6. A New Historical Subject: The Non-Class of Post-Industrial Proletarians

The crisis of socialism is above all a reflection of the crisis of the proletariat. The disappearance of the polivalent skilled worker — the possible subject of productive labour and hence of a revolutionary transformation of social relations — has also entailed the disappearance of the class able to take charge of the socialist project and translate it into reality. Fundamentally, the degeneration of socialist theory and practice has its origins here.

In Marx 'scientific socialism' rested on a dual foundation. Firstly, it was a project carried by a class of proletarianised social producers that formed a virtual majority of the population. Secondly, this class was defined, in essence, by conscious rejection of its class being. Each proletarian, as a member of the class, was a living contradiction between his or her sovereign productive praxis and the commodity status which capitalist social relations conferred upon it by reducing it to an undifferentiated quantum of exploited labour. The proletariat was the potential subject of socialist revolution because each proletarian experienced a contradiction between sovereignty over her or his work and work relationships, and the negation of this sovereignty by capital. Class unity and class consciousness were based upon the inevitability that each proletarian would, in his or her own activity, encounter the general negation of the sovereignty of all proletarians.

Class being was the intolerable and ubiquitous external limit to the activity of each and every class member. The proletariat was the only class, and the first in history, which had no interest but to cancel its class being by destroying the external constraints by which it had been constituted. For Marx, then, the proletariat was itself the negation of its own being. The task of 'scientific socialism' was merely to demonstrate how this negation could become operationally effective and pass into positivity.

As we have seen, however, the capitalist division of labour has destroyed the dual premise of 'scientific socialism'. In the first place, the worker's labour no longer involves any power. A class whose social activity yields no power does not have the means to take power, nor does it feel called upon to do so. In the second place, work is no longer the worker's own activity. In the immense majority of cases, whether in the factory or the office, work is now a passive, pre-programmed activity which has been totally subordinated to the working of a big machinery, leaving no room for personal initiative. It is no longer possible for workers to identify with 'their' work or 'their' function in the productive process. Everything now appears to take place outside themselves. 'Work' itself has become a quantum of reified activity awaiting and subjugating the 'worker'.

Loss of the ability to identify with one's work is tantamount to the disappearance of any sense of belonging to a class. Just as work remains external to the individual, so too does class being. Just as work has become a nondescript task carried out without any personal involvement, which one may quit for another, equally contingent job, so too has class membership come to be lived as a contingent and meaningless fact.

For workers, it is no longer a question of freeing themselves within work, putting themselves in control of work, or seizing power within the framework of their work. The point now is to free oneself from work by rejecting its nature, content, necessity and modalities. But to reject work is also to reject the traditional strategy and organisational forms of the working-class movement. It is no longer a question of winning power as a worker, but of winning the power no longer to function as a worker. The power at issue is not at all the same as before. The class itself has entered into crisis.

This crisis, however, is much more a crisis of a myth and an ideology than of a really existing working class. For over a century the idea of the proletariat has succeeded in masking its own unreality. This idea is now as obsolete as the proletariat itself, since in place of the productive collective worker of old, a non-class of non-workers is coming into being, prefiguring a non-society within existing society in which classes will be abolished along with work itself and all forms of domination.
In contrast distinction to the working class, this non-class has not been engendered by capitalism and marked with the insignia of capitalist relations of production. It is the result of the crisis of capitalism and the dissolution of the social relations of capitalist production — a process stemming from the growth of new production technology. The negativity which, according to Marx, was to be embodied in the working class has by no means disappeared. It has been displaced and has acquired a more radical form in a new social area. As it has shifted, it has acquired a new form and content which directly negate the ideology, the material base, the social relations and the juridical organisation (or state form) of capitalism. It has the added advantage over Marx's working class of being immediately conscious of itself; its existence is at once indissolubly subjective and objective, collective and individual.

This non-class encompasses all those who have been expelled from production by the abolition of work, or whose capacities are under-employed as a result of the industrialisation (in this case, the automation and computerisation) of intellectual work. It includes all the supernumeraries of present-day social production, who are potentially or actually unemployed, whether permanently or temporarily, partially or completely. It results from the decomposition of the old society based upon the dignity, value, social utility and desirability of work. It stretches into virtually every layer of society, well beyond those 'lumpen' whom the Black Panthers, with remarkable prescience, counterposed in the late 1960s to the class of unionised, stably employed workers, protected by labour legislation and collective agreements.¹

¹ The Black Panthers gave the word 'lumpen' a very much wider meaning than it has in German and in Marx's definition of the 'lumpenproletariat' (literally, proletariat in rags). They defined the traditional, stable, unionised working class, whose position was protected by collective agreements, as a minority of privileged reactionaries, a vestige of the industrial economy.

