

Introduction to Panzieri

It is well known that, for Marx, capitalism revolutionizes both "the groupings into which society is divided" and "the technical processes of labour". What is less well known is that Marx theorizes the unity of these two moments (social groupings and technical processes) as constituting "*a specifically capitalist mode of production*" (our emphasis). Taken in isolation from the technical processes of labour, the social groupings (i.e. wage-labourers and capitalists) constitute what Marx calls a *formal* subsumption of labour under capital; but on the basis of this formal subsumption there is erected a set of "methods, means and conditions" of production which Marx terms the *real* subsumption of labour under capital.¹ This is elaborated at length in Marx's recently published *Results of the Immediate Process of Production* (the so-called 'lost chapter' of *Capital*);² but the same perspective is abundantly clear in *Capital* itself, as was demonstrated nearly twenty years ago in the article by Raniero Panzieri printed below.

Born in Italy in 1921, Panzieri's adult life (tragically cut short by his sudden and unexpected death in 1964, at the age of forty-three) was that of a theoretical and practical Marxist militant.³ His formal affiliation was to

1 K. Marx, *Capital*, I, Harmondsworth 1976, p.645.

2 *Ibid.*, pp.941ff.

3 In the absence of any secondary literature in English, I am indebted for much of the following information to John

the Socialist Party (PSI), of which he became a Central Committee member and Spokesman on Cultural Affairs in the 1950s. However, Panzieri broke with the strategy, common to the PSI, PCI (Communist Party) and left-wing Trade Unions, of a corporate alliance aimed at 'developing' Italy through a 'planned' consolidation at national level of the 'rationality' that capitalism established at plant level.⁴ To ground his rejection of this strategy theoretically, Panzieri turned in earnest to Marx. On the one hand, Panzieri made his own contribution to extending the Italian corpus of Marxian texts, himself translating Volume Two of *Capital* (which proved central to his understanding of capitalism); on the other hand, he supplemented the primary texts with a series of theoretical elaborations, at first in the PSI journal *Mondo Operaio*, and subsequently, when these articles created a tension with the PSI leadership that obliged him to leave Rome for Turin, in the epoch-making *Quaderni Rossi*, of which Panzieri was co-founder and chief editor.

Panzieri's most articulate, but far from definitive exposition of his attempt to grasp the laws of motion of capitalist society was published in *Quaderni Rossi* in 1964, the year of his death. Focusing on the labour movement's favourite categories, namely, 'anarchy' and 'planning', Panzieri's concern to undercut the dominant reformist version produced a dual thesis: first, at the

Merrington, whose long-awaited edition of Italian Marxist texts (*Money and Proletarians*, to be published by Allison & Busby of London) will fill a serious gap in this regard. I am also indebted to Ed Emery of Red Notes, whose *Working Class Autonomy and the Crisis* (London 1979) assembles relevant documents of the theoretical and practical development from Panzieri's death to the present.

4 This strategy is propounded at length in *The Italian Road to Socialism: An Interview by Eric Hobsbawm with Giorgio Napolitano of the Italian Communist Party*, London 1977.

social level, capital is not simply 'anarchy', but *social capital*;⁵ as such, capital was capable of *planning*, and while this in no sense negated the *contradictory* laws of capitalist accumulation, it should be abundantly clear that there was nothing inherently 'transitional' about 'planning' in the abstract. The complementary proposition of Panzieri's argument was that, just as at the *social* level capitalist *planning* remains *capitalist* planning, so too does capitalist planning at *plant* level. To the dominant Marxist view of productive forces as the autonomous moving-force of history, Panzieri counterposed the view that "*the relations of production are within the productive forces.*"⁶ And to the equally prevalent idea of the inherent 'rationality' of technology, Panzieri counterposed the "capitalist objectivity of the productive mechanism with respect to the workers"⁷

Fortunately, the article in question has been available in English for some time now, so there is no need for further details. However, the reader may well find the discussion of technology too condensed; this is because Panzieri had already, in the very first issue of *Quaderni Rossi* (1961), devoted an entire article to this question: it is this article which is printed below. Its significance in the present context is threefold: first, it establishes the basis on which machinery is theorized in *Capital*; second, it contrasts the latter with the orthodox Marxist perspective that Panzieri labels 'objectivism' (his term for 'technicism'); and third, it specifies the political dimension to the problem in terms of class consciousness, strategy and revolutionary transition.

5 See K. Marx, *Capital*, II, Harmondsworth 1978, pp.425ff, and III, Moscow 1971, passim but especially pp. 435ff. The significance of all this was later specified systematically in M. Tronti, "Social Capital", *Telos*, No. 17.

6 R. Panzieri, "Surplus value and planning", *The Labour Process & Class Strategies*, London 1976, p.12.

7 *Ibid*, p.9.

In the two decades since the article first appeared, Panzieri's pioneering work has been developed considerably, largely by others due to his early death. First in line came Mario Tronti, whose involvement with *Quaderni Rossi* led to the single most important book of the revolutionary Italian left of the 1960s, *Workers and Capital*.⁸ Following Panzieri's view of the "capitalist objectivity of the productive mechanism with respect to the workers", Tronti argued that a revolutionary class consciousness presupposed "The Strategy Of the Refusal"⁹ Since the factory was the place where living labour reproduced its subservience to dead labour, this "Refusal" crystallized in the "Struggle Against Labor",¹⁰ according to which, "suppression of labor by the working class and the violent destruction of capital are one and the same."¹¹

This apocalyptic vision was fundamental to the development of the Italian class struggle in the 1960s and 1970s,¹² even if Tronti himself beat a hasty retreat to the PCI that he had earlier abandoned. The Panzierian legacy was now taken over by the group called *Potere Operaio* (Workers' Power), which in 1973 dissolved itself into the diffuse 'area' of *Autonomia Operaia* (Workers' Autonomy). Instead of aiming to take over what was in fact an *adequate form of capital* both inside and outside the factory, the revolutionary movement now defined itself as a struggle *against* the 'capitalist objectivity' of 'civil society and the state' as a whole. The title of Toni Negri's *Capitalist Domination & Working Class*

8 M. Tronti, *Operai e capitale*, Turin 1966. An English edition of this text should be a political priority.

9 This chapter of Tronti's book is translated in *Working Class Autonomy and the Crisis*, pp. 7ff.

10 This chapter of Tronti's book is translated in *Radical America*, Vol. VI, No. 3, pp.22ff.

11 *Ibid*, p.25.

