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The Ivory Tower of Theory

A critique of Théorie Communiste and "The Glass Floor"

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gle was that of the affirmation of work. It was not a defeat of the Revolution, but of revolution as it existed historically. It wasn't a question of choosing between diverse positions; it was the entire problematic of revolution as affirmation of the class which had to be overcome. That the theoretical elements could be taken up and used in other problematics didn't affect this imperative."

...

"In the period of real subsumption of labour under capital, the empowerment of the class, in which labour poses itself as the essence of capital, is confounded with capital's own development. It can then, from the First World War onwards, propose itself for the position of management of capital; it can become in such a way the acute form of the counter-revolution. In recognizing exchange, value, the management (the class always exists somewhere in particular for capital), accumulation according to sections, planification, as contents of its affirmation, the affirmation of the class poses as its presupposition the reproduction of capital and, according to its definite historical nature, the real impossibility of the revolution."

ians of Athens behaving like the Polish proletarians of Gdansk, lumping together crudely fascism, people's republic and western democracy. The proletarians of Athens have nothing to do with democratization, that is, with the expansion of value, not out of a theoretical choice but because their everyday existence under capital is beyond democracy. It was out of the question to retreat so that the democrats could pave their way, while anti-authoritarian communism was already at the end of the night". Unfortunately for TC and all of us, it wasn't communism that was waiting at the end of the night but democracy and all the well-known capitalist mediations, which have been established triumphantly ever since for the last thirty-six years in broad daylight. The comrades may have been mistaken once again, thinking as always in terms of certainties, but we prefer to lay emphasis on something positive from their old period – desire: it is never silly to believe that a movement can go beyond its original objectives.

TPTG

September 2009

Excerpt from the unpublished text: *Response to the critical remarks of TC about the student movement of 2006-2007 in Greece* (by a former member of Blaumachen).

“The last point is essential; the defeat of the cycle of struggle was an historical defeat. We had to not throw out the baby with the bathwater neither try to remake the German revolution in a more radical way (less managementist). Under formal subsumption the revolution and communism were posed as the affirmation of the class; then with the ultra-left after the 20's, the decomposition of this affirmation; not withstanding that the class struggle of the period was simultaneously dominated by the perspective of pushing the integration of the class to the point of seeking to abolish the contradiction in removing its grounds of existence (social-democracy, the CPs). It was not because it was managementist that the movement of which the Lefts were an expression failed; it was because it could be nothing else, in so far as the cycle of strug-

Contents

A necessary reconsideration of the permanent crisis in education	9
Hic Sparta? A world of generalized precariousness and helotry?	16
A disjunction between theory and common sense? .	33
The “swerve”: a new practice and theory?	37
All rebellions without exception have their roots in the disastrous isolation of the individual from the human community	41
On productive labour, subjects and the limits of the December rebellion	53
Communitisation	69

the intensity of the counter-rebellion that has been launched so far; when the *divisions* promoted by all unionist and political ideologies, the state's demonization politics against segments of the proletariat and the ensuing re-legitimization of political institutions are not touched upon but instead we are vaguely referred to the certain failure of struggles over demands, the "*future revolution*" and the "*dynamic within class struggle* [which] *was posited: that is, to abolish capital and abolish oneself as a class by acting as a class*", then it's obvious that we deal with a theory that proposes magical solutions in order to avoid the confrontation with the real history of men/women, with their mistakes and with its mistakes. One is therefore entitled to doubt its usefulness, since, instead of being grounded in real class struggles, with all their contradictions, retrogressions, reversals and defeats, it is placed on a level of generalities and abstractions and proposes in effect a philosophical apathy and a swerve ...away from reality.

In 1975, the text "The Class Struggle in Greece" was published in the Greek review *Pezodromio* (Pavement),⁵⁴ no. 5, translated from *Bulletin Communiste*, the review of Intervention Communiste, a group that later evolved into TC. There we can read:

"On the night of the 16th [November 1973] outrageous and inconceivable things happen: two banks are set on fire, the ministry of public order gets attacked ...there you have the proletar-

⁵⁴ *Pezodromio* was the first Greek anti-authoritarian review after the 2nd world war (starting its publication in the beginning of the 1970's). Many French communist texts were published in its first issues. Apart from Intervention Communiste, The Situationist International, Le Mouvement Communiste and La Voyou were also the groups whose texts appeared in this review and which were of immense importance for the formation of the first wave of the Greek anti-authoritarian milieu. Since then, most of these translations have fallen into oblivion as the successive waves of anti-authoritarians were mainly influenced by anarchist-insurrectionalist, autonomist or nihilist ideas. The extract translated below is from the Greek version of the text as we couldn't find the original.

olution”,⁵³ but because communisation, all this that made up its positive content, was not brought to its extreme consequences. Why did this happen? Certainly not because the structure of the contradiction between the proletariat and the capital was not the “ultimate” one yet!

Communism as the practical refusal of capitalism possesses certain necessary and essential characteristics that render it a historical tendency. If it were something historically original that WILL happen to us in the future, then neither TC, nor Dauvé or Marx or TPTG or anyone else could talk about it. The same holds about capitalism, too. If we can talk about it, using notions that were created about 150 years ago by a person that was the historical product of his time, this is possible precisely because it still maintains, as a historical form of social reproduction, its necessary and essential features: exploitation and alienation of the process of life, the development of social labour in value-form. It’s obvious that Marx himself as well as many anarchists and communists did not speak about something essentially different when they referred to “capitalism” or to “communism as the real movement which abolishes the present state of things”, otherwise TC could not talk about the historical reality of 2009 using repeatedly their analyses.

If writing off past struggles, as struggles of the “affirmation of the class”, stemmed from an indifference towards history, or from an absolutely legitimate, human, all too human desire on the part of TC comrades to live communisation now (within their biological boundaries), it would be quite understandable. Especially in periods of crises, both in the past and nowadays, this desire becomes more urgent than ever. However, when TC downgrade the discontinuous moments of communisation during the rebellion and ignore, on the other hand, the nature and

⁵³ The paragraphs from which the specific excerpts were used are cited below and are from *Theorie Communiste*, #14, 1997, <http://theoriecommuniste.communisation.net/English/Presentation%2017/Theorie-Communiste?lang=en>

One of our first priorities, after the first week of the December 2008 rebellion had passed, was to record its most important events so that comrades abroad could have some first-hand information. The recording took the form of a rough chronology of the events in Athens, supplemented with a chronology of what had happened in Thessaloniki which was written by the Blaumachen group and other comrades. Later, in the end of January 2009, we attempted a first analysis of the rebellion which was the text Like a Winter with a thousand Decembers (co-written with Blaumachen) – a text that, as the Chronologies before it, was sent to numerous comrades abroad.

*The above-mentioned texts, as well as an older text of ours, The Permanent Crisis in Education,¹ constituted part of the primary material used by *Theorie Communiste* to write *The Glass Floor in 2009*. They are all included in the book they published on the December 2008 rebellion in Greece, *Les Émeutes en Grèce, Senonevero, April 2009*.²*

*What we have in common with TC, as expressed both in *The Glass Floor* and in their theory in general, is the view that social movements reveal a deep crisis of the reproduction of the capitalist relation, the definition of communisation as the abolition of the value form, the critique of unionism and democracy.*

¹ All our English texts can be found here: http://www.tapaidiatisgalarias.org/?page_id=105

² *Le Plancher de Verre*, translated in English as *The Glass Floor* (http://www.riff-raff.se/wiki/en/theorie_communiste/the_glass_floor), is the introduction to this book (<http://senonevero.communisation.net/publications/article/les-emeutes-en-grece>). Unless it is stated otherwise, all the quotations in italics are from the English version of the text.

The text we are criticizing here differs from many others that were written on the December rebellion in the sense that it is not a usual descriptive presentation of events. On the contrary, it is one of the few attempts to analyze the rebellion within a theoretical framework and the fact that it came from outside Greece makes such an attempt even more interesting.

Among what we consider important in this text is the presentation of the social category of youth as a part of the proletariat, the recognition that the movement of December was not self-complacent and self-referential (that is to say, it did not promote an alternative lifestyle), the critique of militantism (whether of a unionist or a political type). However, since even those elements are seen by us from a different angle and since our disagreements with TC's historicist, structuralist, objectivist, immiseration theory are a lot more than our partial agreements, we had to write the critique that follows. We will show that despite a few good insights their analysis both of the December rebellion and the world present moment is ultimately flawed and inadequate.

After a careful reading of the *Glass Floor*, we realized that TC are unable to understand the December 2008 rebellion as an attack against all forms of capitalist relations –the commodity form, the money form, the capital form, the waged-labour form, the state form (with all its particular manifestations such as police, school, prison), the gender form... This is due to the fact that their interpretations are taken from a theoretical arsenal of a more elaborated version of the classical distinction between base and superstructure: the *functionalist* distinction between production and reproduction, whereby the former –meant as industrial production– is considered to be the basic

revenge for the past and they “redeem” it; they refuse their everyday alienation. **Within this relation and against it** they seek the **possibility** of its overcoming without the **certainty** of its realization.

As we wrote in our brochure on the welfare state: “*The character itself of the class struggle of the proletariat is ambiguous; while it moves towards what lies beyond capitalist reality, and maybe until the very last moment, whatever it gains, remains within this reality and therefore it can be transformed into a part of its chains*”.⁵² We are not aware of the **final** outcome of a continuous struggle; we do not claim that we already know the score, but we do know that it will be the real choices and strategies of the real struggling proletarians that will bring us closer to communism and not an objectivity that in the form of a *deus ex machina*, of History, has predetermined through a linear course the Coming of Communisation. Besides, in the eschatological approach of TC, only now class struggle points towards, the already prophesized, communisation: “*The revolution currently depends on the overcoming of a contradiction constitutive of class struggle: to be a class is for the proletariat the obstacle that its struggle as a class must overcome/ abolish*”. And elsewhere: “*These riots formalized clearly and in practice what is at stake in the current class struggle: to act as a class in the struggle against capital implies for the proletariat its own calling into question and posits the fact of acting as a class as the limit it must overcome*.” So, is it a privilege of our time to achieve communisation someday while this was not potentially attainable in the past? If communism wasn't possible in the past, this didn't happen because in the previous cycles of struggle the movement “*could be nothing else... [than] management*” or because the [affirmation of the] class “*according to its definite historical nature*” –a “definite historical nature” in the way TC want it to be, of course– “*poses... the real impossibility of the rev-*

⁵² *Op. cit.*, note 30.

realizes it should make when the existing state of things cannot satisfy the real needs and desires of the men/women who take part in it. The word itself therefore indicates an activity and not a future situation. If this activity is constantly transferred to “a time yet to come”, to a “rupture” that is going to happen to us, there arises the question of how this “objective structure” (capital), where no trace of this activity is to be found, will be disrupted. If the communist perspective is not present as an attempt in the sharpest everyday struggles and rebellions, then it will never exist. Communisation, which is primarily characterized by the refusal of the various forms of the capitalist relation (money, commodity, state, etc.) does not result from a reflection on the history of the evolution of this relation, but from communist gestures and attitudes emerging in class struggles and everyday life. When during struggles men and women appropriate and share spontaneously goods disobeying the logic of exchange; when they abolish the power of “specialists” (among which the “specialists” on communisation and the “right” understanding of history are also included); when they treat each other as sisters/brothers and lovers; when they abolish the linear, structured time of the circulation process of capital; when they subvert the established use of language; when they open up their work-places to the people of their neighborhood; when they arm themselves against the state and share the danger of clashing with the police forces; when they abolish consciously all divisions, this is what communisation is about as an attempt to create a new world.

The moments of communisation, much more so during a rebellion than in an everyday struggle, become possible precisely because the proletarians, in their antagonistic relation with capital, are not entirely in its service as producers of value. Within this relation and against it, they recompose their memory; they draw lessons from proletarian struggles of the past; they form communities of struggle; they elaborate their own experiences of struggle and transform themselves; they take

process of the capitalist mode of production whereas the latter –meant as *institutions* of reproduction– is considered to be essential but still of secondary importance (as “*faux frais de production*” that should be kept low). However, even when TC focus on the total process of the reproduction of class relations, they merely do it so that the moments of which it is made up are completely disconnected: they write about “*the crisis of the reproduction of the social relations*”, which at first “*was concentrated in the places specialised in the reproduction*”, the disjunction between the reproduction of labour power and the valorisation of capital and the disjunction between consumption and wages as the source of income –a disjunction that seems to be the result of the falling rate of profit. Starting from this basic position they present us with some additional definitions of the crisis as “*illegitimacy of demands on wages*”, “*breach of contract*” or “*running out of future*” for the exploited labour force. They assume then that the dominant feature of the “*riots*” was the “*feeling ... expressed that capital is in “breach of contract”*”. “*In this situation, produced by the very functioning of capitalism*”, the crisis of reproduction constructs “*youth as the subject of social protest*”, since it is “*youth*”, as “*entrants*” in the labour market, that is mainly affected by the double disjunction they talk about. There are certain “*modalities*” of the entrance of this “*youth*” to the labour market (educational training, precariousness), so the student who is about to take up the new undervalued jobs, becomes de facto the “*representative*” of the “*general movement of riots*”. Hence, the rebellion is characterized as being a high-school student and a university student one, even in a broad socio-political sense, and it is also considered to be a development/generalization of the university student movement in 2006 and a rupture with it –a link summarized by a uniform and global “*labour contract*”.

However, according to TC, students have a basic characteristic that distinguishes them from wage labourers. Their “*class belonging*” –their future exploitation that is turned down by

the restructured capitalism and its crisis— appears to them as a state of an exterior constraint rather than as an activity. Since they are defined by the “*vagaries of the reproduction*” and since the crisis is “*concentrated in the places specialised in reproduction*”, the reproduction of capitalist relations appears to them as a specific status, as plain domination, therefore they did not reach “*the very foundation of classes*”: production, “*where the social division takes its roots*”. That is why the rebellion was an attack against the institutions of reproduction and social control, against only “*the tip of the iceberg*”. This interpretation seems a bit like a more theoretically pretentious version of Tony Cliff, the now dead SWP leader who said, after the riots of ’81: “*the kids have been attacking shops when they should have been attacking factories. We must teach them to take the bakery and not just the bread*”.

