, geo-historical areas) i.e. Europe, Russia, North America, Latin America, Brazil, Oceania, East Asia, South Asia, the Islamic World and Africa, gave it first place in terms of wealth produced.

This meant 33.6 per cent of the world product (an average of 6,818 billion dollars per year), against 29.5 per cent for North America (5,900 billion dollars) and 20.4 per cent for East Asia (4,136 billion dollars): altogether 83.5 per cent of the world product concentrated in the three imperialist blocs contending the planet!

Even from the point of view of trade, the first place went to Europe since it held (again according to data from the beginning of the decade) 28% of world

exports against 20% for the Pacific area (Japan, South-East Asia and Australia) and 15.5% for North America.²⁷

In order to better measure the vertical economic and financial concentration that takes place in certain key areas of the planet, bourgeois econometrics devised the economic density gradient that relates per capita income to the population density of a certain area, an area once again understood not as a nation but as a significant region of a continent or state. With due caution, such a measure can yield some significant results. Taking this gradient into account, we can obtain, given that the population density on the face of the earth varies from over 1,000 to less than 1 inhab. per square km and that the average income per inhab. varies from less than 100 to more than 20,000 dollars, an enormous range of variation in the distribution of wealth. We thus have from less than \$100 per square km for the poorest and least populated regions to more than \$100 million per square km in the large hegemonic urban regions.

The six urban regions of London, Paris, Antwerp-Brussels, Ramstadt-Holland, Cologne-Ruhr and Milan constitute the pinnacles of the territorial organisation of the heart of Europe with 51 million inhabitants, 53,000 square kilometres, almost 1,000 inhabitants per square kilometre. The rest of this strong area consists of a connective tissue of smaller metropolises, regions of widespread industry, areas of intensive agriculture, and tourist areas. Altogether another 135 million inhabitants, but with a density six times lower than that of the largest urban regions.

In the urban regions of Europe, the density of economic concentration is 21.2 million per square kilometre and in the regions of strong connective tissue, 3.2 million per square kilometre.

In the equivalent large urban regions of the USA we arrive at an average economic density of \$11.6 million per square kilometre and in the areas of strong connective tissue at \$1.7 million per square kilometre. The only area that significantly exceeds Europe's large urban regions in terms of the economic density gradient is the Tokyo-Osaka megalopolis, which comes to \$39 million per sq. km. The territorial scale is smaller in this case, however.

²⁷ Confirming the historical processes of centralization and development of economies, it must be kept in mind that already in 1937 Europe continental, England, the United States and Japan together accounted for 62% of all world imports and 54% of all exports. See League of Nations-Economic Intelligence Service, *The Network of World Trade. TO Companion Volume to "Europe's Trade"*, Genève 1942, pp. 27-28 quoted in L. Paggi, *A broken century. Politics and wars, in the 20th century The times of history*, Donzelli 1997, pag. 89

Let us suspend here for now a listing of statistical data (remember that they date back to 1990) that would still need to be updated and expanded so as to go beyond the limits of this report.

What is important to glimpse is how verifiable is an economic-financial concentration that is progressive and subjugates entire areas of the globe to a very few centres, which substantially shrink to three and which in turn shrink within themselves into narrow, well-defined areas in which much of the world's wealth ends up being concentrated.

A few more figures to better understand what follows.

In 1990 there was a total production of goods and services in the world that was measured at 20,300 billion dollars (read twenty-three hundred billion).

Of this world product, 16%, or \$3.2 trillion, was used outside the producing countries in the form of exports. It follows that a large part of the product was consumed internally.

However, if we split this total product among the producers, we can see that in 1990:

- \$6 trillion was produced by North America (USA and Canada);
- \$335 billion in the ocean area of Australia and New Zealand;
- \$3,140 billion in the Far East area (basically Japan and New Tigers);
- USD 6,300 billion in Western Europe;
- altogether, out of 20,300 billion dollars, 15,775 were produced in OECD countries.

Shall we look in even more detail?

- The United States alone produced 5,552 billion dollars, Japan alone 2,939 and Germany alone 1,559.

If, in the end, we wanted to do the maths with the \$3.2 trillion of goods and services for export in 1990, we could still see how some \$1.1 trillion was exported by the 'usual three', in the following order: Germany \$415 billion of exported goods, the United States \$394 billion and Japan with \$288 billion of exports.

Let us stop here, recalling how concentration of wealth is also concentration of production.

The Rhenish "magnet" and World Imperialism

We have not yet arranged, alongside the previous ones (taken mainly from three texts by Roberto Mainardi, Professor of Geography at the University of Milan: *Geografia Generale*, *Geografia Regionale* and *L'Europa Germanica*, all published by La Nuova Italia Scientifica), more recent statistical data but, even admitting some changes in the order of the values exposed, the substantial datum remains: in one of the hearts of world capitalism with German reunification (3 October 1990) something has begun to move and march at a fast pace. But the unification itself was in turn the product of more or less distant and recent events (the trend towards the unification of the European economic area, the collapse of Eastern regimes), which can only be partially touched upon on this occasion.

What is certain is that the European centre of gravity for the third time in a century is shifting eastwards again, as the German capital moves from Bonn to Berlin. However, this shift of the axis is not a geophysical phenomenon, but a geo-economic one.

For reasons of time, it is not possible here to carry out a more detailed report on the development of German history and the role that the growth and maturation of capitalism has played in it and its neighbouring countries (especially to the east).

This topic has already been dealt with on another occasion, on the track of texts by Marx, Engels and the Left, and is the subject of a future report or letter.

What is certain is that with the redefinition of a European space whose hinges lie between Berlin, the Netherlands, Paris and the Po Valley we are faced with a problem of political, economic and military unification that already gripped Frederick II of Swabia, Charles V, Louis XIV, Napoleon and Hitler. Let it be clear, however, that here the names of the bourgeoisie are used in exactly the opposite way: it is not their fine thoughts, or their governments, that decide the course of events, but it is the latter that once set in motion must find, no matter whether in a royal lineage or an Austrian corporal, its vector.

What was the problem that gripped these puppets of history in different ways, forms and times? The maintenance of a centralised network and the realisation of unified economic and political functions between the economic areas of Central Europe and the coastal economic areas (towards the Atlantic, the North Sea, the Baltic and the Mediterranean): an essential basis, at least since Louis XIV, for countering the dominance of the oceanic powers (Holland in the 17th century, England in the 18th and 19th centuries and the United States in the 20th).

A common corollary of all these attempts to control the east-west and north-south axis on European territory was that of overcoming the Roman limes (basically along the course of the Rhine), which ran as a frontier from the North Sea to the Alps and 'strategically' separated the plains and plateaus of the centre from the Atlantic and Western Mediterranean communication routes. That is to say, the Rhine axis is the heart of ancient capitalism, but if it is to continue to prosper, it must not be a limit for itself.

If anyone thinks that airlines and computer networks have made the problem obsolete, try moving raw materials and manufactured goods along them!

Letter no. 35 partially addressed the problem of the Maastricht Treaty and its difficult, if not impossible, realisation, since this programmatic agreement certainly arose from the various requirements listed above, but it still seems to respond more to the internal needs of each individual nation in the European mosaic or to the more general need to 'grow without benefiting partners' rather than to those of a centralised command and management unit to replace the aforementioned bickering. Certainly, the central banks, and in particular the Bundesbank, seem to be closer to the task than the charlatan EU political bodies (such as the Strasbourg parliament) with their multifaceted chirping.

On the other hand, if in 1994 currency trading reached ten times the world's product, i.e. 300,000 billion dollars (compared to 2,000 billion dollars in 1970 and 35,000 billion, also in dollars, in 1984), equal to 900 billion a day and twenty-five times the trade in goods and services, this means that in an age of financial imperialism the sceptre must necessarily pass to the central banks. And so while the whining of the bourgeoisie about the end of the politician's autonomy is being raised, the Marxists see their theses about the dominance of financial capital fully confirmed!

But then since 1916, the year Lenin's Imperialism was published, has nothing really changed?

In fact from 1919 Wall Street replaced the City of London as the most important centre of financial intermediation and from 1944, with the Bretton Woods treaties, sterling was replaced by the dollar as the medium of international exchange and payment (in short, two world wars shifted the world financial axis from pale Albion to Uncle Sam).

The United States emerged from the First World War as the leading creditor nation.

'Whereas between 1870 and 1913 and then in the 1920s capital flows consisted mainly of private funds, after the Second World War official foreign aid

assumed a major role. Through the Marshall Plan, the United States from 1949 to 1952 provided Western Europe with aid amounting to 4.5 per cent of the US gross national product (the equivalent, in 1991 dollars, of 250 billion)²⁸.