The notion of a post-industrial economy and proletariat was widely adopted among marxist revolutionaries in North and South America in the late 1960s. One of the most remarkable theorists of that period, Ladislas Dowbor, alias Jamil, one of the founders of the VPR (Vanguardia Popular Revolucionaria) of Brazil states:

The Non-Class of Post-Industrial Proletarians

That traditional working class is now no more than a privileged minority. The majority of the population now belong to the post-industrial neo-proletariat which, with no job security or definitive class identity, fills the area of probationary, contracted, casual, temporary and part-time employment. In the not too distant future, jobs such as these will be largely eliminated by automation. Even now, their specifications are continually changing with the rapid development of technology, and their requirements bear little relation to the knowledge and skills offered by schools and universities. The neo-proletariat is generally over-qualified for the jobs it finds. It is generally condemned

In the modern sector of the Brazilian economy there are factories in which so large an amount of capital has been tied up that it would be counter-productive not to pay the workers a decent wage. But the number of workers needed is shrinking and the share of wages in production costs is declining. So a decent wage is being paid to an ever smaller number of workers.

The growth of the modernised sector generates the crisis of traditional industries... They are obliged either to modernise in their turn, or to disappear. As a result, the working class is progressively expelled from the process of production, swelling the class of marginals and leaving an ever smaller, better paid and relatively satisfied working class which has no inclination at all towards the revolution.

Like the Black Panthers and, subsequently, certain components of the autonomous left in Italy, the VPR believed in the revolutionary inclination of the 'marginal classes', who:

- live in permanently violent conditions as a result of police harassment,
- the usurpation of their land, the loss of their jobs and the condition of illegality in which they are forced to live when they flock to the towns.

This mass of people is extremely responsive to our type of action: armed, violent action. (From an interview given to Sanche Gramont in The New York Times, 15 November 1970.)

In fact, contrary to theories in vogue at the time, armed violent action has never led to a 'people's war' in any country. It has led to counter-guerilla campaigns which have usually been able to liquidate both supporters and sympathisers of armed struggle, together with all forms of political opposition to repression. When the police turn to the same form of clandestine terrorist organisation as their revolutionary counterparts, they have usually been able to annihilate them without much difficulty — once all legal and juridical barriers to police terrorism have been waived. Even in traditionally democratic states like Uruguay, armed action has led to the suppression of a legal system whose existence initially allowed such struggles to develop.
to under-use of its capacities when it is in work, and to unemployment itself in the longer term. Any employment seems to be accidental and provisional, every type of work purely contingent. It cannot feel any involvement with ‘its’ work or identification with ‘its’ job. Work no longer signifies an activity or even a major occupation; it is merely a blank interval on the margins of life, to be endured in order to earn a little money.\(^2\)

In contrast to the proletariat in Marx’s theory,\(^3\) the neo-proletariat does not define itself by reference to ‘its’ work and cannot be defined in terms of its position within the social process of production. The question of who does or does not belong to the class of productive workers — how to categorise a kinesitherapist, a tourist guide, an airline employee, a systems analyst, a technician in a biological laboratory or a telecommunications engineer has no meaning or importance when set against a growing and more or less numerically dominant mass of people moving from one ‘job’ to another. Learning trades they will never regularly practise, following courses without outlets or practical utility, giving them up or failing them because ‘after all, what does it matter’, they go on to work in the post office during the summer, to pick grapes in the autumn, to join a department-store staff for Christmas, and to work as a labourer in the spring...

The only certainty, as far as they are concerned, is that they do not feel they belong to the working class, or to any other class. They do not recognise themselves in the term ‘worker’ or in its symmetrical opposite, ‘unemployed’. Whether they work in a bank, the civil service, a cleaning agency or a factory, neo-proletarians are basically non-workers temporarily doing something that means nothing to them. They do ‘any old thing’ which ‘anyone’ could do, provisionally engaged in temporary and nameless work. For them work is no longer an individual contribution to the total production of society made up of countless individual activities. Social production is now given first, and work is merely the mass of insecure, short-term activities to which it gives rise. Workers no longer ‘produce’ society through the mediation of the relations of production; instead, the machinery of social production as a whole produces ‘work’ and imposes it in a random way upon random, interchangeable individuals. Work, in other words, does not belong to the individuals who perform it, nor can it be termed their own activity. It belongs to the machinery of social production, is allocated and programmed by it, remaining external to the individuals upon whom it is imposed. Instead of being the worker’s mode of insertion into a system of universal cooperation, work is now the mode of subordination to the machinery of universal domination. Instead of generating workers able to transcend their finite particularity and define themselves directly as social producers in general, work has come to be perceived by individuals as the contingent form of social oppression in general. The proletariat which the young Marx saw as a universal force void of any particularised form has become a particularised individuality in revolt against the universal force of the apparatus.\(^4\)

The inversion of the marxist concept of the proletariat is thus total. Not only does the new post-industrial proletariat not find

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2. The practice of ‘job-sharing’, which has become more and more widespread in the United States and the Scandinavian countries, is of some significance in this context.