It remained, so they say, an attack against domination from the perspective of the “*isolated individual*” and a democratic critique of democracy. The young waged proletarians who joined rebel students also remained at the same level of the attack against reproduction without, however, being clear why they also experience reproduction “*as separated and contingent (accidental and non-necessary) in relation to production itself*”. Since for the latter ones, the production of their class belonging — according always to TC’s terminology— is already linked to their productive (or non-productive) waged activity, it cannot logically appear, as in the case of students, as a similar specific state of exteriority and potential exploitation, hence their behaviour during the rebellion should have been different — and particularly the productive workers’ one who, as TC claim, “*have a specific place*” and it is thanks to “*their singular action*” that “*class belonging can disintegrate*”. The only explanation given as to why they also came up against production’s glass floor is the theoretical trick of the uniform “*labour contract*” and the similar “*running out of future*”, a trick through which

spaces from realizing quickly enough that occupations could not concern the “people” as a whole— the actual limit of the extension to the workplaces had to do with the restricted composition of the rebels. It had to do with the fact that the majority of the working class did not participate in the rebellion. The need for the rebels to communicate with those “outside” in order to extend the rebellion, which in some cases could be characterized as propaganda, is not rejected by TC as militantism, and rightly so. However TC “blames” the non-extension of the rebellion on the rebels themselves, in the sense that they are “charged” objectively for this failure, as reproduction unavoidably remained autonomous from production. If TC bothered to reflect on “why” the majority of the working class remained alien to the rebellion, then they would have to deal with inertia, fragmentation, various mediations and of course the enemies of the rebellion (in the forms of political parties, the media, division strategies, family conservatism, the lack of a culture of resistance in many proletarians and of course repression plain and simple); elements that TC may overlook but that had been used by the state accordingly in a counter-rebellion strategy right from the start. However, this would mean that TC should modify their theory radically and start to acknowledge the role of subjectivity and of the political factor in history.

Communitisation

The way TC perceive communitisation is essentially no different from “communism in a time yet to come”. For TC situations look like distinct moments of “all or nothing” kind: either there is a revolution and therefore communitisation or all struggles and rebellions that are not revolutionary have nothing to do with communitisation in essence; at best, they can just point towards it. Communitisation means the abolition of capital and social classes, and it is the “*qualitative leap*” that a movement

*maybe undesirable for the very subjects of the rebellion. What seemed feasible was calling into question yet another capitalist institution of control and reproduction of labour power – trade unionism– and, simultaneously, creating those presuppositions needed for the expansion of the rebellion in the workplaces”.*⁵⁰

Therefore, the fact that the rebellion did not extend to sites of waged-labour did not constitute a historically inevitable limit of the movement. It had to do with the specific, both objective and subjective conditions under which class antagonism was waged in the workplaces, in Greece, at that given moment. It had to do with the practical conditions of the antagonism, with the whole of the social relations in which proletarians act. What had to be done then, and was actually attempted, so that workplaces could become terrains of proletarian power and mobilization, was the creation of a proletarian public sphere of struggle whereby, through the interaction of various initiatives, such an attempt could be organized in a **conscious** and **strategic** way. However much one insists on tracing the limits of this attempt within the movement –and as a matter of fact, in the case of GSEE occupation there was a workerist tendency which regarded the occupation as a tool for propagating rank-’n’-file unionism and which felt uncomfortable with its non working class-proper composition,⁵¹ or in the case of neighbourhood assemblies there was a “populist” conception and practice which prevented those who occupied public

⁵⁰ Extract from the text, *Class War not Trade Unionism*, in TPTG no14, 2009.

⁵¹ The inner division in the GSEE occupation was not between “class self-organisation” and “divergence”/swerve, according to TC’s semantics; most of the participants were more or less “divergent”. It was between two ways of perception of “self-organisation” and “class”. Characteristic of TC’s misunderstanding of this division is the fact that a text with the title *Letter to the students*, which TC use in order to present the mystifying character of class autonomy and self-organization, was written by a comrade who belonged to what we refer to as a non-unionist, proletarian tendency in the occupied GSEE!

all real differentiations within the proletariat, rebel or not, are flattened.

We will show below that this false interpretation of the rebellion (as a university and high-school student one that only half-way reaches the rest of the class and which remains objectively a limited attack against the tip of the iceberg) stems from TC’s many wrong analyses and conclusions rooted in their inadequate method of interpretation of the capitalist relation and its historical transformations.

A necessary reconsideration of the permanent crisis in education

Since a great part of *Glass Floor* is permeated by a confusion between the student movement of 2006-7 and the rebellion, with the result that references to the December rebellion are actually often pertaining to the student movement, we will start from an exposition of how wrongly TC interpret our text *The Permanent Crisis in Education*.

The first critical remark made by TC is based on a misunderstanding on its behalf. For several years, we have made an analysis of the struggles in education aiming to show how the reforms which capital is forced to impose (and not always with great success) respond to its crisis of reproduction. We are not saying, as TC mistakenly assume, that the crisis in education is *caused* by the reforms.

As we wrote in our text *The Permanent Crisis in Education*:

“Education, as the main capitalist institution that shapes, qualifies and allocates the labour power commodity in a continuously developing capitalist division of labour, has been expanding in terms of student population since the 60’s in Greece. This development has given rise to new ‘popular’ demands, expectations, opportunities of social mobility and individual ‘successes’. It has also led to the accumulation of tensions and contradic-

tions, frustrations and individual 'failures' (also called 'failures of the schooling system'). [...]The democratization of education that caused a mass production of expectations (and a corresponding temporary rise in civil servant and petit-bourgeois strata in the 70's and the 80's, e.g. in 1982 68.7 % of university graduates worked in the public sector) created an inevitable structural crisis in the hierarchical division of labour and a crisis of discipline and meaning in school... No matter what you call this crisis – a 'crisis of legitimacy', a 'crisis in the selective-allocating role of education', a 'crisis of expectations' or a 'crisis in the correspondence of qualifications to career opportunities' – the truth is that education has been seriously crisis ridden and it stands to reason that this situation will be maintained in the next years... Reformist class struggles were back on the agenda after the fall of the dictatorship (1974) and education – in particular university education – became the main social climbing 'mechanism' since the 70's in Greece, as was the case in the advanced capitalist countries two decades earlier [...] The integration of 'popular' demands helped the legitimization of the exploitation capitalist relations, which is the one of the two basic functions of the modern democratic capitalist state – its other function being to provide for the smooth course of capitalist accumulation, through the expanded reproduction of both labour power and capital. But class struggles during the 70's had the consequence that in the beginning of the 80's the state started to have great difficulties in exercising these two complementary but contradictory functions in a satisfactory way. 'Social expectations' haven't been reduced even after the introduction of neoliberal policies in the 90's that aimed to resolve this contradiction through the deepening of divisions inside the working class. This is proved by the constant reappearance of struggles in the education sector [...] The movement of university occupations broke out in May 2006... It is possible to understand this movement only if we see it as an expression of the accumulated dissatisfaction a whole generation of working class youth has been experiencing since the previous reforms... These

tions and wildcat strikes outside and against unions, since most of the strikes are called by unions and remain in most cases under their control, notwithstanding the fact that their prestige has been seriously undermined for years now. It is well known that there have been a lot of strikes in the public sector in the last 20 years (in education, public utility services, the Ministry of Culture etc.). However, these past struggles have revealed an inability in creating autonomous organisational forms of struggle and in expressing a content extending beyond the usual trade unionist demands. With most of their colleagues **alien** to the rebellion, those non-precarious workers involved in it could not find a way of communication which could lead to mobilisation in these workplaces. As for occupations of workplaces, they usually take place in cases of factory closures or relocations (as in the textile sector), that is 'defensive' struggles. Most strikes and factory occupations of the last years have been by and large defeated regarding their specific demands. Besides, one should have in mind that Greek capitalism is characterised by a low capital concentration with many small firms where even less than ten people are employed and even institutional unionism hardly exists. For these reasons, waged-labour places were not terrains of proletarian power and mobilization and were not similarly considered as such by workers involved in the rebellion. Let alone that most of the young precarious workers do not identify themselves with their jobs. Possibly, it was precisely this weakness or even reluctance to mobilise in the workplaces that drove them to the streets. Moreover, like most modern urban rebellions, the December rebellion was a violent eruption of delegitimization of capitalist institutions of control and, furthermore, a short-lived experience of communal life, of a community of struggle against separations, outside the workplaces, with the notable exception of the universities and the municipality of Aghios Dimitrios. For the rebel proletarians, the expansion of the rebellion could be nothing less than wildcats and occupations. Given the practical possibilities and the subjective disposition at that time, such an expansion was impossible and

tion, but also the proletarian public sphere of struggle which was practically produced during the rebellion (in the clashes, in the looting, in the occupations and in the assemblies), fueled the negation of our existence as proletarians.⁴⁹

The same dialectics of objective-subjective can also provide us with an insight into the limits of the December rebellion. The fact that the majority of the working class remained “sympathetic” if not indifferent, represents the “objectivity of economy”: the proletariat does not abolish itself through its social practice. The fact that the counter-attack of capital and its political forms was immediate, represents the “subjectivity of economy”: the *party of order* was worried and that’s why it set the repression machine going.

Of course, the fact that the rebellion did not expand to the workplaces (to be precise: to *waged-labour* places) is something that deserves an explanation. However, we have to be as accurate and concrete as we can;

“A careful look at the class composition and the content of the rebellion drives us to the conclusion that its expansion to the places of waged-labour was not only unfeasible but maybe not even desirable for many of those who took part in the clashes and in the collective projects. From our empirical knowledge, most of the workers that were involved in the rebellion were young, coming from sectors where precarious and ‘flexible’ work relations prevail, with the exception of some permanent workers from public services such as health and education. For the latter ones, the extension of the rebellion to their workplaces would mean occupa-

⁴⁹ It must also be noted that these group forms become detached from any social movement when they revert/invert into conservatism; outside of a wider social context they revert to defending only their own existence and become competitors for power within their own narrow terrain; hooligan rivalry, economic territorial gangsterism, political terrorism, political rackets etc. This could be a likely outcome of the defeat of the social movement – a refined apolitical/depoliticised atomisation as seen in most developed capitalist countries.

reforms were instrumental in imposing intensified work rates in the school and in the realm of proper waged-labour... This revolt against student labour was given a boost by a significant number of students who already experience directly exploitation and alienation as proper waged-labourers”.

We believe that the previous excerpts show that we have never claimed that the instability of the education system is caused by the successive reforms but that it is caused by the dialectical relation between reforms and the struggle against them and, to be more precise, by the conflictual history of the democratic-capitalist education during the last thirty years, which in its turn is part of the wider class struggle.

However, TC use these excerpts only to reach the conclusion that “popular demands” lead to the establishment of a “social contract” that is broken and violated on the part of the state when it imposes education reforms. The “social contract” and its violation on the part of the state are necessary as concepts to TC in order to present them as the driving force of both the student movement and the rebellion as its extension, assigning to students the role of the main representatives of the rebellion. In this manner, both students –who do not work and are therefore by definition situated in the reproduction sector, in the “*faux frais de production*”, as TC claim– and the other parts of the class that participated in the rebellion are solely resisting the “*running out of future*” and not their direct, present exploitation. Therefore –they endlessly repeat– they come up against production’s glass floor and remain at the level of a democratic critique of democracy.

We, on the contrary, have shown that the driving force of history, class struggle both outside and within education *forced* the capitalist state to establish “contracts” in order to legitimize exploitation relations and thus to cause their crisis, since it’s unable to reconcile the legitimizing and the reproductive/allocating functions of education, because of the explosion of social expectations. (Of course, this does not mean that the crisis

of reproduction of the capitalist relation is derived only from this terrain of struggle). In other words, we showed how class struggles, both within and outside education, made the expanding “contract” itself to become the crisis, i.e. *the crisis of class relations*. And this is not a kind of pedantry. This difference of analysis means that neither the students in 2006-7 nor the rebels of December rose against some sort of a “looted future”, protesting against the violation of a “deal” –on the contrary, by keeping on demanding, in their own way, for even more, they rose in revolt against their current situation, against their present exploitation.

This brings us to the second point of TC’s critique, always in relation with education. They claim that we mistakenly speak about “*the university as a ‘fraction of capital’ and consider the universities as workplaces – and sites of exploitation*” and, furthermore, that we understand, equally wrong, “*the blockade of universities as a hindrance to total reproduction, if not to production tout court*”. According to TC, this is due to the fact that we, mistakenly again, consider the student “*as the producer of a specific commodity- her labour power*”. TC assure us that “*the student... produces no commodity containing a surplus-value*” and that the labour power commodity being produced “*remains attached to his person, [is] pure subjectivity, [that] does not enter into any productive relation with capital*”. On this point TC have, again, not understood our position correctly –and this is due to the fact that they do not possess a correct understanding of the modern university. Let’s try to unravel the tangle created by TC.

Although the university is **not** a capitalist enterprise *per se*, neoliberal restructuring led to the growth of entrepreneurial activities within the university aiming at the direct extraction of surplus value. Thus, on the one hand whole departments or laboratories of mainly technological schools have been transformed into entrepreneurial sites while on the other hand there are opportunities for the creation of “subsidiary companies” –

leftists). We are not saying, of course, that these people made the rebellion happen but that their culture of resistance functioned as a catalyst. Thereafter, as more subjects participated in the movement, such as students, football hooligans or immigrants, the initial activities got expanded and soon riots were transformed into a rebellion. These subjects were also involved in communities, groups or gangs, that is organization forms that were of decisive importance for two reasons: they don’t favour representation (which is another reason for the lack of demands) and they contributed to the unpredictable character of the rebellion. So, a “world” of direct and inter-personal relations preexisted. These community relations had created a multiform culture of resistance through the years (whether in the form of the political activism of the antiauthoritarian milieu, with occupations, haunts and constant clashes with cops around Exarchia neighborhood, or in the form of antifascist and anti-cop ideology and practice of football hooligans, or in the form of a “tradition” of high-school and university occupations, or in the form of everyday communal life). However, these communities, gangs or groups did not remain unaffected. They were expanded or transformed in the streets, in the occupations and in the assemblies during the rebellion. When these proletarian communities came together, they did not only attack capital and the state but they also searched for their common determining elements. The common activity produced by the mixing up of these different proletarian communities found an expression in their distinct co-operative practices and jointly formed discourse. It was within this activity that one could trace both the difference and the similarity of those conditions in which each subjectivity produces a different situation and a different culture. For example, the precarious condition of a university student cannot be identified with that of an immigrant, although their origin is the same. However, in the rebellion, this common origin, i.e. the domination of capitalist forms, became a visible target of their attack. Not only exploita-

for more than the negation of exploitation, something that will happen “objectively”; there is a need for new positive affirmations. Revolution, communization, is “*the real movement*” but cannot be an objective one. It is not a “power” that acts behind the backs of proletarians and is seemingly greater than them like capital, which is nothing but their alienated activity that is beyond their control. Human community is created when proletarians negate the negation of their human (social) quality imposed by capital –and that is a project in process which may or may not be accomplished.

