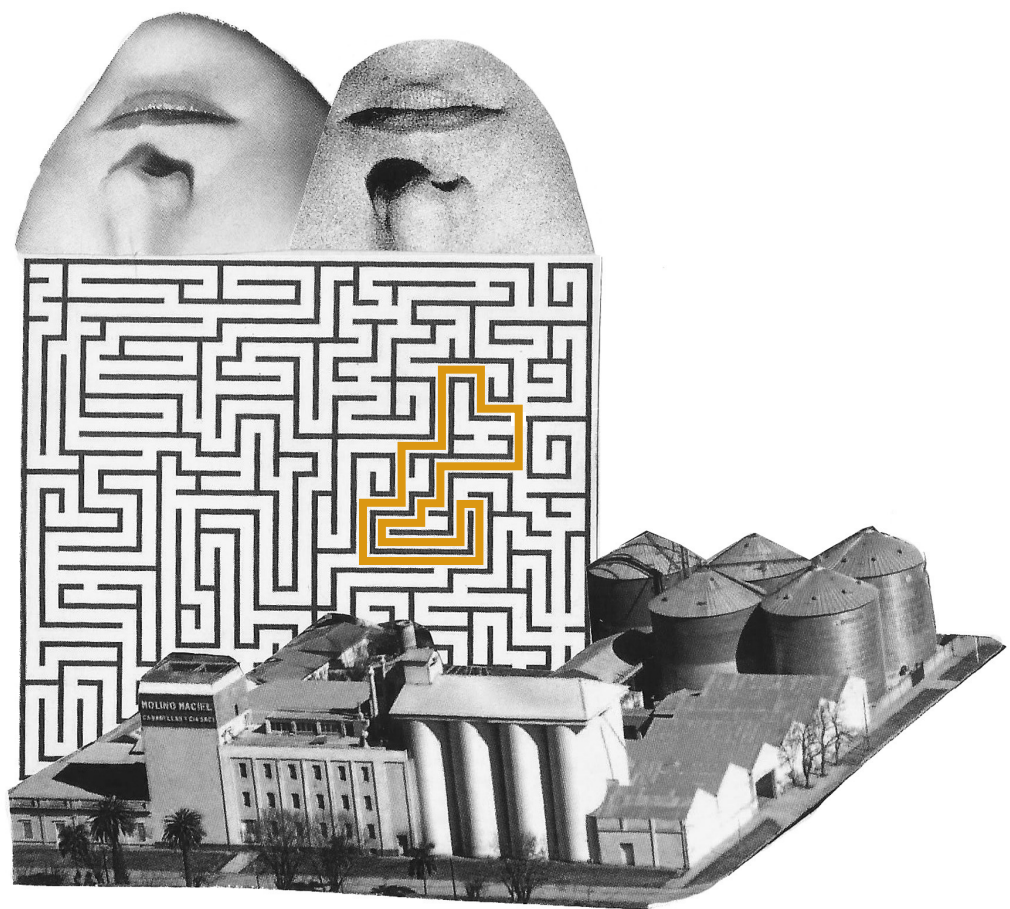


cuadernos de **NEGACIÓN**



**CRITIQUE OF
SELF-MANAGEMENT**

12

november 2018

We have nothing to sell to our class brothers, nothing to seduce them with. We are not a small group competing in prestige and influence with the other small groups and parties that claim to represent the exploited, and that pretend to govern them. We are proletarians fighting to abolish Capital and the State with the means at our disposal, no more and no less.

If you feel that these materials should be disseminated... then go ahead and reproduce them, print them, copy them, discuss them! They were made to be circulated wherever they prove most propitious.

For obvious economic reasons we cannot produce a large print run of this publication as we would like, nor send it to many places around the world, so we encourage the distribution of these Cuadernos by copying them and circulating them as best as possible.

We are deeply grateful to those who have been collaborating with the distribution of the issues of Cuadernos de Negación and we invite them to get in touch.

Forward comrades!

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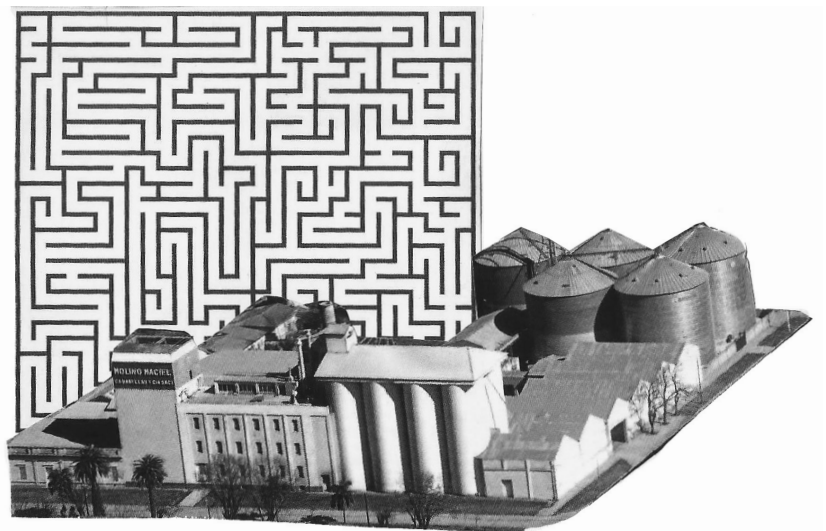
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A NOTE ON THE CITATIONS

It is not our task to announce the news nor guard some ancient treasure, nonetheless, many who decide to read what follows may find small or grand revelations, as well as old statements. Those of us at Cuadernos like to share some well-known paragraphs from different publications, books, texts and papers that we use to prepare each issue. When we reproduce these quotes we name the authors simply to make visible the steps we have taken and offer an invitation to go deeper. Those who read attentively will be able to distinguish the proximity of one or other author. The vast majority of them are related, but this does not imply an uncritical claim of them or of the organizations of which they are or were part. And whoever reads with the intention of reflecting, as well as the desire to transform reality, will understand that all of this is about much more than just books, pamphlets, authors or words.

The texts here cited (as well as others) can be found at:
bibliotecacuadernosdenegacion.blogspot.com

INTRODUCTION

Already since a few issues ago we have wanted to present an extensive critique of self-management, as the management of the existent and/or as a proposal for a society for which to fight. Nevertheless, it seemed too hasty for us to do so without previously developing a few central elements of the critique of the economy which we have been dealing with throughout the length of this block of Cuadernos de Negación, that goes from issues 9 to 12. If indeed reflecting upon these themes has allowed us to delve into the limitations of self-management, we believe that it's not strictly necessary for us to probe deeply into the critique of the economy in order to understand the capitalist nature of self-management. It's for that reason that, although we recommend the reading of the previous issues of this block, we have exposed the present reflections in such a way that this issue can be read separately, in the same manner in which we have made every issue of Cuadernos.

As we indicate from the start, **we're not devoting our efforts to dealing with the economy as a particularity, or as a discipline, but to the struggle against the economization of life.** The critique of the economy stems from the refusal that proletarianized human beings feel towards the categories of Capital. We want to get to the heart of the question and that's why we have done these recent issues we have indicated. This is an intent to put it into words and share it, in order to fight against it.

A few years ago, in issue 3, we presented a short vignette of a critique of self-management with the text *¿Liberar el trabajo? ¿Liberarnos del trabajo! [Liberate work? Liberate ourselves from work!]*, and in order to make it we felt it necessary to commence with a critique of wage labor and the commodity-form.

In the same manner, for the current issue, we explained previously how they economize us (issue 9), they alienate us (issue 10), and they valorize us (issue 11). It is in this sense, that the reading of this complete block of issues offers a better appreciation of the subject.

Finally, **by positioning ourselves against the capitalist system as a whole and understanding its categories even minimally, the critique of managerialism turns out to be a no brainer. It's not necessary to be an expert or an extremist in order to arrive to these conclusions.** It's evident that having expressed a critique of commodity, of work, of value and of the essential categories of capitalism, it would be almost redundant to make a critique of self-management, but nevertheless we want to make evident the danger of the proposal and highlight its particularities. **Because the critique of the proposal (and the struggle) for a managerialist transformation of society is an urgent task.** In these recent times of brief revolts it is presented as the most reasonable option. We have undergone it in Argentina after the social outbreaks of 2001, we know how in Greece since the year 2008 and in other regions a desperate section of the proletariat has witnessed this same experience and wants to draw lessons from it in order to carry self-management further, but "learning from the mistakes". In other

places, in every moment of crisis, of the closure of workplaces, of unemployment, of scarcity, of regroupment in the streets, the moribund body of capitalism returns to wander about in the shimmering robe of self-management, attracting hundreds and thousands of proletarians behind it, ushering them to death in order to continue living.

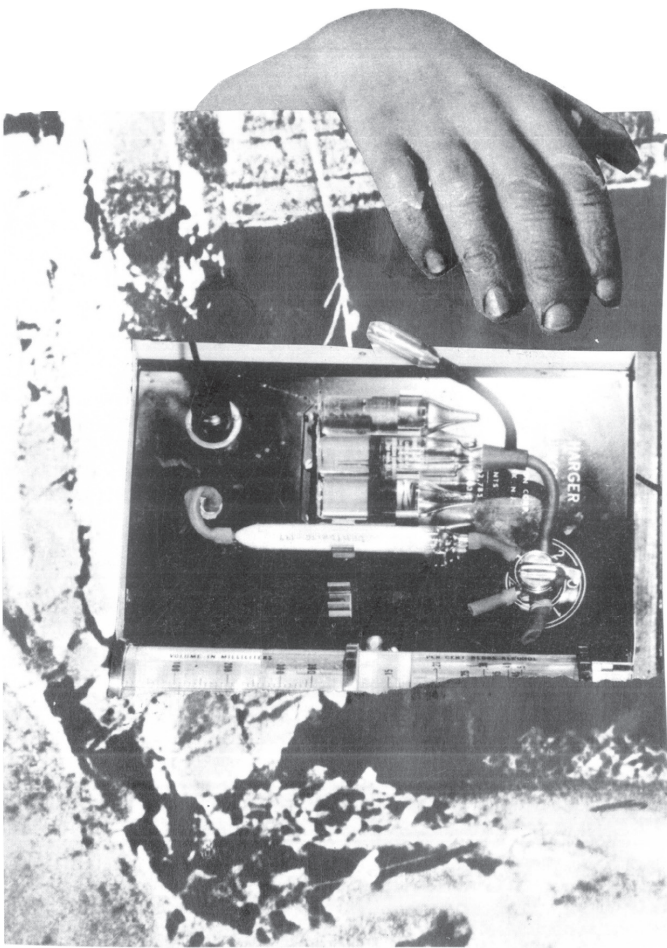
We don't want to appeal to moralizing presuppositions which assure that the individual proletarians are better and more honorable than the individual capitalists. **The aim is to understand that our conducts are completely determined by the mode of capitalist production and that, therefore, it's necessary to put an end to this mode of production which reproduces us to the image and semblance.**

Capital dominates even the most recondite aspects of social reproduction and puts them to work for itself. In this manner millions of proletarians not only take pride in "their" work but they identify with it. And they confuse their necessities with those of Capital, internalizing the capitalist social relation in such a way that even when they want to fight against what they perceive exploits and oppresses them, they continue reproducing it. **The dominant discourse and the everyday capitalist routine have "integrated" the exploited to such a degree that they suppose to resist commerce precisely by engaging in commerce.** Many dissatisfied proletarians suppose to fight through work, the production of commodities, the circulation of money, and the valuation of life in general! It's gotten to the point, that when we criticize the capitalist means of production in its self-managerial facade they feel profoundly offended and attacked. To such a level of capitalist fusion we have arrived.

If we are willing to openly debate the proposal of self-management it is because there were and there are shared spaces, not only of struggle, but of mere subsistence. In such environments, although it's not the rule, we can find proletarians in a certain harmony, with the intention, at least initially, of changing life and integrating distinct spheres of everyday life which are found to be profoundly separated. Although changing life, evidently, it's not a matter of joining the separated.

Naturally, no oppressed person can oppose to earning a few bucks for survival aside to his/her official job, far from the orders of a boss, be it as a principal or complimentary activity, alone or with others. We who make this publication have done it, will do and shall continue to do so. **But in the same way that when we work for a wage we don't advocate for wage labor to be the mode of subsistence, or to be the "school" of exploitation and therefore of the rejection of work; we cannot advocate for self-management, nor cooperatives, nor the work which is denominated as autonomous and independent** (from what? we ask). Even less can we accept that through working and adapting to the system, it is being fought against.

Let's fight against the class society in order to cease being proletarians, in order to never organize ourselves around commodities again, in order to no longer relate to each other through exchange, in order to cease being reified, in order to constitute ourselves as the human community.



AGAINST ALL MANAGEMENT OF CAPITAL

“In the full sense of the word, long term self-management is impossible in this society, but nothing prevents workers from trying to implement it, especially when the firm goes bankrupt or the boss runs away for financial or political motives. This has happened quite a few times, even on a large scale as in Portugal 1974–75 or Argentina after 2001. Self-management is the utmost possible worker autonomy within a company that is not questioned as a company. So the “risk” of self-management will always exist.” (Troploin, *What’s it all about?*)

In strategy and marketing journals they speak of self-management, in business discussions they speak of leadership and competitiveness associated with self-management, journalists celebrate it and diverse work lovers recommend it. Nevertheless, there are also ample sectors displeased with the status quo that speak of self-management and even of social change, others go further and relate self-management and revolution. We want to confront this proposal of managerial transformation of society, this proposal of gradually revolutionizing the society by means of economic measures. This partial revolution which, in the end, would leave the existing mode of production intact.

But, can there be a partial revolution? Is it desirable to salvage a mode of production which destroys us?

Managerialism is presented on repeated occasions as a complement or opposition to politicism (changing society through politics). Both conceptions **assume that future society —call it socialism, communism, anarchy— will be a linear continuation from capitalism, of which it would be enough to cleanse it of its defects (which are defined by each individual’s own consideration). Meaning, the constitutive element of the capitalist system is seen as an error, a defect that can be solved.** It’s the same ideological expression which, when it doesn’t make a shameless apology of the egotistic individual, advocating for its freedom, equality, autonomy and rights, does so for the different units of production: factories, workshops, communes, cooperatives, and even unions or councils. On the contrary, **we must break with the capitalist reason and the horizon that Capital proposes to us, we must abolish the generalized mercantile society, not administrate and manage it!**

We already know the meaning of phrases like “escape from the existing order”, “create free spaces”, “construct non-capitalist environments”, “stay to the margins of Capital”, “rehearse work relations not determined by capitalist economy”. It’s the old illusion that the capitalist mode of production is possible to elude and that furthermore it will sink on its own from the moment in which all human beings would gain consciousness and escape from it. The stupid hope that money would lose its value if we would refuse to accept it (we remind, not painlessly, that the backing of coin is not gold or some type of academic calculation, but the worldwide State with its armies and police, its tortures and killings). The hypothetical form of these proposals expresses on its own the impotence and the chimerical character of pious desire.

It’s the old, ancient illusion that the existing conditions are simply ideas and that changing them would depend on the good will of the people. The modification of consciousness, separated from the material conditions, just as the intellectuals and activists try to practice it as a vocation, be it as a business or specialization, is at the same time a product of the existing conditions and a constituent part of them. This surge of the idea above the world is the ideological expression of the impotence of the intellectuals and the activists confronting the world. Its ideological charlataneries are defrauded day after day by the facts.

Managerialism has given historic examples of being the lifesaver of the capitalist normality and therefore a brake to the revolutionary impulse as well as to incipient revolts in decisive moments: in the iberian region in 1936–1937 to give an example of the first, and for the second it’s sufficient to remember 2002 in the argentine region.

“Extreme managerialism so appears as the last trench of capitalist defense, as can already be glimpsed in the current struggles. The modernizations of managerialism and reformism, which under the form of “to change the world without taking

power” (in reality to change the world without destroying either bourgeois power, or capital), we must consider as a part of the counterinsurrectional preparation of the bourgeoisie. Each time that the proletariat has taken to the streets and has found itself in a certain correlation of forces, these “new” expressions of the old and putrid managerialism have constituted real barriers of defense of the autonomous management of the units of capital (businesses, productive entrepreneurship, municipalities...) and have managed to liquidate the energies and the dynamic of the revolutionary destruction of Capital carried by the proletariat.”

(Internationalist Communist Group, *The russian counterrevolution and the development of capitalism*)

The defense of capitalism behind the facade of an extremist managerialism is no more than the extreme defense of Capital and its functionality.

Obviously we have to eat, leave somewhere, play, stemming necessarily from the existent and not from an ideal or dogma. But that shouldn't bring us to kiss the chains of work or to take pride in being subjected to the totalitarianism of the generalized mercantile society.