12 See *Working Class Autonomy and the Crisis*, pp.167ff.

*Sabotage*¹³ effectively sums up the entire movement. If the 'Autonomists' thereby threatened the whole basis of the traditional labour movement's complicity in supporting the tottering Italian state, the latter was not slow to recognize this threat: since 7 April 1979, Negri and other 'Autonomists', including almost the entire Political Science Faculty of Padua University, have been in prison on charges ranging from 'subversive association' to 'armed insurrection'.¹⁴

By this stage, the "capitalist objectivity of the productive mechanism with respect to the workers", a formulation that presupposed a tremendous theoretical effort on Panzieri's part, had become axiomatic in 'autonomous' theory and practice. Furthermore, the prevarication that was still occasionally evident in Panzieri had been totally extinguished. But at a time when the theory and practice of the Italian class struggle are beginning to make some impact in the Anglo-Saxon world,¹⁵ and, among other things, clearing the ground for a revolutionary critique of technology, a translation of Panzieri's seminal document is particularly opportune.

The Editor

13 Ibid, pp.93ff.

14 For details of the defence campaign, see *ibid*, pp.139ff.

15 See *ibid*, as well as the American journal *Zerowork*.

The Capitalist Use of Machinery: Marx Versus the 'Objectivists'

Raniero Panzieri

It is well known that, according to Marx, simple cooperation appears historically at the beginning of the capitalist mode of production's process of development. But this *simple shape* of cooperation is merely one *particular form* of the cooperation that is the *fundamental form* of capitalist production.¹ "The capitalist form presupposes from the outset the free wage-labourer who sells his labour-power to capital."² But the worker, as owner and seller of his labour-power, enters into relation with capital only as an *individual*; cooperation, the mutual relationship between workers,

...only begins with the labour process, but by then they have ceased to belong to themselves. On entering the labour process they are incorporated into capital. As co-operators, as members of a working organism, they merely form a particular mode of existence of capital. Hence the productive power developed by the worker socially is the productive power of capital. The socially productive power of labour develops as a free gift to capital whenever the workers are placed under certain conditions, and it is capital which places them under these conditions. Because this power costs capital

1 K. Marx, *Capital*, I, Harmondsworth 1976, p. 454.

2 *Ibid.*, p. 452.

nothing, while on the other hand it is not developed by the worker until his labour itself belongs to capital, it appears as a power which capital possesses by its nature—a productive power inherent in capital.³

The capitalist productive process develops through its various historical phases as a process of development of the division of labour, and the basic site of this process is the factory:

It is a result of the division of labour in manufacture that the worker is brought face to face with the intellectual potentialities of the material process of production as the property of another and as a power which rules over him. This process of separation starts in simple co-operation, where the capitalist represents to the individual workers the unity and the will of the whole body of social labour. It is developed in manufacture, which mutilates the worker, turning him into a fragment of himself. It is completed in large-scale industry, which makes science a potentiality for production which is distinct from labour and presses it into the service of capital.⁴

The development of technology takes place wholly within this capitalistic process. Although labour is parcellized, manufacture is still based on handicraft skill, and "since the mechanism of manufacture as a whole possesses no objective framework which would be independent of the workers themselves, capital is constantly compelled to wrestle with the insubordination of

3 Ibid, p. 451.

4 Ibid, p. 482.

the workers." Manufacture thus has a "narrow technical basis" which comes "into contradiction with requirements of production" which it has *itself created*.⁵

The introduction of machinery on a vast scale marks the transition from manufacture to large-scale industry. This transition means that "on the one hand, the technical reason for the lifelong attachment of the worker to a partial function is swept away", and "on the other hand, the barriers placed in the way of the domination of capital by this same regulating principle now also fall."⁶ The technology incorporated in the capitalist system at once *destroys* the old system of division of labour and *consolidates* it *systematically*, "in a more hideous form", as a means of exploiting labour-power:

The lifelong speciality of handling the same tool now becomes the lifelong speciality of serving the same machine . . . In this way, not only are the expenses necessary for his reproduction considerably lessened, but at the same time his helpless dependence upon the factory as a whole, and therefore upon the capitalist, is rendered complete.⁷

Technological progress itself thus appears as a mode of existence of capital, as *its* development:

Even the lightening of the labour becomes an instrument of torture, since the machine does not free the worker from the work, but rather deprives the work itself of all content. Every kind of capitalist production, in so far as it is not only a labour process but also capital's process of valorization,

5 Ibid, p. 489f.

6 Ibid, p. 491.

7 Ibid, p. 547.

has this in common, that it is not the worker who employs the conditions of his work, but rather the reverse, the conditions of work employ the worker. However, it is only with the coming of machinery that this inversion first acquires a technical and palpable reality. Owing to its conversion into an automaton, the instrument of labour confronts the worker during the labour process in the shape of capital, dead labour, which dominates and soaks up living labour-power.⁸