“*We would prefer to say that there is no other limit to the lifespan of capital than the conscious activity of the proletarians. Otherwise, no crisis, however deep it might be, will be enough to produce such a result. And any deep crisis (a crisis of the system, not just in it) could be the last if the proletarians took advantage of it. But there’ll never be a day of reckoning, a final un-mediated showdown, as if at long last the proletarians were directly facing capital and therefore attacking it.*”⁴⁸

So, if we focus on the conscious activity of the proletarians, we will find out that the tendency of the precarization of both labour relations and the reproduction of labour power, violence and exclusion may well be some of the reasons for the December rebellion. However, these conditions have not been something new nor can they fully explain why a part of the proletariat in Greece rebelled. In order to go into the real causes of the rebellion, we should also focus on the subjectivity of the rebels. We should lay a special emphasis on those cultures of resistance –outcomes of older struggles– whose response to the murder of the kid was prompt. For example, the people who responded immediately on the night of December 6th were basically politicized proletarians (anarchists, antiauthoritarians,

⁴⁸ Dauvé-Nesic, *To work or not to work: is that the question?* <http://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/gilles-dauve-to-work-or-not-to-work-is-that-the-question>. Greek translation in *TPTG* no 11, 2005.

better known as spin-offs– in cooperation with public or private enterprises. Funding of such activities comes mainly from the state through public selection processes where private enterprises usually participate as well. In some cases, funding may come entirely from private sources. In any case, the university has assumed the role of a low cost Research & Development department that is available to enterprises in order to increase the productivity of capital. Many undergraduate and postgraduate students work in such entrepreneurial sites in exchange for a wage. It’s not unusual for students who carry out their dissertation to work unpaid in order to complete their studies. The labour conditions and relations of the students who work for a wage in such entrepreneurial activities are usually precarious.

Even though students can also be productive workers *stricto sensu* by entering into a process of direct extraction of surplus value, the main role of the university as a form of the capitalist relation is to train, to evaluate, to discipline and to allocate labour power. At this point we will examine how TC resort to an ideological translation in order to assemble their line of argument. The formulation that “*students reproduce their labour power*” is translated into “*students produce a commodity containing surplus value*” and in this latter formulation they detect the “fault” of the former one. First of all, we have to make it clear that the reproduction of labour power through education is not the production of a commodity containing surplus value but the production of those forms of human activity that are capable of entering the direct production process in order for surplus value to be produced. Abstract labour (which is the essence of value) is not the direct result of concrete labour but it is connected with it since it is the historically specific quality of *every* labour in capitalism. The use values which are produced by the concrete labour of school and university students are *preordained* to be exchanged in the labour market, and thus their labour is already subject to quantification and homog-

enization. Workers must learn to perform the simplest arithmetic calculations, to know how to read and write and furthermore they must be specialized. Capital craves for living composite labour and this living composite labour does not enter the valorization process automatically. The task to form those specific skills necessary to place labour power in the production process is undertaken by the proletariat itself during its training and under the guidance of its trainers. These skills include jargon, style, values and attitudes towards life that should accompany waged-labour and the future profession. Even if the state provides for “free education”, its acquisition is not a mechanical process but it continues to be a task of the proletariat itself. This task, the development of skills necessary to

³ This system of teaching, which is the teaching of the system at the same time, is connected with the liberal right-wing ideology which regards students as isolated individuals and as “entrepreneurs of their selves”. However TC, in their haste to associate our supposedly “left” point of view with the right apologetic ideology of “entrepreneurship of the self”, seem to ignore that this motif of the right constitutes the basis of bourgeois ideology, according to which each worker “provides” “freely” and “equally” to capital her labour power in the form of her merits.

⁴ “We posed the demand for a ‘student wage’ in the context of this self-understanding. There was no strategy for the unification of the class. On the contrary, our aim was the direct satisfaction of our needs. Let’s not forget that in both phases of the student movement of 2006-7, occupation was first of all a practice that served the purpose of waging the examination strikes as well as of blocking university classes/laboratory work. Actions related to the destruction of ticket validating machines in public transport, blocking trains or breaking into the small grocery shops of the universities followed the same pattern of satisfying our needs. This demand had another dimension as well. We aimed at opening a discussion within the movement about ‘what does it mean to be a student?/what is education?’ and, furthermore, we wanted to bring out the fact that the problem is not the specific reform but our life in capitalism in general. Now, if posing demands is a democratic practice, we would like to hear what the members of TC do practically when they participate in a struggle over demands where the proletariat does not abolish itself. Finally, I have to note that the specific demand sounded preposterous to the greater part of the ‘left’ of the movement for which the student movement is considered to be much inferior to the workers’ movement”.

mainly particular surplus and/or insubordinate fragments of the proletariat that, amidst separations, are demonized. (“Security” itself can arise as a *demand* as in the case of Ag. Pan-telehemonas.⁴⁷ There we witnessed the tragic dimensions that separations and divisions can take, when Balkan and East European immigrants who have been living in the area for years supported pogroms against refugees...)

How is it then deduced with certainty that “*capitalism is running out of future*”? Aren’t we now, in a crisis period, witnessing a new, fragile as always, “social contract”, wrought with fear, divisions and inequalities? Isn’t it already functioning through a counter-revolutionary strategy which attempts at re-legitimizing the security-surveillance state that was temporarily blocked because of the rebellion? (The Bush-Deal was used similarly in the USA after the 9/11 attacks. Although failed, it still functioned for some years.)

Crisis, for TC, is not a crisis of class relations which gives birth to a rebellion, in certain circumstances, but is instead the crisis of the one pole of the relation: *capital*. Through the “*double disjunction*”, it causes an under-consumption crisis that is *turned necessarily* into class struggle and leads objectively to a de-objectification process: “*One can count on the unfolding of the crisis for the generality not to remain particular.*”

However, one could quite easily count on the crisis to conclude that barbarism is approaching and that the generalized social decomposition has been already unfolding itself. No, “*the revolution, like capital*”, is NOT “*an objective process*”. The re-composition of human community is a conscious, arduous process that creates new social relations and thus new subjects. When a whole new world has to be created, there is a need

⁴⁷ A working-class neighborhood where new waves of refugees get added to immigrants who have been living there for years. In November 2008 a pogrom-like attack was launched against newcomers, organized by far-right inhabitants and thugs of a Greek neo-nazi group. Clashes followed between them and leftists and antiauthoritarians.

which passes through the contradictory relation of exploitation, a relation without subjects, that is through the contradictory movement of capital as an objective relation. Having constructed a riddle themselves, TC present then their own solution. As they say, the only perspective for communization is the self-abolition of the proletariat now, thanks to the catastrophic movement of capital itself: demands (especially wage demands) have become “*illegitimate*”; “*eventually, it is the proletariat as a whole that will have to be treated as helots within the capitalist mode of production*”.

If by satisfaction of demands, what is meant is a return to social democracy, we will agree that such a perspective doesn't appear on the horizon. But when one converts such an understanding to an axiomatic generalization, legitimate doubts are raised. In several current struggles (wage struggles of Chinese workers, the struggle of the solidarity movement to Kouneva for better work conditions for the cleaners, legal recognition of Zanon factory by the state of Argentina) a partial satisfaction of the demands is evident notwithstanding the unfavourable conditions of balance of class power .

In addition, it is false to say that the “*the proletariat as a whole*” is driven to slavery! What is really happening is that the actual divisions and hierarchies within the working class are being intensified and used by the state in order to turn workers against workers. Besides, as we have shown above, undervaluation of labour power is not universal and there are still waged strata that are attached to their role in production and have a strong work ethic. Moreover, it's neither “*obvious for any worker that state repression is intrinsically linked to economic exploitation, to poverty, to lays-offs*” nor that “*repression becomes the last 'argument' of the capitalist class and of the states*”. On the contrary, the motto of “public security” was high on the state agenda after December when masses of the most devaluated immigrants got deported. So, repression does not target everybody in a symmetrical and simultaneous way, since it is

(re)productive labour, is student labour whether at school or in the university, i.e. education. Just as women (or the family in general) (re)produce labour power, just as they give birth to it, nourish it and bring it up, just as they provide it with basic social skills etc. without producing a commodity containing surplus value, students, also, form (self-reproduce) their labour power through their labour in the school and all the more so under the command of atomized models for the quantification of their performance and behaviour.³ We trace back the proletarian condition of the university students precisely in this form of labour.⁴ *We trace back the cause of the rebellion of school and university students precisely in their dissatisfaction with this form of compulsory and separated labour.*

On the contrary, even if TC acknowledge that the majority of university students today are a part of the proletariat, the way they refer to their rebellion downgrades their resistance to this labour, since the only explanation they manage to give for their rebellion is the form of their future “labour contract”. As for us, proletarians do not rebel projecting themselves in the future but because their present activity forces them to rebel against it. Whether it concerns direct extraction of surplus value in the university or not, the activity of students is alienating: the development of human skills becomes the development of the productive capacity of labour power (i.e. of variable capital). It's for this reason the rebellion against student labour and against the “rationalization” of the allocating function of education becomes such an important factor of the crisis of reproduction of capitalist relations.

Hic Sparta? A world of generalized precariousness and helotry⁵?

In order to bolster up their position that the rebellion was instigated by a “breach of contract” on the part of a state that denies its role as a future employer of university students, TC proceed with a description of the capitalist development in Greece evoking rather the image of a colonial banana republic ruled by the mafia than the reality of a rising capitalist state in the Balkans. In particular, TC do not hesitate to repeat obsolete left conceptions evoking the persistent motif of portraying Greece as the poor relative of the West by using third-worldist expressions such as “*chaotic capitalist development*”, “*big capitalist powers*”, “*foreign capital*”, “*decrepit Greek capitalist industry*”, “*independence*” placed in inverted commas, in other words conceptions that were used in the past to justify the imposition of the national “development of productive forces”. In contrast to this underdeveloped, mafia-ruled capitalism supposedly existing in Greece with an equally non-existent mass alternative lifestyle of the “600 euro generation”, they confuse a ghettoized but strong sociopolitical culture of resistance with a “*Greek society*” where “*the revolt against a capitalism that never allowed it to live properly is intrinsic*”. In any case, we cannot comprehend how it can be that “*this movement is the first proletarian reaction (albeit non-global) to the crisis of restructured capital*” and what’s more, “*a theoretical and chronological landmark*” when Greek capitalism is presented as “underdeveloped” and therefore not at all representative of the movement of restructured global capitalism.

⁵ This unusual for English speakers word means serfdom or slavery. TC claim that “*it is the proletariat as a whole that will have to be treated as helots within the capitalist mode of production*”, that is, they will have to be treated like that unfree, non-citizen population who were under the sway of ancient Sparta.

rebels as a whole).⁴⁶ However, it is equally wrong to regard that the proletarian condition is basically characterized by the coercion of exploitation in the direct production process and thus to underestimate the practical critique of the legitimization of capitalist relations (consent, recuperation, internalization of rules) and the institutionalised discipline of labour power (hierarchy, the police, the military).

“*But neither the schools, the family, consumption, politics nor prisons produce classes*”, TC emphasize. However, the class is not created only when it faces capital in the workplace; all the institutions mentioned above produce classes because they give birth, breed, educate, discipline the commodity labour power. Moreover, these institutions also define the presuppositions of the existence and maintenance of this commodity in order not only to be (re)produced but also to be available for capital – a conflictual, antagonistic and never taken for granted process though.

Behind TC’s unequal bipolar constructions, such as productive/non-productive labour, production/reproduction, from which certain political conclusions are drawn, there lies a question posed by them:

“*How can the proletariat, acting strictly as a class of this mode of production, in its contradiction with capital within the capitalist mode of production, abolish classes, and therefore itself, that is to say: produce communism?*”

To put it bluntly, we reply that it **cannot**. If the proletariat really acts “*strictly as a class of this mode of production*” [our emphasis], if it doesn’t already de-objectify itself through everyday struggle against capital (this struggle includes more than strikes and rebellions), then no *Aufhebung* is possible, except for the objectivist, automatic “overcoming” offered by TC,

⁴⁶ The rebellion did not attack norms of behaviour (the “racist” or the “conservative” ones) *in order to* disturb the existing ideological coherence. It was *because* the rebellion attacked capital forms directly that it disturbed the ideological coherence which is necessary for the reproduction of capital.

tion of the mode of production”?⁴⁵ TC focus only on the direct production process and, despite their recognition of the totality of the capitalist relation, they regard in effect this moment as more important than the other ones. At least, this offers an explanation as to why TC chose to use the term “*émeutes*” (disturbances) instead of “rebellion”...

We had the impression that the adherence to the priority of factory workers’ struggles and the productivist political notions which accompanied it had already left the agenda back in the 70’s through both the movement’s critique of the workers’ identity and the restructuring. In the case of TC it reappears dressed up as a paradoxical kind of *workerism*: first, the starting point of the revolution is defined and then, instead of the established path of demands and mediations, a short cut out of it through the abolition of factories is proposed, wiping out any process of supersession. The adherence to the direct productive labour reveals an inadequate understanding of the fetishistic way in which the capitalist relation appears in its different forms in the totality of social life. The relation between classes, the capitalist relation, is also the forms of its appearance. The capitalist forms are constantly being redefined and refounded because capital is class struggle. Although fragmented, the proletarian experience of class domination is total, and therefore, the rebel proletarians don’t have any difficulty in seeing how education, family or prison produce and reproduce class power relations.