3. However, Marx was very well aware that the socialisation of production would lead to ‘indifference towards any specific kind of labour’, corresponding to a form of society in which individuals can with ease transfer from one labour to another, and where the specific kind is a matter of chance for them, hence of indifference. Labour... has ceased to be organically linked with particular individuals in any specific form. Grundrisse, Harmondsworth, Penguin 1973, p.104.

4. After describing with remarkable prescience the separation of the laborer from science and technology, as they acquired the refined form of fixed capital in the means of production, Marx went on nevertheless to predict that, thanks to the freeing of time, fully developed individuals would become the subjects and agents of the immediate process of production:

This process is then both discipline, as regards the human being in the process of becoming; and, at the same time, practice (Ausbildung), experimental science, materially creative and objectifying science, as regards the human being who has become, in whose head exist: the accumulated knowledge of society.

(Grundrisse, op. cit. p. 712 (in italics) )

The polytechnic and scientific development of the individual through automation is an illusion shared by Marx and the ‘modernists’ of Eastern Europe in the 1960s.
any source of potential power in socialised labour: all it finds there is the reality of apparatus power and its own impotence. Not only is it no longer the possible subjective agent of socialised productive labour: instead, it defines its own subjectivity through the refusal of socialised labour and the negation of work perceived itself as a negation (or alienation). Nothing indicates that this total alienation of socialised work can be reversed. Technological development does not point towards a possible appropriation of social production by the producers. Instead it indicates further elimination of the social producer, and continuing marginalisation of socially necessary labour as a result of the computer revolution. Whatever the number of jobs remaining in industry and the service sector once automation has been fully achieved, they will be incapable of providing identity, meaning and power for those who fill them. For there is a rapid decline in the amount of labour-time necessary to reproduce not this society and its mechanisms of domination and command, but a viable society endowed with everything useful and necessary to life. The requirement could be a mere two hours a day, or ten hours a week, or fifteen weeks a year, or ten years in a lifetime.

The substantially longer period of social labour maintained in contemporary society has accelerated rather than slowed down the devaluation, in the ethical sense, of all forms of work. The amount of time spent working and the relatively high level of employment have been artificially maintained because of the inextricable confusion which exists between the production of the necessary and the superfluous, the useful and the useless, waste and wealth, pleasures and nuisances, destruction and repair. Whole areas of economic life now have the sole function of ‘providing work’, or of producing for the sake of keeping people working. But when a society produces in order to provide work rather than works in order to produce, then work as a whole has no meaning. Its chief objective is simply ‘to keep people occupied’, and thereby to preserve the relations of subordination, competition and discipline upon which the workings of the dominant system are based. Work in general comes to be tainted with the suspicion that it is but a useless compulsion devised to mask the fact of each individual’s redundancy or, to put it another way, to conceal the possibility of liberation from socialised labour itself and the obsolescence of a system of social relations which makes socialised labour the precondition of both income and the circulation of wealth.

The specificity of the post-industrial proletariat follows from this analysis. In contradistinction to the traditional working class, this non-class is free subjectivity. While the industrial proletariat derived an objective power from the transformation of matter, so that it perceived itself as a material force underpinning the whole course of society, the neo-proletariat can be defined as a non-force, without objective social importance, excluded from society. Since it plays no part in the production of society, it envisages society’s development as something external, akin to a spectacle or a show. It sees no point in taking over the machine-like structure which, as it sees it, defines contemporary society, nor of placing anything whatsoever under its control. What matters instead is to appropriate areas of autonomy outside of, and in opposition to, the logic of society, so as to allow the unobstructed realisation of individual development alongside and over that machine-like structure.

The lack of an overall conception of future society fundamentally distinguishes the new post-industrial proletariat from the class which, according to Marx, was invested with a historical mission. The neo-proletariat has nothing to expect of contemporary society nor of its subsequent evolution. That process — the development of the productive forces — has reached its end by making work virtually superfluous. It can go no further. The logic of capital, which, after two centuries of ‘progress’, has led to this outcome through the accumulation of ever more efficient means of production, can offer no more and no better. More precisely, productivist industrial society can only continue by offering more and worse — more destruction, more waste, more repairs to destruction, more programming of the most intimate facets of individual life. ‘Progress’ has arrived at a threshold beyond which plus turns into minus. The future is heavy with menace and devoid of promise. The forward march of productivism now brings the advance of barbarism and oppression.