We quote again from Mainardi's text on p. 212:

'In 1913 Britain, the hegemonic power in the world economy, had foreign investments amounting to more than an annuity of its GNP, which yielded capital incomes equal to 9% of national income. The capital income offset the trade deficit'. From the economist Geminello Alvi we instead borrow the following remarks: 'In 1993, the US merchandise deficit amounted to 2.5 per cent of its gross domestic product; in 1913, the UK had a merchandise deficit of 6.7 per cent of its GNP. But whereas Treasury Island's income earners had accumulated foreign assets in 1913 amounting to 158% of gross domestic product, the US's only amounted eighty years later to just over 40% of net domestic product.(...) The US is indeed, as the UK once was, the world's largest importer of goods. Still like the British in 1913, they are the richest nation. But compared to the UK of yesteryear, they have an unnatural balance of payments in c/c and meagre foreign assets'²⁹.

Sorry, but so much for 'triumphant liberalism'!

In 1981, the US was still the largest creditor country. The net creditor position was valued at 141 billion dollars, 4% of their GNP. Income from foreign investments provided 1% of GNP.

In just five years, the US became a net debtor to the tune of \$264 billion in 1986. In 1990, the balance of capital payments became negative and the net debtor position rose to \$700 billion (equal to 15% of GNP that year). It had never happened before that the leading economic power was also the leading debtor.

Any increase in the vulnerability of the US economy to external events (increased competitiveness, gained leading positions, higher productivity and lower labour costs) is bound to weaken the dollar's role in the international market. It has thus fallen from an 80% to 60% share in world foreign exchange reserves, while the mark's share has risen from 2% to 14% and that of the yen from almost zero to 7%.

More from Mainardi:

'Japan became the main creditor in the 1980s: \$220 billion in 1986, \$500 billion in 1990. The yen is already the second currency in the international capital

²⁸ R. Mainardi, *General Geography*, ed. The new Italy, 1995, p. 206

²⁹ G. Alvi, *The international economy today: the accounts foreigners in the USA and the historical balance*, Marco Fano Scholarship Association, Rome 1996, cited in D. Archibugi - G. Imperatori, *Global Economy e innovation*, Donzelli 1997, pag. 25

markets. But Japan is reluctant to favour greater use of the yen as an international currency: only 40% of Japanese exports and a very modest 10% of imports are invoiced in yen. With the (relative) decline of the dollar, three monetary spaces tend to form: the European monetary system, dominated by the mark (...); the Asia-Pacific region; and the Americas³⁰

This is what was intended to be achieved through the use of the dry data: the Marxist theory of imperialism is not in the slightest bit shaken by an eighty-year excursus. The knife-edge struggle for financial concentration remains, the progressive difficulties of accumulation and valorisation as well.

This is confirmed by the Frenchman Alain Minc, from the pages of the *Corriere della sera* of 6 November 1996:

'In the coming years there will be a tough and objective conflict: it will be the conflict between the dollar and the Euro. The birth of the single European currency will be the most violent blow ever delivered to the dominant position of the United States'.

Ah!... Grandeur often makes one forget, however, that it is precisely the difficult agreement on the weight and role of the different European national currencies (read economies) within the single currency that is holding back this formidable blow.

Steel, Coins, and Pushes

The diktats of Theo Waigel and the Bundesbank; the complaints of the governor of the Banca d'Italia, Fazio, when he declared before the European Parliament (on 25 September 1995) that Europe's difficulty in putting the Maastricht Treaty into practice lay in the fact that it could not avail itself of a single central government like that of the United States for a territory of the same size, but with almost 300 million inhabitants; all this confirms what has always been very clear to the Left: rigid economic and political centralisation is an inescapable necessity for capitalism.

So on with the interest rate manoeuvres, with the jostling not to be left out of the gala dinner... but with attention to making the table neighbour look bad, so that he is kicked out or leaves voluntarily, as in the best Versailles tradition!

But this concentrated, centralised, accumulated capital must go back to being what it is in its innermost essence: value in process. That is to say, it can never stop, it can perhaps try the ploys of financial speculation, but the more money, finding no way out of valorisation in the production process, becomes

³⁰ R. Mainardi, *op. cit.* morning. 212.

capital in itself, the closer the times of its disappearance get. It must therefore find and rediscover the times, ways and forms of its own valorisation .

The playwright Yukio Mishima, in his play *My Friend Hitler*, has Gustav Krupp say:

'(...) the Krupp firm is not guided by the will of its president, it acts in deference to the will of steel, to the wishes of steel, to the dream - hear me well - conceived by steel.(...) The Krupp family must realise the dreams of steel at any cost'³¹

His Majesty Steel is entitled a 'Thread of Time', in which this fruit of the fusion of minerals neither rare nor noble is taken as the parameter and motor of the development of capitalism and the contradictions between imperialisms.

This whirling motion of capital, in its attempt to find new impulses for its own valorisation and commercial outlets for the results of its production processes, however, does not only cause movements, changes and contradictions at its summit and in its centre, but also at its periphery and, of necessity or we would not be here to discuss it, among the groups of those who with their labour must transfer this valorisation to capital itself. What happens and has happened in this respect in the heart or on the fringes of the Rhine magnet will still serve us as an example and framework for interpretation.

Economic Regions and German Hegemony

Walter Christaller is the name of a German geographer who from the early 1930s, with a work entitled *The Central Locations of Southern Germany*³², gave impetus to a particular branch of geography called functional geography. This science studies the territory starting from the capacity of attraction that certain central areas, usually large and medium-sized urban centres, have on the surrounding territory as polarisers of economic and administrative activities. From this point of view, the geographical space becomes a more or less intricate fabric of areas that influence each other reciprocally, either suffering the greater functional weight of certain centres or competing to assert their centrality. It is a vision that presupposes a certain degree of urbanisation and it is no coincidence that the initial 'case study' was based on a particularly urbanised area such as southern Germany.

Let there be no fear: we have not fallen in love with De Agostini's Atlas Calendar, nor are we engaging in academia. Nor, much less, are we interested in fleeing Christaller as to whether or not he was pan-Germanist.

³¹ Y. Mishima, *My friend Hitler* , Guanda 1983, page 29

³² The Italian edition of the book, based on a later one revision of the text, it was published by the publisher Franco Angeli in 1980

What Marxists are given to grasping in the functional study of urban settlements is that the economic and political centralisation of capitalism is materially verifiable on the territory, not only across national borders, but on either side of them, through the influence that financial and industrial poles of different hierarchical order have on the surrounding areas on a scale ranging from the few dozen km travelled daily by commuting workers or 'border crossers' to the 100,000 square km over which the influence of the most important metropolises is exerted on average today. Is this not a magnificent proof of what was said in the beginning through the pages of the Communist Party Manifesto?

Geographical science has already had to take note of what the nationalist and petty-bourgeois political vision refuses to discuss. The concepts of Region (in the sense illustrated earlier by the quotations from the 'Thread of Time') and Pan-region, bypassing localist and nationalist taboos, put on the agenda the end of social relations based on the idea of the nation-state or, even worse, ethnicity and reveal more transparently that it is the modes and relations of production that determine the forms of organisation and aggregation of societies.

Let us now try to transfer this 'geographical' approach to the map of continental Europe and imagine the relations of conflict between economies and classes that intertwine or could intertwine within such a network of mutual influences and attractions.

When Budapest was the second capital of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, it exerted its attraction over an area of some 130,000 square kilometres. We are talking about the end of the last century.

Imagine today, without touching here on the problem of telematic networks and information 'highways', what might be the area of attraction not of cities such as Berlin, Frankfurt, Hamburg, Amsterdam, Paris or Milan over the surrounding areas, but of the entire territory enclosed and included between these poles and the rest of the continent. Let us establish an imaginary line that, after the events of 1989 and German reunification, delimits this area towards the east: it begins in Hamburg-Lübeck, descends towards Berlin, and continues on to Prague, Budapest, Vienna and Trieste. Last but not least, do not forget the very high rate of urbanisation and urbanisation to the west of this line.

There are two questions to be formulated at this point.

I) Is it or is it not legitimate to speak of a peripheral area, but not a detached area, with regard to the European territory extending beyond this line eastwards to the borders of the former USSR and southwards into the Balkans?

II) Is the resumption of the 'Balkan wars', which we have witnessed since 1991, to be considered as a product of local history and the manoeuvres of a

super-imperialism, or are the secessions, military clashes, field deployments and, ultimately, the events in Albania nothing more than the surface response of the profound telluric movements in the economic and financial spheres that have been transmitted from the centre of capitalism to its periphery?

If the correct answer to the first question is yes, and if the second hypothesis is correct for the other, then what is the point of a watchword like: 'Get imperialism out of the Balkans'?!