Capital is the social relation which perpetually accumulates value, i.e. dead labour, through the imposition of work. The ideological forms through which this relation is constituted are also important because they possess a material power. An anti-authoritarian critique of the ideological forms separated from a critique of capital as a totality is wrong (TC are right to point that out but wrong when they attribute such a critique to the

But the use of simplistic schemas by TC is not restricted to the above ones. For TC the state is the future exploiter of the graduates since “*administration is almost the only job opportunity opened*” for them. Starting from such a mistaken assumption, TC will present the rebellion as the reaction of university student youth and precarious workers to the “breach of contract” on the part of the state, a “breach” that supposedly condemns young proletarians to a “*social no man’s land*”. However, a recent statistical study of a sample of graduates of Greek universities proves that after five to seven years since their graduation the proportion of graduates working in the public sector does not exceed 40% (47% work in the private sector and 13% are “self-employed”).⁶ At the same time, this study shows that the major problem faced by young graduates is not so much unemployment, since they are “economically active” in their vast majority, as the problem of the stabilization of their employment in jobs under permanent contracts (if they are precarious workers, as are 29% of those graduates), with an interesting “content of work”, “satisfactory remuneration” and “career opportunities” (these expectations seem to concern most younger workers, of whom only 40% report feeling satisfied with their jobs). In any case, we should note that a change of employers or a succession of temp contracts/contracts on a project basis is not necessarily accompanied by periods of unemployment: 43% of those working on a project basis are steadily employed. Thus, many jobs appearing to be temporary are in essence stable and permanent, in the same manner as in the case of the majority of part-time jobs. These workers may be denied some of the rights of those typically working under a permanent contract (such as paid vacations, full insurance benefits and stamps, etc.) but this does not mean that their em-

⁶ M. Karamesini, *Labour market absorption of university graduates* (Athens, 2008). The statistical data presented in the rest of this paragraph come from this source.

employers can replace them easily, nor that they will do it at the first opportunity, even in periods of recession. The recession and the restructuring of the labour market which accompanies it, does not necessarily entail the generalization of precarious labour. If companies make work-time reductions (accompanied by corresponding wage reductions), the state's "social protection" mechanisms might intervene to supplement the monthly income of permanent workers compensating for their wage losses, as was the case in Germany and France in 2008.

The empirical data do not confirm that youth has been condemned to a "*social no man's land*"; nor has it been the case, in such a simple and superficial way, that the "labour contract" summarized "*the link between the student movement and the riots... in a totally immediate way*" being the reason why "*the students and schoolchildren were immediately joined by a whole fraction of the precarious and immigrant population, and benefited from the sympathy and occasional participation of a part of the population*". If all these were true, then how can one explain that only a small fraction, a minority of the precarious workers participated in the rebellion and not more of them? We believe that this question becomes even more eloquent and persistent when TC, in order to support their line of argument, i.e. that it was *objectively* impossible for the rebels of December to go further from the terrain of reproduction because "*class belonging*" appears to young proletarians as an external constraint, "*as a state, a point of departure, rather than as an activity*", claim that the "*margins*", the "*600 Euros generation*" "*quickly came to represent the whole social functioning*" in Greece, and that the central figure of the movement ("*students, precarious workers, often both, and migrant workers*") expressed "*the general situation of the workers*".

As we will show below, the fact that TC are unable to provide even a partial interpretation of the rebellion has to do with their generalizing schemas in which neither *the* differentiations in the labour market fit, nor the concept of alienation and the di-

In our opinion, the "short circuit" of the theoretical schema of TC and the objective (with a bit of voluntarism thrown in) exit to communization that they present to us, stems from a series of conceptions they are possessed with, the first of which is the centrality of production per se. The adherence to the direct process of production of surplus-value implies that not only capitalist totality is divided into privileged and non-privileged spheres, but also that the very objective of the destruction of the capitalist relation and communization is defined by this division.

This is the reason for the constant reference to the limit of production, the reference to "the very foundation of classes: production"; the long passages on productive labour –the root of the reproduction of capitalist social relations– that is surplus-value production; the priority attached to the struggles of productive workers. However, since the mid 60's, class struggles in all spheres of social life have changed the angle from which we view the living contradictions of the capitalist mode of production. The relations of production are not mere relations of the direct labour process, but antagonistic relations, relations of class power which are constituted through the totality of the valorization and reproduction processes of social capital. They are relations of a total process of production, communication and exchange.

Therefore, if capitalist production is not only the production of surplus-value but also production of social relations, can one argue that the December rebellion attacked only the "*reproduc-*

⁴⁵ The destruction and looting of hundreds of stores and banks wasn't an attack against production as well? Transport blockades weren't an attack against production? How, then, can TC tell us that "*nothing blocked the fundamental activities/functions of Greek businesses*"? It is also false to say that the function of the state wasn't obstructed at all, especially when we talk about its policing function...If neither production nor circulation of capital were really affected, nor even the state temporarily at least, then how can one account for the big mobilization of the police, the "*last word in the self-presupposition of capital*"?

migrants), who *experience the reproduction of capitalist social relations everyday as a coercion because of their activity*, to experience it in exactly the same way with students as a *condition, separated and contingent (accidental and non-necessary) in relation to production itself* ? Given that the very reproduction crisis forces precarious workers to rebel and call into question themselves as a class, why didn't all the precarious workers (or at least their majority) participate in the rebellion?⁴³ Why is it that if revolution starts in the factory it won't remain there but if it starts on the reproduction level it will remain there? (In any case, in December the question of revolution was never posed.) Why didn't the murder attempt against Kouneva provoke similar riots but gave instead a chance for the reappearance of political and economic demands? Why didn't riots break out because of work "accidents", like the ones in Perama (a few months before Grigoropoulos' murder)?⁴⁴ And, finally, why should we care about theory, the act of class struggle and its history if revolution is an objective process?

If we want to answer or just give attention to these questions, we have to abandon the theoretical schema of TC. We should abandon a schema which transforms the historically determined abstractions such as capital, proletariat, value etc., into a world of objects, evolving according to historical determinisms. We should discern the concrete subjects and their concrete practices behind the abstractions. Contrary to TC, we don't believe that crises or the historical evolution of capitalist relation constitute an *objective process*. Social relations of production are always the dialectical relation between the objective and subjective, they are human social practice. *All social life is essentially practical.*

⁴³ Here, ideological inculcation cannot be the answer since it is a process we all enter.

⁴⁴ We refer to a work "accident" in the shipyard in Perama, in July 2008, where 8 workers (most of them immigrants) got killed and many others got injured, when a tanker exploded because of lack of safety measures.

iversity of the subjects of the rebellion. According to TC, the part-time worker, either because of the recession or not, who works under a permanent contract and is obliged to look for a second job, often temporary and in the black, in order to support her income; or the temp worker who nonetheless renews successively her contracts; or the immigrant worker who has found a permanent job but whose employment depends on the renewal of her permit and vice versa; or the "illegal" immigrant without a permit, who works casually here and there and nonetheless manages to send money to her family back home; or the university graduate who works in the black until she finds a job which meets her qualifications and provide her with career opportunities; or the high school graduate who is trapped in precarious jobs –they are all crammed into the same homogenising box, that of precariousness, of the "labour contract", of the "running out of future"... How proletarians themselves perceive their own exploitation (and it must be noted that some of them do not even perceive their exploitation at all) escapes TC's attention and leads them to mistaken conclusions.

But let's return to the central argument of TC, namely that the generation of 600 euros represents the whole of social functioning. The previously mentioned study by Karamesini provides us with evidence that this argument is wrong, since "as time passes, young people who come out of the educational system tend to be assimilated with (...) the older population of the same educational level. As a result, the likelihood of finding stable and satisfactory employment increases with the passing of time since graduation".⁷ Also: "the great majority of university graduates are employed in the secondary sector of the labour market at the beginning and for a longer or shorter period of time, in jobs that do not come up to their expectations, until they find a chance to penetrate into the internal markets of the primary sector (public

⁷ M. Karamesini, *op.cit.*, pp. 72.

sector, organizations, banks, etc.) or to set up their own business”⁸
If we examine the unemployment rates of both men and women between 15-24 years of age we will find that although they go down in the period 1995-2006, yet they remain much (over two times) higher than the respective total (for all ages) of unemployment rates.⁹

In other words, even if the individualized path of young proletarians towards permanent/stable jobs (with whatever these jobs imply concerning “career opportunities”, wages, etc.) is characterized initially by (shorter or longer) periods of unemployment, precarious work, part-time work, postgraduate studies and training seminars, unwaged labour in the context of acquiring “experience/previous service”, this is not the case if their work life is considered as a whole, at least for the great majority. These periods of flexibility and precariousness constitute a weapon which enables capital to “educate” the younger part of the population –the most promising vehicle, in biological terms, for the reproduction of capitalist relations– so that it will “learn” to reduce its needs and to live in a more disciplined way before it enters production in more permanent terms. In this manner, the labour market acquires an increasingly disciplining-allocating character through the imposition of precarious conditions to a great part of young workers, but also through the internalization of the “bogy” of precariousness which might bring down the expectations of the whole class. However, precariousness, as we will immediately show below, is not a general condition even for the entrants in the labour market, let alone those who have many years of work experience.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 348. According to the author “the primary sector includes enterprises with stable markets for their products and internal labour markets”, while “the secondary sector includes enterprises which face greater fluctuation of demand in the markets of their products, have less modern technology and support their competitiveness on a low labour cost” (pp. 35).

⁹ Cf. *The Greek economy and employment – Annual Report 2009*, INE/GSEE-ADEDY (Athens, 2009).

disjunction” and the *surplus population*) constructs objectively the invisible barrier, or rather the glass floor of production; on the other hand, TC say that if proletarians do not attack the places of surplus-value production –from which they are however blocked– no revolution can take place. TC accept that productive workers took part in the rebellion, and that those workers are the only ones who possess “objectively, [...] the capacity to make of this attack a contradiction for capital itself, to turn back the contradiction that is exploitation against itself”; and at the same time they argue that they couldn’t do that during the December rebellion because these productive workers are precarious, like university students, and so the questioning of their existence remains separated on the level of reproduction.

Faced with this “short circuit”, TC present to us as a “solution” a series of assertions which are characterized as ...objective as well: “What can be reasonably considered is that this mode of exploitation of global labour power is reaching its limits, as crisis of this cycle of accumulation and as revolutionary overcoming of this cycle of struggle, overcoming that it will have itself produced.”

Or elsewhere: “like capital, the revolution is still an objective process”. Although objective, these statements permit a bit of subjectivist generalities: “class struggle has often showed to us its infinite inventiveness.”

Above all TC consider the present moment of capital-proletariat relation as *ultimate*: “The production of class belonging as an exterior constraint [is] the ultimate structure of the contradiction between the proletariat and capital, when the class activity of the proletariat disrupts the reciprocal implication of classes and makes capitalist relation to seem as a simple domination, an exterior constraint.”⁴² (Our emphasis)

A series of questions arise with the exposition of the theory of TC: how is it possible for productive workers (native or im-

⁴² Extract from footnote no 8 of the Greek version of *Glass Floor*.

contradiction that structures society as a whole as class struggle comes back on itself, on its own condition, it is thanks to this that class belonging can disintegrate and that within its struggle the proletariat can start its self-transformation (this depends on all sorts of circumstances and does not happen each time productive workers are on strike.)”

Where can this simultaneously productive and subversive subject be found?

Unfortunately, the only answer to that question traced in their text is that this subject is located at the factories! In TC’s words: “*The revolution may start in the factory, but it will not remain there, it will begin its own task when workers leave them to abolish them*”. According to TC, the *intrinsic* limit of the December rebellion is traced back on that: the subjects neither started their rebellion from the factories (or production places in general) nor came back to them in order to get out again, but stayed out of them. TC assert that communization (with the help of some certain *circumstances*) can plausibly begin only in the workplaces, at the same time that they assert that the subject which is constructed by the *crisis of reproduction* assaults only the reproduction institutions because it is there that this subject locates its problem; i.e. the “*running out of future*”. This is the conclusion we reach after reading TC. In TC’s words again: “[...] ‘*the weakest link*’ of this contradiction, the exploitation which ties the classes together, is situated in the moments of the social reproduction of labour power, precisely where, far from affirming itself, the definition of the proletariat as the class of productive labour appears always (and more and more in the current forms of reproduction) as contingent and uncertain, not only for each proletarian in particular but also structurally for the whole class.” Isn’t this “*weakest link*” “*students without prospects, young immigrants, precarious who experience the reproduction of capitalist social relations everyday as coercion*”?

Here we find TC’s absolute “short circuit”: on the one hand, they say that the very restructuring (in creating the “*double*

The extent of temporary employment in Greece is 11.1% (of which 9% in the broad public sector and 12.4% in the private sector)¹⁰, a figure which is remarkably reduced in comparison with the respective figures during the 80’s, when just the proportion of fixed-term contracts, pertaining mainly to public sector jobs, was very high, over two times higher than the proportion of fixed-term contracts in the European Community, reaching 21.5% in 1985, to be gradually reduced in the next years.¹¹ During the period 2004-2008, notwithstanding that 2/3 of the new labour contracts in the public sector are fixed-term ones, the total number of temporary employed workers, in both private and public sector, was reduced by 5.9%, in contrast with the number of permanently employed workers which was increased by 6.6%, contributing to the increase of waged employment which went up by 5.2%. In the same period, total employment was increased by 4.2%, an increase that was caused partly by an increase of 33% of part-time workers, a figure which was increased in the period 2004-2008 by 23.5% –five and a half times over the proportion of the increase of total employment and eight times over the proportion of full employment (3%). The increase in part-time workers seems impressive, but their percentage corresponds to only 5.8% of the total number of employed workers. Even if we examine the part of unemployed workers, we will see that during the period 2008-2009 the proportion of those who entered production in permanent jobs is extremely high, reaching 83%.