The automatic factory *potentially* establishes the domination of the associated producers over the labour process. But in the capitalist use of machinery, in the modern factory, "the automaton itself is the subject, and the workers are merely conscious organs, co-ordinated with the unconscious organs of the automaton, and together with the latter subordinated to the central moving force."⁹

It can thus be concluded, among other things: first, that the capitalist use of machinery is *not*, so to speak, a mere distortion of, or deviation from, some 'objective' development that is in itself rational, but that capital has *determined* technological development; second, that "the science, the gigantic natural forces, and the mass of social labour" are "embodied in the system of machinery, which, together with those three forces, constitutes the power of the 'master'."¹⁰ Hence, vis-a-vis the 'voided' individual worker, technological development presents itself as a development of capitalism: *as capital*, and "because it is capital, the automatic mechanism is endowed, in the person of the capitalist, with consciousness and a will."¹¹ In the master's mind, "the machinery

8 Ibid, p. 548.

9 Ibid, p. 544f.

10 Ibid, p. 549.

11 Ibid, p. 526f.

and his monopoly of it are inseparably united.”¹² The process of industrialization, as it achieves more and more advanced levels of technological progress, coincides with a continual growth of the capitalist’s *authority*. As the means of production, counterposed to the worker, grow in volume, the necessity grows for the capitalist to exercise an absolute control. The capitalist’s *plan* is the ideal shape in which “the interconnection between their various labours” confronts the wage-labourers, while it presents itself “in practice, as his authority, as the powerful will of a being outside them.”¹³ Hence, the development of capitalist planning is something closely related to that of the capitalist use of machines. To the development of cooperation, of the social labour process, there corresponds—under capitalist management—the development of the plan as *despotism*. In the factory, capital to an ever-increasing extent asserts its power “like a private legislator”. Its despotism is its planning, a “capitalist caricature of the social regulation of the labour process”.¹⁴

Technical and Organizational Transformations of Capitalism and Objectivist Interpretations Thereof

Marx’s analysis of the division of labour, in the system of large-scale industry under capitalist management, offers a valid methodology for refuting the various ‘objectivist’ ideologies which are once again flourishing on the terrain of technological progress (especially in connection with the phase of automation). The *capitalist* development of technology, as it passes through the various stages of rationalization, involves more and

12 Ibid, p. 549.

13 Ibid, p. 450.

14 Ibid, p. 549f.

more sophisticated forms of integration, etc.—a continual growth of capitalist control. The basic factor in this process is the continual growth of constant capital with respect to variable capital. In contemporary capitalism, as is well known, capitalist planning expands enormously with the transition to monopolistic and oligopolistic forms, which involve the progressive extension of planning from the factory to the market, to the external social sphere.

There exists no 'objective', occult factor, inherent in the characteristics of technological development or planning in the capitalist society of today, which can guarantee the 'automatic' transformation or 'necessary' overthrow of existing relations. The new 'technical bases' progressively attained in production provide capitalism with new possibilities for the *consolidation* of its power. This does not mean, of course, that the possibilities for overthrowing the system do not increase at the same time. But these possibilities coincide with the wholly subversive character which working-class 'insubordination' tends to assume in face of the increasingly independent 'objective framework' of the capitalist mechanism.

Obviously, therefore, the most interesting aspects of the 'objectivist', 'economistic' ideologies have to do with the problems of technological development and factory organization. We are, of course, not referring here to late-capitalist (*neocapitalistiche*) ideologies, but to positions expressed within the working-class movement and its theoretical problematic. In opposition to the old ideological crystallizations in trade-union action, the process of renewal of the class trade union in recent years has above all been based on a recognition of the 'new realities' of contemporary capitalism. But the attention that has correctly been paid to the modifications accompanying the present technological and

economic phase is—in a whole series of positions and studies—distorted into a representation of those modifications in a 'pure', idealized form, stripped of all concrete connection with the general and determining (power) elements of capitalist organization.¹⁵ Rationalization, with its extreme parcellization of labour, its 'voiding' of the worker's labour, is seen as a passing phase—a 'painful' but necessary transition to the stage which 'puts parcellized labours together again in a unitary sense'. It is ambiguously recognized that the declining use of living labour in production and the corresponding growth of constant capital are pushing in the direction of an uninterrupted continuity of the cycle, while "the bonds of internal and external interdependence increase: just as within a productive unit the individual job and the individual worker can only be seen as part of an organically integrated whole, so too on the outside each individual productive unit and its behaviour have stronger bonds of interdependence with the whole economic order."¹⁶

15 It is useful, in our view, to cite the initial documents of the trade-union 'turn', since it is on the basis of these that the debate continues to develop: *I lavoratori e il progresso tecnico* (Proceedings of the Conference on "Technical and Organizational Changes and Modifications of the Work Relationship in Italian Factories", held at the Antonio Gramsci Institute in Rome in June and July of 1956), and S. Leonardi, *Progresso tecnico e rapporti di lavoro*, Turin 1957. We take as our basic reference the work by Leonardi, which amplifies and develops the paper he presented to the Gramsci Institute Conference. For the most recent developments of the discussion, see the papers and contributions at the recent Congress on "Technological Progress and Italian Society", referred to below. See too Dino De Palma's survey in the present issue of *Quaderni Rossi*. In these notes, we are omitting any reference to the vast literature on the themes in question (whether late-capitalist or Marxist in inspiration) and intend to allude only to the debate in progress in our trade-union movement.

16 *Progresso tecnico e rapporti di lavoro*, p. 93; see also *ibid.*, pp. 35, 46, and 55ff.