There is therefore no point in wondering where we are going
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or in seeking to identify with laws immanent in historical development. We are not going anywhere: History has no meaning. There is nothing to be hoped from history, and no reason to sacrifice anything to that idol. No longer can we give ourselves to a transcendent cause, expecting that it will repay our suffering and reward our sacrifice with interest. We must, however, be clear about what we desire. The logic of capital has brought us to the threshold of liberation. But it can only be crossed at the price of a radical break, in which productivism is replaced by a different rationality. This rupture can only come from individuals themselves. The realm of freedom can never arise out of material processes; it can only be established by a constitutive act which, aware of its free subjectivity, asserts itself as an absolute end in itself within each individual. Only the non-class of non-producers is capable of such an act. For it alone embodies what lies beyond productivism: the rejection of the accumulation ethic and the dissolution of all classes.

7. The Post-Industrial Revolution

Both the strength and the weakness of the post-industrial proletariat lie in the fact that it does not have an overall vision of future society. There are no messianic or comprehensive theories to provide it either with cohesion or with continuity of action. The neo-proletariat is no more than a vague area made up of constantly changing individuals whose main aim is not to seize power in order to build a new world, but to regain power over their own lives by disengaging from the market rationality of productivism.

It cannot be otherwise. Society cannot be reconstructed by decree, and a comprehensive vision has no meaning or purchase unless it is an extension of an already developing process. But the crisis of the industrial system heralds no new world. Nothing in it is indicative of a redeeming transformation. The present does not receive any meaning from the future. The silence of history therefore returns individuals to themselves. Forced back upon their own subjectivity, they have to take the floor on their own behalf. No future society speaks through their mouth, since the society disintegrating before our eyes heralds no new order.

The non-class engendered by the decomposition of present-day society can only conceive of the non-society of which it is the prefiguration. The term ‘non-class’ should not, of course, be taken to imply the absence of social relations and social organisation. It is used to designate the process of subtraction from the social sphere of an area of individual sovereignty beyond economic rationality and external constraint.

The primacy attached to individual sovereignty echoes that revolutionary bourgeois thought which the bourgeoisie itself rejected once it had obtained power. It flies in the face of orthodox socialist thinking, whose implicit premise has always been that individuals should find personal fulfilment in the
appropriation of collective reality and in the common production of the social whole. In Marx there appeared to be some basis for this premise, in that he expected full development of the productive forces to engender fully developed individuals capable of appropriating the productive forces as a whole. It was assumed that there would be a continuum and an absence of conflict between individual activity and social production (and vice versa) The personalisation of social activity and the socialisation of personal activity were taken to be the two sides of communist development.

Marx's postulate has never been practically verified. The productive forces — or, to be more precise, production techniques — did not develop in such a way that socialised production (or socially necessary labour) could become an enriching personal activity, nor, above all, in such a way that the organisation and division of labour at the level of society as a whole could be controlled, reflected upon and experienced by each individual as the universally desired result of voluntary cooperation.

Everything now indicates that it is impossible to create a highly industrialised society (and hence a world order) which presents itself to each individual as the desired outcome of his or her free social cooperation with other individuals. There is a difference in both scale and nature between communal work or life and the social totality. Although it may be possible to build a highly conscious community through total personal involvement in cooperative activity, conflicts and affective relations, so that everyone assures the cohesion of what they feel to be 'their' community, society as a whole will still remain a system of relations embodied in and governed by institutional organisations, infrastructures of communication and production, and a geographical and social division of labour whose inertia is its guarantee of continuity and efficacy. As a structured system, society is necessarily external to its members. It is not the product of free, voluntary cooperation. Individuals do not produce it by starting from themselves: they produce it on the ground of its own inert exigencies, adapting themselves to the jobs, functions, skills, environments and hierarchical relations pre-established by society to assure its cohesive functioning.

This pre-establishment of 'socially necessary' activities is not the work of a subjective agent, a genius leader or Supreme Guide, at least not in market societies. Planning committees, civil service departments, private and public technocracies and governments themselves certainly carry out the work of programming, regulating, forecasting and adjusting. Yet this manifold of collective, anonymous, conflictual and fragmented activities never crystallises into a comprehensive project under the personal direction of the head of the executive or the ruling political party. In other words, the cohesive workings of society appear to be assured, for good or ill, by a quasi-subject, the state. But the state is not a real subject: it is no one. In itself it is no more than an administrative machine, controlled by no one and incapable of formulating a general will which everyone may be called upon to express. The limits, dysfunctions and weaknesses of the capitalist state mean that society is always imperfectly cohesive and, as a result, that more or less substantial areas of indeterminacy and freedom will remain.