In an insurrectional moment, or one of grand class convulsions, it's necessary to occupy the means of production and make use of them in order to meet our own necessities, which immediately causes the mechanisms of valorization of Capital to tremble and begin to situate itself in the diversion of the production and the capitalist distribution. Nevertheless, **the occupation of the means of production must keep in mind and have as its central objective, in addition to the generalized victory of the insurrection, the visceral rejection of the management of the current society.** And this is necessary to remark upon as many times as it is needed. Because just as it is a utopia to change the world without attacking the State, it is a utopia to change it by deepening democracy with its liberty and equality, with the inevitable consequence of producing under the capitalist logic.¹ We can describe certain basic characteristics of capitalism:

- independent and isolated units of production
- democratic decision-making
- socializing that which is produced through exchange, meaning: relating to each other through commodities and as commodities

What difference do we find with what we often call “self-management”? None, and it makes us wonder **what sense does it have to continue conceiving as profoundly different some-**

¹ “It is useless to keep demanding “more democracy”: democracy, understood as formal equality and freedom, is already realized and coincides with the society of men without qualities. Like commodities, all citizens are measured by the same standard; they are quantitative portions of the same abstraction ». (Anselm Jappe, *The absurd market of men without qualities*). Cited in CUADERNOS DE NEGACIÓN no. 9, in the *Liberté, égalité, propriété* section, which we recommend to expand on the intimate relationship between market and democracy.

thing which is not distinct at all from a general point of view. We know, of this society everything is said, except that it is capitalist, and even when it's pointed out as such they don't try to define a social content but to employ a certain succession of empty syllables.

Self management is not an alternative to capitalism, it's an alternation to its interior. In the same manner, we don't reject it as “self-exploitation”. It's more accurate to speak of a **self-management of the exploitation in service of Capital.** Or, in contemporary projects, more concretely of the self-management of a part of the process of production, since rarely the whole process (extraction of prime materials, production, circulation, publicity, etc.) depends completely on self-managed projects, cooperatives, etc. **Who exploits us, as one proletarian or another, is not that one boss, some corrupt guy, or that president, it's the bourgeoisie as a class who exploit the entire proletariat. And they do so as an agent of Capital, which is reproduced through all the spheres of production, in whichever way they are managed. The proletariat, even if it wanted to, can not exploit itself.** Another issue is the self-requisition, the self-conviction, but these are also present, and above all, in the politics of large enterprises, in every self-employee or owner of a small business.

If it's necessary, we will again emphasize that when we refer to the antagonism between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat we're not referring to social relations between one individual and another, which is the caricature of the capitalist society most commonly spread in the self-managerialist scene. We refer to social classes, for which it must be understood that if a bourgeois exploits one, one hundred, or thousands of proletarians it is the general conditions (of class!) that allow the bourgeois exploitation and, precisely, don't allow stepping aside from it. Those who refute the existence of the antagonistic classes and reduce the social problems to personal or group situations, promote and consolidate the dominant ideology. The ideology of falsification and separation, of ‘every man for himself’, of the free and equal citizen.

From a revolutionary perspective, the profound dissidence and the great obstacle which self-managerialism presents to us is the continuity of the existent, its horizon continues to be the capitalist horizon. Capitalism is presented as an imposed exteriority which we can evade. As if it was a question of consciousness, of a “mental state”. It is (erroneously!) considered that we bear capitalist relations in a conscious manner and that in such a way we can rid ourselves of them.

Capitalist exploitation does not reside in the mind or in the interpretations, it resides in the conditions of production and it doesn't cease by changing the labels or even less thanks to good intentions. **To hide the exploitation is to hide the class character of the society in which we live,** it is to hide the extraction of surplus value on the part of the bourgeoisie. It's what is hidden **by expressing that it's possible to be “more” or “less” exploited, as if it was a quantitative issue, of measuring exploitation.** It's what is hidden by supposing that by not

The great illusion: self-management

Excerpts from *A bas le prolétariat. Vive le communisme!* (Les amis du potlach, 1979)

The capitalist system lives off of the proletariat as no other class society has needed to do with its slaves. The fundamental class of capitalism is the proletariat and not the bourgeoisie. As long as there exist proletarians, there will be capitalism, and in fact, the growth of the proletariat causes capitalism to take on a revolutionary character; the expansion of the class that expresses the dissolution of all classes, the class that cannot reconquer its humanity if it's not through the alteration of its own condition and by the destruction of Capital.

[...] In lacking the power to offer a bourgeois, proprietarian, moral or religious ideology to the dispossessed, it presents them with a proletarian ideology: socialism, self-management. The generalization of wage labor has destroyed the old values of property and obliged Capital to prioritize the access to responsibilities, the enrichment of tasks, the democratization of power at work, and the participation. Above all, when the economic difficulties become more painful, the compensations of steady cash to the workers.

The problem of management can only be central in a universe which has been particularized, fractured and atomized, where human beings are impotent in the face of economic necessity. The self-managers and other apostles of workers' control seek to tie the workers to "their" company.

Concretely, this translates into the action of committees scrutinizing the accounts, inside of every business, controlling the boss or the director, supervising the production and the commercial activities all at the same time. With this it is taken as a given the luck of an eternal economy

whose laws would be more or less identical in capitalism or in communism: the workers would then have to learn the rules of administration and of commerce. The logic of commodity is imposed, and determines everything: what must be manufactured, how, etc... But for the proletariat the problem is not to defend the "conception" of what today it would only take responsibility for "manufacturing".

In the best of cases the solution would be synonymous with the self-management of Capital. The example of LIP* is striking: the functions which the boss was responsible for previously became the task of the laborers. In addition to the material process, they were tasked with the commercialization. But all the problems which "management" can bring are completely different in a non-mercantile society. It's because of this that workers' control is an absurdity: It can't teach the workers anything but capitalist management, independently of the intentions of those that put it into practice.

Praised by the ideologies of the new wave, self-management is decked with the attractiveness of the utopia. But what a sad dream it is, in which the confusion of a capitalism without capitalists is added to the ridiculousness of the workers filling themselves with enthusiasm tomorrow for that which they stay indifferent to today: sustaining wage labor... With an eye to future outbursts, the democratic left sees in self-management a discourse which will permit it to increase in strength, present itself as something more finished, which will allow it to reabsorb a movement which threateningly announces itself.

* Note from Cuadernos de Negación: A clock factory in Paris, France. In 1973 a thousand workers occupied the factory under the threat of closure and for 300 days continued the production under workers' control, until securing a final settlement which saved the job positions.

having an owner seated in their office, there's no exploitation, what's hidden by affirming "I do the kind of work that I enjoy".

There isn't either, as the alternativists would desire, a "good" market of workers, the unemployed, the indigenous, artists, ecologists, sexual dissidents, ethnic minorities, as opposed to a "bad" market of the owners, the powerful, bosses, male chauvinists and millionaires.²

The market takes no interest in all of these trivialities. The market is anonymous, it doesn't care how things are produced or in what conditions. These factors are only important to the world of publicity, to which self-management constantly appeals in order to compensate for its real deficiencies, as much

² To those categories, which we do not share, society has been reduced. In that sense we must also warn about the use of the term *alternativists*: it is clear that we are referring to alternatives within Capital and not alternatives to Capital. It is rather an alternation, than an alternative.

the real ones as those of image: a food tastes bad? But it's self managed! The packaging doesn't fit current aesthetic cannons? But it's a product of self management! Publicity has the mission of presenting the same commodity over and over again as something different. The denominated self-managing producers have learned much from the current publicity message in which every product is associated with an experience. Just as it doesn't matter if a drink quenches thirst, but rather that it is synonymous with partying, a snack doesn't need to be nutritional but rather to be "fun", and a product made cooperatively is, above all, more correct than the others, **for which it is associated more with a kind of politics than a satisfaction, or with the satisfaction of a false political necessity.**

The private labor of the self-managing producers of commodities is related to the labor of all the other producers of commodities, converting them into social labor, because the product of every producer is equated as a value with all the

other commodities, because they were produced for exchange. **All labor competes in the same mercantile and totalitarian economy.** From the point of view of Capital they are simply commodities. The halo of particularity is given to every commodity by publicity. In the case of those displayed in the supermarket it is bestowed by traditional marketing. For its part, the political discourse singularizes that which is produced or subsidized by the State, and the ideological or emotional touch is offered in the promotion of a commodity manufactured by a cooperative or a self-managed project.

Every relation of capitalist production imprints a capitalist social form to the things for which, and through which, people enter into that relation. These commodities begin likewise to make an influence on the persons, to mold their motivations and induce them to establish concrete relations of production amongst themselves.

“It seems as if the social character of things determines the social character of their owner. As such, the “personification of things” is realized. In this sense, the capitalist shines with the reflective light of their capital”. (Isaak Illich Rubin, *Essays on Marx's Theory of Value*)

We note as such that **the limits are not to be found in “the exterior” at the moment of exchange, as it is usually argued from the self-managerialist sector.** A kind of complaint which would be formulated more or less like so: “We can produce in a self-managed manner, at the margins of capitalism, the problem is when we must go out and sell”. It's a completely mistaken focus on the problem, because **even if production, exchange and consumption can be differentiated, they are part of the same process.**

There's no limits from the “capitalist exterior” to the “self-managed interior”. In the organization of work within a company (technical division of labor) we can't find a huge contrast with the division of labor among separate private producers (social division of labor). The internal organization of every business is related previously beforehand by determined and permanent relations of production, according to the necessities of Capital.

The “self-managing” producer (even when it's the case of a mere hobby) doesn't decide what to produce, produces according to what the bourgeois society demands. Therefore, when they “go out” to sell their merchandise they don't encounter the market, the market has already defined what and how to produce it, its possibilities and its purposes.

In this generalized mercantile society all production is production of commodities, all production is production for exchange (be it through currency or not³) The questioning must not, therefore, be reduced to a problem of circulation or

3 We say currency and not money because, even when there is no currency involved in an exchange, as in the case of bartering, money is present as the general equivalent of commodities. At the same time, although in its simple determinations money serves as a unit of measure or medium of change, it is a social relation and a palpable fictional community that manifests itself in all kinds of social relations.

distribution. When the critics find the problem in the sphere of consumption they assume it is autonomous from the production and reproduction of society.

The circulation of commodities is not a moment where many modes of production coalesce (capitalist and “semi-capitalist” if such a nonsense term is allowed). **The market is how and where the producers relate, meaning the market is the social relation to the interior of capitalism.**

At the risk of being repetitive, but in need of being direct and concise, we will print below two fragments of the book by Rubin where he characterizes briefly the capitalist mercantile economy, which as we will see, is completely applicable to the self-managerialist proposal which thinks of itself as semi-capitalist or even anti-capitalist:

“The distinctive characteristic of the commodity economy is that the managers and organizers of production are independent commodity producers (small proprietors or large entrepreneurs). Every separate, private firm is autonomous, i.e., its proprietor is independent, he is concerned only with his own interests (...) On the basis of private property, he has at his disposal the necessary productive tools and raw materials, and as the legally competent owner, he disposes of the products of his business. Production is managed directly by separate commodity producers and not by society. Society does not directly regulate the working activity of its members, it does not prescribe what is to be produced or how much.

On the other hand, every commodity producer makes commodities, i.e., products which are not for his own use, but for the market, for society. The social division of labor unites all commodity producers into a unified system (...), into a “productive organism” whose parts are mutually related and conditioned. How is this connection created? By exchange, by the market, where the commodities of each individual producer appear in a depersonalized form as separate exemplars of a given type of commodity regardless of who produced them, or where, or in which specific conditions. Commodities, the products of individual commodity producers, circulate and are evaluated on the market. The real connections and interactions among the individual —one might say independent and autonomous— firms are brought about by comparing the value of goods and by exchanging them. (...)

Thus the following elements can be found in the structure of the commodity economy: 1) individual cells of the national economy, i.e. separate private enterprises, formally independent from each other; 2) they are materially related with each other as a result of the social division of labor; 3) the direct connection between individual commodity producers is established in exchange, and this, indirectly, influences their productive activity.” (Isaak Illich Rubin, *Essays on Marx's Theory of Value*)

It's not its utility or its beauty, its lack of utility or its ugliness which constitutes the value of a commodity in capitalism, not even the demand, but the socially necessary time employed in producing it, it's the abstract character of the labor which de-

termines the value of a commodity. It is indifferent with respect to that content and only pursues profit. That is the alienation that we point out and fight!

Capital can't be managed according to our needs, to attempt to do so is to waste our lives just as we waste them day after day at whatever job. Even so, we can propose concrete material demands: against the lay-offs, against the cutbacks in salaries or public services, against the evictions. **We can go even further constituting ourselves by fighting outside of and against the bourgeois institutions. Fighting against the social crisis and its necessary crisis of the imagination. If we stay within the capitalist imagery there's no revolutionary struggle for communism and anarchy, but only the reproduction of Capital.**

PEARLS FROM THE BOURGEOISIE

These three articles were published on the website materiabiz.com on September of 2006, February of 2009 and February of 2007 respectively. We want to reassure the readers, the three companies named are to be found in an optimal state of health. While they are not dazzling examples for their historical importance, they are concrete examples where business people propound their own defense of these progressivist tactics. Tactics which were not snatched from us, but which always belonged to them!

Down with the CEO! Down with the bureaucracy of the executives! Long live the government of the workers!

The dutch bank Rabobank. Nine million clients in 37 countries. One of the safest in the world according to the credit rating agencies Moody's and Standard & Poor's.

Few know that this jewel of global finance, to a substantial measure, is administered like a soviet. The article A Cooperative Solution of Strategy+business places it as an example of a revival of cooperative methods of corporate governance.

Four times per year, clients and workers of Rabobank meet in assembly in order to debate the progress of the company. They are not large investors or representatives of investment firms. They are citizens of the local communities in which the bank operates: lawyers, merchants, schoolteachers. The slogan: "One person, one vote."

Crowdsourcing: smashing the dogmas of corporate innovation

[...] The Canadian mining enterprise Goldcorp (GC) was at the margins of ruin, besieged by strikes, deeply in debt, in a shrinking market and with very high production costs. According to the analysts, Goldcorp's days were numbered.

Its CEO, Rob McEwen, needed a miracle. Frustrated because his geologists were incapable of estimating the value

We have to be **a struggle that reminds us that life can be completely different.** This doesn't mean abstaining from the world. Our antagonism with respect to Capital is a reality which we must cause to explode. And we stem from this reality, there is no other. While Capital rules we speak some of its feeble language, but it's a matter of something more, of not separating the immediate necessities from the historic ones. We don't defend wage labor, but rather the contrary: while we are to be proletarianized **we must defend our labor force and not the sources of work.** In order to struggle against Capital we must struggle just as much at work as outside of it, but neither as workers nor as citizens. It's a matter of, in the very same struggle, ridding ourselves of the roles imposed and not acquiring others available in the display windows of Capital.

and the location of new gold deposits, McEwen took an unusual decision: he published the geological data for his deposit in Red Lake on the web, and challenged the world to do the prospecting. The "Goldcorp Challenge" would award 575,000 dollars to the analysts who could present the best evaluations. The news spread rapidly over the web. More than a thousand participants from 50 countries accepted the challenge.

[...] What is *crowdsourcing*? Just like in outsourcing the jobs are sent to external companies in order to reduce costs in cheaper markets, like India or China; crowdsourcing proposes problems and rewards whoever solves them.

Can a business function without managers?

Taco Bell implemented a system in which the workers were put in charge of the organization for production, minimizing the necessity of managers. Can this phenomena spread?

[...] The company created a smaller amount of positions for managers (though better paid). At the same time it began to train hundreds of new employees so that they could manage the bulk of the operations at each subsidiary by themselves. Like so, the groups in charge of every locale began to be responsible for the hiring and supervision of new workers, the management of inventories, etc.

In this manner, Taco Bell saved millions in the salaries of expensive managers. By decentralizing a considerable part of the decision-making, now a head manager for each subsidiary wasn't needed, but one single manager was sufficient for controlling the evolution of more than three subsidiaries. [...] However, according to the investigation *Are We Ready for Self-Management?* by the Harvard Business School, the main benefit of the initiative was not the savings in costs but the impact on the motivation of the workers.

By feeling themselves responsible for many decisions, the work groups became models of motivation, efficiency and creativity. In short time, the workers themselves began to propose new forms of improving the organization of activities.



ARGUMENTS IN FAVOR OF SELF-MANAGEMENT

We have heard of the governors and the governed, of those who praise work and those who claim to despise it. Some of the arguments in favor of self-managerialism could be summarized in the following manner:

“In an era of crisis it’s necessary to tighten the belt, make a collective effort and move the country forward.”

This argument is usually enunciated by the governors and other kinds of leaders. The nationalist and populist rhetoric is the perfect alibi to try to make us believe that we have the same interests, or that our interests coincide more with those of one sector of the bourgeoisie than another. This we have come to hear in successive crisis with its calls for austerity, but it’s also a frequent discourse in moments of economic reactivation or after certain political transformations, as has occurred in different processes of national liberation. In whatever moment and place that it be, in the private sector or in that of the state, under an owner or self-managed, to work for more hours or more heavily means submitting to the necessities of the growth of Capital.

“Workers’ control educates the worker about production and it gets him to understand that he can produce without an employer.”

We’re in agreement, in complete agreement, that we are educated about capitalist production, with or without an employer, but we don’t want that education! We learn to produce and

obey, and we learn on many occasions that the same capitalist shit can be produced without leaders and without supervisors, so what is the important lesson? This argument which can be heard in the mouth of trotskysts, anarchists, peronists, stalinists and all other workerists lovers of production, trying to pound it into our heads that there’s no escape from capitalism, that at most we can change its name, but what and how to produce will remain intact.

“It’s not capitalism because the workers possess and control their own means of production”

Yes it is! And it’s not even true that they control the means of production. The hours and techniques of production, the materials, the quality of that which is produced, is determined by the rate of profit of every sector and any self-managed work project that doesn’t obey its laws will quickly end in failure. From a revolutionary perspective it’s important to acknowledge that more so than factories under workers’ control, it’s a matter of workers under the control of the factory, under the control of Capital. It doesn’t matter if they don’t like to call that capitalism, the problem is the mode of production and not its name.