Whoever proposes it today, while perhaps proclaiming himself a Marxist, has not even read the ABC of grandfather Lenin who, again in that 1916 text, already stated:

'(...) the colonial policy of the capitalist countries has completed the grabbing of unoccupied land on our planet. The world for the first time appears completely partitioned, so that in the future only a new partition will be possible, i.e. the passage from one master to another'³³

This is because, again according to Lenin, there is:

'the tendency of finance capital to enlarge its economic territory, and also its territory in general'³⁴

Finally, to avoid any mystification, he further specifies:

'It is characteristic of imperialism precisely its eagerness not only to conquer agrarian territories, but also to lay its hands on heavily industrialised countries, since in the first place the fact that the land is already partitioned compels, when a new partition is in progress to lay hands on countries of any kind, and secondly, for imperialism is the competition of a few great powers fighting for hegemony, i.e. for the conquest of land, directed not so much to their own benefit as to weaken the adversary and undermine its hegemony'³⁵

Western and, in particular, German investments in Central Eastern Europe and the Balkans will be the subject of a forthcoming work, the results of which have already been presented to the Turin comrades; for now, it is sufficient to observe that from 1936 to 1986 Germany was the main trading partner of Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland (only in the latter case, and only for 1936, was it second to Great Britain), while after 1990 it became their first trading partner ever³⁶. The data already collected also confirm this trend for the other

³³ Lenin, *Imperialism, the supreme phase of capitalism* , Edizioni Rinascita, 1948, page. 73

³⁴ Lenin, op. cit. page 79.

³⁵ Lenin, op. cit. page 86.

³⁶ In this regard, compare the data expressed in the tables on pages. 655 and 656 by T. Garton Ash, *In the Name of Europe* , Mondadori, 1994.

Eastern European and Balkan countries. Except for Albania where the first trading partner and first investor country is Italy...

So: which will be the hegemonic power in this 'peripheral' area?

And what appetite can international financial capital have for a city like Budapest, in which more than 30% of Hungary's entire population is concentrated?

And if, finally, it turns out that already in 23 A.D., in order to close off the centre of Europe and isolate it from the sea, eight legions were deployed on the Rhine and five between the Pannonian Plain (present-day Hungary) and the lower reaches of the Danube, what can one think of the deployment of 'western' troops that is unfolding between Bosnia and Albania?

There is no escape: the Kalashnikovs have recited their dirges and the propellers of the Vittorio Veneto have ploughed the depths of the Valona roadstead for pulses that come, from that ancient heart of capitalism mentioned at the beginning, through the arteries pumping money from private individuals and states, all equally in search of new opportunities and better investment conditions. The Imperialism of 1916 still serves in 1997.

Are we at the photo finish? As far as the convulsions of the periphery and imperialism of 'Italic stock' are concerned, at the moment, yes.

As for the 'consequences' of this for the proletariat and communists, not yet.

Monetary Unification and Social Classes

If the 'peripheral' areas are somehow destined to be simultaneously drawn into the vortex of the financial activity of the 'central' ones and to be the momentary playing field for a game of distribution of resources, wealth and positions of strength of enemies that have not yet openly declared themselves as such, at the centre the vast work of rearranging expenditure, redirecting investment and redefining the priorities of states is in turn beginning to reanimate the social body.

One of the prerequisites given as fundamental for the resumption of a cycle of class struggles, namely the ruin of the half-classes, seems to be firmly underway.

If European states, both as allies among themselves and as mutual competitors, are to embark on a programme to restructure their activities, lay the foundations for a resumption of competitiveness and modernisation of their production cycles, and devote funds and attention to the reorganisation of their

military apparatuses, this must necessarily be reflected in a worsening of the conditions of existence of the half-classes.

In the best Keynesian tradition, private savings must be reduced, forced back into the markets in the form of risky stock market investments or in the form of simple purchases of goods and services. The lowering of the discount rate continually demanded by entrepreneurs for a resumption of industrial investment is inversely proportional to the interest small and medium-sized savers have in maintaining high rates to secure their deposits. The cutting of baby or 'limited seniority' pensions transforms civil servants and skilled workers who already believed themselves safe with pensions and, perhaps, second jobs, back into mere proletarians with little or no reserves.

The entry of automation and electronics into every area of service and administrative activities reduces the number of employees needed and leads those who do not lose their jobs back to carrying out operations with an increasingly factory-like discipline and timing.

The 'travet', but sometimes also the aspiring manager, looks in the mirror and recognises himself, willy-nilly, as proletarian.

Hence the outcry, the protests, the attempts to maintain one's status, in order not to fall into the bedlam of the class from which one thought one had forever distinguished oneself.

The forms of protest here are varied, blind, often nationalist or localist: from the lock-out of small shopkeepers, to the generic marches of pensioners, to protests against immigrants or against the mafias.

These struggles and the organisational forms they may take may be symptomatic, as was D'Annunzio's movement after the First World War, but they are not a substitute for an authentic clash between classes.

In a recent article published in the journal *Il Mulino*, Giulio Tremonti stated that with globalisation, '*the poverty of the East has entered the pay envelopes of the West*³⁷. For the European working class, the statement has a kernel of truth, in the sense that not only are the blows of the technological and productive restructuring of companies beginning to be felt (reduction of jobs, greater flexibility), but also the working and living conditions of the proletariat are beginning to unify across the continent.

It has been said: they are beginning and not that they already are.

The responses are still fragmentary and archaic.

³⁷ G. Tremonti, *The "civil" war*, *Il Mulino* n° 5, September/October 1996, page. 850

They are of defence of the workplace, of claiming legalisms and rights (such as the right to work) that capital seems to invent on purpose to then sweep away like fairy tales, which in fact they are.

Yet when in Belgium and the Ruhr, as in this last period, demonstrations with a workers' component resume, with street clashes, or timidly the class tries to regain a space of expression outside those represented by trade union intermediation or parliamentary political representation, the bell of the class struggle can ring again.

It is no coincidence that Belgium and the Ruhr are mentioned here, perhaps some other episode could have been cited: but there one is, to paraphrase an American novelist '*in the heart of the heart of the continent*'³⁸.

A continent where the working class, as numerous as in any other area, has been divided, from the post-war period until a few years ago, not only by the borders of nations but also by the fictitious division between East and West.

A working class, the European working class, which especially in the centre of the continent has demanded, with a capitalism mindful of the first post-war period, the presence of Russian and American army corps for its control, in addition to those already available from all 'democratic' governments.

A working class that, even in conditions of the closest dependence on opportunism and Stalinism, from Mirafiori in 1969, to Flins in 1968, to Budapest in 1956, to East Berlin in 1953, to Gdansk, Szczecin and Warsaw between 1970 and 1980, was able to give evidence of irreducible combativeness.

In a possible resumption of the class struggle, what plays in favour of the European proletariat is its concentration, its proximity that could turn, as in other periods, into a factor of rapid propagation of struggles and organisation. And what also matters for the proletarians of the neighbouring continents is that large numbers of immigrants from the Near East, the Indian sub-continent, Africa and the more disaffected areas of the East could learn valuable lessons from contact with such eventual experiences. And bring them back home.

So, onward central bank governors, onward technocrats, onward unifiers of Europe, by treaty or by cannon, it makes no difference! Do your duty: cut, slash, regroup and concentrate!

Reappropriate even the plate of lentils with which you have bought social peace for decades! Help abolish the remnants of obsolete classes that for

³⁸ WH Gass, *In the Heart of the Heart of the Country*, Einaudi 1980

decades have strenuously defended their existence through the preservation of your governments!

Do your duty: unify the world working class and help prepare the conditions for the ultimate demise of capitalism and wage slavery.

“The End of Work”

From the point of view of the economic maturity of society in view of its transition to a later socialist or communist form, it can be said that this maturity has long since been reached: by 1847, at the time of the Communist Party Manifesto, it was already historically given, as well as consciously ascertained by communists.

And it has never been a revolutionary Marxist position to see the need for further growth, for a broader development of the productive forces in the developed capitalist social sphere, before the forces of revolution could and should politically overthrow capitalism. It is no coincidence that in several Left texts it is said, with a formidable linguistic twist, that the capitalist form is already dead, no longer exists. Yet, after a century and a half, the capitalist form has not yet been overwhelmed, while the productive forces have not ceased to increase, to grow: the corpse still walks.

We believe it is important to try to explain why the corpse still walks despite the fact that historically the occasion for its final burial has long since been determined.

As a premise, let us do some gymnastics around some Marxian categories related to productivity.

Let us start with the law of the tendential fall in the average profit rate:

$$s = \frac{p}{c+v} = \frac{p/v}{c/v + 1}$$

It relates, in the profit essay formula, the trend in the numerator of surplus value to the trend in the denominator of total capital invested or, in an easier to understand form, the trend in the numerator of the exploitation essay (p/v), to that of the denominator elements of the same algebraic formula, which can be traced to the organic composition of capital (c/v).

Historically, necessarily and naturally, capitalism seeks better profit performance mainly through the introduction of new technology, new machinery and new organization that allow a higher exploitation of labor power (thus, a rise

in the exploitation essay), i.e., allow for the application of labor power in ever-increasing shares for capital, for the share of surplus value in the final product as a whole; in other words, every technological innovation in production tends to raise the share of surplus labor relative to the share of labor needed.