Since it advocates social integration not through the random play of multiple initiatives and conflicts, but through consciously willed planning or programming of the activity of society, socialist political theory implicitly gives society precedence over the individual and assumes their common subordination to the state. This latter is called upon to coordinate the global project of development whose imperatives are to be internalised by each and all as a common will and a social cement. In theory, the superiority of socialist society lies in the fact that the outcome of multiple activities is not, as in market societies, a random result which can only be corrected after the event either by the state or by individuals themselves, with all the waste, delay, duplication and error that this entails. The specificity of socialism lies in the fact that the results of social activity are determined in advance as an objective chosen by the collectivity, so that each person's activity is adapted, regulated and programmed as a function of this collective goal.

The problem, however, is precisely to define the collective goal. I shall return to this point in the next chapter. For the moment, let me simply note that whatever the process by which one or several collective projects are elaborated, and whatever the choice or choices of the type of society and culture they imply, it will always be a process that requires mediation and mediators. It cannot be undertaken by individuals as such, nor even by 'the
associated producers’, local communities or councils (soviets). It implies an overall vision of what society is to become — and even pluralism, a multiplication of decision-making centres, an increase in the space allowed to individual liberty, and careful limitation of the area encompassed by the state’s sphere, amount to an overall vision. But even if such a vision is the result of genuinely democratic political debate involving parties and movements, its application will still entail planning, and planning requires a state.

Of course the elaboration of the plan may itself be hedged about with democratic safeguards. There may, for example, be broad consultation to establish the possibilities and preferences of each collective of producers, each local community, each region etc.; and several ups and downs to the coordinating body, back to the grass-roots community and vice versa to allow each to correct the other as the plan is carried out. Yet however open and sincerely democratic the process of consultation, the plan schedule and objectives will never be the expression of a common civic will or of grass-roots preferences. The mediations which made it possible to coordinate broad social options with grass-roots preferences will be so complex and so numerous that the local community will be unable to recognise itself in the final result. This result — the plan — will inevitably be the work of a state technocracy obliged to make use of mathematical models and statistical materials which in itself can only imperfectly control because of the very large number of inputs, variables and unforeseeable elements. Thus the plan will never be a ‘photograph’ of everyone’s preferences, but will have to adjust each sub-set of preferences in the light of all the other sub-sets and of the technico-economic constraints upon their coherence. In the last analysis, ‘democratic elaboration’ of the plan does not allow each and all to become the subject of that voluntary social cooperation through which ‘the associated producers’ are supposed to impose their common will upon the society they seek to create. Instead, the plan remains an ‘autonomised result’, intended by no one and experienced by all as a set of external constraints.

From the point of view of the individual, the plan has no advantage over the market. It, too, expresses an average of heterogeneous preferences, which, like the ‘average consumer’ or the ‘person in the street’ of market surveys, does not correspond to the real preferences of real people. The person in the street never exists as self, only as ‘the others’.1

In these circumstances, it is wrong to make it everyone’s patriotic, civic or political duty to equate the objectives of the plan with his or her personal fulfilment. For that is to require an unconditional identity between individual and state, and an abandonment of the specificity and autonomy of all values and activities not related to politics and the economy. From being ‘soldiers of production’ in the capitalist economy, individuals end up as soldiers permanently mobilised to serve a plan presented to them as the emanation of ‘the general will’. As long as the protagonists of socialism continue to make centralised planning (however much it might be broken down into local and regional plans) the linchpin of their programme, and the adherence of everyone to the ‘democratically formulated’ objectives of the plan the core of their political doctrine, socialism will remain an unattractive proposition in industrial societies.

The source of the theoretical superiority of socialism over capitalism is thus the source of its practical inferiority. To argue that society should be the controlled, programmed result of its members’ activity is to demand that everyone should make their conduct functional to the overall social result in view. Thus, there can be no room for any form of conduct which, if generalised, would not lead to the programmed social outcome. Classical socialist doctrine finds it difficult to come to terms with political and social pluralism, understood not simply as a plurality of parties and trade unions but as the coexistence of various ways of working, producing and living, various and distinct cultural areas and levels of social existence.

Yet this kind of pluralism precisely conforms to the lived experience and aspirations of the post-industrial proletariat, as well as the major part of the traditional working class. Only by continually stressing and defending its importance can market societies maintain their legitimacy in the eyes of the majority of the population. And it is precisely because the socialist movement

has failed to embrace and enrich this pluralist perspective that it has condemned itself to a minority position even among working people.