Therefore, it is not possible for anyone to claim that the “future is already looted” (the emphasis is ours), neither of course that

¹⁰ The statistical data of this paragraph are gathered from the annual reports of INE/GSEE-ADEDY for the Greek economy and employment in 2008 and 2009. In any case, Karamesini’s study shows that these statistical data underestimate the extent of precarious labour in younger ages over 10%, while figures regarding self-employment are respectively overestimated, since self-employment covers up a variety of dependent employment relations.

¹¹ Cf. G. Kouzis, *Labour relations and European unification: flexibility and deregulation or upgrading of labour?* INE/GSEE-ADEDY (Athens, 2001).

“the proletariat as a whole will have to be treated as helots”, as the eschatological theory of TC would desire. And we argue that it’s not possible to make such a claim by taking into consideration not only Greece and its local peculiarities but also the situation on a global scale –which is, besides, the frame of reference of TC, the “background” which constitutes the basis for their interpretation of the December rebellion. TC place the Greek rebellion, as well as every struggle given since the mid-seventies onwards, in a specific period when “against the previous cycle of struggles, restructuring has abolished all specificity, guarantees, ‘welfare’, ‘Fordian compromise’, division of the global cycle into national areas of accumulation, into fixed relations between the centre and the periphery, into internal zones of accumulation (East/West)”. According to TC, in the same period, “the extraction of surplus value in its relative mode demands constant upheaval and the abolition of all restrictions to the immediate process of production, the reproduction of labour power and the relations of capitals with each other”.¹² As it will be shown below, this theoretical point of departure is mistaken in its entirety.

According to various studies, long term employment, i.e. employment at the same employer for more than 10 years, has increased in the periods 1991-2002 for Europe and 1983-2002 for the USA and Canada, and what’s more it has increased at a higher rate than that of total employment, which was also increased in the same periods. This increase of both total and long term employment stems mainly from the entry of women onto the labour market, revealing a secondary but equally important function of the “welfare state”. Through the development of institutions such as schools, hospitals, nursing homes for the aged, nurseries, to mention just a few, which are necessary for the reproduction of labour power, a large part of the female population is “freed” and

¹² These are extracts from TC’s self-presentation text, *Who are we?* which can be found at <http://theoriecommunisme.communisation.net/English/Presentation%2C17/Who-we-are?lang=en>

reproduction because they are proletarians, but they experience it everyday as separated and contingent (accidental and non-necessary) in relation to production itself.” And because of this way of experiencing reproduction, when these subjects rebel, their attack remains on the level of reproduction of capitalist relations. According to TC the limit of the rebellion of these subjects is intrinsic.

“These riots have been a class movement and not simply a political agitation by activists (which would equally be a class movement) but it was not a struggle within the very foundation of classes: production. This is why this movement has been able to accomplish this key thing that is to produce and to face one’s class belonging as a constraint, but they could only do that and reach that point by coming up against production’s glass floor. What is more, the way (the objectives, the unfolding of the riots, the composition of the rioters...) in which this movement has produced this exterior constraint has been intrinsically defined by this limit.”

Provided that *the crisis of reproduction*, “running out of future” and the “general situation of labour power” (that is precariousness), constructs/determines a subject and the only thing that this subject can do is to question itself as a class on the level of reproduction, then, how can revolution and communization result? How can this subject assault the centre of the contradiction which is productive labour?

TC’s answer focuses on the fact that “*the productive character of labour can be defined at the level of the collective worker*”. Although “*the same (temp) worker can change, from one week to another, from a productive job to one that is not*” and although “*productive workers are [not] revolutionaries by nature and at all times*”, however, “*through blocking the production of value and surplus-value, the men who live at the core of the conflict of capital as contradiction in process do not simply ‘block’*”. These sometimes productive workers, “*in their singular action, which is nothing special, but only their engagement in the struggle, the*

why according to TC productive labour represents the capital-proletariat contradiction. As they write:

“It is the very mode through which labour exists socially, valorisation, which is the contradiction between the proletariat and capital. Defined by exploitation, the proletariat is in contradiction with the socially necessary existence of its labour as capital, that is to say an autonomised value which remains so only through valorising itself: **the falling rate of profit is a contradiction between the classes**. The proletariat is constantly in contradiction with its own definition as a class: the necessity of its reproduction is something it finds facing it in the form of capital, and for capital the proletariat is always necessary and at the same time to be done away with. The proletariat never finds its confirmation in the reproduction of the social relation in which it is yet a necessary pole. This is the contradiction of productive labour.”

In other words, as capital develops, namely as the organic composition of capital rises, more and more labour power is thrown out of productive labour process. More and more proletarians (although essential for capital) become surplus. As the rate of profit falls, which depends on the proportion of the surplus-value to the total capital employed (constant and variable), more and more living labour is unnecessary for valorization, therefore, the proletariat faces its own existence because it cannot be reproduced outside capital. Thus the proletariat experiences the capitalist relation as an *external constraint*. It is exactly because of this shrinkage in productive labour (during the accumulation cycles), of labour essential for valorization, that precariousness becomes “*the general situation of labour power*”. However, since precariousness represents the general condition of labour power, “*the contradictory relation between the proletariat and capital is situated at the level of the reproduction*”. The subjects which embody this general situation “*students without prospects, young immigrants, precarious workers, these proletarians experience the reproduction of capitalist social relations everyday as coercion, coercion which is included in this*

is given the opportunity to participate in the labour market, if, of course, it possesses the appropriate training skills, and what’s more, in jobs created exactly by these institutions. We will return to this point, i.e. to the expansion of the population of waged-workers, when we will examine the characteristics of capitalist restructuring.

If we focus on new jobs pertaining to long-term employment, we will see that in the USA about 73% of them are full-time jobs.¹³ On the contrary, part-time employment is prevalent with regard to new jobs pertaining to long-term employment in Europe at a proportion of 62%.¹⁴ Correspondingly, despite the drastic cuts of the workforce in specific sectors of the economy (those who were mainly affected by the restructuring of production in Europe were farmers, fishermen, miners and utility workers, whereas in the USA those affected were industrial workers, miners and work-

¹³ In any case, the proportion of part-time employment in the USA has not changed significantly since the mid 50’s, when relevant statistical data were first recorded. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, in 1960 part-time employment was 14.7% of total employment, in 1970 it was 15.8%, in 1980 it increased to 17.5%, it was temporarily reduced to 16.1% in 2000 to be increased again to 17.3% in 2008.

¹⁴ Nowadays, the view that part-time employment as a whole is identified, like temporary employment, with “precariousness” is extremely widespread. This appears as a self-evident truth that supposedly requires no further analysis. Furthermore, some researchers go so far as to add the number of those working on a part-time basis with the number of those working “temp” in order to determine the range of “precariousness”. Nevertheless, as we have already mentioned, precariousness is a subjective situation to a great extent, since even a worker with a permanent contract may feel “precarious”, especially in conditions of crisis and when “business is not going well” for the bosses. However, even part-time contracts are largely connected with stable jobs, both in Europe and in the USA. Cf. K. Doogan, *New capitalism?—The transformation of work*, 2009. But what happens with those having two or three jobs? These workers are certainly precarious, since their second job is usually informal and probably temporary (even if it is not necessarily part-time). However, in the USA in the period during 1994–2008 the number of those employed in two or three jobs (temp and part-time workers) has increased only by 400.000, with the result that their proportion to total employment has decreased from 5.9% to 5.2% (Bureau of Labor Statistics).

¹⁵ Cf. K. Doogan, *op.cit.*

¹⁶ Cf. R.-P. Bodin, *Wide-ranging Forms of Work and Employment in Europe*, ILO report, 2001. Of course, these figures may differ from one state to another, reflecting the different national strategies of employment and of capitalist accumulation in general.

¹⁷ Cf. D.W. Jorgenson, M.S. Ho, K.J. Stiroh, *A Retrospective Look at the U.S. Productivity Growth Resurgence*, in *Journal of Economic Perspectives* Vol.22, no.1, 2008. According to the study of International Labour Organization (ILO), *Is a stable workforce good for productivity?* (*International Labour Review* Vol.144, No. 3, 2005) by P. Auer, J. Berg and I. Coulibaly, short tenure in a firm is connected with adverse effects on productivity. In particular, productivity increases in proportion to job tenure at least until 13.6 years of employment in the same firm. In the durable goods industries, the average productivity of workers with 0-6 months of tenure is only 24% of the average productivity of workers with over two years of tenure whereas the productivity of workers with 6-24 months of tenure is 65% respectively. Things get even worse for the bosses in the industries of non-durable goods where the respective figures are 5% and 54%. The fact that in the decade between 1992-2002 the average job tenure in the countries of OECD reached 10.5 years with a tendency to increase slowly is also revealing (in Greece the average job tenure was about 13 years in the same period). Since productivity begins to decrease when average job tenure exceeds 13.6 years to sink after 25 years, the issue for capital is to adjust the structure of the labour market on the basis of the appropriate proportion of short-term jobs to long-term jobs. Furthermore, according to the study *Labor market institutions and industrial performance: an evolutionary study* (*Journal of Evolutionary Economics* Vol.18, 2008) by Y. Kilicaslan and E. Taymaz which was based on data from 44 countries (24 with a low GDP and 20 with a high GDP), the implementation of measures of labour market **regulation** had positive effects on productivity. The explanation these researchers give for this finding is based on the following observation: excessive labour “flexibility” results in the survival of low productivity firms through low cost of labour and as an outcome total productivity decreases. The study by E. Toledo, *The Crisis of the Maquiladora Model in Mexico*, in *Work and Occupations*, Vol. 34, 2007 reaches the same conclusion by a different route. According to this study, precarious labour relations in maquiladoras caused the resistance of workers, which although not taking the form of strikes, was expressed, however, through either individual worker claims filed in labor courts or –more likely– through voluntary turnover which is more frequent among younger, single, more educated male workers, because of boredom, fatigue, as well as poor health and safety conditions. The maquiladora workers follow a “nomadic” labour path from one company to another and are characterized by zero identification

On productive labour, subjects and the limits of the December rebellion

At this point of our article we will examine how TC use the notion of productive labour which they conceive as *the living and objective contradiction of this mode of production*. We will present the contradictions inherent to their theoretical schema and its ‘short-circuited’ form. Then, we will come out of this schema and develop our own viewpoint concerning the content and the limits of the December rebellion.

According to a definition by Marx “*Productive labour, in its meaning for capitalist production, is wage-labour which, exchanged against the variable part of capital (the part of the capital that is spent on wages), reproduces not only this part of the capital (or the value of its own labour-power), but in addition produces surplus-value for the capitalist*”,⁴¹ a definition that TC seem to agree with whenever they refer to productive labour. *Productive labour* is of immense importance for TC because “[it] *structures society as a whole*”. How does productive labour do that? For capital, the proletariat appears to be useful only as long as it enters the valorization process, only as a surplus-value producer. The needs of valorization are the ones that structure society as a whole because social – therefore proletarian– reproduction is exclusively determined by these needs. The emphasis on the direct production process, on surplus-value extraction, in relation to social reproduction which constitutes a secondary process, is evident throughout TC’s text: “*But neither the schools, the family, consumption, politics, nor prisons produce classes, these are not where the social division takes its roots*”, but in “*the core of class struggle [exists] the contradiction represented by productive labour*”. Let’s see

⁴¹ Karl Marx, *Theories of Surplus-Value [Volume IV of Capital]*, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1863/theories-surplus-value/ch04.htm>

In this theoretical schema there is no space left for the communist moments of the rebellion. But, however TC want to ignore it, the rebels created communities of struggle, they overcame the existing separations in many cases, they liberated their creativity and they attacked alienation creating new social relations. And if all this can happen during a rebellion in a relatively easy way, then nobody can take for granted that there can be no communist moments even in an everyday struggle, inside or outside workplaces. Besides, wasn't December already present in the revolt against student labour in 2006 or in the teachers' slogan in the streets "*We have no brains, we will give you another salary away*" during their strike in the same year;⁴⁰ in the myriads of minor or major transgressive attitudes in everyday life that pass unnoticed; **in the prisoners' revolt just one month before the December rebellion – a struggle over demands just like the above-mentioned ones.** Or weren't rebellious practices present in the solidarity movement for Konstantina Kouneva, after the rebellion, although it was mainly a struggle over demands?

TC deny explicitly any links between everyday struggles and the rebellion and that is why they present the "rupture" – which the rebellion no doubt was – as produced automatically by the "*ultimate structure*" of the contradictory capitalist relation. Contrary to what TC assert, what the rebellion was – the changing of the circumstances coinciding with self-changing – was present in the everyday refusal/abolition of alienating mediations. This unspoken, indescribable and incomplete "something else", as a potentiality, runs through everyday antagonistic struggles. We will come to this fundamental issue below.

⁴⁰ This slogan, which is actually a variation of a football-hooligan popular slogan, was sung in the streets as the primary school teachers' strike was entering its second month.

ers in the telecommunications sector), not only did total employment rise between 1991-2002 (and what's more, long-term employment), as we have already mentioned, but the relative proportion of jobs under long-term contracts has risen everywhere, including the sectors that underwent restructuring, with the exception of the telecommunications sector in the USA.¹⁵

In Europe, notwithstanding that at the beginning of the 90's there was a significant increase in precarious jobs, a stabilization of the ratio between permanent/temporary job was observed during the period 1995-2000 at 4.5:1 (82% permanent jobs, 18% temporary jobs).¹⁶ Of course, precarious labour will continue to be a means of discipline and worsening conditions/terms of labour (a means of wage reduction/moderation, deepening separations between precarious and permanent workers within the same workplace, an internalization of the feeling of insecurity amongst large parts of the working population, even if there is no real danger) – a simultaneously defensive and offensive weapon to be used in class struggle on the part of capital, which, nevertheless, cannot constitute the general condition of labour. And how can that be when, on an international level and despite neoliberal propaganda, it seems that the introduction of new forms of employment, even if it served as a response to the fall of productivity during the 70's (and in the USA already since the end of the 60's), leads to very low increases in the productivity of labour?¹⁷ This "duality" of the labour market should not seem strange. Contrary to TC's historicist structuralism which mechanistically divides history to a period of formal domination of capital and two periods of real domination of capital, the whole modern history

with the company and their work in general. According to Toledo, this is the explanation why the maquiladora model has entered a crisis of productivity. (Maquiladoras: factories in Mexico that import materials and machine parts without customs and taxes, assemble these materials and then export the finished goods mostly to the countries of origin of the imported materials and machine parts. The maquiladoras were first created in 1964 along the northern border of Mexico and employ young women in their majority.)

of capitalist accumulation is interwoven with the co-existence of processes of extraction of both absolute and relative surplus value, with a combination of permanent and temporary work, as well as with the existence of pockets of slavery, even within the same country. China is a typical and, because of its significance in global production, far from negligible example.