But the same process of technological innovation that raises the rate of exploitation, so beneficial to the trend of profit, by introducing more capital investment in machinery and thus increasing the share of constant capital in total capital invested, simultaneously pushes up the organic composition of capital. It is precisely this kind of dynamic that entails in itself the tendency for the average profit rate to fall: in order to obtain increasing masses of p , of profit, it is necessary to mobilize more than proportionately increasing masses of capital, of investment.

Of course this process, necessary in that it is not a matter of choice from which the individual capitalist or the system as a whole can escape by subjective will, involves (if we see it over a medium to long period) an uninterrupted growth of the social productive force. The individual capitalist's pursuit of a better return, of a greater profit, entails a greater investment in restructuring, in machinery, in technology, etc., and this entails, at the level of the system as a whole, a continuous raising of the productive forces present in society.

This continued process entails a difficulty, the downward trend in the average profit essay, because it normally causes a rise in the organic composition, as mentioned above.

However, the rise in productivity is not in direct correlation with organic composition, it is not directly a function of it: organic composition is a ratio of value between the two constituent elements of invested capital, namely constant capital and variable capital. What, on the other hand, measures social productive force is not a ratio of value but is a physical ratio: it is the technical composition of capital, that is, the physical ratio there is between the actual production workers, the laborers, the quantity of machines they are able to operate, the quantity of commodities, products, use-values they are able to produce, to realize.

This last physical ratio is the true indicator of productive force, which certainly has grown continuously throughout the evolutionary arc of human society, and has grown even extraordinarily in the recent arc of full capitalism, that is, from machinism onward.

Not as rapidly, not in a directly proportional way does the organic composition grow. Why? Because the same processes that lead to the increase in productive force (and thus to the devaluation of the individual products that are produced in the capitalist system), also lead to the devaluation of the means of

production themselves, of Marx's Section I goods, those that go on to constitute the constant capital in subsequent cycles of production. In short, that same increased productive force which, applied in the spheres of production of mass consumption goods, of so-called wage-goods, devalorizes them by contributing to raising at one and the same time the rate of exploitation and the organic composition, and, applied in the spheres of production of the means of production, causes their devaluation by tending to contain the growth of the organic composition or even to cause it to decrease.

This is a complex and contradictory phenomenon that Marx was well aware of: one of the causes antagonistic to the fall in the profit rate that Marx illustrates and discusses in the third book of *Capital*. In certain periods, the devaluation of the constant element of invested capital is so strong that it can cause the organic composition to fall, while continuing the technical composition of capital to grow forcibly, in the forced race for greater labor productivity.

This is what seems to have happened over the past two decades in the capitalism of the Western metropolises: after the steam engine revolution in the late 1700s and the electrical revolution in the late 1800s, the so-called third technological revolution of capitalism, the one related to information technology and telecommunications, seems to have had such a significant, continuous and extensive impact on the average spheres of the means of production of world capitalism that it has temporarily lifted the fortunes of the average profit essay.

At a meeting of ours almost 15 years ago, in November 1983, the focus was placed, starting from the aggregate data that current statistics made available to us, on the trend not of the profit essay, which is not easy to measure directly, but of the accumulation essay, which is more directly inferable from the data of the increases in industrial production of the different countries (six were examined, the main ones: U.S., Japan, Germany, France, England and Italy): out came a beautiful table that, following the movement of this essay inferred from the statistical data available since the beginning of the 1900s, showed how the oscillating curves of individual countries had radically contrasting trends up to the whole of the 1960s (partly because of their different roles and successes in the world wars), while equally clearly showing how they had, with the beginning of the 1970s, come into synchrony. All that swinging, quite hysterical, of curves had converged into a uniform trend in which the single curve diverged from the others by very few percentage points (or even tenths of a point).

This was the first phenomenon we pointed out: the synchronization of accumulation cycles at the world level, at least among the major countries. As a second relevant phenomenon we observed that this synchronization had manifested itself at values close to zero, that is, the accumulation rates of the major countries had become uniform in a range of about -4% to +4% annually.

This had been the case since the early 1970s, but with an impressive bottleneck in '75: all the curves in correspondence with that year pass almost at the same point; which gives us an opportunity for a brief parenthesis concerning the all too often cited "erroneous" prediction of the Left, which had set around 1975 a turning point in the capitalist system, whereby a revolutionary crisis could be expected precisely on the basis of material causes, i.e., the uniform maturing of the accumulation contradictions of the world capitalist system. Well, while this prediction evidently did not find confirmation from the point of view of revolutionary success, which there was not, it did, however, demonstrate the formidable ability to ante-sight into the economic structure of the capitalist form: capitalism would reach a point of malfunction, of overall jamming of the mechanisms of accumulation. And this overall jamming, no longer differentiated in time and space, at least in major areas, seemed evident to us to the extent that in one of our papers on these issues we spoke, perhaps exaggerating a bit, of a flat cardiogram of capitalism.

Twenty years after the "fateful" 1975, one cannot help but see that the corpse still walks: the cardiogram was almost flat because in reality there has been a material redetermination of profit possibilities, of the ability to resume making profitable investments for capital. The explanation in its general terms has been known to us all along: there is no possibility of a transformation in continuity, of an evolutionary kind, from one social form such as capitalism to the next, just because all the material pre-conditions are ripe and overripe; without a powerful political and social rupture the transition to a new economic form does not take place, and all the contradictions that we are highlighting here in the functioning of capitalism, have in nuce always been there, are not new: in a sense it can be said that Marxists know them by heart and only strive to find them over time.

The "trivial" fact that there was no revolutionary social rupture meant that necessarily capitalism could and should have gone on.

This is in general terms. But what were the specific ways in which capitalism was able to move forward and relatively overcome that form of flattening of its accumulation capacity? We believe that it was precisely that element mentioned earlier, that is, this new technological revolution constituted a rejuvenating cure for capital, for its conditions of profitability, insofar as it devalued in a massive and rather generalized way constant capital in the main productive sectors. We shall see below some concrete examples in this regard.

Let us now examine an example, with arbitrary data, to help us develop the thread of our considerations: suppose an initial situation (row 1 of the table) in a certain sphere of production, say that of automobile production: the situation of the value elements, constant capital, variable capital, surplus-value, and their ratios (profit essay, exploitation essay, and organic composition), and

the situation of the physical-technical elements, such as the number of employees and the number of cars produced, and their ratio (productivity measured in cars per employee), and finally a unit value of the car.

Let us now hypothesize a series of variations to examine what happens.

A typical case is the introduction of new technologies into the sphere itself, that is, new machines, new production apparatus that would lead to a massive increase in productivity in the sector; for fun concrete examples: let's remove the FIAT Mirafiori plant and replace it with the Melfi plant. But we, in row 2 of the table, made a more arbitrary assumption: a doubling of internal productivity in the sector, because, for example, robots are introduced in certain places, etc. The effect of this kind of occurrence in the sphere is fully in tune with the law of the tendential fall in the profit essay: there is an increase in constant capital investment, there is a decrease in the unit value of the good in question (the car), there is an increase in surplus value, but there is a decrease in the profit essay. Everything squares with our expectations in this kind of scenario.

	c	v	p	s (%)	p/v (%)	c/v (%)	No. of employees	Car no	No. of cars per employee	Productivity variation (%)	Value 1
1	4.000	1.000	2.000	40	200	400	100	350	3,5	=	20
2	7.000	900	2.100	@ 26,6	@ 233,3	@ 777,8	100	700	7	100	@ 14,9
3	3.500	950	2.050	@ 46,1	@ 215,8	@ 368,4	100	350	3,5	=	@ 18,6
4	3.400	620	1.480	@ 36,8	220	480	70	350	5	@ 42,9	@ 15,7
5	3.000	950	2.050	@ 51,9	@ 215,8	@ 315,8	100	350	3,5	=	@ 17,1

Notes for reading the table:

1. Data are completely arbitrary, with no claim to verisimilitude.
2. The rows do not represent situations in logical-chronological relation, but:
 - . the first one represents a hypothetical starting situation;
 - . the others are all to be compared with the first, representing situations varied from that one.
3. The decrease in the value v of the labor force is explained by the decrease in the value of the car, which is also considered a wage good.
4. In order to understand the changes in the C-value of constant capital, it is necessary to keep in mind that in the starting situation we assumed a situation of equal weight between fixed capital (plant depreciation) and working capital (raw materials).