Essentially, the 'freedom' which the majority of the population of the overdeveloped nations seeks to protect from 'collectivism' and the 'totalitarian' threat, is the freedom to create a private niche protecting one's personal life against all pressures and external social obligations. This niche may be represented by family life, a home of one's own, a back garden, a do-it-yourself workshop, a boat, a country cottage, a collection of antiques, music, gastronomy, sport, love etc. Its importance varies inversely with the degree of job satisfaction and in direct proportion with the intensity of social pressures. It represents a sphere of sovereignty wrested (or to be wrested) from a world governed by the principles of productivity, aggression, competition, hierarchical discipline etc. Capitalism owes its political stability to the fact that, in return for the dispossession and growing constraints experienced at work, individuals enjoy the possibility of building an apparently growing sphere of individual autonomy outside of work.

It is possible, following Rudolf Bahro, to regard this individual sphere as a sort of 'compensation' for the repression and frustration of the 'emancipatory needs' and to conclude that such 'compensatory needs' will disappear after the 'general abolition of the condition of subordination' associated with the 'vertical division of labour'. This, however, is a dangerously simplistic view. The sphere of individual sovereignty is not based upon a mere desire to consume, nor solely upon relaxation and leisure activities. It is based, more profoundly, upon activities unrelated to any economic goal which are an end in themselves: communication, giving, creating and aesthetic enjoyment, the production and reproduction of life, tenderness, the realisation

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3 Bahro's conception is actually very much more subtle since he posits individual self-realisation, even in socialised production, and the development of autonomous individual activities as the premises of the communist cultural revolution. In this he is strictly marxist, as we shall see. Cf. Bahro, op.cit., pp. 377 et seq.

4 See Appendix 1 below.

5 'As soon as labour in the direct form has ceased to be the great well-spring of wealth, labour time ceases and must cease to be its measure, and hence exchange value [must cease to be the measure] of use value... With that, production based on exchange value breaks down, and the direct, material production process is stripped of the form of penury and antithesis. The free development of individualities, and hence... the general reduction of the necessary labour of society to a minimum, which then corresponds to the artistic, scientific etc. development of the individuals in the time set free, and with the means created, for all of them.' (Grundrisse, Harmondsworth, Penguin 1973, pp.705-6.) And Marx goes on to cite an astonishing unsigned work entitled The Source and Remedy, published in 1821:

Truly wealthy a nation, when the working day is 6 rather than 12 hours. Wealth is not command over surplus labour time, but rather, disposable time outside that needed in direct production, for every
subordination of every activity to those associated with the economy, is specific to capitalist development. Only with capitalism does work, or the heteronomous production of exchange-values, become a full-time activity and the self-supply of goods and services (by the family or community) become a marginal and subordinate activity. An inversion of this relationship will signify the end of political economy and the advent of 'post-industrial socialism' or communism.

It is an inversion already underway, although this has been more or less successfully concealed by the dominant system. In fact the hegemony of economic rationality has never been total. As feminist theorists have indicated, the sphere of commodity production could never have existed without a parallel sphere of household production not subject to economic rationality. In particular, all activities associated with the reproduction of life are outside the domain of economic rationality — as are the majority of aesthetic and pedagogic activities. Raising children, looking after and decorating a house, repairing or making things, cooking good meals, entertaining guests, listening to or performing music — none of these activities is carried out for economic ends or for consumption. This extra-economic sphere, by no means necessarily confined to the home or the nuclear family, has in practice always been as important as the sphere of economic production, providing it with a concealed material base through the unremunerated and unmeasured housework of women and, to a lesser extent, of children and grandparents.

Such work has never been recognised in capitalist society. Because it does not create a surplus that can be accumulated or sold on the market, it has never been defined as work, but seen as a sort of personal service without economic value. For some theorists of the women's movement, housework is therefore an enclave of slave labour within the capitalist economy. The bourgeoisie may have abolished slavery in relations between workers and bosses, but it has not done so in the relations between men and women. According to this interpretation, it is only right to extend market regulations to the sphere of housework, integrating it into the sector of activity governed by economic ends. Housework should be waged, to the extent that it cannot be industrialised.

The only value of this uselessly simplistic and regressive theory lies in its demonstration, carried to absurd lengths, that the autonomous activities of the extra-economic sphere fall outside any possible economic rationalisation. Political economy here reaches its limits. Indeed, if housework were remunerated at the marginal price of an hour's work — so that the performance of an hour's housework entitled the person in question to receive the quantity of goods and services that could be produced in one hour in the commodity sector — the cost of domestic payments would be so high as to exceed the capacities of even the most opulent society.7

This example is even more suggestive for its non-economic implications than for its economic significance. If the activities performed by women without any financial reward were to be given a wage, they would either not be done at all or would be done very differently. All the aspects of 'spontaneous offering', affective involvement and scrupulous care would not only

7. Andret, in Travailler deux heures par jour, Editions du Seuil 1977, gives the following proportions for 'captive' and 'free' work (i.e. waged and unwaged work) in present-day France: 60% for unwaged work and 40% for waged work. This distribution of the total number of waged and unwaged hours of work is very unequal, given the sexual division of labour: 24.5 billion hours of waged work per men and 12.7 billion for women, while men carry out 9 billion hours of unpaid work and women some 40 billion.