New characteristic features assumed by capitalist organization are thus mistaken for stages of development of an objective 'rationality'. Hence, for instance, the positive, 'rational' function of Methods-Time Measurement is stressed, in that "by studying times, the technician is obliged to study methods"¹⁷ Again, it is quite forgotten that—in the great modern firm "with planned production achieved through continuous flow"—"the non-correspondence of a worker or group of workers with what is asked of them on the basis of the forecasts made in the firm's production plan"¹⁸ has enormous disruptive potential. What is instead dwelt upon is the necessity ('rational', of course) of "the so-called 'moral' relationship between entrepreneurs and workers, which is both precondition and aim of so-called 'human relationships', precisely because only on this basis can collaboration be established". Thus, "integrated production must be matched by an integration of the worker within the firm, and this integration must be voluntary, since no constriction or discipline can obtain of men the surrender of their freedom, for example, to produce a little less one day and a little more another day", etc., etc.¹⁹ Thus, "the reason why this ['human relationships'—R.P.] movement may peter out is that the valid part of its ideas can be absorbed"—though, of course, the unions must intervene "to destroy harmful forms of 'company-ism' closely bound up with such 'human relations' "²⁰ Thus, the *substance* of the integration processes is accepted: they are seen as having an intrinsic necessity that flows inevitably from the character of 'modern'

17 Ibid, p. 48.

18 Ibid, p. 50. "The mere lateness or absence of a single worker, or even just a drop in his production, can be reflected through an entire line of machines", etc. (Ibid, pp. 50ff).

19 Ibid, p. 50f.

20 Ibid, p. 52.

production. One is merely reminded that certain 'distortions' which capitalist use injects into these procedures must be corrected. Even the 'functional' organization of production is viewed in this framework merely in its technologically 'sublimated' form, as an actual leap beyond the hierarchization characteristic of the preceding phases of mechanization. It is not even suspected that capitalism might use the new 'technical bases' offered by the passage from the preceding stages to that of high mechanization (and to automation) in order to perpetuate and consolidate the *authoritarian* structure of factory organization: indeed, the entire process of industrialization is represented as being dominated by the 'technological' fatality which leads to the liberation of man from the 'limitations imposed on him by the environment and by his physical capabilities'. 'Administrative rationalization' and the enormous growth of 'outward organizational' functions are alike viewed in a 'technical' or 'pure' form. The relationship between these developments and the processes and contradictions of contemporary capitalism (its quest for ever more complex means to accomplish and impose *its* planning), or the concrete historical reality in which the working-class movement finds itself living and fighting (the daily 'capitalist use' of machinery and organization)—these are ignored in favour of a technologico-idyllic image.

An 'objective' view of the new technological-organizational forms gives rise to particularly serious distortions of the nature of employment in the modern factory. There is a tendency to perceive a disappearance of parcellized functions and establishment of new tasks of a unitary character, allegedly involving responsibility, decision-making and a multiplicity of technical skills.²¹ The development of techniques and functions connected

21 Ibid, p. 55f.

with management is isolated from the concrete social context in which it occurs, i.e. from the growing centralization of capitalist power, and hence viewed as the basis for new categories of workers (technicians, 'productive intellectuals') who will 'naturally'—as a direct reflection of their new professional qualities—bring a solution to contradictions "between the characteristics and requirements of the productive forces and the relations of production".²² The clash between productive forces and relations of production here appears as a technical 'non-correspondence': for example, "in choosing the best combination of specific factors of production (something which can now be achieved with ever more objectively valid methods)", the 'new-type' workers are often "constrained to set aside the objectively most valid solutions, in order to respect limits imposed by personal interests".²³ And it is certain, from this point of view, that "the hammer and sickle . . . can only be a symbol of human labour today from an ideal point of view!"²⁴

All this, of course, has a direct impact on how the working-class struggle is conceived, on the way in which the actual protagonists of this struggle see it. The reality of today's struggles shows the various 'levels' of workers created by the present organization of the large factory tending to converge on *self-management* demands. This, it goes without saying, is a process which takes place on the basis of objective factors, represented precisely by the various ways in which workers are 'situated' in the productive process, the various types of relation to

22 Ibid, p.82f. On the 'total alienation' of the 'productive intellectuals', however, see Pino Tagliacozzi's observations, really perceptive and to the point, in "Aspetti della condizione impiegatizia nell'industria moderna", *Sindacato Moderno*, February-March 1961, pp. 53ff.

23 *Progresso tecnico e rapporti di lavoro*, p. 81f.

24 Ibid, p. 67.

production and organization, etc., etc. But the specific element of the process of 'unitary recomposition' cannot be grasped if the connection between the 'technological' and politico-organizational (power) elements in the capitalist productive process is either missed or else denied. The *class* level expresses itself not as progress, but as rupture; not as 'revelation' of the occult rationality inherent in the modern productive process, but as the construction of a radically new rationality counterposed to the rationality practised by capitalism. What characterizes the processes whereby workers in large factories (like those studied in this issue of *Quaderni Rossi*) acquire class consciousness today is "not just the primary demand for expansion of the personality in work, but a structurally motivated demand to wield political and economic power in the firm and through it in society".²⁵ Hence, the aforementioned factors that 'objectively' characterize the various strata of workers in the productive process certainly do have some significance in forming a 'collective' awareness, on the workers' part, of what the factors of production imply politically. But these factors relate to the formation of a unitary, disruptive force tending to invest every aspect of the capitalist factory's present-day technological-organizational-proprietorial reality.