Let us now assume, referring to row 3 of the table, that productivity increases in an upstream sphere, in the sphere, for example, of sheet metal production, considering it, again arbitrarily, to be the main raw material in car production. Lo and behold, if there is a massive increase in productivity, and hence a strong devaluation of sheet metal, under the same production conditions in the sphere of car production, the third cause antagonistic to the fall in the

profit rate identified by Marx emerges overbearingly: "falling price of the elements of constant capital"; this entails a benefit from the capitalist point of view within the sphere of production, i.e., a rise in the profit rate, precisely because, since the other production conditions have not changed, it entails a reduction in the organic composition. In the branches of equipment production this entails a further reduction in the value of that particular type of commodity and thus a generalized decrease in the organic composition of capital.

Referring to row 4 of the table, let us examine another scenario related to the introduction of production innovations not related to new machines, but to new production methods. In recent years we have had our ears (and more) rattled by talk of "quality systems," Japanese-style systems, "re-engineering," "total quality": there is no doubt that the Toyota model (if you want to call it that in the auto industry), more or less emphasized, mythologized, represents the effort that capitalism has made to reorganize production in a more efficient and productive way even in the sectors of heavy mechanics, metalworking, etc. In Turin for years there have been the Japanese as consultants to FIAT, in America the big manufacturers have fully espoused this model: in short it is disrupting and changing the old (so-called scientific) organization of work, the Fordist-Taylorist one³⁹.

Although in practice the introduction of new methods should never be separated from the introduction of new technological apparatus, one would theoretically be able to produce more machines even with the same technical-productive apparatus combined with new labor methods, one could have productivity improvements; and this without necessarily growing in its own form constant capital.

Finally, following row 5 of the table, we see what changes can occur in the productive sphere under consideration in the face of real technical innovations, inventions. The concept of the automobile is clear to everyone: that thing mounted on wheels which is capable of taking us for a ride; however, in measuring productivity in that particular branch of production on the basis of the number of "automobiles per employee," an important consideration must be taken into account: comparing an automobile of thirty years ago with one of the present day, we see that it in itself performs the same useful function, is comparable as its use value; but its internal technical structure has varied quite significantly. If we actually consider a midsize car of thirty years ago and one of today, of equal "range" of utility (number of seats, luggage compartment

³⁹ The term "Taylorism" is now in common usage used as the equivalent of "Fordism", i.e. production according to rigid sequential schemes and parceled operations. Nothing is anymore distant from Taylor's dynamic conceptions that he simply meant introduce rational elements to replace the empirical ones. The methods today, in fact, are nothing more than a coherent application of the concepts Taylorists, that is, the exasperation of that "integrated system of functions" introduced by Taylor and which Lenin also considered positive for the foundations of the future society.

capacity, etc.), we can see that the car's internal technical structure has changed quite significantly, although in today's one there are many more accessory features to justify maintaining high prices: the heated rear window, reclining seats, electric windows...), it is certain that we measure a very different weight in kilos or quintals of the two cars: the old car was based on chassis and sheet metal, the new one is based on a thin sheet metal monocoque, with extensive use of plastic.

To take a more obvious example, again relating to the latter scenario: the chairs we sit on during meetings. Let's go into that sphere of production, compare a current molded plastic chair with one from fifty years ago, and measure productivity in terms of chairs per employee in any given "chair shop": we probably find exceptional productivity uplift indices: even a thousand times higher. However, it is clear that it is completely different from the point of view of value, of human labor time contained, of value transferred, of the overall capital represented in a chair. If it is made of wood, it has a frame, it has its own saddlery, it has padding, it has nails hammered into it, it is a rather complex object; if, on the other hand, the chair is made of plastic with a nice little mold, like the ones we have before our eyes, it is something else. It is certain that the worker in a modern "chair-maker's shop" will be able to produce as many as 1,000 chairs a day with proper machinery; but it is equally certain that the value of the circulating capital, that is, the raw material, which he transfers into the product over and above the working time, is enormously less than that transferred by the traditional "chair-maker."

If, for example, at one time half a man's day was crystallized in a chair, because a worker could make two a day, and there was thus a considerable amount of valorization, it will have been true that in the chair value (wood, nails, cloth, upholstery) of a certain magnitude was also crystallized at the same time. Now, in the assumption of plastic chairs, a worker will make as many as a thousand a day, and therefore very little is crystallized in each chair in terms of value added, a thousandth of a man-day. But also in terms of constant capital, of raw material, very little is transferred into a chair (in plastic it will be less than 1,000 liras).

The above is by way of illustration, it is just to give a sense of the kind of investigation that has been done.

After these examples let us pick up the thread of the discourse begun: it is true that the formidable growth of productive forces in the capitalist epoch has put the system under the sword of Damocles of the tendential fall in the profit rate. It is also true that historically in some phases, and in this phase particularly, capital has been able to fight back by devaluing the constant share of capital across the board as well.

Mention was made at the outset of the all too frequently mentioned ongoing technological revolution, mainly related to information technology and telecommunications. There are indeed remarkable effects, in the sphere of the means of production, and a thousand examples could be given; let us look at one at random.

In all industrial sectors, until not too many years ago, an important production department was that of draughtsmen, either for the design part of products or for documentation; the investment per employee on draughtsmen, even if only in terms of a drafting machine, wooden cabinet with ink pens, graph paper, etc., was relatively considerable (to give a dimensional idea let us recall that in the 1970s at FIAT the draughtsmen's department still consisted of several hundred people working by hand on drafting machines). At a certain point, in the 1980s, there was a huge increase in productivity in this specific sector related to the introduction of electronic drawing systems (CAD, CAM, etc.) on the first "graphic workstations," resulting in the expulsion of almost all draftsmen. These were machines that entailed a considerably higher investment per employee than in the days of the drafting machine, on the order of 100 million/man; in other words, in full accord with the law of the tendential fall in the profit rate, there was a definite raising of the organic composition to increase productivity. Today, the same automatic design functions with that same productivity, or perhaps even greatly increased, are achieved with an investment per employee of 4, 6, 10 million at most, while drastically reducing the organic composition.

Generalizing, it can be said that the actual dematerialization of entire production processes, even in cases where the product-goods retains its physical consistency, but especially in cases where the final commodity product is embodied in a huge number of bits without any tangible physicality, as in the areas of information, documentation, drawing, design, advertising, etc., has actually led to a lightening of the c-component of capital, and this has allowed for the resumption of profit.

At the expense of what? We mean: it is certain that with this the capitalist system has not found the formula of eternal youth, indeed these phases of generalized technological innovation, of technological revolution come at the expense of something, in the historical course of capitalism. Of what? First of all, they come at the expense of the ability that overall social capital has to employ labor power; a problem that, by hook or by crook, is the focus of attention of trade unions, political movements, political scientists, philosophers, consultants, of the much-quoted enlightened bourgeoisie, because by now, like a specter, it agitates the dreams of a little of everyone. This enormous technological reconversion of the productive apparatus of developed countries has given birth to a baby of difficult social management: the expulsion from the world of work, not temporary, not toward parking in the reserve industrial army, but permanent, structural, of tens of millions of wage earners. In OECD countries,

official statistics speak of 35-40 million unemployed. No one, not even among bourgeois analysts, expects a structural, systematic, continuous return from these numbers; on the contrary, there is increasing talk of a trend toward their further growth.

Without arriving at any definitive theoretical conclusions, we have done since 1983, with our first notebook, some work that has raised no small amount of perplexity and has presented ourselves with not inconsiderable difficulties: we refer to the mathematical formalization work that hinged on the parabola (in the mathematical sense) of surplus value. It is boring work just enough for most of the fellows and we certainly do not want to resume it here. But one element came out clearly: for Marxism number of workers in capital valorization and mass of surplus-value are not disjointed and disjointed entities; the ability that capitalism has to make relative exploitation of labor rise, increase relative surplus-value, make the surplus day grow in relation to the necessary day, can historically compensate, within certain limits, for any absolute decline in the number of workers, of proletarians incorporated in the process of capital valorization. But only within certain limits, and this Marx was well aware of. Of course today we are not yet at the point where "you cannot extract as much surplus value from one worker as you used to extract from a hundred," but we are talking about 35, 40 million proletarians from whom the capitalist machine of the most developed countries no longer extracts surplus value. Of course there is to be taken into account that with the enormous growth in productivity, surely there is an enormous growth in the relative surplus value that can be extracted from each individual worker.

From this relation between the number of workers engaged in the valorization of capital for capital, thus in the production of surplus value, and the mass of surplus value produced, we arrived in the form of theoretical-mathematical induction at the conclusion that there is a point beyond which there could also be a reduction in the mass of surplus value, not only in the rate of accumulation, but in the absolute mass of surplus value⁴⁰. Has such a point already been reached? Is it getting there? Are we getting there? Is such a thing compatible with the very survival of the capitalist system? These are heavy and open questions. We at the time said yes, that such a fact is theoretically conceivable: certainly it would not be normal, best-functioning conditions for capitalism, those in which the total mass of surplus-value produced in each cycle

⁴⁰ In the *aforementioned Notebook* we came to the conclusion that 1) the curve of accumulation, i.e. the curve that expresses the general dynamics of the value of total commodity capital produced annually, must historically reach an inflection; 2) there is therefore a historical maximum in the mass of surplus value produced in each year of reproduction; 3) there is an all-time high for the total number of proletarians who can still sell their labor power on the capitalist market. The data available even then demonstrated that the point inversely, at least in more developed countries such as the United States, it had been reached up. This is consistent with much of the Left's previous research on decreasing rates of accumulation in the course of capitalism world".

did not grow or even decreased. However, for capitalism to function, for capital investment to take place, the essential thing is that the individual capital invested should measure an increase in surplus value; and this even in the presence, possibly, of an overall decrease in the mass of social surplus value, that is, with the parallel expulsion from the accumulation cycle of other capital that can no longer invest itself.