“Of course it’s not anticapitalism but it has more anticapitalist elements than wage labor does. And in the case of a situation where the owners have fled, self-management is better than state nationalization or the introduction of a new manager.”

Better than what? What is the parameter? We ask the eternal defenders of the “lesser evil”, the apologists of “worse is nothing”. Reforms and the “lesser evil” are radically opposed to revolution, they are not a rest stop in the halfway point of the road towards total transformation. Continuing that same logic, another day they will defend wage labor as opposed to a forced labor camp... this is the sad reasoning of the “lesser evil”. Earlier we have pointed out that it’s not a quantitative question but a qualitative question. It’s not a matter of measuring the exploitation but of abolishing it.

Furthermore, we can add that the struggles, both recent and historical, which have arisen in the workplace environment have been of those wage laborers who are often looked down upon by the cooperativists and self-managerialists. Perhaps because that wage laborer can experience the violence of Capital truly as an exteriority, in contrast to the wage laborers who identify with “their company”, or even worse to the “self-managed” workers who administrate the particular capital they possess. Even worse, we say, if what we are looking for is a revolutionary consciousness.

“Workers have to eat”

We agree, and it wouldn’t be possible to think otherwise, with the exception that those who must eat are not only the workers, but all proletarians. Beyond “the details”, with the same argument which purports to be superb, pragmatic and realistic, one can defend wage labor as opposed to unemployment, or

some other minor atrocities as opposed to other major ones. It's the inexhaustible politics of the "lesser evil" with a human face. Meanwhile, when property and its guardians are sacked, destroyed or attacked, "the workers have to eat" will not be heard coming from those who justify with that magical phrase only the politically justifiable, that which fits into the dominant parameters of the acceptable.

This argument almost never refers to human necessities but justifies all kinds of reforms and concessions, because with the same argument it would be possible to speak about expropriating the entire bourgeoisie and fighting against the State. Nevertheless, it is employed to the contrary, in order to establish that there are immediate necessities separated from the human necessity of revolution, separating the necessity of resolving something economically from that of fighting against the oppressors and exploiters, separating that which is needed right now (for example bread or housing) from what is also needed right now (to destroy the oppressors). It is the reformists who transform the demands into reforms and separate the necessities. These are not separated in their own nature.

"Self-management doesn't work because it reaches its limit when being placed on the market"

It's a fallacy heard on a number of occasions. Self-managing entrepreneurs do not find themselves in the market when they already have the finished product, they do it before beginning to work, more precisely they find themselves participating in it. Therefore, even if they can make some decisions about their projects in the same way that the capitalists can, they must essentially respond to the demands of Capital if they don't want to fail. This argument is wielded, in general, by those who have taken into account that producing in less noxious forms or simply in forms different to those which permit greater productivity, necessarily yields a lesser grade of competitiveness in the market, blaming it for their misfortunes. They forget, or want to forget, that circulation is a moment of production, not a separate sphere. Therefore, once more, the problem is that the production assumes the form of commodities and the dominant social relation is that of exchange.

"There's no exploitation, since there's no owner to extract surplus value from the workers"

This myth is founded in a profound lack of comprehension of what capitalism signifies, in the non-comprehension of Capital as a subject, as a social relation of exchange, exploitation and valorization.

First of all, as we have already said, this is an attempt to reduce the exploitation to an individual relation between a bourgeois and the workers they exploit, when in fact it's a matter of a relation between social classes. At the risk of simplifying in various aspects, we will try to give an example.⁴ From

⁴ See in CUADERNOS DE NEGACIÓN no. 11 regarding the limitations when conceptualizing the individual value of commodities in the

a motorcycle, which is sold on the market at \$10,000, the producer of motorcycles receives \$7000, for which the owner of the dealership is left with \$3000, of which discounting all of their costs they obtain \$1000. At the same time, the producer of the motorcycles must allot \$1000 to pay the interests on the credit which was requested from the bank in order to start their business, and is therefore left with \$6000, of which, discounting everything invested between labor force and the other costs of production, they are left with \$2000. Like so, the surplus value extracted from the production of motorcycles is appropriated by the owners of the dealership, the bank and the factory (plus the advertising firm, the owner of the locale and a long etcetera). Supposing that it's a self-managed factory, it's not possible to escape this interrelation between the different spheres of production, for which its workers will continue being "exploited" by those capitalists of the commerce and the bank that participate in the profits obtained from the sale of the motorcycle.

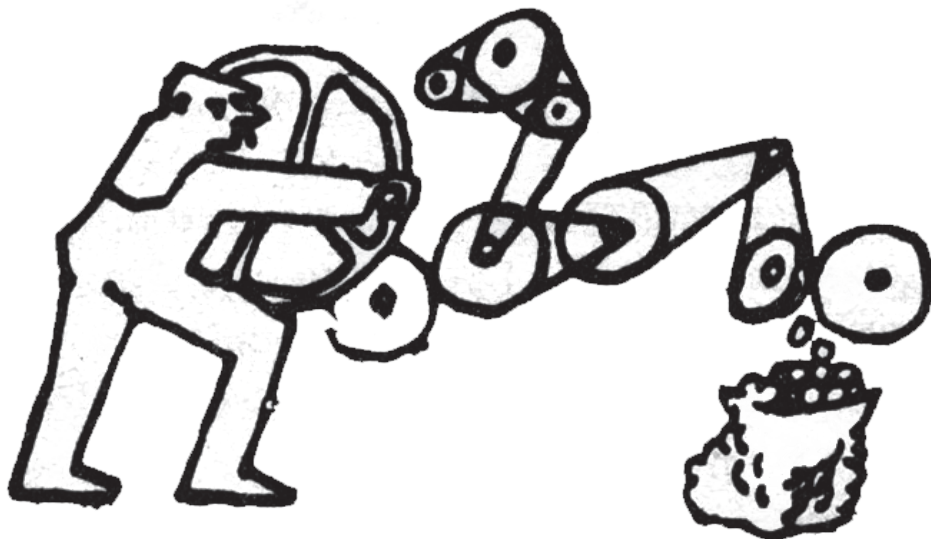
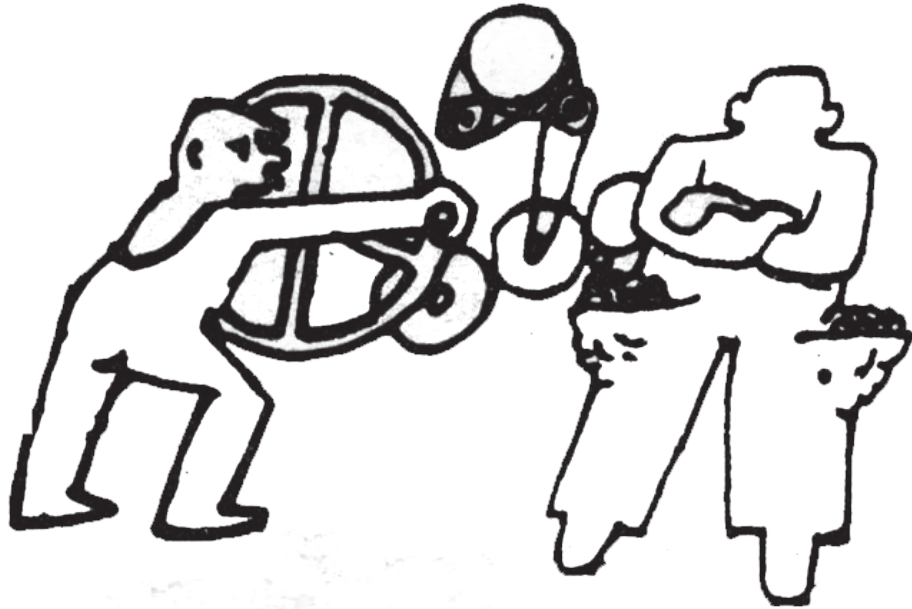
They will tell us that at least the portion of the surplus value, which would have been pocketed by the previous owner of the factory, will remain in the hands of the workers. Here is where we must go deeper into other considerations. **We have been accustomed to thinking of exploitation as the fattening of the bourgeois gut. Thus, if there's neither bourgeois nor gut, there would be no exploitation.** But what's been forgotten, and to this we refer in saying that the bourgeois is a mere agent of Capital, is that the bourgeois who conserves and grows in their social position never consumed or wasted all of their profit, but rather principally reinvested it in production, in new and enlarged cycles of the reproduction of Capital.

The reward which the bourgeoisie enjoys for its unsavory social function, they only obtain in exchange for the enormous portions of capital which they manage and to the extent in which they don't do so well, they must do without their luxuries and obscenities. From the optic of Capital, the bourgeois who best exploits their workers is the one who invests their profit in their business in order to make it grow and exploit more workers, not the one who wastes it.⁵

Therefore, we can say that the greatest part of the surplus value extracted from the proletariat must be constantly reinvested

text *The law of value*, particularly in footnote no. 13.

⁵ The trend of contemporary capitalism seems to even indicate that the figure of the company owned by a single capitalist is already something of the past or a characteristic of non-central sectors of the economy. At a certain moment of their growth, companies tend to make a public offer (better known as IPO) to obtain funds more efficiently than through credit, and because this is how they position themselves and try to dissuade similar projects to win a bigger market share. It is the "community of shareholders" that replaces the capitalist of yesteryear, and the most curious thing is that in various historical phases, that community contains people who work as salaried workers in non-managerial positions. Many of the model companies of the cooperative movement (Sancor in Argentina and Mondragón in Spain to cite just a few cases) followed this same path and today their owners are a combination of cooperativists together with investors.



Sometimes Capital doesn't need a boss...

in new cycles of valorization, in the growth of the businesses. Although it hurts to admit it, this is exactly what the self-managed enterprises which are considered most successful do: cause the business to grow, reproduce their capital, contributing to the reproduction of Capital in its totality. Success is rarely measured by the living conditions of the workers of a business, but by its growth. This is what we referred to at the beginning of this publication when we said that more than self-exploitation, it was a matter of a self-management of the exploitation in the service of Capital. Although the self-management of the totality of the production would be impossible, we can see that it's not something desirable either.

The growth of capitalism is therefore the increase and the constant reproduction of Capital, which is concretized through an endless amount of autonomous units of production that compete and exchange amongst themselves. These units can be private enterprises or state-owned, organized in an endless amount of ways, where the self-managed enterprises are no exception. We say that if the companies grow (whatever their form of administration might be), Capital grows, exploitation grows.

At the same time, supposing that in spite of everything which self-management contributes to the reproduction of Capital there still remains the advantage of appropriating that which an owner would have enjoyed, we must remind that for the small entrepreneurs it's always more difficult than for the large capitalists, which means a greater dependency on other sectors of the bourgeoisie which bestow credit and commercialize commodities on a large scale, meaning a lesser profit. It's because of this that the States, as is the case of the argentinian, have implemented policies for the fostering of self-management and cooperativism through **different subsidies, for which funds are employed that are not derived from any other source than that of the exploitation of the proletariat in its totality.**

Finally, we must not forget that the proliferation of self-managed enterprises and recuperated factories arose from a situation of heavy crisis. In the previous issue of Cuadernos we had this to say in respect:

“The movement of units of capital in regards to the rate of profit is also important for thinking about the development of certain cooperatives and self-managed enterprises in recent decades, in which the workers push the owner aside (or generally it's the owner who decides to go) and they place themselves in the administration of their businesses. Firstly, we keep in mind that if a capitalist decides to go it's due to the rate of profit not reaching sufficient heights in this branch of production. Therefore, the workers don't have too much profit to manage or distribute when taking the reins of production. In doing so, they help Capital by replacing a bourgeois who is too taxing in times of crisis. Furthermore, in many cases, if the self-managed business manages to prosper it's due to the workers submitting themselves to conditions of exploitation that they would never allow a bourgeois to impose. If an owner would try to implement measures such as decreasing salaries abruptly or even to go months without paying them, increasing the work pace, obli-

ging the workers to involve themselves in a gratuitous manner in the organization of the labor process, ceasing to pay pension funds and other types of social security; their business wouldn't take long to go up in flames. Under self-management, with the ideological weight of that “the business belongs to the workers and they work for themselves” the alienation is carried to its summum where all these kinds of sacrifices are accepted. But even in the hypothetical case in which the workers manage to achieve effective administration of production, so maintaining a high rate of profit, they must always allot a significant part of it to the growth of their particular capital, of which they are now owners. Definitively, Capital always continues to grow at the cost of their labor.”

“That's not true self-management”

When the defenders of self-managerialism as a form of struggle must confront themselves with the reality that the vast majority of the self-managed and cooperative enterprises don't present themselves even in the proximity of opposition to capitalism, they brandish this argument and accuse the State, the political parties and different credit and development institutions, of being responsible for co-opting a movement which in reality would be a movement of the struggle against, and not of integration with, Capital. We ask ourselves: **Do they really think that their great ideas are being stolen? Or could it be that those ideas never belonged to them?**

At the end of the story, it's the argument of every ideology: “It's not true democracy”, “It's not real politics”, etc. etc... And in order to expound the true one they don't counter posit a reality or a social movement which expresses this truth, but they construct it on an ideal, fantastic plane, as a mental creation which affirms that what is true is what exists in the mind and not what happens in reality itself. Because of that we are disposed to criticizing self-management as an ideology that is opposed to revolutionary action, as a material force which entraps the proletarians in a dead-end street that brings them to continue reproducing the society of capitalist exploitation.

“I enjoy working like this more”

Well, “there is no accounting for tastes” goes an old refrain... There are people who will assure that they prefer to work under pressure, others in more or less hostile environments. The Stockholm syndrome appears to have a multitude of variations. What's depressing about this kind of arguments is **the supposed emotional component which is presented as untouchable in the face of any reflection.** And at the same time the importance which is given to the individual self and to its minute interrelations. The world is enclosed upon personal experiences and from there on it is attempted to extract general lessons.

A relation of production is not simply a casual one between two people nor between ten or a hundred. It's a generalized social relation that can not be evaded —much less abolished— in an individual form. Of course that according to “their” personality everyone can feel more or less content at a job,

they can even sell their labor force at a high price in the least destructive conditions possible, but that is simply a momentary individual escape which hangs from a thread in the face of the capitalist monster.

And we say “their” personality since it is no more than the personality of their era. This society, that today venerates performance, calls us to exaggerated motivation and, on certain occasions, is more effective than the repression and open authoritarianism. A self-entrepreneur feels free, and this self-coercion can be very efficient in some work environments.

“The coercion engendered by one’s self is presented as freedom, in the way that it’s not recognized as such. The you can exercises even more coercion than the you must. Self-coercion is even worse than coercion from outside, since no resistance is possible against oneself.” (Byung-Chul Han, *What is power?*)

The defeat of the notion of the necessity for a revolution of everyday life, which we can situate in the tendencies previous to ‘68, naturally gave way to the reform of everyday life, endowing new elements to the conquerors who would not take long to use them in political and promotional campaigns. The conquered were left to console themselves with the echo of those discourses.

Hens

We present below an article by **Rafael Barrett** published in *El Nacional* on the 5th of July of 1910. In four paragraphs, this comrade not only describes what property is, but also what it does with each one of us and our relations.

While I possessed nothing more than my cot and my books, I was happy. I now have nine hens and a rooster, and my soul is disturbed.

Property has made me cruel. Whenever I bought a hen, I would tie her to a tree for two days, to impose my domain, destroying in her fragile memory the love of her former residence. I patched the fence of my yard, in order to avoid the evasion of my birds and the invasion of foxes of four and two feet. I isolated myself, fortified the border, drew a diabolical line between my neighbor and me. I divided mankind into two categories: I, the owner of my hens, and the others who could take them away. I defined the crime. The world was filled for me by suspected thieves, and for the first time I sent a hostile glance over to the other side of the fence.

My cock was too young. The neighbor’s rooster jumped the fence and began to court my hens and to bitter the existence of my cock. I sacked the intruder with stones, but the hens jumped the fence and laid eggs at my neighbor’s house. I claimed the eggs and my neighbor began to hate me. From then on, I saw his face over the fence, his inquisitive and hostile look, identical to mine. His chickens passed the fence, and devoured the wet corn which I had devoted to my own. The foreign chickens seemed criminal to me. I chased them, and blinded by rage I killed one. The neighbor attributed an enormous importance to the attack. He refused to accept a financial compensation. He gravely retrieved the corpse of his chicken, and instead of eating it, he showed it to his friends, and with that the legend of my imperialist brutality began to circulate around town. I had to reinforce the fence, increase the vigilance, raise, in a word, my war budget. The neighbor has a dog determined to do everything; I intend to get a revolver.

Where is my past tranquility? I am poisoned with distrust and hatred. The spirit of evil has overpowered me. I used to be a man. I am now an owner.



SELF-MANAGEMENT OF THE STRUGGLE?

Some comrades defend the term *self-management* in order to refer to certain forms of struggle against the exploiters and oppressors, specifically against the form and the content this society represents: self-management of the struggle, they call it. Okay, we understand and for us it's not a question of terms or categories which we should agree on but of actual practice. Anyways, since putting a stress on certain terminologies has allowed us to arrive at collective understandings, we don't want to miss this opportunity to deal with a theme as fundamental as this one.