Integration and Equilibrium of the System

It is obvious that simply to ratify rationalization processes (taken as the totality of productive techniques evolved within the framework of capitalism) is to forget that it is precisely capitalist 'despotism' which takes the form of technological rationality. In capitalist usage,

25 R. Alquati, "Documenti sulla lotta di classe alla Fiat", *Quaderni Rossi*, No. 1.

not just machines, but also 'methods', organizational techniques, etc., are incorporated into capital and confront the workers as capital: as an extraneous 'rationality'. Capitalist 'planning' presupposes the planning of living labour, and the more it strives to present itself as a closed and perfectly rational system of rules, the more it is abstract and partial, ready to be utilized solely in a hierarchical type of organization. Not 'rationality', but *control*, not technical programming, but a plan for power of the associated producers, can ensure an adequate relation to the global techno-economic processes.

In fact, in the framework of a 'technical', pseudo-scientific study of the new problems and contradictions which arise in the present-day capitalist firm, it is possible to find ever more 'advanced' solutions to the new instabilities without touching the substance of alienation, indeed while guaranteeing maintenance of the system's stability. In fact, the sociological and organizational ideologies of contemporary capitalism reveal various phases—from Taylorism to Fordism and finally to the development of techniques of integration, human engineering, human relations, regulation of communications, etc.²⁶—precisely in a more and more complex and sophisticated attempt to adapt the planning of living labour to the stages progressively attained, through the continuous growth of constant capital, by the requirements of productive planning.²⁷ In this context, it is evident that techniques of 'information'—

26 See N. Mitrani, "Ambiguité de la technocratie", *Cahiers Internationaux de Sociologie*, Vol. XXX, p. 111.

27 Franco Momigliano has correctly pointed out that "the modern factory does not just exclude the workers more and more from any conscious participation in the actual process of drawing up a rational production plan, in the global productive process; it also requires the workers, subordinated to the new rationality, to personify simultaneously the 'anti-rational' moment, that corresponds to the old empirical philosophy of 'muddling

designed to neutralize the working-class protest that arises immediately from the 'total' character which the processes of alienation assume in the large rationalized factory—tend to take on greater and greater importance. Naturally, concrete analysis finds itself confronted by situations that may be profoundly different one from another, from this point of view, depending upon a considerable quantity of specific factors (disparities in technological development, differing subjective approaches in capitalist management, etc., etc.). But the point we want to emphasize here is that in the use of 'informational' techniques, as a manipulation of working-class attitudes, capitalism has incalculably vast margins for 'concession' (or, rather, 'stabilization'). It is impossible to define the limit beyond which 'information' concerning the overall productive processes ceases to be a factor of stabilization for the power of capital. What is certain is that information techniques tend, in the more complex situation of the contemporary capitalist enterprise, to restore that 'charm' (satisfaction) of work of which the *Communist Manifesto* already spoke.²⁸

The extension of information techniques and their field of application, like the extension of the sphere of technical decisions,²⁹ fits perfectly into the capitalist 'caricature' of a social regulation of production. It is,

through'. In this way, working-class resistance itself—paradoxically—is rationally exploited." (F. Momigliano, "Il sindacato nella fabbrica moderna", *Passato e Presente*, No. 15, p. 20f.)

28 "Owing to the extensive use of machinery and to the division of labour, the work of the proletarians has lost all individual character, and, consequently, all charm for the workman. He becomes an appendage of the machine." (K. Marx and F. Engels, "Manifesto of the Communist Party", K. Marx, *The Revolutions of 1848*, Harmondsworth 1973, p. 74.)

29 On the ways in which a more rational capitalist administration requires 'democratic' participation by the workers, see the very important book by S. Melman, *Decision-Making and Productivity*, Oxford 1958.

therefore, necessary to stress that 'productive awareness' does not bring about an overthrow of the system; that participation of the workers in capitalism's 'functional plan', in itself, is a factor of integration—of alienation, so to speak—at the furthest margins of the system. But what is true is that this development of late capitalism's 'stabilizing factors' represents a condition which, so far as working-class action is concerned, makes the total overthrow of the capitalist order immediately necessary. The working-class struggle thus presents itself as the necessity of global opposition to the capitalist plan, where the fundamental factor is awareness—let us call it dialectical awareness—of the unity of the 'technical' and 'despotic' moments in the present organization of production. The relationship of revolutionary action to technological 'rationality' is to 'comprehend' it, but not in order to acknowledge and exalt it, rather in order to subject it to a new use: to the socialist use of machines.³⁰

Wages and Political Enslavement

With the modern organization of production, 'in theory' the possibilities for the working class to control and direct production increase, but 'in practice'—through

30 The most recent developments of economic and technical research in the Soviet Union present an ambiguous character: the call for autonomy of research does undoubtedly represent a break with the cruder, Stalinist-type voluntarism in planning; however, the development of 'rational' processes, independently of the social control of production, seems rather to represent (to what extent already today, and to what extent as a future possibility?) the precondition and basis for new developments of the old processes of bureaucratization. But it is important not to lose sight of the distinctive feature of Soviet planning compared with the capitalist plan: the authoritative, despotic element of productive organization *arises* within capitalist relations, *survives* in planned economies of a bureaucratic type. The

the ever more rigid centralization of power decisions—alienation is intensified. Consequently, the working-class struggle, *any* working class struggle, tends to propose a *political* rupture of the system. And the agent of this rupture is not the conflict between the 'rational' demands implicit in the new techniques and the capitalist utilization of them, but the opposition of a working-class collectivity which calls for productive processes to be subordinated to social forces. There is no continuity to be asserted, across the revolutionary leap, in the order of techno-economic development: working-class action calls into question the very foundations of the system, and all its repercussions and aspects, at every level.