Let us observe in passing: from these problems comes another one, which we will have to deal with and which has often been posed to us from the outside as well: that when we talk about these figures (employment, investment, GDP) we are always talking about the most developed part of the world, but there are many other areas which, although at a lower level of capitalist development, are nevertheless already abundantly developed from the capitalist point of view and churning out surplus value at full speed: it is certain that in Korea, in Formosa, in immense China itself, the accumulation curve will be much brighter today than in the old-developed world, the mass of surplus value will be continuously growing, given the youth of those capitalist systems. For large numbers, however, it seems that the number of new employees, in those emerging countries, does not compensate for the loss of jobs in the more developed countries.

It should be noted, however, that capitalism develops in national spheres, and in some of these spheres, the older and more developed ones, the accumulation difficulties we are dealing with have already partly manifested themselves and are to be explained.

The first cost of this greening of the conditions of profitability for capitalist investment, we have already pointed out: capitalism can no longer occupy, and thus exploit, the same amount of men, of proletarians, that it was able to exploit in its previous history. In capitalism there has always existed a tendency for the productive force to grow, and this has entailed the conquest of new spaces for profit; consequently there has always been a tendency toward an increase in the organic composition; but this tendency has hitherto been more than compensated for by the enlargement of the productive base, and the correlated enlargement of the industrial proletariat, or at any rate of the proletariat in the overall sense, so that the mass of surplus-value produced has not ceased to increase on average. We now seem to be moving to a stabilized tendency toward a decrease in the number of those employed in the valorization of capital: this is an absolute novelty, observable for some years in developed countries.

From the point of view of the individual capitalist it can only make one rub his or her hands together that he or she has a very high productive output with very little labor employed, a very high rate of exploitation, especially if the average conditions of production in the industry are less developed and allow the acquisition of profits and surpluses in a manner tangibly satisfactory to the

capitalist. But those conditions of competitive advantage cannot be final in any sector, not even for a Luciano Benetton: sooner or later the whole garment sector will adopt those same techniques and this will simply be reflected in a generalized lowering of the value of those commodities and thus will tend to crush the rate of return on capital (profit essay) throughout the sector.

The problem of the ability of the system as a whole to "provide work" is already a fairly dramatic social problem today: the whole host of bourgeois politicians, all the enlightened scientists advising them, harp laboriously on the problem of a future described in gloomy terms unless "political" solutions to the progressive expulsion of labor power are found. Of these gloomy predictions many could be cited: those of Ruffolo and Gallino in Italy, those of Rifkin and Alain Minc abroad; we quote one that is quite symptomatic of the attitude of these gentlemen: it is taken from the work of an American, stuffed with a thousand fascinating and sometimes misleading examples. In it, not only is the reabsorption in the near future of this expelled labor force not expected, but a radical worsening is predicted to the extent that the phenomena of rationalization, let us call it productive efficiency, will penetrate even the sectors that in the past guaranteed its partial reabsorption: the sectors of the famous "advanced tertiary sector" (services, public administration, etc...).

*"...Although still in its infancy, the third industrial revolution has already led to the marginalization of tens of millions of workers in agriculture, industry and the service sector. New technologies have paved the way for a revitalization of the global economic system along high-tech lines, with a concomitant reduction in the labor force globally needed to produce goods and services. Yet the current wave of automation and re-engineering represents only the pale simulacrum of a technological transformation that is set to increase productivity enormously in the years ahead by making an ever-increasing number of workers redundant and irrelevant in the economy." (J.Rifkin, *The End of Work*, 1995 p. 266).*

Never mind certain phantasmagorical projections reported in these works (an assumed 70 percent of the unemployed among working-age adults!); we are interested here in the signal of how the problem of rising unemployment is experienced by the bourgeoisie. It is dramatic precisely from the point of view of capitalist administrations, because it actually puts out of action the whole mechanism by which the bourgeoisie had managed to contain the great revolutionary crisis at the beginning of the century: the fine-tuning of fascist (or Keynesian whatever) policies aimed at ensuring both social control and the stabilization of the economic operation of the capitalist machine was based on the fact that, through public activities of deficit spending, the direct assumption by the state of services that had previously been the prerogative of mutual assistance associations, the construction of the state pension, health, and school systems, all of this had also ensured a flywheel of uniformity and continuity in the production of income and thus in the domestic consumption capacity of individual countries. Keynes' "rule" is well known (never mind how theoretically

well-founded it is): demand must be created to get the capitalist economy, grappling with the long depression of the '29-'35s, back on track; well, today this rule is difficult or impossible to apply, given the speed with which the economy "economizes" on labor in all sectors, productive and unproductive.

We mentioned earlier the dematerialization of production, achieved thanks to the continuous inventions and technological innovations that science, now completely reduced to a productive force for capital, has continued to churn out in a continuous stream; the concrete result of this generalized phenomenon makes it difficult to compare use values even a few decades apart: we mentioned above some notable changes found in "durable" goods such as automobiles. But much more conspicuous are the distances between woolen garments of a few years ago and today's garments made of synthetic fibers such as fleece; or between a 33 rpm vinyl record of a decade ago and a present-day CD; and even striking is the comparison between a 1950s calculator, occupying rooms for hundreds of square meters, with dozens of linear meters of metal furniture containing panels full of components (just think of the memories in use until the early 1970s, a ferrite core for every bit!), magnetic tapes or low-capacity hard disks, etc., with a present-day server, suitable for holding processing for dozens or hundreds of jobs, with hundreds of Mbytes of central memory and dozens of Gbytes of disk, and confusable dimensionally with any personal computer.

If it is so difficult to compare corresponding usage values, it is equally difficult to compare real productivity over time: the number of computers (of a given power output) produced per employee has grown, in the age of microprocessors and integrated circuits, by several thousand times, while the unit material content of the same computers has certainly dropped by a few hundred times. And qualitatively similar considerations could be made about the spheres of production in which plastic has taken the place of wood, fleece the place of wool, etc., etc.

In short, the increased social force of production, which can be measured in the geometric growth of the use values produced, has not led to a proportionate growth in the value of constant capital either in its fixed capital component (plant and machinery) or in its working capital component (raw materials, energy, depreciation).

In practice: the very lightening in terms of the weight of commodities, on the one hand, and on the other, the replacement or upgrading of much of the plant apparatus with a low-cost commodity such as information technology is today, have functioned as a "rejuvenation cure" for capitalism: a significant part of constant capital c is devalued, millions of workers are expelled, and variable capital v is lowered as a result. But in the end, the cost of this newfound "vibrancy" of the capitalist system would seem clear: if both c and v fall, so does

the capital that is able to invest itself, and this is a specific contradiction in which capital struggles at this stage.

On the other hand, for the purposes of the "good yield" of surplus-value production, the rise in productivity nevertheless has a characteristic and limitation that Marx had already noted: it always brings about a simultaneous increase in surplus-value, but not in a proportional way; indeed, in a way that is all the less than proportional the more mature, developed, the average previous productivity of society is already. We quote from the Grundrisse (Einaudi, Nue, vol. I p. 294) only the passage in which Marx gives the most striking example of his reasoning, assuming a situation of already highly developed productive force, in which the necessary labor was already reduced to one in a thousand (this is probably not the present case, but certainly in certain sectors we are already at 700-800% exploitation rate); note that here Marx speaking of "productive force" refers exclusively to that of the spheres of production of consumer goods:

"If the necessary labor were already reduced to 1/1,000, the total surplus value would = 999/1,000. If at this point the productive force increased a thousandfold, the necessary labor would be reduced to 1/1,000,000 of a working day, and the total surplus value would amount to 999,999/1,000,000 of a working day; whereas before this increase in the productive force it amounted only to 999/1,000 or 999,000/1,000,000; it would thus have increased by 999/1,000,000..."

That is, it would have increased by less than one thousandth. In the following quoted passage Marx gets the calculations wrong, but it remains demonstrated that under those already highly evolved conditions, a thousandfold increase in productivity would result in an improvement for capital, in the extraction of relative surplus value, of scarce one thousandth. The "mountain-top" of one-thousand-fold growth in productivity would give birth to the "mouse" of one-thousandth increase in surplus value produced!