What follows are extracts from the book *Self-management* by Alfredo Maria Bonanno (1977), and we bring them up not to redefine the word, give an authority to the quotes, nor much less to discover shared positions with this comrade. We know that in recent decades Bonanno surely would not affirm these positions. We do it because it seems important to us to consider how, from an anarchist perspective (and against the current of the majority of the anarchist movement) other comrades have spoken about and still speak about self-management not in terms of mercantile administration, but of the autonomy of the struggle with respect to parties and unions. And deeper still, the question of how to struggle (and produce) as well as what to fight for (and what to produce).

The adjective *self-managing* has been and continues to be used often for those militant projects that don't pursue aims of profit, that are not financed by businesses, unions, parties, etc., that don't frame themselves within the legality of the State in their functions as many institutions do, that don't organize themselves bureaucratically. Without a doubt they are important elements, but separated from a radical content they don't guarantee anything. In fact, they have been basic characteristics of the revolutionary groupings and organizations of history, even since long before the category self-managing was employed. That's why we insist on the content of the struggle and not its form. The self-management of the struggle doesn't suppose that it will be revolutionary.

Although many comrades do it, we find it necessary to point out that employing the same category for a reformist political and economic use on one hand and for describing a revolutionary and social force on the other leads to diverse mistakes and opportunisms. But we're not going to resolve that which must be overcome in the struggle itself, by using either the current dictionary or a new one.

Here are a few fragments of the aforementioned book. Warning: the subtitles are ours.

Self-management and struggle

Left to say is that the principle of self-management cannot be separated from a critique of reality in its centralizing aspects.



For which it is not enough to say what is meant by "self-management", but it is necessary to indicate the dangers of an economic version of the problem and the visible deformations in the different attempts already made. (...)

Self-management is also, and mainly, self-management of the struggles that will lead the producers and the exploited classes to destroy the bosses' power. In other words, we cannot expect to build a future self-managed society based on a pyramid like organization of the struggle, built by a party or by a professional leader. (...)

For this reason we must ask: self-management yes, but for what purposes and on whose account? If the ends are identified with productivism, if a fatigued economic system finds the solution of its own cyclical crises by pushing workers towards the false perspective of a participation in the management of the company; then, this type of self-management is not what we are looking for. Similarly, if self-management is organized from above on behalf of a party, or a group of people who take the right to use it to "build socialism", we are not interested either. (...)

The concept of self-management concerns the problem of the struggle for emancipation (vindictive and revolutionary struggles), and the ways of organization of future society. To consider self-management as a problem of economic nature only is a matter of ignorance or bad faith. (...)

At one time, the occupation of factories and fields meant maximum outrage to private property, the vigil of the revolution; today, occupations are often requested by the same employers so as to win through dark operations of marginal power.

At one time, the concept of self-management of production was found exclusively in the books of anarchist theorists; today all the parties of the left, all the unions and many capitalist or pseudo socialist countries, speak about and apply self-management. (...)

But the problem is different. Creative capacity can be used by the capitalist system as an alternative instrument in its survival, and in this way it would be involved in a struggle that, although apparently strange, would be positive and a source of improvement. This fight could make creative ability perish quickly. This would happen in the case, not totally unthinkable, of a significant decrease in working hours, of an increasingly wider automation process, of the use of other energy sources, of a global use of information sources, of a centralization of free time and all the problems related to it.

Ideology of production

The dominant ideology is that of production. This term has a positive and an irrational meaning at the same time. In pronouncing it, all political men refer to a hypothetical common good that must be protected and accumulated. Servers of the system of all races, periodically illustrate the collective benefits of an increase in production, calculate average income per ca-

pita, try to convince people that everything is for the best and in the best of all possible worlds.

It could be easily demonstrated how the ideology of production is not limited to the sector of the economy, but that it floods the whole of society: language, social structure, sex and so many other things are transformed, leaded, multiplied by this productive mania. In Marxist terms, it is a process of reification, of transformation into objects. The same ideology is deified and ends up in supermarkets.

Culture is conditioned by this phenomenon in a very clear way. It's already made when distributed. It follows the ideology of production, in the same way as cars and televisions do.

(...) The thesis of the parties, called workers', fails to shake off the ghost of production. These organizations sustain a "liberation" of the productive forces confusing this issue with the liberation of the human being. The danger of such an error is of great importance



THE ARGENTINE EXAMPLE

“Besides the new companies, let’s also look at the companies that are experiencing difficulties. At those which, according to the old patterns, it’s best to let die, and that instead can be resurrected through the initiatives that you call “Workers’ buy-out”, “*empresas recuperadas*” in my language. I’m a fan of recuperated companies.” (Jorge Mario Bergoglio, current pope of the catholic Church. March, 2015)

During an interview that we gave a while ago,⁶ curiosity arose about the year 2001 in the argentine region. The questions of self-management, cooperatives and recuperated factories continue to be inescapable, so to begin we want to resume from what we responded on that occasion:

An ideology of self-management was set in motion at different levels. This came as much from the unemployed who had no other way of finding a job as from the workers who had to start up their workplace after their indebted bosses had fled rather than face their employees. In many neighborhoods, these projects were part of a palpable class solidarity. People were in the street, protesting and solving their problems without asking the government for anything. For example, a neighbor would open their house and oven for common use and whoever

⁶ Made by the Asymétrie collective in France. Published in September 2014, also available in Spanish and French on our website.

needed to would come and make bread to sell. These situations were common, and they created a greater understanding between proletarians and made links that were less weak than those in times of apparent social peace. Still, **without the prospect of revolutionary struggle, these situations retreated into self-managerialism, which means: continuing to survive within the capitalist system without looking for a way out.**

As we mentioned before, we know that in various countries, Argentina is brought up again and again as an example of self-management. For this reason, we think that it is extremely important to explain that it was and is a break on anger and proletarian creativity in the moments of revolt that occur in these times of global crisis. Self-managerialism forgets, and wants to make us forget, that exploitation resides in the conditions of capitalist production and can not be stopped by a changing of labels, much less by good intentions. Concealing exploitation is concealing the class character of the society we live in; it is concealing the extraction of surplus value by the bourgeoisie. After a period of adjustment and the recovery of the national economy, the current president of this country publicly thanked those who had continued running the factories where they worked without a boss, and she declared that “Argentina is like one big reclaimed factory”.⁷ We think that this is further evidence of the counter-revolutionary character, not of the struggle of proletarians to survive, but of managing the economy without a boss and putting ourselves at the service of capital with a lowered wage and worse conditions in periods of crisis. The bourgeois are thankful when, in times of great need, the proletarians do not loot or destroy what is destroying them but tighten their belts for the nation. Just as they are thankful

⁷ Words from the former president of Argentina, Cristina Fernández de Kirchner during her visit to the Mataderos cooperative (March 17, 2010): “Let me tell you that I feel that Argentina is also a large recovered factory, a large factory that at some point was closed; (...) And today that we have recovered and opened that factory, I assure you, I promise you that whatever it takes, that factory will continue to be open and functioning, they will not close it again. This great recovered factory that is Argentina was recovered twice, in 2003 and when they thought we were going to close last year and the crisis was coming, we kept it open against all odds. We kept it open with the cooperation of the unions, which were open and intelligent. Also with the effort of the businessmen, who articulated with them how to not fire people, to be able to continue with the level of occupation that was what most revealed to us, what worried us most, which was the great objective, to defend that labor bond, that it didn’t break. (...) Finally, I do not want to overwhelm you with so many things, I want to thank the 132 workers of this company, their families, the Buenos Aires Graphic Federation, all the men and women who believe that it is necessary to keep the factories up and down open. There, in every place that Argentines believe we need an Argentina with greater added value, of production, internal market, export, there they will find me, not as a boss but as a soldier, because I am a soldier of this cause. I never felt or wanted to be head of anyone or anything, just a soldier of the national cause, a soldier of production and work. (...) Thank you very much and to continue working for the great Argentina, for the recovered factory, for the recovered homeland, for the recovered hopes, for the recovered dignity. Thank you very much compañeros.”

when many of the militants that were in the streets in 2001, today, stick to official proposals for self-management. It is not the first time that the weaknesses of the proletariat in a period of conflict have been presented afterwards as “virtues” to be defended in a time of passivity. The same thing that happened with an ideology of politics and parliamentarianism in the first decades of the 19th century happens today with an ideology of self-management.

The specialists can make thousands of detours, but the reality is simpler than how they present it: the greater the profit of the bourgeoisie, the greater our suffering.

More than a century ago proletarian comrades who fought against Capital in the Argentine region arrived to conclusions such as the following:

“In relation to the cooperatives, at the proposal of the tobacco workers, it has been decided to approve this declaration:

The third congress of the Federación Obrera Argentina declares that the cooperatives, as much those of production as those of consumption, are harmful to the working classes because they unnerve the spirit of rebellion, promoting the spirit of ambition” (June, 1903, Cited in Isaac Oved, *El anarquismo y el movimiento obrero en Argentina*)

“Cooperatives. Considering that the cooperatives, in being works of accumulation, are contrary to the action of the workers, that their greatest success is equivalent to a substantial economic improvement of the cooperatives, they are contrary to the principle of the emancipation of the workers, given that the action of those inside of the cooperatives is to look after the conservation of their capital, and given that this defense of interest is a purely bourgeois egoism and not the emancipation from Capital as some believe, but the perpetuation of it; and that this is equivalent to a transformation of the economic state in benefit to certain individuals that end up stepping away from the proletariat.

The 6th Congress declares that: given that the success of the cooperatives is the defeat of the proletarians, given that when they triumph, they are bourgeois institutions that accept the law, and to it they recur in order to chase their debtors, deduct money transfers, allocate their capital and speculate in their enterprises, finally becoming a true enemy of the proletariat, it is recommended that the Societies [of resistance] fight the implementation of cooperatives through every means.” (6th Congress of the *Federación Obrera regional Argentina*, September, 1906. Published in *La Organización Obrera* issue 50, October, 1906)

The typical example of the *fábricas recuperadas* in Argentina, with their apologists around the world, is an example of what we want to explain. Those factories abandoned by their owners, are put into service by the employees who were left unemployed and return to the funeral procession of Capital at the price of the intensification of work and of the general cheapening of the working conditions. Like so, the proletarians are pressured to work and take control, to think and act like exploited and exploiter at the same time. Over the years we see how those who have subsisted have managed to do so at the cost of making harder decisions than those of their owners: they worked for a lower salary, have worked for free, have implemented timekeeping where it wasn't done before, and some even have taken on employees. Today the flimsy arguments from before 2001 remain far behind, and only the discourse of the defense of work is left standing.

“Just as protestantism asked of every christian to become their own priest, the capitalism of the self-managerialists asks of every worker, with the whole weight of their limitless powers, to become their own overseer, their own time keeper; it asks of them to establish themselves as representatives of Capital in the face of their own nature and consciousness of being exploited.” (Munis, *Autogestión*)

In having the responsibility to manage the exploitation, the workers must compete against one another, identify with the interests of the company, hire and fire employees, control the pace both of their own work and that of others, and fight against absenteeism, meaning: exercise violence and the harshest of competition to the interior of our class.

It's mainly for these motives that **the proletariat is not strengthened through self-management but weakened, it is reaffirmed as proletariat in the service of Capital and not as a class which must abolish itself along with all of the capitalist shit.** Accepting the difficulties of the national economy and the blows of the crisis should not be our task, just as neither is it our task to learn to be servile to the laws of the economy.⁸

After the combative days of December 2001 many self-managing entrepreneurs had one or various excuses: “this robs you of less time than normal work”, “money is left over for the cause”, or “this reinforces the human link between us”. The reality is that with one sole venture one could seldom meet their needs, and so, many ended up having two jobs, therefore there wasn't money for “the cause” either and even less was there time for it. Social relations were reinforced as labor relations or those of sale and acquisition. And **those who triumphed in these businesses rapidly forgot that they wanted to change things. But yeah, they remember it if it's needed in order to promote themselves.**

⁸ In this sense it is remarkable how more and more left-wing slogans are associated with the economic policies that “the government should use in defense of workers”: “No to the payment of the external debt”, “No to the IMF”, “No to the rescue of the banks”, etc.

Getting the boss off your back is not equivalent to putting an end to the exploitation. It's reminiscent of when someone covers the eyes of a baby and asks them "Where am I?" If there's no businessman in sight there's no Capital? There's a world much further beyond our limited sights, "Here it is!". And this is what was discovered rapidly by the cooperatives, recuperated factories and self-managing projects when they had to survive within the cruel competition of capitalism. In order not to perish they used to create networks of production and consumption just as they continue creating today, also maintaining the ideology of an alternative economy.

The dilemma in which the defenders of self-management find themselves, inasmuch as it is a supposed practical critique of capitalism, is that if the enterprise or the network of enterprises doesn't work, it means that the self-management that they promote so much doesn't work, and if it does manage to work they had to act increasingly more akin to those "faceless companies", which they demonize. In full self-management, like in any other business, growing is a must, and therefore it's needed to employ other proletarians or buy machines and begin to intensify the labor. Every venture is then a collective owner and capitalist.

But the dilemma is not solved so easily and even less so at the current moment. In Argentina many of these ventures are not self-sufficient and therefore a good part of the project consists of obtaining subsidies from the State. This can be done through procedures, competitions, or even using heavier measures like cutting off roads and resisting the police. The State has managed even to outsource⁹ work which had previously been directly salaried in order to offer it to these cooperatives. Like so, mowing the lawn of plazas and boulevards can return to a minimal cost by being left in the hands of a cooperative which must even supply the work tools, selling the labor force cheap, without retirement, or health insurance. And this, the leaders of the organizations present as a victory in the face of the State! Their voices do not tremble in saying that they are recovering "our money" from the State.

"Firstly, the identification of state funds with "our!" money (exclamation no less!) requires an embarrassing conflation of the population with the state. State funds raised by taxation are no more 'ours' than my boss' Bentley is 'mine', because tax revenue represents the state's portion of the surplus value expropriated by the capitalist class. Of course taxes are more visible than other forms of surplus value, but they are no more 'ours.' The notion of 'taxpayers money' may have rhetorical advantage to

9 The expansion of outsourcing in Argentina came from the 1990s, closely related to increasing unemployment and job flexibility. This outsourcing by private capital and the State, also obtained its correlation in terms of repression. Although throughout the history of this country there have been repressive parastatal groups that exercised their function alongside the official state apparatus, in recent years the role of the union mafias, barrabravas or a mixture of both in the repression is notorious to those who fight, even murdering various militants.

populist orators, but it's a staple of bourgeois ideology [...]" (Joseph Kay, *On co-ops, conflicts and straw men*)¹⁰

Meanwhile, the State presents its unemployment indexes which are lower than the reality, incorporating all of these employments and sub-employments into the category of employees and spits its filthy ideology of "whoever doesn't work just doesn't want to, because there's work to do". Meanwhile, the "fortunate" who can obtain work thanks to self-managerialism or cooperatives will work longer, harder and under increasingly worsening conditions, and as a greater tragedy there's no one in sight to insult, sabotage, rob or call a strike against.

The producer shines in the light of their commodities and identifies with their work. They display it to the world as "their" work, which they have achieved identification with through the alibi of self-management. They relate by means of the commodities produced with other producers of commodities, in their places of business, at expos, in festivals and on trips. They drag their self-managerialism along wherever they go, they are full-time workers just like those that big companies demand in their wanted ads.

In the comprehensible desperation to subsist, or in the unrestrained path of profit, is created a trademark, a logo, a slogan, and also truth is disguised in order to sell, like any vendor: in front of the State and in search of a subsidy it's better to display oneself as "fighters of the good fight that work and don't make revolution", in front of the citizen and consumer it's best to show off the honest labor and the particularities of the product, in front of the progressives of the left it's best to insist on the political aspect of the production, and in front of those who proclaim the revolution to present themselves as revolutionaries with a serious project. You can't blame anybody for trying to sell what they produce, but we're going to denounce over and over again the amalgamation of work and revolutionary activity, of work and emancipation, of mercantile socialization and human community.

The argentine example from which the worldwide proletariat must learn is that if the confidence in capitalism is not lost, if a horizon different than that of the bourgeois is not sought after, then we are lost even before beginning to organize ourselves.

Although what's important here is our experience as a class and not our adventures and misadventures as individuals, we want to highlight that we know what we're talking about. We have alternated our survival working in cooperatives which formed immediately after the revolts of 2001, we have worked on our own account, building self-managed and salaried work projects. We're not intellectuals that condemn one form of subsistence or the other, we're proletarians who subsist under capitalism but we don't want any more, and we don't want our struggle put an end to this dominant order to be reduced

10 Included in *Bailouts or Cooperatives?* Debate on cooperatives and self-management, and their use as strategic tools, that took place on libcom.org.

to a manner of working. **We don't want to make a virtue out of necessity.** We don't want to discuss forms of collective management, or new forms of measuring our work. We want to struggle along with other proletarians in order to cease being the proletariat. Establish a new form of communication, through the struggle, recognize ourselves through ourselves and not by means of commodities or the communications mass-media, or even through the "self-managed means of communication".¹¹

Why conquer the means of production? Those means determined by the production of commodities and not for the satisfaction of the desires and needs of an emancipated humanity. And afterwards? To manage jails and mental hospitals?