Finally, if we focus on the age distribution of the workers with long-term employment, we find that in the period between 1983 and 2002 there is a very large increase in the representation of the age group 35-54 in the USA, both for men and women, in contrast with the age group 25-34 whose proportional representation in long-term jobs decreases significantly.¹⁸ The last finding is particularly revealing and reinforces our position regarding the disciplining-allocating character of the labour market, especially as far as entrants are concerned. A relevant European example is that of France. As we have shown in our analysis of the struggles against the “first employment contract” (CPE), the proportion of youth under the age of 26 working under temporary contracts ranged between 35% and 40% in the mid-90’s. According to the statistics, the proportion of stable employment increased with the years of service in the period between 1985 and 2001 (with stable employment prevalent among workers being in the labour market more than five years).¹⁹

The identification, on the one hand, of Keynesian regulation and the fordist organization of production with stable, guaranteed labour and the development of state interventionism as well as the identification, on the other hand, of neoliberal restructuring and the expansion of the “diffuse factory” with a limitless mobility of industrial capital around the world, extreme expansion of precarious labour relations and the dissolution of the interventionist character of the nation-state is simplistic, to say the least,

¹⁸ Cf. K. Doogan, *op.cit.*

¹⁹ Cf. Y. Fondeur and G. Minni, *L’emploi des jeunes au coeur des dynamiques du marche du travail*, Economie et Statistique No 378-379, 2004. See also TPTG No 12-13, pp. 48-55.

on the inevitability of the non-satisfaction of demands. So, if everyday struggles do not contain, not even in a latent form, the negative human activity and the creation of a community of struggle while their failure is deterministically given, what exactly do TC actually suggest? To become **spectators** of the struggles waiting for the ripening of time when we will “face [our own] existence as a class and treat it as something to do away with”?

TC wrongly claim that the advocates of the autonomy of struggles limit themselves to the form, while it is clear that for a considerable part of the revolutionary movement, not only in the past but also nowadays, autonomy is inextricably connected with the content of the struggle: the autonomy of the proletarian struggles is the constitution of the proletarian subject that puts in motion the revolutionary process for the abolition of wage-labour and all classes.

If, according to TC, the proletarians in their struggles find nothing else than “*all the divisions of wage-labour and of exchange*”; if “*the proletariat produces ... its whole existence in the categories of capital*”; if the overcoming of separations can be achieved only by a universal and simultaneous change of the content of the struggle towards revolution, then the “class in itself” becomes class for itself only under compulsion, because of some historical objectivity to which class struggle is subjected. Proletarians create nothing, neither momentarily nor permanently; things just happen to them (e.g. they are transformed into surplus population due to the problematic “transformation of surplus value into additional capital”). There is no self-critique for them to do because they do not have “*any confirmation of [their] existence for [themselves] in the face of capital*” to criticise. They are just capital, therefore they don’t make mistakes because their “mistakes” are historically determined. The “*ultimate structure*” will solve all the problems, although this does not exclude the possibility that the proletarians will have to lend a hand with it.

expropriates their activity and is ready to shoot them when they show signs of indiscipline. That is why the destruction of banks and state buildings was accompanied by the occupation of town-halls and public (or even private) buildings: the unification of individuals normally separated from each other within a non-human community –the community of capital, dominated by objects– was decomposed and the recomposition of a real community of interests was attempted.

Here's what one of the many leaflets distributed in those days said on the matter:

*“We despise democracy more than anything else in this decadent world. For what is democracy other than a system of discriminations and coercions in the service of property and privacy? And what are its rules, other than rules of negotiation of the right to own – the invisible rules of alienation? Freedom, rights equality, egalitarianism: all these dead ideological masks together cannot cover their mission: the generalisation and preservation of the social as an economic sphere, as a sphere where not only what you have produced but also what you are and what you can do are already alienated. The bourgeois, with a voice trembling from piety, promise: rights, justice, equality. And the revolted hear: repression, exploitation, looting”.*³⁹

The definition of the revolutionary process as a “rupture”, as a “qualitative leap” given by TC implies that there is no connection between the reality of the everyday struggles with communization, which is defined largely negatively. They do not see the positive content that may exist in the real struggles as creation of new social relations, overcoming of separations, constitution of a revolutionary subject. They take for granted that every struggle over demands is doomed to fail because they fail to see beyond the demands –although they are mistaken even

³⁹ *A Bedouin anytime! A citizen never*, 23/12/2008 (<http://www.occupiedlondon.org/blog/2008/12/29/a-bedouin-anytime-a-citizen-never/>).

*if not outright wrong since it is based on the equation of various tendencies of the capitalist relation with the general situation. The source of this wrong perception is the so-called Regulation School which, focusing on the economic and state institutions that monitored and organized (supposedly objectively) the social relations of production, presented capitalist development endeavours since the 20's till the end of the 60's as a uniform process with homogenizing characteristics, ignoring the various forms assumed by the struggle of the subjectivities which were involved in these very social relations. According to this School, the capitalist development process following the fordist model was interrupted because of the crisis in the beginning of the 70's, to start again as “post-fordism” in the West and as “toyotism” in Japan.*²⁰

Nevertheless, the giant growth of the “welfare state” in the West, namely of social expenditure and expenses with which it is interwoven (health, education, social benefits, pensions, etc.) was not a necessary effect dictated by Keynesian theory, but, on the contrary, it was the response of the state to class struggles. For example, in the USA, the country where scientific management of labour emerged, part-time/temporary employment covering the seasonal needs of the auto-industry, attacks against strikers or unionized workers, iron discipline in workplaces and lack of benefits or health care were particularly widespread till the 40's, when militant workers' struggles obliged the bosses to make concessions. In England, the first attempts to cut down on social expenditure had already started since the beginning of the 50's. Moreover, it's difficult to talk about a “fordist compromise” in this country in the decades following the 2nd World War, since until the end of the 60's, when redundancy payment was introduced into labour legislation, even formal labour contracts were non-existent. In mass workplaces, such as docks and the auto-industry, employees

²⁰ Cf. F. Gambino, *A critique of the Fordism of the Regulation School*, Common Sense No 19, 1996.

were day-laborers. In Ford, particularly, there were struggles against this regime and against massive layoffs even during the 70's. In France, to mention another example, legislative efforts that would favour workers' mobility, in an increasingly rigid labour market until then, as well as working time arrangement (reduction in working hours accompanied by a simultaneous reduction in wages) began in the mid-60's.²¹ These attempts faced a strong resistance from the workers and the rest of the proletariat, as, if anything, the revolt of '68 has shown (which of course had a much deeper and more substantial content than a simple opposition to the "dual" labour market).

These struggles, both in Europe and in the USA, no matter which form they took (strikes, sabotage, urban rebellions, civil rights movements, absenteeism, etc.), broke out at an increasing rate, with an increasing fury already since the mid-60's and until the mid-70's and led to a great increase of social expenditures in a series of developed capitalist countries (USA, Canada, Germany, UK, Australia, Sweden), which attempted thus to integrate the working class and its struggles. Indeed, if we consider the amount of benefits per employee, after the subtraction of direct taxes and insurance contributions given by each employee to the state, we will discover that the "surplus" per employee as a proportion of the GDP increases gradually since 1968, is reduced temporarily as a result of the international depression because of the "oil crisis" in the first years of the 70's and then increases again reaching its peak in 1975. This great increase was caused by the direct wage reduction policies which were followed after '73, the increase of unemployment and the pressure exercised by proletarians for more public expenditure (benefits, etc.). In the years that immediately followed, this "surplus", always as a proportion of GDP, starts to get reduced, because of the onslaught on sectors of the "welfare" state, till the end of the 70's when it got some-

²¹ B. Astarian, *Les greves en mai-juin 1968*, 2003.

dications at face value as formal demands without seeking their deeper causes and the processes behind them, what makes them appear as concrete demands. Such an identification would not allow us to explain why struggles over demands all too often overcome the framework of democratic legitimacy and negotiation (see for example street fighting, occupations, violent acts, "bossnapings" and threats for machinery destruction in French factories during recent struggles over workers' compensations). Moreover, it would mean that everyday class struggle in general is looked down on in expectation of the ... coming insurrections.

We stressed the importance of the absence of demands during the rebellion, without however turning it into a standard according to which any past, present or future struggle should be discredited. It was interpreted as the glorious moment of coming together of the various proletarian subjectivities that the *community* of their struggle at that particular time made them unwilling to demand anything partial. However, our analysis focuses on this community (its composition, its targets, its actions) and not on the absence of demands itself, otherwise, we would risk confusing the result with the starting point.

Rebellions start where movements over demands stop and they *shed light* on the deeper and latent aspects of these movements. And it is precisely these aspects of the movements over demands that, overcoming their limited character, come to the surface in the rebellion and take on a general dimension.

Ultimately, for TC, the content of the rebellion is identified with the absence of demands and is thus perceived only negatively. However, the pivotal feat of the December rebellion was that in its **deepest content** it was non-democratic, precisely because its critique arose from the point of view of the isolated individual-citizen seeking to overcome herself/himself, confronting not just a corrupted government but Democracy, the political **form** of capital that in the name of the common, abstract good unifies the "free" sellers of their labour-power,

ist relation abolishes: sociality (i.e. the human essence) and the conscious activity whereby changing of the circumstances coincides with self-changing. Therefore, what makes the capitalist relation contradictory, the relation between proletariat and capital, is not the inability of the proletariat to reproduce itself within this relation as a class, but the fact that the very proletarian activity turns against itself. This potentially makes the proletariat into the gravedigger of capital through the struggle against itself. We say “potentially” since the class struggle of the proletariat, as it has manifested itself through its historical forms in the last two centuries, is not uniform nor cohesive nor one-dimensional. Besides, it offers no historical guarantees for its outcome.

Although TC recognize that the rebellion “*seem[s] to be the first movement in the recent period where democracy was centrally and genuinely criticized, in its governmental form as well as in the mode of functioning of the struggle itself*” and that even more “*these riots... in their simple and direct critique of democracy... made [an] enormous and quite radical progress, both in theory and practice*”, they nonetheless consider that this critique remained formal and eventually democratic. This happened, as they say, because it was limited within the critique of the democratic procedures and the form of governing, something that in turn is due to the fact that the rebellion as a whole was limited in the sphere of reproduction and inevitably in the critique of ideology from the point of view of the isolated individual. However, they nonetheless recognize that the absence of demands on behalf of the movement gave to its struggle a content that necessitates no form of representation. For TC, the very existence of demands “*impl[ies] democracy as self-recognition of the group and relation to the opponent*”.

Let’s try an inversion of the above. If we identified demands in general with democracy, this would be tantamount to deleting the multi-dimensional content of past and present struggles, since it would mean that we would take their reven-

how stabilized, with small fluctuations and remaining, during the whole 80’s, at a higher level than in the 50’s and the 60’s. In those decades workers in the USA were paying more than what they were getting from the state in the form of benefits and, thus, they not only supported the national “welfare state” but also they funded, partially, national development. But also in Sweden, which is generally considered as the model country for the development of the “welfare state”, the “net social wage” was roughly zero and the social welfare expenditures were actually “self-financed” until the end of the 60’s.²² Since the end of the 70’s and until the mid-90’s the expenditures of the “welfare state” as a proportion of the GDP were continuously increasing and have corresponded thereafter to the respective levels of unemployment and to the needs of the reproduction of labour power, remaining more or less stable.²³

The data presented above show that the restructuring, as a response of capital to its *crisis of reproduction* (which is simultaneously a *crisis of legitimacy of capitalist relations* and a *crisis of overaccumulation*), that began to be promoted in the mid-70’s and afterwards, and became known as “neoliberalism”, did not aim at breaking the “social contract” and shattering the state into pieces, as it is mistakenly argued by the anti-neoliberal “anti-globalization movement” and by TC. And how could that be? As it was also demonstrated beyond any doubt through the measures that were taken to deal with the recent depression, the helping hand of the state, the hot and abundant money of the state (not to mention the other equally important, partic-

²² Cf. A Shaikh, “*Who Pays for the ‘Welfare’ in the Welfare State?*”, Social Research, Vol.70, No 2, 2003. Of course, even if this “surplus”, which is called by Shaikh “net social wage”, is at a higher level in the 90’s than in the 50’s and the 60’s, it is however more difficult to have access to, while on the other hand it is used in order to further discipline and atomize its recipients.

²³ Niklas Potrafke, *Did globalization restrict partisan politics? An empirical evaluation of social expenditures in a panel of OECD countries*, Public Choice, Vol. 140, No 1, 2009.

ular manifestations of the state such as school, the police and the prison system) is always necessary for the proper functioning of the capitalist system and its perpetuation. Most notably, it was precisely because the magnitude of the crises that broke out in the last years was far bigger than of those that had broken out during the period of Keynesian regulation, that the

²⁴ Cf. G. Efstathopoulos and K. Ioakeimoglou, *The service sector, competitiveness and labour* (Athens, 2004).