All of this indicates that the unpaid work carried out by women (mainly as housework) is in fact captive and will only become a genuinely free activity when women are no longer responsible for four-fifths of household tasks:

In a society in which everyone has the time and is accustomed to taking a turn, housework will be shared by all. It will recover its meaning as a symbol of the mutual exchange of affection, of collective responsibility for the concrete aspects of communal life and as an opportunity to enjoy tasks which, when carried out by the same individual every day, become profoundly tedious.

(Andret, op. cit., pp. 114-15)
become 'priceless', but could never in fact be expected of a male or female wage worker whose main concern was to exchange a certain number of working hours for market goods and services of an equivalent value.

Besides, the search for higher productivity would lead to the standardisation and industrialisation of such activities, particularly those involving the feeding, minding, raising and education of children. The last enclave of individual or communal autonomy would disappear; socialisation, 'commodification' and pre-programming would be extended to the last vestiges of self-determined and self-regulated life. The industrialisation, through home computers, of physical and psychical care and hygiene, children's education, cooking or sexual technique is precisely designed to generate capitalist profits from activities still left to individual fantasy. It is leading towards that social trivialisation of the most intimate areas of individual behaviour which Jacques Attali has described as the 'society of self-supervision'.

The computerised socialisation of autonomous activities runs directly against the aspirations at work in post-industrial society. Instead of enlarging the sphere of individual autonomy, it can only subordinate the activities constituting this sphere to the productivist criteria of profitability, speed and conformity to the norm. At the very moment when the reduction in socially necessary labour time is increasing free time and the possibilities for individual fulfilment in non-economic activity, computerised socialisation seeks to reduce this time. Its development implies the 'liberation' of individuals from their freely chosen activities, in order to reduce them, even in the domestic field, to passive users of commodity objects, information and programmes.

The women's movement enters the logic of capital when it seeks to free women from non-economically oriented activities by defining these as servile, subordinate tasks which need to be abolished. They are servile and subordinate, however, only to the extent that economically oriented activities remain dominant and endowed with 'noble' status both in society and in the household community itself. This dominance is precisely what is being called into question. Only insofar as the women's movement deepens that challenge, asserting the centrality of non-economic values and autonomous activities, and the subordination of economic values and activities, will it become a dynamic component of the post-industrial revolution and, in many respects, its vanguard. From this perspective, its main concern can no longer be that of liberating women from housework but of extending the non-economic rationality of these activities beyond the home. It has to win over men both inside and outside the home; to subvert the traditional sexual division of labour; and to abolish not only the hegemony of the values of virility but these values themselves, both in relations between the sexes and in society at large. Thus, as Herbert Marcuse has shown, post-industrial socialism — that is communism — will be female or will not exist at all. This implies a cultural revolution which will eliminate the principle of performance, the ethic of competition, accumulation and the rat-race at the level of both individual behaviour and social relations, replacing them with the supremacy of the values of reciprocity, tenderness, spontaneity and love of life in all its forms.

In this respect, as Alain Touraine has said, the women's movement is,

a movement of liberation not only of women but of men by women. One of its most basic aspects is its opposition to military and financial models of organisation, to the power of money and giant organisations. It represents a will to organise one's own life, to form personal relationships, to love and be loved, to have a child. Of all social movements, the women's movement is the one most able to oppose the growing hold exercised by giant corporations over our daily lives. Only women have preserved those personal qualities which male domination has crushed out of men. Since they have been completely excluded from political and

9. 'Trivial' is used by Heinz von Foerster to denote the perfectly predictable responses produced by a system (either living or mechanical) to a given stimulus.

military power, women have succeeded in maintaining a capacity for affective relations from which men have been estranged by the structures of power — or have estranged themselves to serve the structures.