In an insurrectional process it would be precise to insist on the delimitation between self-management and the taking of the means of production on the part of the proletariat (although some self-managerialists want to amalgamate it). In full-on insurrection, the proletariat must launch itself into action and evidently take everything just as it finds it: fields, factories, industries, buildings, weapons... It must immediately subvert the social function of these mediums and production centers by utilizing them not for value but for the immediate human necessities (inseparable from the human necessity of revolution). A large part will have to be left inoperable since they are only for valorization, with others there's no other remedy than to start from what's available (factories of weapons to use for the insurrection, means of production of food, means of transportation...) Evidently, these means are not conceived for human necessities, but in the first instant there's not much more to do than employ them, as much in the struggle against Capital, as for living. In this process all of these mediums which were conceived not for human activity, but to exploit and to create commodities, must be completely transformed.¹²

11 In the absence of companies with a more progressive and populist proposal, some people decide to create their own solitary confinement project. The self-managing characteristics are made patent either way if sweets or news are produced. As well as a media monopoly, the small website or short-range newspaper also produces its news for later consumption. Its members do not quit their assigned roles of journalists, communication or computer students, photographers or activists. They have learned very well, surely in college, that only the domesticated, the normalized, can be capitalized. All this content production is packaged and presented to a consumer who's eager for news and can't find what he is looking for in large multimedia. But Capital, under one facade or another, offers a bad satisfaction to every false need.

12 "(...) the production of useless goods will be left aside and the quality of what is needed will be improved. Who would produce a meal full of chemicals for themselves and their peers, when a really nutritious one can be made? (...) The purpose of the revolution (even in the struggle for it) is not the "workers' control" of production, because production as a production of goods destined for exchange, as a production of value, will always dominate the producers, even if they wish otherwise. Production is inseparable from "political" decisions, therefore the proletarian practice as a totality gets rid of its "economic" straitjacket by producing, of its "political" straitjacket when deciding, as well as its "military" straitjacket when taking up arms." CUADERNOS DE NEGACIÓN no. 4

The watershed is the continuation or the rupture with capitalism. If the goal is to overcome capitalism it's no use to employ the capitalist model of production, which doesn't only produce objects but social relations of exploitation and alienation. Nevertheless, the watershed mustn't be understood as a duality between self-managed work or sackings, or fetishizing the aforementioned as "the true proletarian form of subsisting". The comrades of the Internationalist Communist Group published in November of 2002:

"The need of surviving, in a context of generalized chaos like in Argentina, where the material situation has become unbearable for more and more people, pushes everyone to use their wit in a thousand different ways: sackings, occupations of stores and/or factories, recuperations, strange inventions, *scams*, artistries, traffickings, falsifications, changes... Nobody, much less us, can judge or condemn any of these procedures of survival, of struggle against hunger that our class makes up in order to confront the conditions which are imposed on it by the mercantile society. In the management of immediate survival and under the dictatorship of capital all which is done against the law of private property and the bourgeois State is valid, legitimate, and be the protagonists conscious of it or not, they express the total and irreconcilable opposition between the human necessities and the society based on private property.

The problem arises when mechanisms of this survival, or the necessary occupation of means of production realized through the proletarian struggle, are idealized as if they were alternatives for change in the current society, as if it was possible to perform a social change without the necessary revolutionary rupture." (From the journal *Comunismo* issue 49, *Acerca de las luchas proletarias en Argentina, parte I*)

We can relate it directly to the profound reclamation which expressed "May they all go!" A slogan of considerable weight, even more so when keeping in mind the resignation of the president in that context, who had to flee from the seat of government by helicopter under the gaze of the demonstrators, as well as the resignation of the three presidents who succeeded him during the span of a month. The resignations were requested from all politicians, challenging the declared *curfew* in the streets. Some argued that the functionaries badly performed their charges, others went further, like when a journalist asked: "and after they all go?", and "may they keep on fleeing!" was their response. This slogan became present in many popular assemblies and was assumed by many people who didn't know what they were going to replace the politicians with, but their necessities impelled them to kick them out.

But **it's not about replacing the politicians because they work erroneously, in the same sense that it's not desirable to substitute a boss.** This whole rotten system produces its supporters and guarantors, it produces them in the measure of its decomposition. The only way to free ourselves from these types once and for all is to destroy the system which demands them and produces them.

Those who didn't manage to comprehend or at least intuit these inescapable necessities, believed the next candidate who appeared with a more likable discourse, they believed the story that the work they invented wasn't a simple question of subsistence but of identity and pride, of true work as opposed to precarious work. In the same manner, others dumped their energies into participative assemblies propelled by the state to channelize the disobedience, without comprehending that what's important isn't only who decides in an assembly, but what is decided.

If the State could recuperate the “popular assemblies” into “participative assemblies”, “participatory budget”, etc., it's because over months their content had already degraded into a reunion of neighbors that, only as neighbors, presented their complaints. What today signifies meeting up because of a lack of traffic lights or a lack of police. In the same way that a considerable amount of people, previously to the outburst of 2001, defended the established; in another moment they found themselves challenging authority, destroying a bank and expelling a president. The social struggle having been suppressed, by means of baton and discourse, “the people” meet up without leaders in order to demand heavy hand and jail time for low-level thieves. This is clear evidence that human beings aren't simply determined by our individual consciousness but that we are, mainly, the circumstances which constitute us and which we constitute.¹³

The example of 2001 in the Argentine region teaches us that it's not a matter of changing one owner or politician for another, it's not even a matter of us assuming their functions collectively and horizontally.

To assume these tasks is to remain in the field of the class enemy. It's not a healthy system with corrupt or useless representatives, it's simply a system which deserves nothing more than its abolition.

13 To be more precise, we want to add that individual conscience exists only as a singular concretion of social circumstances, of a social fabric. Both the conscience of this bourgeois world and its denial are social expressions, of classes, of projects... And they are reflected in singular consciences that are nourished by a whole series of experiences of those circumstances (both present and historical) and that oscillate, are strengthened based on those experiences and circumstances...

Letter to the proletariat in Greece

Here in Argentina combative struggle for a better life was replaced with the struggle for work—work without an apparent boss, but work nevertheless. In this way “the nation was saved”, and we demonstrated once more that life and the existing social order are incompatible, even if we have not yet recognized it as a class.

Creating small productive enterprises for daily survival subsumed the community in struggle that we had formed into a support for the national economy, and ruined the possibility of a revolutionary transformation. This self-managerialism was initiated by unemployed people who had no other way to get a job, as well as by workers who kept working after their indebted bosses had fled. In many neighborhoods these self-managed projects were part of a palpable class solidarity, along with socializing in the streets, protesting and solving problems without asking the government for anything. Later many of these enterprises were forced to ask the state for subsidies in order to survive. In this way, asking for things from a paternal state became the reason to struggle. At times these struggles involved blocking roads and clashes with the police, at other times agreements with corrupt unions, bosses, politicians and community leaders. The forms of protest changed but not the content.

We know that in various countries the Argentinian example of self-management is pointed to again and again. For us the Argentinian example that has been sold to the world is an example of how struggles can be channeled into production and economic growth passing through a step of combative struggle. Struggle should not be a tool of the bourgeoisie to keep the gears turning and to fine tune the machine of capitalist progress! Struggle, with radical intentions, has to stop this progress! It is the destruction of the gears!

We hope that our experience will be of interest to you and useful in some way. Self-managerialist proposals from those in power have been and are in reality a break on the rage and creativity of proletarians in moments of revolt. If what is desired is a return to capitalist normality then all our reflections here are of little importance.

The friends of negation. December, 2015

This text was translated into greek, french and english. Its different versions are available on our website.



THE SPANISH EXAMPLE

The experience of the proletariat in the Spanish region during the decade of the '30's of the last century, and specifically in the years '36 and '37, is a source of inspiration for those of us who fight against Capital. But the historical experiences of our class must be critically reappropriated, assuming its virtues and infecting ourselves with its revolutionary fervor, as well as learning from the mistakes so as not to repeat them. For reformists of all kinds they are, in contrast, a source of justification, of the "had to have been there at those moments", of making of the past defeat an aim for the future.

There had been a time in which reform was proposed as being halfway to revolution, in order to later in practice not only not realize it, but to suppress the revolution. With the excuse of the correlation of forces a halfway path is justified which in truth is a charted destiny in which it's precisely impossible to gather strength.

In our critique we do not demand at a period of time something that could not have reached. On some occasions proletarian groupings went against the current and had already established at that moment that which we are saying now. They established it through words, but also with actions. Furthermore, some of the leaders of the counterrevolution had previously positioned themselves in support of the social revolution which they later suppressed.

For example, Diego Abad de Santillán, who went from being a fervent critic of technology and the capitalist organization of labor to becoming an enthusiastic partisan of them. In 1931 he wrote: "Modern industrialism, in the manner of Ford, is pure fascism, legitimate despotism. In the great rationalized factories

the individual is nothing, the machine is everything. Those of us who love freedom are not only enemies of statist fascism but also of economic fascism." But nevertheless, two years later he extolled "the Taylorization, which eliminates the unproductive movements of the individual and increases their productivity".

"It is not necessary to destroy the present technical organization of capitalist society, but we must make use of it.

The Revolution will end private ownership of the factory, but if the factory must exist and, in our opinion, improve, it is necessary to know how it operates. The fact that it becomes social property does not change the essence of production or the method of production. The distribution of production will change and become more equitable."¹⁴

Therefore, it's evident how, since previous to July of '36, the anarchosyndicalist project was industrial and anti-human. **The anarchosyndicalist ideology didn't find itself in trouble in the midst of war but rather went to war to dispute the mode of managing capitalist production.**

"Until recently, historians have stressed the antistatist character and the political thought of anarchosyndicalism and have therefore ignored its economic doctrines. Although many anarchosyndicalists wished to abolish the state or radically reduce its functions, they were not opposed to economic organization and coordination. In fact, they favored a strong union as the basis of both the revolution and the future society. [...] **Indeed, few were more fervent believers in progress and production than Spanish anarchosyndicalists; they criticized their bourgeoisie because of its inability to develop the productive forces.**

¹⁴ Both paragraphs of *Anarchism and Revolution in Spain: writings 1930-1938* quoted by Michael Seidman in *Workers Against Work*.

By glorifying labor as emancipatory, the dominant forms of anarchism and, later, anarchosindicalism led not only to the acceptance of industrialization but also to its active promotion. In 1872 the regional conference of the First International in Zaragoza asked, “How can women be free?” and responded to its own question, “through nothing but work.” In 1910 the founding congress of the anarchosindicalist CNT again espoused the idea, which became common among many sectors of the Left, that women were to be liberated by labor.”

(Michael Seidman, *Workers Against Work*)

The anarchosindicalist ideology, like all ideologies that do not foresee a problem in capitalist form of production, concentrates on its administration. Because of that, these tendencies don't seek the conquest of the government but the conquest of the factories. In one sense, **they have recognized that power is not to be encountered merely in the ministries but in the production of commodities itself and for that reason proposed—and still propose—their unions not only as a means of struggle but also as a future organization of the emancipated society, but “emancipated from what? Emancipated from a “parasitic and unproductive” bourgeoisie, branded as incapable of developing the productive forces.** There is found the reason for such rejection of priests, the military and the leisurely bourgeois, and even the forced labor camps.¹⁵

“The anarchosindicalists of the thirties fundamentally shared the point of view which Moishe Postone has labeled as “traditional marxism”, meaning, a critique of capitalism “from the point of view of work” or, in what amounts to the same, from an optic which considered the relations of production based on the private ownership of the means of production and the market as the principal obstacles to the development of the productive forces and the “emancipation of work”. Hence, according to Postone, it could be said that “traditional marxism” as much as anarchosindicalism replaced the critique of the mode of production done by Marx—a “critique of work under capitalism”, meaning, of the totality identified with capital and constituted by labor, which is why both were central objects of the critique—for a political project of modification of the distribution of the social product, and the corollary of the said critique, the self-abolition of the proletariat, for a theory of the “emancipation of work” understood as the conquest of power (political or social) on part of the working class and the generalization of the worker's condition throughout the whole of society.” (Jorge Montero and Federico Corriente, *Sobre las vicisitudes de Los obreros contra el trabajo*)

15 In December 1936, Juan García Oliver, as Minister of Justice, inaugurated the first labor camp in Totana (Murcia), whose entrance read: “Work and do not lose hope.” Seidman points out that the camps of work were an extreme but logical manifestation of Spanish anarcho-sindicalism. Anarcho-sindicalists granted great moral value to work; the bourgeoisie, the military and the clergy were immoral precisely because they did not produce. Therefore, criminal reform meant forcing these classes to work, freeing them from their sins through work.

The difficulty in proposing a historical balance, and even more so in just a few pages, arouses at the time of comparing the theoretical elaborations of different authors and the massive and anonymous practices, within and outside of the formal structures. This mutual relation and impulse amongst the diverse expressions of the struggle, needs also **to distinguish what was effectively done through the formal declarations. It's not the same to declare libertarian communism as to take concrete measures against Capital and for communism.** Once more, we have to remind that the importance is not either this or that declaration nor the idea that an individual or group holds of itself, but reality itself.

For example, as opposed to the libertarian historiography (principally Frank Mintz, in *Anarchism and Workers' Self-Management in Revolutionary Spain*), who announced with grandiosity that “in Spain money was abolished”, we can't be such dreamers. In any case, if they refer to the fact that in some regions it was attempted to abolish the monetary signs, then we could discuss about what the real reach of that was. Effectively in some towns this was attempted, but in the grand majority it wasn't possible to go further than the utilization of vouchers which represented labor time. It's not our intention to undervalue the experiences in this sense, but its indubitable to recognize that we must go further and attack value and money at their very core, and not just in some of its manifestations. Further than the visceral refusal of money that existed among the spanish proletariat in struggle which still surprises us, it's needed to keep in mind that the whole situation of war notably transforms a regional economy. During the last few years in Spain there were cases of high inflation, a shortage of paper money and other situations considered problematic for regular capitalist growth.¹⁶

But what we find interesting here is not to once again go through the general aspects of this enormous confrontation between revolution and counterrevolution (which have been tackled exhaustively in a numerous amount of material)¹⁷ but to problematize in these initiatives of collectivization of the lands and socialization of the production. This transformation on a large scale, systematically forgotten by liberal and leninist historians, and distorted and converted into a bulwark for the libertarian current¹⁸ as one of its *grand moments*, remains still

16 It has happened many times that the limitations in the use of paper money do not respond so much to the need for suppression of money in revolutionary terms but to problems of circulation and devaluation in particular contexts as was also that of Argentina in 2002, where numerous “barter clubs” operated.

17 In this sense we recommend magazine *Comunismo* nro. 66 *Revolución y contrarrevolución en la región española* (no English translation available), as well as the contributions of colleagues such as Agustín Guillamón and Miguel Amorós. For this particular section we consulted *Self-management and the Spanish Revolution*, of the USA group PointBlank, available on libcom.org.

18 There is also another current that grants the depth of self-managed experiences in Spain to the widespread dissemination of the cooperative movement during the 20s and 30s in Catalonia.

to a large part miscomprehended, waiting for its balance to be retaken under the focus of the critique of the economy, and with the passion of those who need to take from these experiences the impulse to radically change this world.

The official libertarian tale establishes that while the marxists wanted to consign everything into the hands of the State, it was the anarchists organized in the CNT–FAI who proposed that the collectivization would be carried out by the workers themselves in fields, factories and workshops.

The reality was not so schematic, and in practice it's hard to see the difference between the politics undertaken by the anarchosyndicalists and the rest of the republican forces.

The case of Catalonia is one of the most studied for its social dimension, and there we can observe how the experiences of the socialization of production in rupture with capitalist management were carried out in tension with the anarchosyndicalist ideology and the leadership of the CNT, and in opposition to the decisions of the catalan government in which the CNT collaborated since the beginning.

The following extracts from the Decree on Collectivizations of the 24th of October of 1936, express well that situation, as well as the dispositions which carried it forward:

“After the 19th of July the declaredly fascist bourgeoisie deserted its posts. The majority has fled the country, and a minority has disappeared. The industrial companies affected couldn't remain without direction, and the workers decided to intervene in them and created Committees of Workers' Control. The *Consell de la Generalitat* had to sanction and bring into line what had been spontaneously realized by the workers in the enterprises [...]

But the collectivization of the enterprises meant little if it didn't contribute to their development and growth. To this effect they had commissioned the Council of Economy¹⁹ with the study of the basic norms to proceed with the constitution of an Industrial Credit Union that would provide financial help to the collectivized enterprises and would group our industry into large concentrations, that assure a maximal yield and make possible the largest transactions to our exterior commerce. [...]

The previous owners or directors will be adapted to the service of the collectivized enterprise [...]

In the enterprises where there are interests of foreign citizens[...] all the interested elements will be summoned [...] in order to tackle the issue and resolve what is needed for the due safekeeping of those interests. [...]

The managing direction of the collectivized enterprises will be carried out by a Company Council named by the workers in the General Assembly”.²⁰

19 The Generalitat's Economic Council was made up of Diego Abad de Santillán (FAI), Juan P. Fábregas (CNT), Estanislao Ruiz Ponseti (PSUC), Andrés Nin (POUM), among other UGT and Esquerra Republicana militants.

20 Extracted from *Collectivizations: The constructive achievements of the Spanish Revolution*, by G. Leval, A. Souchy and B. Cano Ruiz.