²⁵ Cf. Anon., *Alternatives Economiques*, May 1994, DARES data: *Enquêtes spécifiques Acemo: Enquêtes sur l'activité et les conditions d'emploi de main-d'oeuvre*. Quoted in F. Gambino, *op.cit.* The fact that there has been a reduction of manufacturing employment in most of the developed economies in the past four decades and in a number of “middle-income” countries more recently cannot be disputed. Services account nowadays for the majority of both employment and GDP in most countries of the world. However, a significant part of this reduction can be attributed to the outsourcing of a range of activities of manufacturing enterprises to specialized service providers. This effect is nothing but a statistical illusion. Furthermore, the recent growth of the service economy is characterized by the increasing importance of large scale services both in terms of technology and in terms of the number of workers per firm. In other words, there has been an “industrialization” of services which makes the classification of certain activities into the service sector improper (e.g. software development, printing, motion pictures, etc). Another important reason for the growth of the service sector in relation to manufacturing was the massive entrance of women in the labour market. A wide range of activities connected with the reproduction labour of women at home (child-care, elderly-care, cooking, etc.) has been transferred into the market. However, according to some studies, the expansion of the service sector is mainly attributed to the expansion of skill-intensive services (education, health care, legal services, banking, real estate, accounting, broadcasting and television, air transportation, etc). It must be noted that the wages of skilled service workers are pretty high with a rising disparity to the wages of less skilled workers (in the United States the average wage of college-educated workers rose from 125 percent of the average high school-graduate wage in 1950 to over 200 percent by 2000). See, F. Tregenna, *Characterizing deindustrialization: An analysis of changes in manufacturing employment and output internationally*, Cambridge Journal of Economics, vol. 33, 2009; F. Buera and J. Kaboski, *Scale and the Origins of Structural Change*, FRB of Chicago Working Paper No. 2008-06; and F. Buera and J. Kaboski, *The Rise of the Service Economy*, National Bureau of Economic Research Working Paper No. 14822, 2009.

It's also obvious that the theoretical schema of TC doesn't include the notion of alienation. That's why TC disdain the individual dimension of the rebellion and of the subversive activity in general, as if it weren't all too clear that “*the conditions will never change unless men change themselves*”.³⁸ Besides, for Marx, analysis should begin with the method of research, the recording of the empirical data, of the “real and concrete experience”, which also includes the individual experience. Afterwards, the chaotic empirical material should be organized systematically starting from the simplest abstractions and progressing to ever more complex concretizations. In this dialectical analysis of capitalist society, which is the analysis of all the perverted (*verrückte*) forms of existence of human social relations in capitalism, the moments of particularity and of individuality are considered to be equally essential with universality and in interdependence with it. Since Marx, unlike TC, does not consider revolution as an objective process, he is not satisfied with the presentation of a self-reproducing totality within which individuality would be reduced to the role of a secondary component part. And this is so because he considers it to be the only component part of totality that can pose insurmountable obstacles to its reproduction. Thanks to the moment of subjectivity, which, in its self-undermining action, subverts all the perverted forms of its social existence in capitalism, we are able to talk about communism. In this sense, the starting point and the end –not only of the analysis but also of the struggle– is the real individual in her/his social relations. Within the capitalist social relation, i.e. within the continuous self-expansion of alienated labour (value), the product of labour confronts its producer as an alien force that belongs to capital. The struggle of the creative-subversive subjectivity against alienation, against reified relations in capitalism, is the struggle for a recovery of all that which the alienating capital-

³⁸ Karl Marx, *The German Ideology*.

over the misunderstanding of what we wrote in our texts)³⁶ is due to their geographical distance from it. Right from the beginning their text is revealing: “*The overcoming in the struggle of the objectivity of the course of capital and the activities of the classes [involved] appear as choices, decisions, tactics, and strategies*”[our emphasis],³⁷ therefore they are not such. That’s why all the ways of communication consciously chosen by the rebels, for example the assemblies, the self-proclaimed “popular assemblies” among them, too, are summarised in a few words –even though they constituted the vital space in the rebellion for the creation of a **proletarian public sphere**, a sphere that was both a necessary presupposition for the extension of the rebellion and its immediate creation.

2002).

³⁶ By the way, concerning the “divergences” TC mention in the number of demonstrators/rioters in our texts, the initial *Chronology* (which is included in the French book) and *Like a Winter*, we must point out some details that obviously have been misunderstood by them. As far as the first day is concerned, in the *Chronology*, when we said that more than 10,000 people took to the streets and clashed with the police, we were talking about the total number of people mobilized that very evening in the centre of Athens. In *Like a Winter*, when we talked about 2,000 people, we referred to those (mainly leftists) that in the same night participated in the demo in Patision and Akadimias St. On the second day, in the *Chronology*, we estimated that approximately 4,000 people participated in the demo towards the Police Headquarters (a rather moderate estimation, by hindsight). However, in *Like a Winter*, we referred to 10,000 people that were present in the streets, because after this demo desolved, a lot of people that were not necessarily a part of it took to the streets in the centre (maybe this number is moderate, too). Finally, on the third day of the rebellion, in the *Chronology*, we referred to over 1,500 people that were involved in smashing and looting, while in *Like a Winter*, we talked about over 10,000 people that were involved in clashes with the police.

³⁷ According to the French original it reads “*Le dépassement dans la lutte de l’objectivité du cours du capital et les activités des classes en présence comme choix, décisions, tactiques, stratégies*”. The Greek translation of this sentence is more faithful than the English one we cite here, that is why we added the underlined missing verb.

amount of state money that flowed in order to address their results and to put the capitalist machine back in operation was equally bigger. Restructuring, as we have shown, did not aim at radically imposing a new, general labour contract. Neither did it induce a total change of the production model: the giant growth of the service sector in the West cannot be considered aside from its increased interdependency and complementarity with the secondary sector, neither can it be considered aside from the fact that a significant part of the tertiary sector is industrialized. Thus, “*the dynamics and the ‘health’ of services [will] determine to a great degree the competitiveness of the industry and of the economy as a whole*”, while “*the future of an economy will be increasingly based on the necessary combination of both forms of labour (‘industrial labour’ and ‘creative labour’)*”.²⁴ In France, for example, the number of those working in fordist production models has risen both in an absolute and a relative way during the whole 80’s and at least until the mid-90’s.²⁵

What was attempted, and only partially achieved, through the restructuring of the last 35 years, was a more rational and efficient management for capital of the necessarily rising state expenditures, their channeling into developing sectors, such as the security sector, and the limitation of proletarian demands: minimizing their expectations through a more tight fiscal policy. Proletarians had been asking for too much during the whole decade between 1965-1975 and had forced capital, through their struggles, to expand the “welfare state”. However, since this expansion was accompanied by the weakness of capital to raise the rate of exploitation in proportion to the increase in costly fixed capital, it had to come to a halt if not to be reversed. What else do the continuous fluctuations of the “net social wage” as a proportion of GDP reflect if not an ongoing class struggle on a global scale, whose conclusion has not been determined yet?

Of course, restructuring was not just a “defensive” strategy of capital, neither did it just stay limited to keep the demands of the proletarians in check. It introduced new forms of capitalist attack in the developed world, such as, for example, tendencies of increased precariousness amongst entrants onto the labour market, privatizations in a series of the sectors of the economy or the explosion of financial capital through the expansion of credit to proletarians. It also induced increases in working time, the intensification of labour, the reduction of the direct, individual wage but also the increase in employment (albeit the periodical numerous layoffs and the increase in unemployment in specific sectors of the economic/productive activity). The increase in employment led to the increase of the household income: more people are now working more than before in order to satisfy their increased needs, because of the transfer of a part of the cost of social reproduction to the workers themselves.²⁶ If the initial phase of the crisis of reproduction of capitalist relations at the end of the 60’s was the result of multiple proletarian negations, *the present phase of the reproduction crisis was accelerated by the, necessarily contradictory, neoliberal capitalist politics.*

We were obliged to elaborate a little more on the subject of labour relations and of restructuring since, unfortunately, in the few cases where TC try to be concrete, attempting to interpret the rebellion of December 2008, both in its particular historical and social ground as well as in its global context, they make crude mistakes.

²⁶ Through the Structural Adjustment Programs in the countries of the so-called “third-world”, the restructuring accelerated the processes of primitive accumulation as well as the resulting violent proletarianization of local populations and has caused the destruction of the natural environment, wars, immiseration, starvation, uprooting and mass population transfers.

*stitutes the self-organized proletarian collectivities and reunifies the workers as private individuals-citizens. Therefore, from our perspective, the state-form is the integration and the defeat of the autonomous organization and activity of the proletariat on the whole of everyday life”.*³⁵

Starting, therefore, from a partial and unilateral perception of the reproduction crisis of the capitalist relation which focuses mainly on “*the transformation of surplus-value into additional capital*” as an objective process and which downgrades the *legitimacy crisis* of the existing mediations that the capitalist state is *forced* to use in order to confront class struggle and to perpetuate the exploitation relations, TC end up with a partial view of the rebellion itself. Hence, they *underestimate* intentionally the practical critique of the rebels on all aspects of life as fetishized categories: commodity circulation, money, wage-labour, police, politics. Thereafter, they reduce the richness of a lived critique produced through experience (the experience of the rebellion as a feast, the sensation of the breaking of the onward frozen reified time and space continuum of capitalism, the communities of the occupations, of the assemblies, of the gatherings in the streets, the moments of the overcoming of separations, work absenteeism) to the “*perspective of the isolated individual*” that “*loses sight of the structure*”. They refuse to see the blockade of normality, the plethora of ruptures on both an individual and a collective level caused by the participation in the rebellion; they refuse to see the transgression of bourgeois law through collective delinquent practices. Therefore, for TC the rebellion means nothing more than a reaction to the “*breach of the contract*”, a breach that has been summarized into the crisis of the “*contract of labour*”.

From what we write, it’s clear that we don’t think that TC’s lack of understanding of the content of the rebellion (and more-

³⁵ *They shoot horses, don’t they?*, 2nd edition, 2008. (A brochure on the restructuring of the welfare state we first published with other comrades in

work' for each worker; it protects capital and the labour power in general. Nevertheless, the state, since it constitutes basically the **political form of the capitalist society**, is not the result of a linear historical evolution of the process of the reproduction and the accumulation of capital. It's not only the collective capitalist, let alone a collective capitalist acting on its own will.

As capital is an antagonistic social relation, its very reproduction process itself is a conflictual process that is created, interrupted, destroyed, re-created or transformed by the process of class struggle. The whole history of the capitalist development up to now has been a history of continuous reproduction crises of capital, as the working class decomposes and recomposes itself in its continuous struggle that it wages in order to impose the satisfaction of its own needs against the needs of the capitalists. The state is a moment of this reproduction process and therefore it is a moment of class struggle. Since, however, workers do not confront the capitalists in an immediate way as class against class in exchange relations or in production, similarly they do not confront each other as class against class in the sphere of the state. The political power of the capitalist class lies in its ability to present the state as an autonomous and neutral organization that functions in the interest of the 'civil society' and of the 'nation'; it lies in the existing identification of the reproduction of the capitalist relation with the reproduction of society in general. This is achieved through the artificial separation of circulation from production. But here also lies the vulnerability of the capitalist state. Its history is a history of continuous legitimacy crises, as it faces the working class demands for redistribution of the social wealth which it can never fully satisfy. On the other hand, the vulnerability of the working class lies in the fact that its struggles are contained in the mechanisms of parliamentary, political and unionist representation. This form of representation strengthens the existing divisions inside the working class (divisions that are rooted in the competition among workers in the labour market and in the hierarchal organization of the labour process), sub-

A disjunction between theory and common sense?

Another text of ours which TC used for its analysis is *Like A Winter with a thousand Decembers*. There we said that "the spontaneity and uncontrollable nature of this insurrection was proven by the absence of political proposals, thus by an explicit rejection of politics... There were no specific political demands and this, combined with their ferocity, made the riots all too threatening for the usual forces of recuperation and manipulation." TC turned this lack of demands in the rebellion into one of the cornerstones of their analysis and, because of their progressivist view of History, they attributed it to the fact that in the present cycle of struggles (in which they place the rebellion) "there is no longer any alternative" since "the future is already looted". Just the mentioning by TC of the simultaneous appearance of "Onda anomale" (the protest student movement) in Italy, in the end of 2008, suffice it to render the generalization of this axiom non valid. Older urban rebellions as well as modern ones (Detroit '68, L.A. '92, French banlieues 2005) constitute those social "earthquakes", as Marx would call them, during which –whether there exist links among the fragments of the class or not, the absence of demands remains an invariable characteristic.

In footnote no 3 of their text TC state that our historical period makes demands themselves *illegitimate* and mainly the demand par excellence, the wage demand, and speak, as we said, about a disjunction a) between the valorisation of capital and the reproduction of labour power and b) between consumption and wages as source of income.²⁷

²⁷ To be precise, the phrase used by TC to characterize the wage demand (and the reproduction of labour power) in the present period is that it becomes "*structurellement illégitime*" ("structurally illegitimate"). According to this notion, which is reflected in the whole text about the rebellion, police repression is the only way left for the state to confront class struggles!

However, the basis of this reasoning is totally false: if the process of the valorisation of capital (which is at the same time a labour process) gets disconnected from the reproduction of labour power, this will mean the end of surplus value production, the end of the reproduction of the capitalist relation; since, as we know, neither machines produce value and surplus value, nor money breeds money. In order for capital to valorise itself, it must be in a position to absorb surplus labour from an endlessly reproduced labour power. That's why the additional capital produced through the exchange process is turned again into constant and variable capital (irrespective of their proportion). The variable capital is the wage, in other words the means for the reproduction of the labour power.

Consumption is one of the moments of the total circuit of the reproduction of the capitalist relation; and as the consumption of means of production and labour power in the production process presupposes profit for the capitalist, likewise the consumption of the means of subsistence that renew the labour power presupposes the wage for the worker. If now, by the use of this second "disjunction", the one between consumption and wages, TC want to refer to the increasing use of credit on the part of the working class, two remarks should be made. First, the increased supply of credit by banks in the last decades shows the contradictory attempt by capital to run away from the antagonistic wage relation offering in the form of credit a part of the value which has not been produced yet. Thereby, it desires to decrease the pressure exerted upon it for the satisfaction of wage demands. Secondly, this contradictory (since it is highly risky, if we consider the 2007 subprime mortgage crisis) historical movement does not negate the fact that the wage still remains what repays the loans –and here we should take into consideration that such a repayment could be made through the total family income and through the second or even third job. We could speak about an undervaluation of the individual

theory, the state constitutes just the embodiment of the action of the capitalist class that tries to put the proletariat "*back in their place*", in other words it is nothing more than the policeman of capital, "*organ of a predatory capitalism*".