The argument is led to paradox, but it is very useful in understanding the point Marx wants to make here: the growth of productive forces, which even capital cannot help but cause, has diminishing "beneficial" effects as the average conditions of capital production mature. Marx summarizes it this way (ibid p. 295):

"The surplus-value of capital does not increase by reason of the multiplier of productive force, that is, by reason of the number of times productive force (posed as a unit, as a multiplicand) increases; it increases instead by reason of the surplus of the fraction of the day's living labor, which originally represents the necessary labor, over this same fraction, divided by the multiplier of productive force...."

And again (ibid. p. 296):

"...The greater the surplus value of capital before the increase in productive force, that is, the greater the amount of surplus labor or surplus value of capital presupposed, or, in other words, the smaller the fraction of the working day that constitutes the worker's equivalent, which expresses the necessary labor, is already, the less increase in surplus value capital obtains from the increase in productive force. Its surplus value increases, but in a diminishing ratio to the development of productive force. The more capital is thus already developed, the more surplus labor it has created, the more formidably it must increase its productive force in order to valorize itself, that is, to add surplus value, only to a modest extent - since its limit always remains the ratio of the fraction of the day expressing the necessary labor to the whole day's labor. It can only move within these limits. The more the fraction concerning necessary labor is already reduced, the greater the surplus labor, the less any increase in the productive force can appreciably diminish necessary labor; since the denominator is enormously increased. self-valorization of capital becomes more difficult to the extent that it is already valorized. The increase in productive forces would become indifferent to capital; and so would valorization itself, since its proportions have been reduced to a minimum; and it would have ceased to be capital."

In other words, it is a matter of what we were saying earlier: the benefit to capital, in terms of an increase in surplus value, does not occur by direct reason of the grafting of new productive force, but by reason of the extent to which such grafting "improves" the previous situation of the division of the workday between necessary labor and surplus labor.

We believe it can be taken for granted that the average of this ratio in developed countries is considerably lower than a century and a half later, when Marx was writing (note: lower because we are talking about the ratio between the parts of the workday, between necessary labor in the numerator and surplus labor in the denominator; thus higher in terms of the exploitation essay). Marx never gave numerical examples at random: if in his abstract examples he normally took 100 percent as the value of the exploitation essay, it was because he estimated that about such were the conditions achieved in England in his time. Referring to the 1950s, in the Dialogues Amadeo estimated in turn that by then the labor required on the total day at Mirafiori was under two hours a day. Today it will certainly still be diminished: we are not at the 1/1,000 of Marx's paradox, but we are certainly already in a starting situation in which new grafts of productive force give relatively mild direct results of valorization for capital.

On the other hand, they have very conspicuous social results, i.e., the continuous expulsion of millions of workers from the cycle of valorization of and for capital, with the consequent difficulties from the point of view of the circulation of goods and the realization of value.

We derive from here a marginal observation: in the last century of capital's life there has already been more than once a massive transfer of the employability of human labor power. First of all from the old primary sector, from agriculture, which still at the beginning of this century, in all Western countries, employed the majority of the working population: today in all these countries the labor force is now reduced to 2-3% of the total. For long decades, however, this expulsion has been offset by an absorption of peasants into factories with an increase in "blue collar," industrial workers. Even that cycle of absolute expansion in the number of workers in the industrial or secondary sector ended as early as the 1950s-60s. Since then there has been a gradual decline, and lately a precipitous decline in the capacity to employ labor in all industries.

For years bourgeois economists lulled and blissed themselves into short-term statistics that provided the comfortable illusion that this trend was again offset by the development of another sector, the tertiary sector, that is, the production of services of all kinds, then by the development of the advanced tertiary sector. Commercial services, financial services, and insurance have in fact been growing in activity and employment at a whirlwind pace for years, enough to offset overall the fall in employment in the first two sectors and overall ensure a tenuous but continuous growth in the overall number of employees, at least proportional to the population. By now, even the expansion of the service sector is a memory, and with the introduction mainly of information technology and telecommunications, we are witnessing (and more will witness in the coming years) a drastic employment contraction throughout the sector.

And finally, past history has assigned a major role for employment stability to the bulge of the state apparatus and generally the (non-productive) public administration: one knows all the clichés about this great absorptive capacity. Now we see that the state and the entire public sector are also in the "crosshairs" as far as productivity growth is concerned: whether it is the new conditions of global competition related to the competition of the Asian model or whether it is any other variously theorized cause, it is a fact that all countries are setting themselves the problem of reforming the welfare state and rationalizing the state machine to make it more efficient; that is, they have begun to break, even legally, the taboo of the non-redundancy of public employees.

Of course, the phenomenon is not uniform: in the United States it happened in one way, in Italy in another, in France in yet another.. But everywhere the introduction of new technologies and new management methods in public administration, when not a given, have become a generalized project, a constant part of the program for any political force: to improve the quality and lower the costs of public services.

It is obvious what can happen, what is happening, what will happen with the introduction of some computerization: the possibility of efficiency growth in terms of "certificate per employee" is staggering, and from many quarters one finds descriptions of truly apocalyptic scenarios for the coming decades, in relation to the resilience of employment in public administration; and the predictions are that not only will this trend not be reversed, but that there will be an acceleration.

We are certain of one fact: we are not describing a new form of capitalism, we are not in the presence of a "phase" involving theoretical innovations. Simply, certain contradictions in the capitalist system are gaining prominence among others: there is tremendous growth in the technical composition while containing and often downsizing the organic composition; this makes it possible for individual capital to measure an acceptable and sometimes satisfactory maintenance of the profit essay; but at the same time this very fact may result in a relative and absolute reduction of wage earners and, continuing over time, may thus result in ever less growth or even a reduction in the mass of surplus value produced in each cycle. While the system remains efficient for individual capital, it becomes inefficient for the capital complex: an increasing proportion of capital can no longer invest itself in the form of real capital.

What this set of phenomena will entail is another open question. Certainly it has entailed and is entailing an export in financial form of capital to new areas: China, India, Southeast Asia. Can such a movement compensate for this growing surplus, this mass of capital that is no longer able to exploit itself in its own form in the traditional areas of capitalism? Can it find profitable employment, in the desired quantities in the new areas?

When we made an examination, albeit not a thorough one, of the problem, our answer was no: the mass of capital being reasoned about is too large and the spread of productivity conditions in the "globalization" of markets is too rapid. To explain further: it is not that in those areas capital finds "virgin" conditions in which it can invest itself with high labor density and low capital density: if one can use tools unchanged since the Neolithic period to harvest rubber, its processing is automatic; if one invests, even in areas that are not very developed today, in a very short time one will reach the same maturity of production conditions that exist in imperialist countries. It is not as if we can think of going to invest in China to produce there cheaply, for example, typical bamboo stools, probably still manufactured by some skillful "stool maker," who quickly knots bamboo planking or other material, perhaps helping himself with some fairly elementary machine: it is clear that within a very short time (and perhaps they are already doing so) the great mass of Chinese production of stools and chairs will be done with the plastic mold, to meet the "sitting" needs of even a billion or more Chinese.

So far we have tried to point out what are some characteristic connotations of capitalism's accumulation and valorization difficulties today. We have then mentioned what social consequences this causes, namely a massive, constant and permanent expulsion of wage earners from the production cycle. But what appears most important to our eyes is not so much the apocalyptic scenarios spoken of by the bourgeois scholars we referred to earlier (later we will discuss the total divarication between our approach and theirs), but the fact that in these "novelties" is re-manifested, as it was already manifested a century and a half ago, the obvious contrast (actual, not just potential) that now exists between the level reached by the productive forces and the framework of legal, state, production relations that cage them. By now, all the policies we are talking about are blatantly inadequate to control capital and contribute to containing the productive forces, when they do not even contribute to restraining them.

There are symptomatic cases of products whose marketability is guaranteed purely and simply by legal convention (and forcing). Consider software products: there is absolutely nothing to justify the current cost of a license for a program except the legal norm that tends to prevent a user from getting hold of such a product free of charge, to have it at the touch of a button on any computer. Via the Internet, then, one could have it available to an unlimited number of users, with the only precondition that each has an available PC. If software manages to be a commodity that yields overprofit, it is only because international conventions and state laws are made that punish those who simply use these products, which materially cost little to produce and even less, indeed nothing, to reproduce. In telephony, equally good examples could be given: the use of telephone-type communication systems is paid for and billed at a price that now has nothing to do with actual costs (so much so that while the city time rate increases here, in the U.S. the city phone call is free): put in the cost of research and satellites, but the most "expensive" part of a phone call is now probably related to the technical-administrative system of counting the clicks!

There are numerous other such product families whose market price is supported by legal forcing: think of music, performances produced in analog or digital form on tape, CD, etc. Anyone could copy a digital format of any kind from the Internet at no material cost to anyone (other than phone shots) and it is laws that prevent this because there is copyright (or there is griffing of the original so that other copies cannot be reproduced from the matrix at near-zero cost).