As it often happens, the decrees of these “transitional” governments only come to regulate and control that which the proletariat had already realized disobeying its orders. Although historically they had presented themselves as forces which would guide the proletariat from reform to revolution, in reality they were those that had taken the responsibility for bringing the revolutionary rupture towards the terrain of reform.

The revolution in Spain was an international struggle, not only because the combatants traveled from all parts of the world, but because its very existence was an expression of the human opposition to worldwide Capital, and against the current in the moment of counterrevolution which was experienced internationally. Internationalism can express itself in many forms: with solidarity and organization that surpasses borders, like confronting the local and foreign bourgeoisie that act in each region without seeking help or alliances of any kind. **A fundamental point of rupture with capitalist management in the revolutionary context is the non-participation in the global market, as well as the generalized expropriation of all properties, lands, and industries without consideration to the nationality or sector of the bourgeoisie to which they belong.** It's a message directed to the proletarians of the world and against all of the exploiters of the world.

Along these lines, certain initiatives of rural collectivization in the fields of Aragon, ignoring the military mandates, refused to commercialize their product on the foreign market. In contrast to the antifascist and popular–frontist discourse, which sought a management of the war economy and the possibility of aid and armaments from the democratic powers,²¹ many of the collectivizations attempted to directly exercise the distribution of food by necessity among villagers and militia combatants. Even, in some villages, production and possessions were redistributed in a totally gratuitous form, having only as a system of control the existence of annotators in which everyone marked what they took and to what aim (with the principal objective of being in account of where the common–use tools were). This was one of the greatest leaps of our class in that period, transcending the mere *form* of producing, going further than the mere *nonexistence* of a bureaucratic or patron figure, and transforming the use itself of what is produced. Producing for the revolution, not for the market. This action was necessarily collective, but that's not its major achievement, but rather its importance is rooted in the deed of breaking the spell of the mercantile fetish on the human world, returning to place the product of human effort around the satisfaction of necessities.

Against all the hordes of social–democratic theorists who affirmed that the peasants were essentially reactionary, and who point out in a dismissive manner that in Spain there was a majority of anarchists because it was a brutish and backwards land, the rural workers of the spanish region responded with a fervent revolutionary will in the struggle for anarchy.

21 This refusal was the main motivator of the repression by the Frente Popular of these experiences.

Returning to the urban environment, the experience of the supply committees²² (whose principal task was the distribution of rations in the proletarian neighborhoods) is prominent. Many of them, functioning with ample autonomy from the union structure, formed groups of pillagers during the first days of July, attacking properties of the bourgeoisie and socially distributing the possessions of the exploiters, their foods, their blankets and clothing, and safeguarding the expropriated armaments for the militias that fought on the front. These initiatives were early condemned by the CNT leadership, which already since the first days of the war sought to limit the *uncontrolled*, and labored to safeguard its place on the small table of state management.

On the other hand, the revolutionary reach of the experiences of factory takeovers was much more limited. There the rigid control of the union managers cut off all initiative that attacked the foundations of mercantile production. In general, the socialization, as it was comprehended by the most reformist sector (the CNT), didn't pass on from being a vertical integration²³ and an accountancy oriented towards making the surplus available for the war effort (civil, and not revolutionary). Although in the city there were diverse remarkable expressions like the refusal of gastronomy workers to continue receiving tips in the bars and the self managed popular kitchens that functioned in what had been the hotels of the bourgeoisie, in the production and circulation in general they couldn't express significant material advances against money, value, and wage labor. Facing this situation, the cases in which workers systematically refused to continue working were not scant. Absenteeism (without warning, due to sickness, or with diverse excuses) was rampant during the whole decade of the 30's, and not even the calls to

22 "In the twentieth century the Russian Revolution broke out starring the Soviets, the German Revolution characterized by the *râters* (councils), and the Spanish Revolution identified with the committees" writes Agustín Guillamón, editor of Balance magazine and several books that have become unavoidable references as far regarding the actions of the committees.

23 Vertical integration is a strategy whereby a company owns or controls its suppliers, distributors, or retail locations to control its value or supply chain. It was generalized with the emergence of oil production towards the end of the 19th century and is a characteristic of the capitalism of the called monopoly era. Vertical integration is usually one of the prerequisites for monopolizing the market by a company (or also a cartel). In order to do so, the company will also tend to perform a horizontal integration (acquire or merge with some other company located in the same situation within its sector). Social democracy (Marxist or not) used to consider that the tendency towards the centralization of Capital and the process of vertical monopoly integration resulted in a process of socialization and that through parliamentary action the working class could begin to take control of an industrial production that already had socialist elements. Although industrial unionism (such as that of the CNT) often differed around parliamentary action, there would appear to have been no differences around this consideration of monopoly capitalism as a progressive historical force that would facilitate the passage of the means of production to workers' hands.

the *war effort* managed to palliate this situation.²⁴ The response to this was given by the bureaucracy of the CNT and UGT, which had at their disposal authentic companies of control of work procedures, controlling the laziness and the despondency on the shop floor, as well as visiting the homes of the workers to personally verify that they were sick.

It's necessary to detach ourselves from certain formalisms that identify the action of the whole proletariat with some organizations and their programs, like in the case of the CNT with its collaborationist popular-frontism and its industrialism. As well as to also detach ourselves from those analysis which only see resistance and struggle, for example, against work, when those slogans are painted on the walls, written in pamphlets and theorized in books, as it has happened since the 60's. From its very origin, work has incited resistances and strong oppositions, with a more or less clear consciousness of it.

Obviously there exist contexts of a marked integration of the proletariat into Capital, and others where this integration breaks, and work and the very existence as a class are more strongly questioned. What worries us is that the stagist simplifications around the different historical moments, which many times even conclude in a progressive and apologetic vision of certain moments of capitalist development of the past. Investigations such as that of Michael Seidman, in *Workers Against Work: Labor in Paris and Barcelona During the Popular Fronts* are strongly criticized because they analyze deeds from a historical moment with, supposedly, blinders from another, because the rejection towards work is identified with the struggles of the 60's and beyond. Like so, the expressions of the proletariat against work and concrete experiences of the struggle of the past are demerited by the bias of certain authors and analysis instead of being assumed, deepened and reappropriated in the present.

The CNT, this structure which throughout various years had discussed the character of the spanish bourgeoisie as "inefficient", and problematized (like in the famous leaflet by Isaac Puente, *Libertarian Communism*) around how to develop the national economy, never betrayed its role of manager and controller of work and the labor force. On the 1st of May of 1937, along with the other republican forces, the *Generalitat* declared a normal workday, so resolving two bourgeois necessities: producing for the war and preventing the mobilization of the proletarians in a climate of absolute tension. This determination, along with the takeover on part of the catalan government of the Telephone Exchange building, which was a bastion of the CNT (which agreed to its surrender), unleashed the ultimate revolutionary attempt in the Spain of the 30's, confronting the Popular Front and the CNT itself, with barricades all over Barcelona for various days.²⁵

24 See *Workers Against Work* by Michael Seidman.

25 About the events of May 37, we recommend the magazine *Reapropiación* no. 1, reissued and expanded in the book *Mayo de 1937. La barricada de la revolución* (Selección de textos sobre las jornadas de mayo de 1937 en Barcelona), Reapropiación Ediciones.

“What problem is necessary to discuss? Political, military and economic problems. It’s not possible to separate them: in a word, revolutionary problems. The decisions that were made on the plane of military organization are related to the decisions taken on the plane of political collaboration with the government. From this perspective, the resistance of the base on the plane of the economic construction of the new society, couldn’t avoid being destined for failure.” (Alfredo M. Bonanno, *Self-management*)

Karl Korsch pointed out in 1939 that “for the first time, from the attempts of establishing socialism in Russia, Hungary, and Germany after the First World War, the revolutionary struggle of the Spanish workers demonstrates a new form of transformation of capitalist forms into production collectives, which, beyond its incomplete nature, was carried out impressively”. The proletarians in Spain were without a doubt advanced, but beyond confronting the same strictly bureaucratic and statist parties as always, the federalist, horizontal and libertarian phraseology operated as a great dissuasion for the strength of the committees, which in their practice —and in spite of many times having been gestated to the interior of the anarchist union— on numerous times surpassed the restrictions of the social-democratic and anarchosyndicalist program.

But we know that, like in other regions, it’s not enough to adopt a specific form. It could well have been committees not associated with the CNT with the same practice and managerialist perspective. The councils are not pure organs of which, when they succumb, it’s due to an external and monstrous enemy, like a Noske, a Trotsky or a Lister. They are structures whose content depends on their theoretical/practical development. The lack of previous experiences and of theoretical developments around the critique of the economy were also elements which contributed to the defeat of the proletariat in Spain.

The Spanish example shows clearly how the form that a movement adopts, or even what it says about itself, are not a guarantee of standing before a revolutionary project. If we concern ourselves with studying and going to the interior of this historical process it’s because what was very difficult and adverse to realize in Spain, is today the precondition of any proletarian insurrection which professes that the revolution will triumph. Because of this it will be necessary to put an end to work, money, value, the State, and all the barriers to human emancipation which the capitalist society imposes.

A pearl of libertarian self-management

Under the subtitle *The law of value under socialism*, Abraham Guillén, in his book *Self-managing Economy. The basis of economic development of the libertarian society* affirms:

“Libertarian socialism doesn’t have the need for central planning, but of a market socialism, of the competition between collective work groups, of direct democracy in the businesses by means of the self-managing councils of workers, technical and administrative, which appoint and revoke the director of the factory; they have the control of their enterprise: they are collective owners in distributing and investing their economic surplus; they must contribute or invest a good part of it in order to realize the increased reproduction of social capital (communitarian, not governmental). Socialism will only exist with freedom or in self-management; since otherwise, on the contrary, it would be State capitalism, where the bureaucracy would substitute the bourgeoisie as a new oppressing and exploiting class.”

Abraham Guillén (1913–1993) was a militant and theorist of anarchism, cooperativism and self-managerialism. He fought in the Spanish region in the 30’s and was a life-long member of the CNT. In 1940 he took exile in Latin America. Licensed in Economic Sciences, professor of political economy (director of economic investigation in the Faculty of Law and Social Sciences in Buenos Aires), journalist in many countries, economic consultant of the University of Labor in Uruguay, among other merits of this society. “Very few people know the political-ideological influence of Abraham Guillén, who in addition to possessing an incredible editorial output, realized the concrete action which transformed him into the war mentor of the guerrillas in Latin America.” they write in the website elortiba.org where they eulogize him as an “anarcho-peronist” (sic) and comment on his practical impact on the Tupamaros, Uturuncos and Montoneros.

We briefly present a few facts about the story of this author in order to show an example of from where come —and to where can arrive!— the self-managerial reclamations, although they claim to be of the anarchist movement.



AGAINST THE MANAGEMENT OF THE EXISTENT

“Any economic definition of communism remains in the economic sphere, meaning, of the separation of the time and the productive space from the rest of the world. Communism is not based on the satisfaction of the necessities just as they exist now or even how we could imagine them in the future. It’s a world in which people establish relations and become involved in activities which allow them to feed themselves, take care of themselves, accommodate themselves and cultivate themselves... themselves. Communism is not a social organization. It’s an activity. It’s a human community.” (Gillés Dauvé, *In this world but not of this world*)

Under the capitalist domination the community of money is imposed on human beings and allows no other community by its side, except itself behind different facades: the family, the fatherland, the school, the union, the party, the sports club, the cultural ghetto and so many other variants which are little more than mere institutions or personal tastes. These are the refuges where packs of humans go, one after another without being able to find a truly human community.

From nazism to the evangelical temples, from tupperware reunions to any concert of any subgenre of rock, there is an underlying promise: community. But Capital can only offer falsifications, its method is to take a real human necessity and offer a falsification of its satisfaction. Cooperatives and self-managing projects form a part of these intended communities. Functioning like communities to the interior of Capital

with their own characteristics, they falsify not only the abstract notion of community but the possibility of reproducing life in community amongst human beings, **destroying the possibility of subverting the dominant relations of production.**

To notice this it’s not necessary to be erudite in economic categories, the anti-economic sensibility which the economy itself pushes us towards is enough.

Walking through a self-managing fair and/or cooperative with the simple, though forgotten, visceral rejection towards the market, what we here explain becomes evident: although in some cases there exists the desire to create a world supposedly different to the existing one, the participants only relate through exchange. Each one of them presents themselves as a producer or a consumer. **The language of money is imposed, every gesture is in intimacy with the buying and selling, each vendor is a self-promoter, of the commodity and therefore a self reduced to a commodity.** And even worse, this whole mercantile event is perceived as something different, as morally superior to a supermarket or a shopping center. But there’s only a quantitative difference and not a qualitative one in respect to the social function of all this. There one finds themselves subjugated by the community of money just like anywhere else or even more so than in others that don’t claim to be emancipating like these small markets of objects and ideology.

Today the defenders of capitalism give the name social economy to a sector that would be, allegedly, between the private and the public sector. A sector which is supposed would be safe from the greed of capitalists and even from the designs of global capital.

A truly human community must take responsibility for satisfying its needs and desires, nevertheless, through projects to the interior of Capital what are satisfied are needs and desires determined no more nor less than by Capital. Our need for enjoyment, food, communication, refuge, and affection is converted into the fuel of this power-plant of value which is the capitalist society. Those same necessities can only be managed where the separation reigns between decision and action, between what is and what is employed, in the capitalist mode of production. The notion of management as economic administration is recent, it's not a trans-historical issue.

For example, to discuss in terms of self-management the study of the communal areas in Europe in the juncture between capitalism and its preceding forms, and the practices of organization which numerous exploited people in that continent carried out during this period would be a grave error.²⁶ Although we don't doubt that, in a strict sense, those villages had an ample grade of autonomy in the employment and evolution of the forests, wetlands and other common areas, we don't consider that the extrapolation of the term *self-management*, gestated in an urban context during the 20th century, would be of use at the moment of comprehending this far-off reality. Furthermore, it confuses, and would seem to constitute a continuous historical line—which does not actually exist—between these practices of subsistence and other contemporary ones like the problematics of care, social housing and many others.²⁷

26 We recommend on this subject a block of 3 monographs titled *Communes* of the radio program *La linterna de Diógenes*, already recommended previously in our issue no. 10.

27 The germ of this confusion we believe originates in the current called *Commons Theory*, which in recent decades enjoys some popularity in the field of studies on social history. Among the main exponents of this current there are well-known authors such as David Harvey, Silvia Federici, and Raul Zibechi, as well as the English group and publication *The Commoner*, or the Mexican *El Apantele*, *Revista de estudios comunitarios*. The commons are, according to political economy, those natural and cultural "resources" common to the members of a population. They would not be strictly private assets, but their destiny is determined collectively, through a communal, state or mixed structure. Historically, these have been studied by economic science in the form of the so-called tragedy of the commons, which, attributing to the members of society an excessive use of the resources that would end up destroying the world, justifies the existence of the regulatory State. In this view, and with positions similar to that of John Holloway or autonomism in its most alternative sense, commons theorists argue that resources must be conceived and managed by communities, trying to escape control and state domination. This is why the great references of these groups are the forms of collective work that occurred in medieval Europe and that still exist in many indigenous and peasant communities in the Latin American region. In practice, most of the time a criticism of the State is not carried out, nor its overcoming is called for, but simply an alternative form of sociability, which in certain circumstances can use the State to carry out its objectives. Similarly, it is common to read in these authors calls for the appropriation of surplus value, either in the strict framework of production (under cooperative productive projects) or in a broader sense of distribution—solidarity economy, new monetary systems or even campaigns like the famous *Salary for*

Self-management and democracy

Excerpts from the book *Beyond Democracy* (Gillés Dauvé and Karl Nesic)

Our lack of control over our conditions of existence (and, first of all, over the material production of those conditions) results in the loss of control over the direction of the group's life and our personal life. The problem is not to find a way to decide jointly about what we do, but to do what can result from common decisions, and stop doing what can only escape the control of those who do. Peugeot factories, a nuclear plant, the BBC, a bank, an insurance company, will never be managed by staff and / or users. **Self-administration serves for what is likely to be self-administered.**

(...) The bourgeoisie is the class of the form: that democracy is a form incapable of modifying its own content is not a problem for the bourgeois, since the content of society suits him.

The proletarians, on the other hand, are not attached to anything firm in this world: neither to the economy, nor to the productive forces, nor to a progress whose banner they should bear; nothing but the solidarity produced by their common condition and their struggles. The content of its actions (the association, the rupture with mercantilism and the commodification of itself and everything) needs forms, but it self-destructs when it turns those forms into objectives and makes of organization, even of autonomy, a priority.

Everything would be easier if the proletariat were a democrat only when it is going to vote. The problem is that it is so also, and especially, when it tries to emancipate itself through a management system, privileging the creation of truly democratic institutions (no matter how innovative), as if the ideals of the bourgeois revolution finally got filled up with a content. Democratic practice is not the cause of the defeats of the proletarians; it is the weakness of revolutionary action that forces them to accept the essentials of this society, and therefore also democratic uses.

(...) democracy, not in the ancient Greek sense, but in the sense of political competition is the ideal form of capitalism. (...) **Capitalism is a confrontation between legal equals who know themselves unequal but treat each other on an equal footing,** whether in an employment contract, in a trade or in an elected assembly. Just as the value of a commodity is fixed by the interaction of the forces of production and exchange in the market space, and not by the decision of an authority.