Our point of view is different on this matter:

"All political theories so far have confused the discussion on the nature of the state. The state is not 'neutral' as the liberal democrats believe; it is not an instrument of the ruling class as the marxists-leninists believe (it's not the 'party of the bosses' and it can't be turned into the 'party of the workers' either –the 'workers' state' was in the past a theoretical monstrosity of the Bolsheviks); it's not the intriguing and omniscient Big Brother as anarchists think. Finally, the capitalist state is not an ahistoric 'structure' deriving unilaterally from capital's logic. Clearly, the necessity of the reproduction of the capitalist social relations lies in the heart of the particular legal, administrative, repressive, political, social, ideological and economic functions of the state. The state provides for the preservation and the increase of the exchangeability and the efficiency of the labour power (for example, through vocational and technical training courses, health care services, subsidies to enterprises and benefits to the unemployed, etc.). It protects the 'right' of the worker to sell his/her labour power and the 'right' of the capitalist to buy it and exploit it. It provides for the 'free' (in reality, compulsory) entrance of the worker to the labour market as a seller of his/her own commodity, his/her labour power. In this way, it safeguards the domination of capital, not through the personal subjugation of some individuals to some other individuals, but through the subjugation of the workers in general to capital in general. The state, as an ensemble of functions and apparatuses, does not protect each individual capitalist and his/her property (on the contrary, in certain periods it plays an important role in assisting certain capitals and in destroying other ones), nor can it guarantee the 'right to

on Bonefeld and Jessop, Capital and Class 36, 1988.

tivist tradition of a certain current of the ultra-left, regards the struggle of the proletariat against capital as the poor relation in history.³³ However, the “laws” and the categories of capital (the falling rate of profit etc.) are not objective processes functioning independently of conscious class antagonism; on the contrary, they are its mystified forms. Therefore, “*Crisis is not an external framework imposed on class struggle: it is the crisis of the class relation, the crisis of the rule of capital over labour.*”³⁴ In TC’s theoretical schema (crisis → restructuring → double disjunction → underconsumption crisis → poverty → resistance → disciplining) the reality of class relations in the West in the last decades is completely reversed. The falling rate of work-discipline and the explosion of social expectations that blocked after ’68 the rise of the rate of exploitation in proportion to the rise of the costly constant capital and dismantled the post-war forms of legitimacy of the exploitation relations, in other words, what was the crisis in its initial phase are ignored; disciplining and the recuperation of the exuberant social expectations – which both constitute the restructuring – are also ignored. The shifting of a part of the reproduction cost of the labour power onto the individualized proletarians (a strategy that in no way can be considered successful) is perceived as a “disjunction” between valorisation and reproduction. The external aspect of the ongoing overaccumulation crisis, i.e. underconsumption, is perceived as its essence. The divisions inside the proletariat (citizens/non citizens, “dual” labour market etc.) are presented as a universal “breach of contract” and generalized “helotry”. The non-uniformity of movements over demands and also of rebellions is flattened; the methods used by capital and its state against demands are dealt with in the same way, since they are all simply reduced to the use of repression!

This distortion of reality stems from the fact that TC downgrades not only class struggle but also the state-form. In their

³⁴ J. Holloway, *The great bear, post-Fordism and class struggle: A comment*

direct wage as a means of consumption, but not of a “disjunction” (and in no way for the class as a whole).

Statistics show that in the case of the USA the median household income has risen by 31% between the years 1967 and 2004 and by 15% between the years 1980 and up to 2006 after adjusting for inflation. Notably, the median household income has increased between 1967 and 2004 in all 5 income quintiles (each quintile represents 20%, or one fifth, of all households according to their gross income) notwithstanding that the increase was higher for the wealthier households of the top quintile (57,2%) than for the lowest incomes of the first quintile (28%). The increase of the median household income in conditions of wage stagnation or even decline can be explained by the increase of the employment of women –between 1967 and 1996 the proportion of wives working year-round in married couple households with children has increased from 17% to 39%– and, furthermore, by the increase of the personal income of college graduates, a group that has doubled in size since the 1960s and whose wages are higher on average than the wages of workers without university education. It must be noted that the income of married couple households with children is higher on average than the income of households of single-parent families and of single persons. Apart from the stagnation or decline of wages, another factor explaining the reduction of the rate of increase of the median household income –despite an ever increasing female labour force and a considerable increase in the percentage of college graduates– is the relative decrease of the

²⁸ Furthermore, according to the data provided by the Treasury Department of USA (see US Treasury Income Mobility Study-income data, <http://www.treas.gov/press/releases/hp673.htm>), the period between 1996-2005 is characterised by social mobility of individuals since roughly half of the people who began in the bottom income quintile moved up to a higher income group within 10 years. This shows that the position of TC about a supposed “looted future” is also not valid. To what extent the climbing of the wage and income ladder is due to individual docility and to what extent it is due to collective demands remains an open question.

proportion of married couples with children from 40% in 1969 to about 25% in 1996. Thus, it is made clear from all the above data that it is out of the question to claim that there is a disjunction between wages as income and consumption. On the contrary, the conclusion that may be drawn is that inequalities are sharpened and income hierarchies are amplified within the working class.²⁸

The view that there is a fall in consumption and that consequently the recent crisis could be characterized as an under-consumption crisis is widely spread in the “anti-globalization movement”. According to this view, neoliberal politics led on the one hand to a decline in global purchasing power and on the other hand to credit, so that to counterbalance or at least to reduce the purchasing power loss. In USA, however, the rise in household consumption between 1980 and 2005 (from 63% to 70% of the GNP) is not mainly due to mortgage loans for house purchase (in 2005 housing investments corresponded to only 6.2% of the GNP) or to the rise in household credit (consumer debt corresponds almost to 25% of the aggregate debt). What’s more, the percentage of debt corresponding to consumer loan contracts remains stable between the years 1980-2000 and declines in the next 7 years to 18.5% (from 24.6%). This strange, as it seems, phenomenon can be explained if we take into consideration that in the same period (1980-2007) household savings declined by 7%, which means by the same rate that consumption rises, as a percentage of the GNP. This decline in savings is not to be detected in the low-income wage earners, but, on the contrary, in the most affluent 20% of the population. This part, encouraged by the explosion of the so-called “new economy” and the NASDAQ indexes, used savings worth 240 billion of dollars in the period of 1992 to 2000 for their consumption, while the low-income wage earners increased their savings by 40 billion, which resulted in a decline of the total savings by 200 billion dollars. When the NASDAQ bubble burst, this most affluent part would continue its speculative investment in real es-

ism, the radical and the reformist tendency co-existed at the same time.

All rebellions without exception have their roots in the disastrous isolation of the individual from the human community

Although TC state in the beginning of the second chapter of the *Glass Floor* that “*It is not exploitation in itself that contains its own overcoming, it is the specific situation and activity of the proletariat, as a pole implied by the capitalist mode of production as a totality, which contains and produces the overcoming of this totality*”, it seems that they mean nothing more than that the proletariat is simply subject to the contradictory process of the “*transformation of surplus-value into additional capital*”. In this objective structuring of the capitalist relationship “*the bankruptcies, the lay-offs, the transformation of one part of the population into supernumeraries, [...] the intensification of work, the transformation of the labour-process, the setting of the price of labour power*” are all manifestations of the problematic “*transformation of surplus-value into additional capital*” and only in this way within the intensification of exploitation there bursts upon the proletariat that “*has become again poor*” struggling “*against this ‘putting back in one’s place’*”, which means struggling against state’s violence. This approach, part of the objec-

³³ “*What I mean by the fact that the proletariat is not an immediate self-consciousness – that it doesn’t know itself simply on its own basis but only in and through the mediation of capital [our emphasis] – we could say the same thing of the bourgeoisie. The difference is that capital subsumes labour and not the other way around, which means that in this opposition the self-consciousness of the bourgeoisie can really become a self-consciousness because it has integrated the other into its own pole, which could never arrive, which is not the case with the proletariat*”, excerpt from *Interview with Roland Simon (a member of TC)*, on http://www.riff-raff.se/en/8/interview_roland.php

second, nothing can justify cramming differing movements of our era on the Procrustean bed of some “*ultimate structuring of the contradiction between the proletariat and the capital*”.

Precisely the fact that the contradictory dynamics of the rebellion gave birth to the solidarity movement for K. Kouneva, the cleaner, and precisely the fact that its majority tendency was a reformist one proves wrong TC’s view that the historical dimension of this cycle of struggles has attained a new meaning, that is, “*the putting into question by the proletariat of its existence as a class*”. Because the existence of a movement over demands born out of the rebellion which renewed, among other things, the social-democratic demand for “stable and permanent work”, with the addition of the denunciation of the “slave trade”, makes it quite doubtful whether the generalization by TC that today “*the proletariat’s struggle can be its own abolition*” is valid. Moreover, the solidarity movement for Kouneva proved that TC are wrong when they also claim that wage demands become “structurally illegitimate”. The action of this solidarity movement forced the bosses at the cleaning agency where Kouneva worked to turn all fixed-term labour contracts into permanent ones, to stop violating the collective agreements and start providing the social security according to law –something they used to evade in the past through seemingly lawful tricks.

At the same time, this movement from demands or inertia to rebellion and back again to demands or inertia would require an explanation that should bother to recognize and analyze the different political tendencies appearing in class struggle and the conflicting practises within it, instead of resorting to generalities and pompous phrases as if they were axiomatic truths. The “swerve” from the social-democratic demands and the affirmation of a worker’s identity was a **subjective political choice** within the solidarity movement for K. Kouneva of a very concrete part carrying within it the practices of the rebellion. In this struggle, as in many other cases in the history of capital-

tate, and would continue financing its consumption by decreasing its savings. Thus, the rise in consumption should not only be attributed to lower income strata debt, but in general we should take into account the overconsumption of the wealthier strata, in which the better-paid wage earners are included.²⁹

The presence of surplus population, unemployment, is not explained through the disjunction between the valorisation of capital and the reproduction of labour power. TC should know that a counter-tendency to the tendency of the rate of profit to fall is the relative surplus population –a phenomenon seen by Marx already since the 19th century.

The undervaluation of the individual direct wage and the relative depreciation of labour power are not due to some inescapable, historical “*ultimate structuring of the contradiction between the proletariat and the capital*”,³⁰ as TC think, but to historically shaped power relations that can be reversed.³¹ Besides, the bosses have never in the history of capitalism stopped regarding working class demands as “illegitimate”.

As we have showed, this new immiseration theory promoted by TC in order to convince us that capitalism is already... breathing its last breath is not grounded on the reality of labour relations and the consumption standards of the working class.

The “swerve”: a new practice and theory?

Their conviction over the “illegitimacy” of the wage demand leads TC to the conclusion that what is at stake nowadays is

²⁹ See Isaac Joshua, *La grande crise du 21eme siècle*, 2009.

³⁰ This phrase which is not found in the English version of *Glass Floor* comes from footnote no 8 of the Greek version; a footnote made by the Greek translator in collaboration with TC.

³¹ “*The degree of this fall [of the wage] ... depends on the relative weight, which the pressure of capital on the one side, and the resistance of the labourer on the other, throws into the scale*”, K. Marx, *Das Kapital* (found only in the french edition, Editions Sociales, Livres I/Tome 2).

the very survival of the proletariat, that is, its physical reproduction, which urges it to rebel against itself. But if one downgrades the rebellion to a movement born out of the “illegitimacy” of the wage demands, then one ignores the richness of the negations expressed during the rebellion which was not confined of course to the resistance against material poverty. (On this point we will come back later in length).

Let’s examine the concept of the “swerve” used by TC. This concept describes how nowadays “*in its action against capital, the proletariat faces its own existence as a class and it must treat it as something to do away with*”. We can’t see anything new in what they describe. In the sharpest moments of class struggle – in the past as well as nowadays– proletarians understood their own activity, their own selves as that which has to be abolished. Already since 1965 Tronti wrote on this:

“No worker **today** [our emphasis] *is disposed to recognize the existence of labor outside capital. Labor equals exploitation: this is the logical prerequisite and historical result of capitalist civilization. From here there is no point of return. Workers have no time for the dignity of labor... Today, the working class need only look at itself to understand capital. It need only combat itself in order to destroy capital. It has to recognize itself as political power, deny itself as a productive force. For proof, we need only look at the moment of struggle itself: during the strike, the “producer” is immediately identified with the class enemy. The working class confronts its own labor as capital, as a hostile force, as an enemy - this is the point of departure not only for the antagonism, but for the organization of the antagonism*”.³²

However, the basic difference between Tronti’s theory of proletarian self-negation and TC’s theory of “swerve” is that for TC the development of the “mutual involvement” of proletariat and capital –the class struggle– is identical with the de-

³² Tronti, *Struggle against labor*, Radical America 6 (3): 22-5. For the Italian original, *Operai e Capitale* (3rd edition 2006), p. 263.

velopment of the capitalist relation, while for Tronti class struggle creates a counter-dialectic to the dialectic of capital; that is, for him, there is a subjective non-capitalist element inside the capitalist relation, a subversive and inventive practice within and against the work identities and the productive regimes of the social factory, which always threatens the smooth reproduction of the capitalist relation and is able to create a revolutionary perspective of supersession.

So, TC’s “swerve” is just the description of the “class for itself” with a new name, with the omission however of the conscious activity of the proletariat against capital. As a class of the capitalist mode of production, from its existence “in itself”, for something else –capital– in its struggle against it, it starts existing for itself and faces both capital and labour practically as what has to be abolished. In Marx’s work as well as in anarchocommunist, the ultra-left, dadaism, operaismo, the Situationist International, the theoretical conception of the antagonistic practice that seeks the self-abolition of the class itself in the abolition of the relation that constitutes it was pivotal, *because it existed as a real practice of their era*. If this dimension of the struggle, even as a minority tendency, in theory and in action, was nowhere to be seen, communism could not have existed either as a concept or as a practice, either in the 19th century or in the 20th or nowadays.

On the other hand, we can’t see how the “swerve” constitutes “*the dynamic of this cycle of struggles*”, precisely when TC include in it from the “Onda anomale” in Italy and every kind of wage demand on the planet to rebellions, i.e. movements over demands and movements where “*there can be no demands*”. When they mention the “*chaotic manner in which it [this cycle of struggles] develops itself*”, they do not strengthen their argument but, on the contrary, by qualifying it, they make it weaker.

Let’s summarize our objections on the matter: first, the “swerve” is not a characteristic of this “cycle of struggles” only;