Thanks to the women’s movement, we men have already regained certain rights to express feelings, to get involved with children, and so on. What began as a form of cultural self-defence can become a directly social and political struggle against a world of managers, sub-managers and employees, and against all aspects of a life wholly devoted to keeping the machine in motion.¹²

Thus, far from being a relic of pre-capitalist society, women’s activities and qualities prefigure a post-capitalist and post-industrial society, culture and civilisation. Indeed, in every overdeveloped society they are already imposing their ethical hegemony in relations between couples. The qualities and values of women are becoming common to men and women, particularly, but not exclusively, among the post-industrial proletariat. Taking care of babies is no longer exclusively allocated to women, just as full-time socialised work is no longer the prerogative of a male ‘bread-winner’. The ever more frequent permutation of tasks and roles within the extended or nuclear family is abolishing not only sexual but other hierarchies: wage labour no longer seems more ‘noble’ or admirable than unpaid, autonomous activity within the extended or nuclear family. People can find greater fulfilment in the latter than in the former.

It is also far from true that the increasingly secondary character of wage labour and economic goals encourages individuals to accept any type of work or working conditions without a murmur. The opposite is the case. Growing personal fulfilment results in greater demands and growing combativeness rather than resigned indifference. The more people are capable of practical and affective autonomy, the less they are willing to accept hierarchical discipline and the more demanding they become as regards both the quality and the content of the work required of them.¹³

The priority task of a post-industrial left must therefore be to extend self-motivated, self-rewarding activity within, and above all, outside the family, and to limit as much as possible all waged or market-based activity carried out on behalf of third parties (even the state). A reduction in work time is a necessary but not a sufficient condition. For it will not help to enlarge the sphere of individual autonomy if the resulting free time remains empty ‘leisure time’, filled for better or worse by the programmed distractions of the mass media and the oblivion merchants, and if everyone is thereby driven back into the solitude of their private sphere.

More than upon free time, the expansion of the sphere of autonomy depends upon a freely available supply of convivial tools that allow individuals to do or make anything whose aesthetic or use-value is enhanced by doing it oneself. Repair and do-it-yourself workshops in blocks of flats, neighbourhood centres or rural communities should enable everyone to make or invent things as they wish. Similarly, libraries, places to make music or movies, ‘free’ radio and television stations, open spaces for communication, circulation and exchange, and so on¹⁴ need to be accessible to everyone.

The extraordinary success (particularly in Germany) of Bahro’s book The Alternative in Eastern Europe is mainly due to the manner in which he has revived a dimension of marxist thought¹⁵ ignored in socialist or ‘communist’ policies and programmes (apart, that is, from various dissident Italian groups, running from Il Manifesto to the various ‘autonomist’

¹³. See the account given by Charly Boyadjian in Travailler deux heures par jour, op. cit. where the monotony and stupidity of work become the more apparent as the length of the working week becomes shorter and where, because of partial unemployment, family life and affective relationships are able to grow. The accounts presented in this work all demonstrate the accuracy of Simone Weil’s remark that ‘no one would accept being a slave for two hours a day.’ See also the classic studies by Kornhauser, showing that anomie varies inversely with the possibility of personal involvement in one’s work: A. Kornhauser, Mental Health of the Industrial Worker, New York, Wiley 1965.

¹⁴. See Appendix 2 below.

¹⁵. A dimension that is particularly visible in the Grundrisse.

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¹². Alain Touraine, ‘La révolution culturelle que nous vivons’, Le Nouvel Observateur 1 August 1978.

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In this dimension, communism is conceived as the extinction of political economy, and as the measurement of wealth by freely determined possibilities for happiness rather than quantities of exchange-value.

One of the essential preconditions for a cultural-revolutionary economic policy is a theory of development of human individuality, dominated neither by a fetishism of 'objective requirements', nor by the impressive adaptability of the psyche, and daring to make normative assertions. The communist demand, in short, is that the overall production and reproduction of material life should be reshaped in such a way that people be repaid for their work as individuals.

If a society is so far industrialised that it can fairly reliably satisfy the elementary needs of its members at the level of culture that has been attained, then the planning of the overall process of reproduction must... give priority to the all-round development of human beings, to the increase in their positive capacities for happiness... Historical examples show, moreover, that the same or similar results of human development and human happiness are compatible with fairly great differences in the quantity of available products. In no case can the conditions for freedom be measured in dollars or roubles per head. What people in the developed countries need is not the extension of their present needs, but rather the opportunity for self-enjoyment in doing, enjoyment in personal relations, concrete life in the broadest sense. The remoulding of the process of socialisation in this direction will be characterised first of all at the economic base by a

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16. Notably Antonio Negri who writes, in his commentary on the Grundrisse: Communism can only be equated with planning to the extent to which it is firstly defined in terms of the abolition of work... When the preconditions and the aim of the abolition of work do not exist, planning can only be a new form of capitalist command — its socialist form. (A. Negri, Marx au-delà de Marx, Paris, Christian Bourgois 1979, pp.288-89)

17. Rudolf Bahro, op.cit. pp.404 et seq. Bahro, who is not a 'dissident', was responsible for training industrial management in East Germany.