Escape and self-management

“In a unified world it’s not possible to go into exile” (Guy Debord, *Pangyric*)

We share a common sensibility with those who agitate against the existing order and therefore propose an imprecise escape. But **within the space of Capital there’s no possible secession, there’s no geographical space where one could desert to.** Nobody has gotten lost along the way because there’s no destination to arrive to, nobody could nor will be able to escape from the existing order by moving away from the horrible buildings and hard asphalt.

A few years ago a Call invited us to “to immediately establish a series of foci of desertion, of secession poles, of rallying points. For the runaways. For those who leave. A set of places to take shelter from the control of a civilisation that is headed for the abyss.”*

The struggle against Capital can’t be reduced to an amount of logistic problems inspired by the voluntarist and immediatist pretensions of a handful of comrades, who ultimately will become disappointed for not having been able to “live communism” in full-on capitalism! **We must assume these failures as the failures of the voluntarist and immediatist idealism and not as failures of the struggle against Capital, of the movement which destroys the existing conditions.**

* *l’Appel (The Call)* is a book published in 2003 by the same group which made the journal *Tiqqun* a few years ago, and which would later appear signing other texts under the name Invisible Committee.

It may appear we show an excessive anger towards this proposal made by the Invisible Committee and its kin, but no. As in so many occasions, trying to dialogue with an already finished proposal is an exercise that includes not only its authors but also those with whom a common denominator can be found, even though they don’t know the authors indicated.

The fully self-managed society will possibly be the last promise which we the proletariat will be obliged to rid ourselves of in an advanced stage of the struggle to cease being such. It will be presented to us as the escape from Capital only in order to conserve it, it will be presented to us as community in order to distance us from community. Therefore, it’s in the social practice of the struggle itself which we must choose between self-management of the existent or communism, between a socialization through the commodity or the human community.

domestic work. As we make clear in the previous issue of Cuadernos and also throughout this, the central objective of the revolution is the elimination of the phenomenon of value, and not a supposed fairer redistribution.

Behind the alibi of a supposed realism and the demand for “concrete proposals” is hidden an ideological blackmail: the justification for defending the existing order. In the same manner in which conformism is trafficked in the name of anti-sectarianism and anti-dogmatism. What’s real and concrete is the necessity of putting an end to capitalism once and for all, without sectarianism or dogmas or their false rejoinders. Our struggle is not sectarian but social and it arises not from a dogma or an assortment of principles detailed in a platform, but from these material conditions of existence and the necessity of overcoming them.

In every conformist discourse there is an underlying necessity of guarantees that express brilliantly, though timidly, the incapacity of thinking beyond the existent. This beyond is not unreal, it arises from this world itself, from its contradiction, from revolutionary social action. The reformist and conformist of today would call sectarian and utopian those who in the past fought for what he himself defends today and assumes to be eternal. The conformist ignores history. **The conformist doesn’t recognize borders between their political involvement and the form in which they have to gain money, it’s powerless to understand that what is often expressed discursively arises from concrete material grounds. They think and act in accord with their own commercial motives.** It’s because of this that we say that the self-managerialists and cooperativists defend the existing order and are opposed to the realization of the human community when they put their trade ahead.

Community!

It is precisely for material motives that we can say that **social life is becoming abstract and that, therefore, in a certain manner we are abstracted from social life.** We previously said that the isolated and independent economic units of production form a society only through exchange. We’re not making a moral reproach in order to later propose substituting one thought for an apparently more just one. It’s not a matter of the product of thought of human beings but their actions. This “real abstraction” is the subordination of concrete content to abstract form.²⁸

Thanks to this abstraction we can compare what is different without objections: between human beings, between objects, between situations and between each other. The problem is not that a person is worth less than an object or that for a food company our health is worth less than a restriction of their ingredients. The problem is that this can be compared with the same parameter and we find it’s the most natural in the world. This parameter is quantitative and abstract, it’s money. It’s the same money that appears in an exchange or barter among people who presume to reject it. If it’s not thanks to this

28 See *Abstract work and value as real abstraction* in CUADERNOS DE NEGACIÓN no.11.

general equivalent how could we define how many X equals that many Y?

“The exchange of their products—in the broadest sense, in terms of division of work and circulation of its results—is what links men and what constitutes their sociability. Where this exchange is not mediated by conscious social activity, but by the self-movement of value, it is necessary to speak of an alienation of the social bond. Value itself, in the visible form of money, has become a social form of organization: its laws have been transformed into the laws of social mediation. It is the opposite of any conscious control: ‘Money itself is the community, and can tolerate none other standing above it.’” (Marx, *Grundrisse*). (...)

If money becomes a community, it’s not an organic community or one of a concrete universality, but of an exterior and abstract universality which erases the concrete qualities of its members:

“Money is immediately the real community, in as much that it’s the universal substance of existence for everyone, and at the same time the social product of everyone. But in money, as we have seen, the community is but a mere abstraction to the individual, a merely external, accidental thing, and at the same time a simple means for their satisfaction as an isolated individual” (Marx, *Grundrisse*).

This “external, accidental thing” doesn’t have relation to the individual qualities of its owner, but is simply an object of acquisition and sale. We can say, then, of every individual that “their social power, just like their relation with the society, they carry along in their pocket”, that is, as money.” (Anselm Jappe, *The adventures of the commodity*)

In these conditions it’s very difficult to size up the possibility of a human community that wouldn’t be that of money. From the moment in which is accepted, consciously or unconsciously, the permanence of the dissolution of the community, and the necessity of seeking it is rejected, the problem is presented of how and how much Capital will go on to progress. Meaning, now it’s not a matter of how to destroy capitalism but how to manage it, administrate it and develop it, including in the name of the opposite.

For our times, the overcoming of capitalism is an inseparable aspect of the realization of the human community (*gemeinwesen*). A practical community which doesn’t seek to oppose itself and sacrifice the particular being in the name of a superior abstraction, call it fatherland, society, humanity or even in the name of a supposed community.

As Jacques Camatte expressed “the elemental unit (atrociously called individual) is no more than singular, we’re always infected by the binary metaphysical opposition singular–universal. Communism—which is not a society—is characterized by the destruction of this bipolarity”.

To emancipate ourselves as a community and as a singularity is an indivisible struggle. **The reduction of communism to a “community” where the society would be emancipated, but in which the singular human being lives solely to serve it**

is not a theoretical error, it’s a practical impossibility. It’s a vision of barracks–style “communism”, of the “anarchy” of the forced labor camp.

Also indivisible is the absolute deprivation of the human beings that Capital breeds by constituting a material community, though fictitious. The classes can’t develop more than with the destruction of the community. When we express the need of destroying Capital, we make a reference to a physical and temporal space, a totalitarian social relation where the human activity has been transformed into work, which has become abstracted and autonomized, becoming an oppressive force against us.

“Communism will not overthrow capital in order to return to the early days of the commodity. Commodity exchange is a link in the chain of progress, but it is link between antagonistic parts. It will disappear without however occasioning a return to barter, that primitive form of exchange. Humanity will no longer be divided into opposed groups and enterprises. It will organize to plan and utilize its common heritage, and to distribute tasks and enjoyments. The logic of the gift (sharing) will replace the logic of exchange.” (Les Amis de 4 Millions de Jeunes Travailleurs, *A world without money*)

Communism!

In order to express in words what we are referring to by communism, two old definitions suffice: “the movement for the destruction of the society of Capital and the society which results from this practical negation” and “from each according to their possibilities; to each according to their needs”.²⁹

We give the name communism to a possible society posterior to capitalism but also to the movement that seeks its realization. Would that movement be already living communism in the present? No. Nevertheless, that movement doesn’t try to apply an ideal arisen from its brilliant lucubration. It’s a movement which stems from the material conditions in which it exists, from the needs and desires.

The communist revolution doesn’t separate its means from its ends, because if we want to be precise there are no means and ends, there’s an inseparable unity. Consequently, we shouldn’t take charge first of (or detach ourselves from) political power, in order to later, and only in the second place, change society.

It’s a matter of, with all of the imaginable difficulties, taking the side of the communist tendencies in the class struggle (in revolutionary periods as much as in non–revolutionary periods). This results in a change, not only in our mind, but in our being. **Because it’s as much a matter of making as being the revolution, because a revolution is made by being it. To**

²⁹ While it is true that this last communist affirmation has its strength, it should be noted that it still starts from a point of view of today’s society and that is why it is thought from the individual and not from the community.

revolutionize the existing conditions is to revolutionize the existing human beings.

That's why when we refer to the revolution we insist principally on its social content and on that it's not a matter of taking this world just as it is, displacing the "parasites" as the majority of marxism and anarchism have presented it, not to speak of ideologies already completely subscribed to the dominant order. A social revolution must put our whole world into question from the first moment, and not only after an indefinite period of transition. Against it, the revolutionary movement must impose openly communist measures immediately, "both for their own merit, and as a way of destroying the material basis of the counter-revolution. If, after a revolution, the bourgeoisie is expropriated but workers remain workers, producing in separate enterprises, dependent on their relation to that workplace for their subsistence, and exchanging with other enterprises, then whether that exchange is self-organised by the workers or given central direction by a "workers' state" means very little: the capitalist content remains, and sooner or later the distinct role or function of the capitalist will reassert itself. By contrast, the revolution as a communising movement would destroy —by ceasing to constitute and reproduce them— all capitalist categories: exchange, money, commodities, the existence of separate enterprises, the state and —most fundamentally— wage labour and the working class itself."

(Endnotes, issue 2, *Communisation and value form theory*)

"So there will a "transition" in the sense that communism will not be achieved overnight. But there will not be a "transition period" in what has become the traditional Marxist sense: a period that is no longer capitalist but not yet communist, a period in which the working class would still work, but not for profit or for the boss any more, only for themselves: they would go on developing the "productive forces" (factories, consumer goods, etc.) before being able to enjoy the then fully-matured fruit of industrialization. This is not the programme of a communist revolution. It was not in the past and it is not now. There is no need to go on developing industry, especially industry as it is now. And we are not stating this because of the ecology movement and the anti-industry trend in the radical milieu. As someone said forty years ago, half of the factories will have to be closed.

(Troploin, *Communization*)

A revolution doesn't happen in spite of the people. **When someone thinks that first a revolution happens and then the people accommodate themselves to it, they are thinking of a coup d'etat, of a transfer of control but not of a social revolution.** If it occurred like so it wouldn't be a matter of a social revolution, but at best of a political revolution of one sector of the society. They are human beings those who by means of the revolution transform the social relations and transform themselves.

"Any more or less revolutionary period will give birth to gangs half way between social subversion and delinquency, temporary inequalities, hoarders, profiteers, but especially a

whole range of uncertain conduct which one would be hard-pressed to characterize as "revolutionary", or "for survival" or "counter-revolutionary", etc. Ongoing communization will resolve this, but only over one, two, perhaps several generations. Between now and then, we must prepare ourselves — not for a "return to order" which will be one of the key slogans of all anti-revolutionaries, but by developing what makes the originality of a communist movement — essentially, it doesn't repress, it subverts.

This means, first of all, that it uses only the amount of violence strictly necessary to obtain its goals, not out of moralism or non-violence, but because superfluous violence always becomes autonomous, turns into its own end. It also means that one's weapon is first and foremost the transformation of social relationships and of production of living conditions. Spontaneous looting will no longer be a massive change of ownership, a mere juxtaposition of private appropriations, if a community of struggle is formed between looters and producers. Only on this condition can looting be the starting point for social reappropriation of riches and use of those riches in a context broader than plain and simple consuming. (Consuming, per se, is not to be denounced, since social life is not only productive activity. It is also consumption and consummation. If poor people wanted first to taste a few pleasures, who but the priests would hold it against them?)

[...] The more a revolution is radicalized, the less it needs to be repressive. We make no bones about stating this especially since, for communism, human life in the sense of biological survival is not the supreme good. It is capitalism which offers this monstrous sucker deal: "Be assured of maximal survival in exchange for maximal submission to economy".

(Gilles Dauvé, *For a world without moral order*)

Communism is not a new mode of production ; it is the affirmation of a new community. It is a question of being, of life, if only because there is a fundamental displacement: from generated activity to the living being who produced it. Until now men and women have been alienated by this production. They will not gain mastery over production, but will create new relations among themselves which will determine an entirely different activity." (Jaques Camatte, *The Wandering of Humanity – Repressive Consciousness – Communism*)

And as communism is not a new mode of production, it's not our duty to liberate the reproductive forces confined within the current mode of production, as the major portion of anarchism and marxism have proclaimed for decades and decades. Not starting from the development of the productive forces which Capital inhibits either.

We speak of communism and anarchy, not of "justice" and "equality". If the social revolution would suppose a "just society" then, and according to the impoverished modern imagination, it would be a symmetrical society, a geometrical equilibrium. For worse, measured according to the current individual parameters or those of limited groups of individuals. But it's in the mercantile exchange where the human beings think in terms

of equality, it's worth repeating it: communism is not a more egalitarian equality.

"We cannot admit with the collectivists that remuneration proportional to the hours of work contributed by each one in the production of wealth, can be an ideal, not even a step forward towards that ideal. (...) it is enough to say that the collectivist ideal would seem unrealizable in a society that considered the instruments of production as a common heritage. Based on this principle, it would be forced to abandon any form of salary on the spot.

(...) Salary has been born from personal appropriation of the land and the instruments for production by some. It was the necessary condition for the development of capitalist production; it will die with it, even if it tries to disguise it in the form of "work bonuses". The common possession of the working instruments will necessarily bring with them the common enjoyment of the fruits of common labor." (Piotr Kropotkin, *Anarchist Communism: Its Basis and Principles*)

In the same article cited, Kropotkin expresses that "under a thousand different appearances new organizations arise based on the same principal of "to each according their necessities", because without a certain dosage of communism the current societies couldn't survive."

David Graeber retakes this argument and carries it even further:

"In fact, 'communism' is not some magical utopia, and neither does it have anything to do with ownership of the means of production. It is something that exists right now —that exists, to some degree, in any human society, although there has never been one in which everything has been organized in that way, and it would be difficult to imagine how there could be. All of us act like communists a good deal of the time. [...] all social systems, even economic systems like capitalism, have always been built on top of a bedrock of actually-existing communism.

Starting, as I say, from the principle of "from each according to their abilities, to each according to their needs" allows us to look past the question of individual or private ownership (which is often little more than formal legality anyway) and at much more immediate and practical questions of who has access to what sorts of things and under what conditions. [...]

Almost everyone follows this principle if they are collaborating on some common project. If someone fixing a broken water pipe says, "hand me the wrench", his co-worker will not, generally speaking, say, "and what do I get for it?" —even if they are working for Exxon-Mobil, Burger King, or Goldman Sachs. The reason is simple efficiency (ironically enough, considering the conventional wisdom that "communism just doesn't work"): if you really care about getting something done, the most efficient way to go about it is obviously to allocate tasks by ability and give people whatever they need to do them.

One might even say that it's one of the scandals of capitalism that most capitalist firms, internally, operate communistically. [...] This is presumably also why in the immediate wake of great disasters —a flood, a blackout, or an economic co-

llapse— people tend to behave the same way, reverting to a rough-and-ready communism. However briefly, hierarchies and markets and the like become luxuries that no one can afford. Anyone who has lived through such a moment can speak to their peculiar qualities, the way that strangers become sisters and brothers and human society itself seems to be reborn. This is important, because it shows that we are not simply talking about cooperation. In fact, communism is the foundation of all human sociability. It is what makes society possible.

There is always an assumption that anyone who is not actually an enemy can be expected on the principle of "from each according to their abilities", at least to an extent: for example, if one needs to figure out how to get somewhere, and the other knows the way." (David Graeber, *Debt, the first 5,000 years*)

Aside from some elements that we want to share, evidently we're presented with lots of critiques towards what we just mentioned. But others have said it before us and in an accurate way, therefore, we will continue overusing quotes:

"Right from the start, Graeber identifies 'communism' with the axiom 'from each according to their [sic] abilities, to each according to their needs'. There's nothing wrong with this kind of rhetorical borrowing as such, but **there is something crushing in the way the meaning is trivialised, the stakes reduced from total social upheaval to behaviour change in personal encounters.** The power of individuals to decide on the taking or giving of anything – according to ability or need or otherwise – remains objectively pitiful all the way up to the wealthiest charity donor. **If the logic of 'need and ability' is ever to overthrow that of Return On Equity, it must impose itself globally, i.e. far beyond the reach of friendly sociability, and collectively, i.e. impersonally.** (The Clinical Wasteman, *No interest but the interest of breathing – A critique of David Graeber's "Debt, the first 5,000 years"*)³⁰

So, communism and anarchy are something more than the custom of sociable and cooperative interaction. To immediately share, face to face, either affections or objects, is not only pleasant, but necessary. But, how can communism expand in such a way that it destroys the exchange, the social hierarchies and the competition? Only by being the social movement for the abolition of capitalism and the State. It might sound cliché, but because of this there's no other escape than a communist social revolution. We can't have tolerance for a society that doesn't tolerate any other form of sociability which is not its own, the capitalist one. And we're not expressing it in moral terms, it's not permitted in material terms!