The contrast of productive forces with the relations of production is also evidenced by another fact: the loss of jobs is producing a union and government policy of "searching for lost time," the creation of jobs, the attempt to return to something that no longer exists. There is now a jarring contrast between an economy that is constantly expelling labor force, even though the productive

force is in many ways restrained, and a social management mechanism that was once based on a stable relationship between employment, guaranteed in part by abundant government orders, and the state, the great regulator of an almost fully employed mass, in such terms that it could lubricate the realization of surplus value through a broad and widespread ability to purchase goods. In this stable relationship was identified the model that we can succinctly call Keynesian-fascist. This model of social management is now no longer possible, grapple all they want: not having alternative ones available, they go climbing on the glass of the creation of useless labor in order to keep up the social convention that in order to get to the benefit of being able to consume the social product, one must have a sticker guaranteeing that one has sweated, that one has worked; in order to keep up, crutching it badly, the value-labor relationship, which is one of the cornerstones of this mode of production, but which is no longer as adequate to make the whole mechanism of social reproduction work as it once did.

And then you see things that are quite grotesque from our point of view: inventing totally useless forms of labor, and calling them socially useful, in order not to have to say that they provide free income, in order to try to contain this material force, this mole that digs in and asserts that production and social reproduction can no longer be based on the intensive application of labor, of the exploitation of human labor in a massified form.

Certainly there are many other explanations of the great increase in nonprofits besides the one above, but it is certain that even those being advanced by the various bourgeois foundations are very partial. As a matter of fact, taking their own figures for good, today 20-30% of the working-age population is enough to reproduce the entire society (in Italy we are very modern: 36%); this, despite the more or less idealistic efforts of the trade unions in the past years, does not become a reduction to 20%-30% of the average working day, but it becomes the super-exploitation of a minority and the marginalization of all the others. How can the contradiction be resolved? By having others do - they say - activities unrelated to capital appreciation, creating and expanding the sphere of "socially useful work."

In one of our letters we quoted one of those bourgeois who feel enlightened, Giorgio Ruffolo, who told the fairy tale of King Dagobert and his happy reign. He said: it will mean that those who will be excluded from productive activities, because they are supernumerary, will devote themselves to exquisitely unproductive activities, the performance of Mozart, the cleaning of historic centers or the opening of museums and libraries, leisure activities, entertainment. And they will be paid for, according to a rational plan, from the income of the productive sectors. But here the kettle falls: why should such activities be carried out without applying the social productive force that society is capable of developing? It is an attempt to put a cage on it that will not stand

the test of things. Let us go back to the example of music: in the production of records, some production companies already make music synthetically, that is, they record good performers separately, sample their sounds by means of computers, do the mixing of voices and instruments, even create voices and instruments, etc. If this is true there where a CD is to be sold on the market, who knows why for the bourgeois conception of leisure time millions of people should be set in motion strumming a bow or sweeping the streets with a sorghum broom. Let them do it for their own enjoyment, not to be entitled to a hard-earned consumer card, as long as they do not accept the social perspective, already grounded in the facts of today, of a society in which the value-labor relationship is no longer the prevailing norm. And our pundits, with the "leftists" in the lead, climb on increasingly smooth glass: if gigantic machines are used to clean and maintain a highway, why should unemployed boy scouts with a bucket and shovel be sent to clean historic centers? If you send them, D'Alema nodded, you get to pretend that there is an employment outlet for a large number of unemployed young people, but from the social point of view this is completely useless.

However you disguise it there is one fact: an enormous liberation of labor time, potentially made available to the human species as a whole, only grows in society, while dialectically manifesting itself to the honor of the capitalist world as an ever-worsening hell of exploitation for a minority of exploited workers in the production cycle and a chronic alienation for a mass of the unreserved, marginalized, more or less permanently excluded from the labor market; this is the form in which this contradiction manifests itself today. But the availability of time is now a historical product from which capitalist society can no longer withdraw on average.

From the Grundrisse (ibid p. 720) we quote again:

"The creation of much available time for society as a whole and for each member of it (i.e., of space for the full development of the productive forces of individuals, and thus also of society) beyond the necessary labor time, this creation of non-labor time presents itself, on the level of capital, as of all those before it, as non-labor time, free time for some."

And this is there for all to see: this available time that is freed up in society is not distributed equally but manifests itself in the dialectically antithetical form of free time for some: in our case, then, free time is often unemployment.

"Capital adds to this the fact that it increases surplus labor time from the mass by recourse to all the means of art and science, because its wealth consists directly in the appropriation of surplus labor time; since its aim is directly value, and not use-value. It is thus, unintentionally, an instrument for the creation of the possibilities of available social time, [an instrument] for the reduction of the

working time of the whole society to a decreasing minimum, so as to make everyone's time free for personal development. But his tendency is always, on the one hand, to create available time and, on the other hand, to convert it into surplus labor. If the first thing succeeds too well for it, [i.e. productivity growth and thus the creation of available time], it suffers from overproduction and then the necessary work is interrupted because capital cannot value any surplus labor. The more this contradiction develops, the clearer it becomes that the growth of the productive forces can no longer be tied to the appropriation of others' surplus labor, but that instead the working mass itself must appropriate its surplus labor."

Here, as in so many other passages, Marx tells us that at some point this contradiction, inherent in the capitalist system, preludes and alludes to the communist transformation of society; it brings back the contradiction between the development of the productive forces and the cage of the relations of production no longer sufficient to contain them.

All this has, evidently and conclusively, superseded any trade union policy based on the old watchword "the workplace is not to be touched." There will be no more backtracking, except partial, momentary, ephemeral: you can have a thousand demonstrations for the hundred thousand jobs, Berlusconi can shoot his baloney about creating a million jobs, but they are clearly either ephemeral or useless jobs.

As we recalled this morning, classist positions are not always combined with self-consciousness, with clear purpose. Luddism, the labor movement that fought against the introduction of machines, was in fact the concrete manifestation of a strong social antagonism with which the working class was beginning to have consciousness. Of course, nowadays, any class movement manifests itself in improper forms per se, destined to remain within the sphere of bourgeois control achieved through official trade unions and their corporate or vague appendages. What chance did the British miners of 1980 or the German miners of 1997 have of keeping open coal mine shafts rendered useless and unproductive? Today, it is less important than before to have steel and therefore coal that is needed for blast furnaces, even taking into account that a lot of coke is produced from oil. Steel production has punctuated the production of everything that is now already dead labor, present on the capitalist earth's crust; the lightening of products requires, in absolute terms, less steel. On the other hand, the introduction of new mining techniques and the exploitation of open-pit quarries in other parts of the world (which, by the way, requires fewer wage earners in the hell of tunnels) had produced the beneficial closure of the most lethal mines for proletarians. The manifestation of this kind of struggle is dead-end; they certainly represent an attempt to preserve something that is there, especially labor, but it has a worse meaning than a struggle against the introduction of robots or computers would have. The class struggle will therefore know its own revival perhaps with partial goals, perhaps wrong from the class point of view, but its importance will be revealed by the extent of the clash and

the overcoming of the present trade union formations and their policies. In this momentum the content, the immediate claim, will also have to be overcome.

To conclude, it is worth pointing out how much distance exists, in addressing the issue of the "end of work," between us and the bourgeois scholars, who also, in increasing numbers emphasize the problem, sponsoring various solutions. We think that there is no mechanism of a natural, evolutionary kind, whereby the accumulation of certain contradictions in the working mechanisms of the capitalist system, by its own internal capacity, can cause a "natural" and smooth transition into other social formation. That is to say: the fact that many bourgeois thinkers and consultants frame some of the obvious contradictions in the functioning of capitalism at this historical stage, does not at all imply that we come to the same conclusions: they mainly think about avoiding the possible (and for them undesirable) social consequences and strive to find miraculous remedies, which would solve these same contradictions, for example, by the extension at will of the third sector, nonprofit or whatever.

We, on the other hand, know two things well: first, that the transition to a new social form occurs historically only when the latent contradictions on the economic level between productive force and legal relations of production, take the unfolded form of a social clash sufficiently radical, extensive and strong to reach, in the presence of the party, a political conclusion.

Second: that in the absence of this there will be no substantive transformation: the most obvious specific contradictions will be resolved into deeper ones; the economic system will overcome its contingent major difficulties, adapting in some way; just as in 1975, at the time of the flat electrocardiogram of capitalist accumulation, there was automatically no social transformation of the mode of production into a higher form.

Marxist science tells us that if the contradictions of the economic structure do not materialize in an unfolded social clash, in manifestations of open class struggle, formation and manifestation of the proletarian party, political revolution, dictatorship of the proletarian class, without all this there can be absolutely no true social "novelty." Marx proudly claimed in this his true originality.