Obviously, technological progress is deeply engrained in the capitalist process: Engels spoke of "discoveries and inventions which supersede each other at an ever-increasing rate", and of a "productivity of human labour which rises day by day to an extent previously unheard of".³¹ But while Engels deduced from this process "the

bureaucracies, in their relation to the working class, cannot appeal solely to objective rationality; they have to appeal to the working class itself. The demise of the basic element, the element of ownership, deprives the bureaucratic organization of its own basis, so to speak. Hence, in the USSR and the People's Democracies, the contradictions manifest themselves differently, and despotism presents a precarious rather than an organic character. This does not, of course, mean that its manifestations may not assume forms just as crude as those of capitalist society; see Rodolfo Morandi's seminal observations in "Analisi dell'economia regolata" (1942) and "Criteri organizzativi dell'economia collettiva" (1944), rptd in *Lotta di Popolo*, Turin 1958. The exclusion of the ownership element, and the simple study of the authoritarian-bureaucratic element or of technical alienation (or both), are, as everyone knows, at the centre of a by now boundless neo-capitalist and neo-reformist ideological literature; one of our *Quaderni Rossi* will be devoted to the analysis of these ideologies.

31 See F. Engels, Introduction to Marx's "Wage Labour and Capital", K. Marx and F. Engels, *Selected Works In One Volume*, London 1970, p. 70.

division of society into a small, excessively rich class and a large, propertyless class of wage-workers", Marx foresaw an increase not just of the nominal but also of the real wage: "if the income of the worker increases with the rapid growth of capital, the social gulf that separates the worker from the capitalist increases at the same time, and the power of capital over labour, the dependence of labour on capital, likewise increases at the same rate." Hence, the more the growth of capital is rapid, the more the *material* situation of the working-class improves. And the more the wage is linked to the growth of capital, the more direct becomes labour's dependence upon capital.

The more rapidly the working class increases the power that is hostile to it, the wealth that does not belong to it and that rules over it, the more favourable will be the conditions under which it is allowed to labour anew at increasing bourgeois wealth, at enlarging the power of capital, content with forging for itself the golden chains by which the bourgeoisie drags it in its train.³²

Moreover, Engels himself was to acknowledge (in his *Critique of the Erfurt Programme*) that "the system of wage labour is consequently a system of slavery, increasing in severity commensurately with the development of the social productive forces of labour, *irrespective of whether the worker is then better or worse paid*" [our emphasis—R.P.].³³ Lenin stressed this aspect

32 K. Marx, "Wage Labour and Capital", *ibid.*, p.87.

33 [The Engels text referred to is "A Critique of the Draft Social-Democratic Programme of 1891", to be found in K. Marx and F. Engels, *Selected Works in Three Volumes*, III, Moscow 1977, pp. 429ff. However, the passage Panzieri quotes is not in fact by Engels, but is taken from Marx's "Critique of the Gotha Programme"; see K. Marx, *The First International and After*, Harmondsworth 1974, p. 352.—*Trans.*]

of Marxism: "Marx's theory, which recognised that the more rapid the growth of wealth, the fuller the development of the productive forces of labour and its socialization, and *the better the position of the worker*, or as much better as it can be under the present system of social economy, took over this view of accumulation from the classical economists."³⁴

The progressive widening of the *social gulf* between workers and capitalists was also expressed by Marx in the form of the—declining—*relative wage*. But it is obvious that this concept implies the element of political consciousness, precisely the awareness that to the improvement of material conditions, the growth of nominal and real wages, there corresponds an intensification of *political dependence*. The so-called inevitability of the transition to socialism is not on the plane of the material conflict; rather—precisely upon the basis of the *economic* development of capitalism—it is related to the 'intolerability' of the social rift and can manifest itself only as the acquisition of political consciousness. But for this very reason, working-class overthrow of the system is a negation of the entire organization in which capitalist development is expressed—and first and foremost of technology insofar as it is linked to productivity.

The rupture, the superseding of the wage/productivity mechanism, thus cannot be posed as a 'general' demand for increased wage levels. It is obvious that action tending to supersede wage inequalities constitutes an *aspect* of the superseding of that relationship; of itself, it does not in any way guarantee a rupture of the system, but merely 'chains of brighter gold' for the entire working class. Only by attacking the alienation processes at their roots, and isolating the growing *political dependence* upon capital, is it possible to give shape to a

34 V. I. Lenin, "A Characterisation of Economic Romanticism", *Collected Works*, II, Moscow 1963, p. 148.

truly general class action.³⁵ In other words, the subversive strength of the working class, its revolutionary capacity, appears (potentially) strongest precisely at capitalism's 'development points', where the crushing preponderance of constant capital over living labour, together with the rationality embodied in the former, immediately faces the working class with the question of its political enslavement. Moreover, the growing dependence of the overall 'external' social processes upon the capitalist plan, as this first manifests itself at the enterprise level, is so to speak in the elementary logic of capitalist development. It is well known that Marx more than once emphasized such an ever-widening proliferation of the roots of capitalist power: ultimately, the division of labour in the factory tends to coincide with the *social* division of labour—which, of course, should not be viewed in a crudely economic manner.