If we present some extracts of a book where it is affirmed that communist practices are already present in this moment (although they cohabit with forms of exchange and hierarchy) it's not in order to interest ourselves in the meticulous

30 It would be necessary to leave in evidence that notion of "efficacy" that permeates these types of defenses or those of the type "anarchy works". It is an expensive loan to the dominant capitalist reason, because that effectiveness is measured with its own parameters. Why argue on their own ground when this is about annihilating it?

investigation of the thought of some author. But because what was expressed by them can be the observation of many proletarians in observing the simple procession of the days. Nevertheless, **the reducing of the analysis to interpersonal relations between people who know and are close to each other makes a tribal, family, or groupuscular relation out of communism, which would be impossible on a global level.** It's stimulating but it's not enough, and that's what the previous critique points out.

Having said this, we want to highlight that **communism is not a utopia or a place to arrive to, but a natural human course (not the only one) subsumed by Capital.**

By subsumption we're referring to how Capital has gone on appropriating and integrating diverse aspects of social life into its own dynamic, modifying them. Even, previous modes of production, like slavery, conserving and utilizing its forms of exploitation, integrating them into mercantile production.

To give an example: a smartphone is conceived of by young creatives under newfangled work schemes, it's produced serially in China, the necessary coltan is extracted by children at gunpoint in Congo and it is sold by a wage laborer in a shopping mall or by a thief in the black market of any city. It can be utilized for consumerist trivialities or for sharing free software. In any case, it's profit, and all these characteristics which might appear to someone as dissimilar or even contrary are integrated in Capital.

It's not possible, therefore, to speak about coexistence of modes of production but of incorporation of forms of production previous to the capitalist mode of production. In this sense, we said previously that capitalism tolerates nothing by its side.

In lots of cases the term domination has been utilized as a synonym for subsumption, not comprehending that the former presents things as external, implying, for example, that Capital dominates work and that, therefore, this must emancipate itself from that. But **Capital does not only dominate work, it incorporates and converts it into Capital. In the same manner that it subsumes our communist behaviors and puts them to work for itself.** The example about the internal functioning of an enterprise where certain communist behaviors are not only tolerated but necessary says a lot about all of this.

And it also says a lot, that many people dissatisfied with the existing order cannot observe how Capital benefits from what would purport to be exits from the existing order.

Let's return to another example, one which we published in issue 8 of Cuadernos de Negación:

"Without international division of work there are no computers or internet as we know them. To make an abstraction of the materiality of the physical supports of the internet is to avoid recognizing the obtainment of necessary materials, their production, distribution and their inevitable disposal. Cyberspace for many technophiles fulfills the function of religious paradise, which is no more than the projection of an image of the world cleansed of its contradictions. Again, a "place" without physical space to which they can cast their wildest fantasies.

It's supposed that enjoyment and empathy, just as even egoist reasons, animate the people to share, to create a kind of "community" of users, where every individual takes from the network much more than they could give. Nevertheless, as a total absurdity it has come to make reference to that as "anarcho-communism"(!?): "the gift economy and the commercial sector can only expand through mutual collaboration within cyberspace. The free circulation of information between users relies upon the capitalist production of computers, software and telecommunications. [...] Within the digital mixed economy, anarcho-communism is also symbiotic with the state. [...] Within the mixed economy of the Net, anarcho-communism has become an everyday reality.

(Richard Barbrook, *The hi-tech gift economy*)

To which Jean-Marc Mandosio responds: "Once more, **the invisible hand is there to cause egoistic interests and public prosperity to magically coincide, and as a bonus the resolution of all the contradictions of our sadly material world: capitalism and the gift economy are mutually stimulated,** 'anarcho-communism' and the State work in concert... Its formidable, and it's even nicer because it's not a case, like with christianity or the classical utopias, of a vision of the future, but of a discourse which tries to describe an already existing reality; this land of cockaigne exists, it's enough to go online to live there eternally with love and fresh water. The 'anarcho-communists' that propose this ideology do a great service for the governmental and industrial promoters of the Internet, since it is precisely presenting the Internet as this new 'wonderland' where everything is free which creates the need in people to equip themselves with the technological material necessary in order to connect."

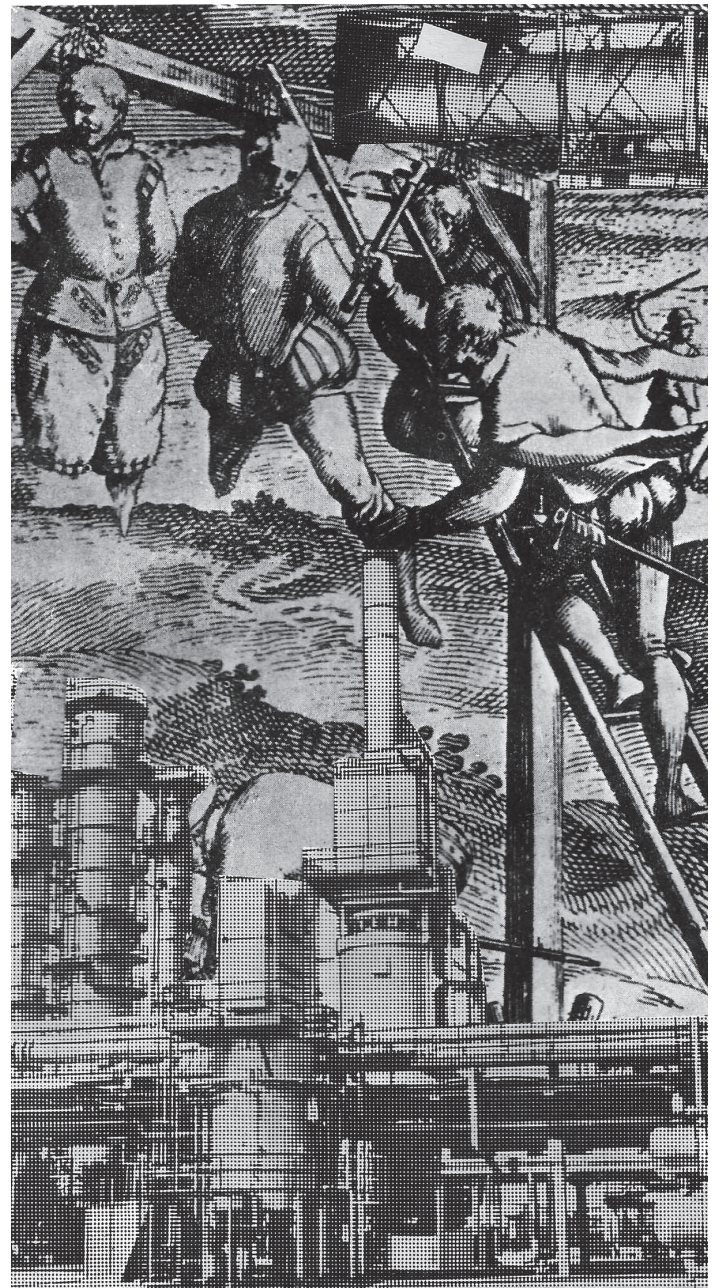
Although this example is reduced to the sphere of the Internet, it illustrates well what we want to express, there's always a space or an environment to which one can go where it's supposed that the social contradictions are harmonized and are mutually stimulated. **One can always make their "own path" while they move through the territory of Capital.** Ultimately, or unabashedly, the hope is always placed in that the invisible hand of the market will harmonize all the differences and put everything in the place where it belongs without upheavals or violence and to the benefit of all. But the invisible hand of the market is an iron fist and it crushes us, because it only benefits the reproduction of Capital.

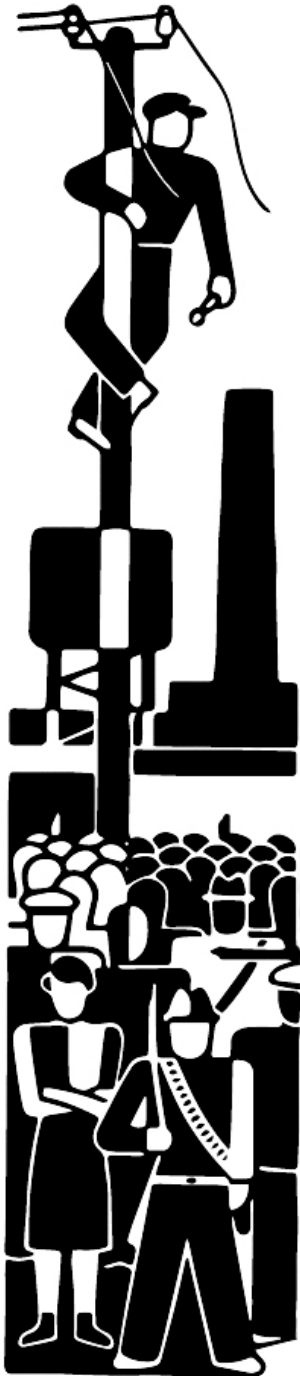
This relation of subsumption to that which we are subjected has a false element: **Capital, which subsumes everything, displays itself as the truth of the subsumed, as its own essence.** It displays its word as the only possible one, it no longer matters if better or worse, it's enough to not allow an option.

Just as we have expressed since the beginning of this publication: Capital dominates even the most recondite aspects of social reproduction and puts them to work for itself. In this manner millions of proletarians not only take pride in "their" work but they identify with it. And they confuse their needs with those of Capital, internalizing the capitalist social relation

in such a way that even when they want to struggle against what they perceive exploits and oppresses them, they continue reproducing it. **The dominant discourse and the everyday capitalist routine have “integrated” the exploited to such a degree that they suppose to resist commerce precisely by engaging in commerce.** Many discontented proletarians suppose to fight —through work—, the production of commodities, the circulation of money, and the valuation of life in general! It’s gotten to the point, that when we criticize the capitalist means of production in its self-managerial facade they feel profoundly offended and attacked. To such a level of capitalist fusion we have arrived.

It’s a matter then not of liberating the productive forces enclosed within the current mode of production, but of liberating the human community which has been imprisoned, eroded and placed in the service of Capital.





Also available in english

Cuadernos de Negación #11 Against the valorization of life

NOVEMBER 2018

The foundation of capitalist society is the dictatorship of value in process, and the utility of the objects produced is just one means. The so-called use value is only a vehicle for the exchange value, for the valorising value.

But nothing, nowhere, naturally possesses a quality such as value. That is a consequence of the manner in which society organizes its production. Value and commodity, like money or labor, are not neutral and transhistorical data, let alone natural and eternal, they are basic categories of capitalism.

Open letter to the proletarians in Greece

DECEMBER 2015

Brothers and Sisters, at the end of 2001 and the beginning of 2002 those of us who live under the control of the Argentinian state experienced a situation that was quite similar to what millions in Greece are living through today. Although this was only a decade or so ago, it is difficult for us to discuss this with other proletarians here because the memory of these struggles and the perspectives that were opened at that time seem to have been lost. And this is exasperating. It is essential to avoid forgetting such experiences or we will always be starting again from nothing. It is for this reason that we wanted to share some thoughts with you, our brothers and sisters. The crisis is not Greek or Argentinian, and there are no national solutions to this global problem.

Interview with Cuadernos de Negación

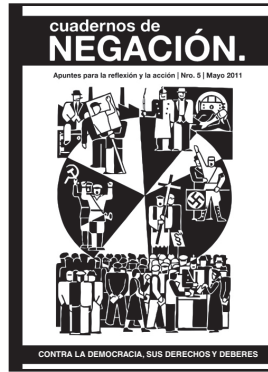
SEPTEMBER 2014

An english translation of a written interview with Cuadernos de Negación (Negation Notebooks) from May, 2014. The questions are from members of the French collective L'Asymétrie, who were traveling in South America at the time.

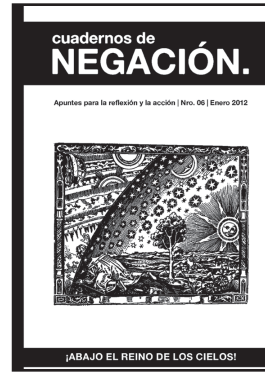
NÚMEROS ANTERIORES



4 The State is not an enemy for reasons of taste, moral affinity or ideological aversion. It is an enemy as a fundamental power structure that guarantees our submission to wage labour, that allows and defends the destruction of nature in pursuit of economic production, and that guarantees war as a method of economic re-organization and social control. It is our enemy, not because those who hold power are bad people or are motivated by blind ambitions; it is our enemy because it structures and orders the subjugation of our lives in harmony with Capital, because it is the government of Capital!

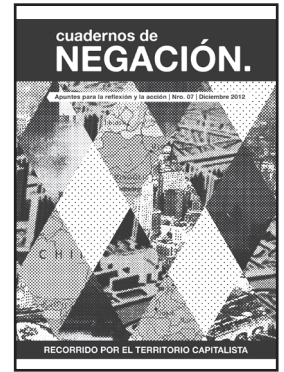


5 The alternative for wage slaves does not lie in having a government more to the left or more to the right, in enduring the contempt of pluralist politicians or the arrogance of a military oligarchy, in participating in the constant aggravation and reproach between one party political organization and another. The fundamental contradiction lies between the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie—whatever the mechanisms put into effect by this class to administer exploitation—and the development of communism and anarchy, i.e. the destruction of exploitation, the State, value and class society.



6 Religion undoubtedly surpasses any other human activity in quantity and variety of nonsense. If one also considers its role as an accomplice to class domination throughout history, it is not surprising that it has attracted the contempt and hatred of more and more people, particularly revolutionaries.

Religion continues to adapt, in its institutional form or without it, to the small changes in the mode of production and reproduction of life, lingering under different shapes. The revolutionary movement must oppose religion, but take a stand on the other side of it. Not by being less than religion, but more.



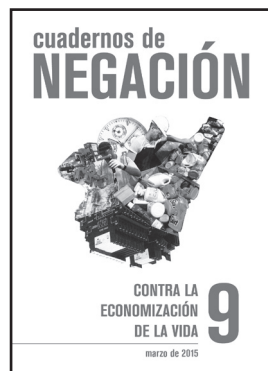
7 Science, technology and the notion of progress are not to be found outside the capitalist mode of production; they are a constitutive part of it and, as a single ideology, they imprint a way of perceiving the world and acting on it.

The dominant reason is bourgeois, because as an idea but also as a material force, it acts in the benefit of Capital.

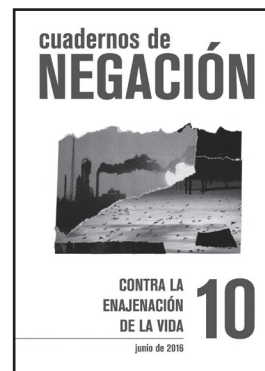
To this day, most of the calls for “revolution” have been in the name of bourgeois freedom and equality, of science and reason, of efficiency and progress... it's about time that we break with that.



8 Walking from one point to another: always arrive. The purpose of our movement through the city streets, or between cities, is one: to arrive at a point in the space before us as an organized circuit of tasks. Space has been reduced to a thing by Capital, and like everything in relation to Capital, it encloses and conceals social relations, here is its material character and its abstract character, presented in an inseparable way. We can call all this urbanism, although it is simply the territory that has been subsumed by Capital.

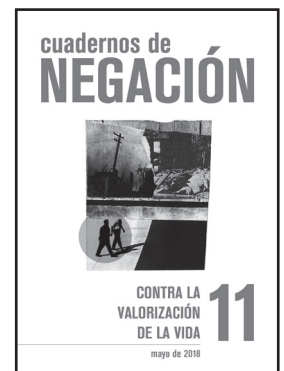


9 Although commodity, Capital and value do not explain absolutely everything in this society, without them we cannot understand anything. The criticism of the economy, as it could be supposed, does not leave aside politics, religion, science and other dimensions of this society, but, on the contrary, it allows us to understand them and to attack them as partialities of the totality that they conform. The contrast we wish to make is stark: we will not engage in the economy as a partiality, as a discipline. It is a question of the struggle against the economization of life, of the practical contraposition between human needs and the needs of valorization of Capital.



10 In this issue of Cuadernos we continue our critique of money, of Capital as the subject and ultimate end of the production and reproduction of society, of fetishism and estrangement as the instrumentalization of the world and all of us who inhabit it.

Estrangement does not simply mean the separation of our livelihoods, we are talking about a whole historical process through which our own existence has come to be presented to us as alien, in a society where the objective is not people, nor things, but production for the sake of production itself, the valorisation of Capital. It is a whole social order that we experience as strange to us and, inevitably, immersed in it, we have to confront.



11 The foundation of capitalist society is the dictatorship of value in process, and the utility of the objects produced is just one means. The so-called use value is only a vehicle for the exchange value, for the valorising value.

But nothing, nowhere, naturally possesses a quality such as value. That is a consequence of the manner in which society organizes its production. Value and commodity, like money or labor, are not neutral and transhistorical data, let alone natural and eternal, they are basic categories of capitalism.

NEGACION

Millions of proletarians not only take pride in “their” work but they identify with it. And they confuse their necessities with those of Capital, internalizing the capitalist social relation in such a way that even when they want to fight against what they perceive exploits and oppresses them, they continue reproducing it. The dominant discourse and the everyday capitalist routine have “integrated” the exploited to such a degree that they suppose to resist commerce precisely by engaging in commerce. Many dissatisfied proletarians suppose to fight through work, the production of commodities, the circulation of money, and the valuation of life in general! It’s gotten to the point, that when we criticize the capitalist means of production in its self-managerial facade they feel profoundly offended and attacked.

If we are willing to openly debate the proposal of self-management it is because there were and there are shared spaces, not only of struggle, but of mere subsistence.

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