Consumption and Free Time

'Objectivism' accepts capitalist 'rationality' at enterprise level and downplays the struggle within structures and development points; but it tends to stress the value of action in the external sphere of wages and consumption. The consequences of this (with the quest for a 'dialectic' at a higher level, within the framework of the system, between capital and labour) are an over-rating of action at the state level, a distinction/separation between the trade-union and political movements, etc., etc. Thus, even in the most serious and 'up-to-date' discussion (which in Italy today takes place above all within the ambit of the class trade unions), one ends up finding a simple confirmation, in more critical and modern forms,

35 See the current debate in *Politica ed Economia*, with articles by Garavini, Tato, Napoleoni, etc.

of the old 'democratic' conceptions of the working-class struggle. All the toil of research, all the adapting of trade-union action to the modes of development of capitalism, risk debouching into a mere ratification of old positions, enriched by a new content, but in a mystified form. In this way, "the autonomous action of the broad masses comes to be defined only in the wake of decisions by the bosses, never in advance of them."³⁶

While the processes intrinsic to capitalist accumulation become ever more globally determinant both 'internally' and 'externally' (at the level of the firm and at the level of society in general), the various positions which are springing up anew from the Keynesian matrix (even within the working-class movement) represent genuine ideologies, a reflection of late-capitalist developments. Marx's warning is still—indeed more than ever—valid against them: "the sphere of circulation

36 R. Spesso, "Il potere contrattuale dei lavoratori e la 'razionalizzazione' del monopolio", *Politica ed Economia*, November 1960, p. 10. The positions expressed by Momigliano merit special consideration; he correctly recalls that consideration of the "instruments for organization and rationalization of the modern world" must constitute, for the trade union, a precondition "for discovering the conditions for an effective competition and a hegemonic capacity of the working class". ("Il sindacato nella fabbrica moderna", pp. 20ff.) And on several occasions he has insisted on the need for the working class, by this means, to reconquer a true and compete autonomy vis-à-vis capital. But it is hard to understand how he can reconcile these theses and demands with his ratification of the 'specific institutional terrain' of the trade union, which leads him to refuse to recognize that trade-union action itself has the character of an increasing disruptive tension with respect to the system: see F. Momigliano, "Struttura delle retribuzioni e funzioni del Sindacato", *Problemi del Socialismo*, June 1961, p. 633; see too, by the same Momigliano, "Una tematica sindacale moderna", *Passato e Presente*, No. 13, and his report to the Congress on "Technological Progress and Italian Society" (Milan, June 1960), on the theme of "Workers and Trade Unions Face to Face with Transformations of the Productive Process in Italian Industry".

or commodity exchange, within whose boundaries the sale and purchase of labour-power goes on, is in fact a very Eden of the innate rights of man."³⁷ Not for nothing is 'healthy' consumption, which the working class should propose, counterposed to the consumption 'imposed' by capitalism; and not for nothing is a general increase of wages, i.e. the ratification of capitalist slavery, presented as an 'appeal' from the worker as a 'human being', who (within the system!) calls for the recognition and assertion of his 'dignity'.³⁸ Even the invocation of 'essential needs' (culture, health) as against the spectrum of consumption imposed by capitalism (or late capitalism) makes no sense, as Spesso has correctly pointed out, without a refusal of capitalist rationalization and a working-class demand for control and self-management in the sphere of production.³⁹

It is significant that 'revisionist' positions should refer to, and distort, Marx's conception of free time, its relation to the working day, and its place in the perspective of a

37 *Capital*, I, p. 280.

38 See A. Tato, "Ordinare la struttura della retribuzione secondo la logica e i fini del sindacato", *Politica ed Economia*, February-March 1961, pp. 11ff. The growing immediate social incidence of the sphere of production is, of course, stressed in all Marxist research. Like other authors, Paul Sweezy gave a demonstration of this that is still in many ways valid today: see P. Sweezy, *The Theory of Capitalist Development*, 1942, rptd New York 1968, in particular pp. 239ff and 270ff. Sweezy recalls (p. 249) the following passage from Rosa Luxemburg's *Reform or Revolution*: " 'Social control' . . . far from being . . . a reduction of capitalist ownership . . . is, on the contrary, a protection of such ownership. Or, expressed from the economic viewpoint, it is not a threat to capitalist exploitation, but simply the regulation of this exploitation." (*Rosa Luxemburg Speaks*, New York 1970, p. 53.) For the English laws on the limitation of working hours, see *Capital*, I, pp. 389ff.

39 "To wish for . . . increased cultural consumption has no sense if one cannot consider it feasible for the individual to utilize this culture precisely in his creative activity, in other words *par excellence* in the labour process . . . An individual's consumption

communist society. There is a tendency, in other words, on the basis of an 'economistic' interpretation, to identify communist freedom in Marx's thought with the expansion of free time, on the basis of more and more 'objective', rationalized planning of the production processes.⁴⁰ In fact, for Marx, free time for the free mental and social activity of individuals by no means simply coincides with the reduction of the 'working day'. It presupposes a radical transformation of the conditions of human labour, the abolition of wage labour and the "social regulation of the labour process". In other words, it presupposes the total overthrow of the capitalist relationship between despotism and rationality, for the formation of a society administered by free producers, in which—with the abolition of production for the sake of production—planned development, the plan itself, rationality and technology would be subjected to the permanent control of social forces, and work would thus (and only thus) be capable of becoming man's 'vital need'. Overcoming the division of labour, as a goal of the social process and the class struggle, does not mean a leap into 'the realm of free time', but the achievement of a dominance of social forces over the sphere of production.

is itself wholly conditioned by his position in productive activity . . . His 'essential needs' (culture, health) arise, become defined, are asserted in the refusal of 'work rules', in the acquisition of a *working-class* consciousness of the meaning and role of work." ("Il potere contrattuale del lavoratori e la 'razionalizzazione' del monopolio", p. 9f.) The representation of alienation under late capitalism as alienation of the consumer is at once one of the most ridiculous and one of the most widespread of present-day ideologies.

40 See P. Cardan, *The meaning of socialism*, Solidarity Pamphlet No. 6; it should, however, be made clear that Cardan alludes to this kind of interpretation in order to express a revolutionary point in polemical opposition to Marxism. [Paul Cardan is the pseudonym of Cornelius Castoriadis, whose work is discussed at some length in the general Introduction to the present volume.—Ed.]

The 'complete development' of man and of his physical and intellectual capabilities (which so many 'humanist' critics of 'industrial society' like to invoke) appears as a mystification if it is represented as an 'enjoyment of free time', as an abstract 'versatility', etc., independently of man's relation to the process of production and the worker's reappropriation of the product and of the content of work in a society of free associated producers.⁴¹

Workers' Control in a Revolutionary Perspective

The 'new' working-class demands which characterize trade-union struggles (studied in the present issue of *Quaderni Rossi*) do not directly furnish a revolutionary political content, nor do they imply an automatic development in that direction. Nevertheless, their significance cannot be limited, either, to their value as an 'adaptation' to modern technological and organizational processes in the modern factory—precondition for a 'systematization' of work relations in general at a

41 The representation of communist society as a society of 'abundance' of goods (even if not purely material ones) and of 'free time' is widespread in Soviet ideology, and is obviously the result of denying any effective social regulation of the labour process. 'Technological' illusions intervene today to sustain such ideology; for example, in R. Strumilin (*On the Road to Communism*, Moscow 1959), 'directing functions in the processes of production' are identified with 'technical' control, with the 'higher intellectual content' of work made possible by the "development of technology with its miraculous automatic mechanisms and electronic machines that 'think' ". Thus, automation will make it possible to achieve a really 'affluent' society of consumers of 'free time'; see above, note 30! As an example of typical deformation of Marx's texts on this point, see G. Friedmann, *Industrial Society*, New York 1955, where the worker's reappropriation of the product and of the content of work itself is identified with 'psychic-physiological control of work'!

higher level. They contain *development pointers* relating to the working-class struggle as a whole and to its political value. Such pointers, however, do not simply spring from noting or adding together such demands, however different and more 'advanced' they may seem compared with traditional objectives. Contracts governing the tempo and rhythm of work, the work-force, the relationship between wages and productivity, etc. will obviously tend to oppose capital within the accumulation mechanism itself and at the level of its 'stabilizing factors'. The fact that such contracts are extended *pari passu* with the struggle of working-class nuclei in the strongest and most highly developed firms is a confirmation of their vanguard, subversive nature. The attempt to utilize them for the purposes of a general struggle that is purely concerned with wages is only illusorily to seek a new and vaster unity of class action. On this path, what would be achieved in practice would be precisely what the aim allegedly is to avoid, i.e. a retreat to situations of enclosure within the firm, an inevitable consequence of neglecting the potential elements of political struggle. The tendential line that can be identified objectively as a valid hypothesis/guide lies in the strengthening and expansion of self-management demands. Since self-management demands are not posed merely as demands for 'cognitive' participation, but affect the concrete relationship rationalization/hierarchy/power, they do not remain closed within the ambit of the firm. Instead, they are precisely directed against the 'despotism' which capital projects and exercises over society as a whole, at all levels, and they are expressed as the need for a total overthrow of the system, by means of a global *prise de conscience* and a general struggle of the working class as such.

We consider that, practically and immediately, this

line can be expressed in the demand for workers' control. However, some clarifications are necessary here. The slogan of workers' control may be judged today to be ambiguous, assimilable to a 'centrist' approach that attenuates the revolutionary demands thrown up in struggle, or conciliates them with the traditional national-parliamentary-democratic line. And it is true that there do exist hints of a utilization of the slogan in this sense. For instance, the reference to workers' control is voluntaristic and ambiguous when what is meant by it is the continuation or revival of the theory and practice of the *Consigli di Gestione* (Management Councils).⁴² In the *Consigli di Gestione* movement, an authentic demand for workers' control was subordinated, to the point of annihilation, to the 'collaborationist' element linked with the ideologies of national reconstruction, and to an approach that instrumentalized the real movement for the purposes of an institutional-electoral plan. The same ambiguity can be discerned when a workers' control line is proposed as an 'acceptable' alternative, as a 'corrective' to the 'extremism' of a perspective of full workers' self-management. Now, it is obvious that a non-mystified formulation of workers' control makes sense only in relation to an objective of revolutionary rupture and a perspective of socialist self-management. In this framework, workers' control expresses the need to bridge the chasm which exists

42 [The *Consigli di Gestione* were established to run factories during the last months of the War, as the Resistance spread especially in northern Italy. Recognized by all the anti-fascist parties in the Decree of 25 April 1945, they were for the most part clearly organs of class collaboration, and were seen as such by the main working-class parties. The movement reached its high point when a national congress was held in November 1947, and was briefly swayed to the left by a turn on the part of the Communist Party. After this, it went into sharp decline.—*Trans.*]

today between even the most advanced working-class demands at the trade-union level and the strategic perspective. It thus represents, or rather can represent, in a non-mystified version, a political line that is a direct alternative to those currently being put forward by the working-class parties.

Obviously, the line of workers' control is proposed here as a factor which can accelerate the time-scale of the overall class struggle, a political instrument for the achievement of a 'shortened' time-scale for revolutionary fractures. Far from it being possible to present it as a 'surrogate' for the conquest of political power, workers' control would thus constitute a phase of *maximum* pressure on capitalist power (as a threat explicitly directed at the roots of the system). Hence, workers' control must be seen as a preparation for situations of 'dual power', in connection with a total political conquest of power. There is no point in insisting on the reasons for putting forward workers' control here and now as a general political proposal. What is really important is that a polemic against slogans should not serve as an alibi for evading the general political problems imposed by the workers' struggles; and that concretely one should strive to reconstruct, on the basis of these struggles, a new political perspective that guarantees against a 'trade-unionistic' degeneration of working-class activity and its reabsorption into capitalist development.

Translated by Quintin Hoare