

After Marx, autonomy

Alfredo M. Bonanno



1975

Contents

Working class autonomy	3
The active minority	7
Relations within the working class	9

The road ahead of the proletariat is blocked: the reformist parties, trade unions and employers have coalesced to obstruct any growth in the level of the struggle, or any conquests that could lead to a revolutionary transformation of production relations.

The proletariat have only one alternative: that of building communism directly, passing over the counterrevolutionary bureaucratic structures. In order to do this we must provide analyses of and realise in practice, elements organised by the base at the level of production: autonomous workers' nuclei.

These nuclei must not, in our opinion, be confused with the company, the factory, etc., but their concept must extend to a global vision of factory, living area, school and land.

Within this globality the idea of autonomy must be reinterpreted by the working class and related to the autonomy of each individual, element of constant reference and correction of any tendency to construct the former at the cost of the latter.

Here the action of a minority that has acquired a revolutionary consciousness has its place: to point out the ever present dangers of bureaucratisation, any involution towards the control of the struggle by a minority, certain corporative tendencies intrinsic to the workers' movement, and all the other limitations that centuries of oppression have developed.

Their very delicate task is therefore that of fusing together struggle and organisation, uniting them in daily praxis. This requires analytical clarity in order that the second should be maintained within the usable limits of the first, and to prevent its autonomous essence being destroyed by the organisational aspect, leaving it in name only.

Not negligible, finally, is the work of the active minority concerning the problem of gaining information, essential element for the emancipation of the working masses and their control over the elements necessary for their liberation: the demolition of all constituted power, and the communitarian management of the means of production.

If once the possibility of revolution could be confused with the simple expropriation of the means of production (on which the Marxist ambiguity rests today), we now know with certainty that the bourgeoisie themselves are prepared to transform their property titles in order that exploitation can continue under another guise. The 'smooth' passage to State socialism is the most widely diffused prospect among the 'progressive' circles of the bourgeoisie.

In the face of such a prospect the working class must build the means necessary for the struggle and the recapture of a revolutionary perspective.

Working class autonomy

The analytical individuation of the working 'class' is a complex problem. Usually comrades like to refer to even the most sophisticated of the Marxist analyses, coming through with all possible glory by affirming that they intend to limit the 'use of Marx' to the strictly indispensable (usually identified with the economic analyses), for the construction of the true libertarian perspective of workers' autonomy and their struggle.

Frankly, I have never been able to do as much. Perhaps for reasons derived from my profound aversion to metaphysics, and perhaps, given the character of my studies, I have learned to detect the smell of metaphysics a long way off. And such a large part of the Marxist analyses, even in economy and historical methodology, stinks of metaphysics. That is why, as far as is possible, I mean to avoid doing the same.

As the great founder fathers themselves have admitted, the themes of the problem of class are not their 'invention'. They, and Marx in particular, limited themselves to relating the existence of classes to certain precise historical phases in the development of production, from which, with a considerable logical jump, they drew the conclusion of the ineluctability of the dictatorship of the proletariat and the consequent mythology of a transition to the classless society.

I have often heard Marx's 'realism' exalted, it being identified in his refusal to lament on the 'immorality' of society, and in his analysis of exploitation and the character of accidents of the class struggle as a necessary process leading to the liberation of society, therefore a salutary and evolutionary process. We do not see anything 'scientific' in all that. Marx could not follow his predecessors such as Saint-Simon, Fourier, Owen and Sismondi for two good reasons: he believed in revolution (in his own way) and had studied Hegel (whom he never digested, in spite of all his youthful criticisms). In this way he managed to found in his 'systematic' brain, the realism of the propagandist and political journalist and the optimism of the metaphysician who identifies rational with real.

What bewilders us most is the fact that anarchist comrades often do not realise that they are fully subscribing to a programme that has its roots in German protestant mysticism of the Middle Ages (see Hegel and his debtors), a philosophical Middle Ages that still insists on a claimed difference between 'class in itself' and 'class for itself'. The passage is the awakening of consciousness; the point of departure the objective situation obtained by the distribution of private property. Sometimes the awakening of consciousness is made to coincide with class organisation.

Apart from the metaphysical premise, the only concrete fact here is history. For the first time, with great clarity and analytical explanation, Marx manages to free reasoning on Man from all religious, biological or evolutionary idealisation. What remains is man in history: no small feat, seriously wasted, however, by the 'rationalising' pretension of enclosing it within the 'Romanesque' atmosphere of the phenomenology of the spirit (albeit it upside down). In this way the justification of the history of man emerges from the dialectical process placed within a fixed structure. History is rationalised through a metaphysical process, in the same way as it has been done by other historians with just as much need for 'a point of reference', using the dominion of religion or the evolution of the species. Once history is 'rationalised' historical reason ceases to be 'absolute reason' (as it was for example for the theoreticians of the old democracy) and becomes 'dialectical reason'. Rationality becomes a new wrapping for an old parcel, enabling it to be sold off as new goods. But old or new, these goods are always a product of 'Metaphysical & Co.', supplier to all the 'Royal Houses' of the world.

Certainly the old 'absolute reason' had lost favour. To reinterpret the world with its measure would have been a very difficult and easily discreditable operation, as were the attempts of the ingenuous materialists of the first half of the nineteenth century, romantics in love with matter and its metaphysical 'sensations', incapable of tearing the vicissitudes of Man from their absolute periodicity: exploitation/rebellion, and again exploitation, and again rebellion. Obtuseness of history on the one hand, obtuseness of its interpreters on the other. This blessed spirit's path did not want to move in a progressive direction: exploitation continued to grow again after the revolt, the workers' blood bathed the streets with a constancy that gave some with a sense of humour the idea of predicting revolutionary cycles.

Nevertheless, in spite of such poverty of means and pollution in the few basic ideas, Marx managed to go beyond the useless production of his time, uniting optimism and realism in a remarkable reconstruction, even though they were lacking in many aspects and requiring some

fundamental changes. One of the most deficient parts is precisely that concerning the problem of 'class'. It is no coincidence that the unfinished manuscript of Das Capital stops precisely here.

For we anarchists the problem should be quite clear. Any reasoning of the kind 'thing in itself' should not interest us. Who the devil 'class in itself' might be does not strike us as being an important problem; in fact we do not see it as a problem at all. How this 'class in itself' could become a 'class for itself' seems to us to be a joke in bad taste. Let us leave such 'typographical jokes' to professors of philosophy and reason more simply, sticking to the facts.

We do not know, nor do we want to know, if a class in itself actually exists. What does interest us is to know that there exists a power structure. This macroscopic fact, which goes right through history, cannot be denied. In this way history can be said to be marked by power and by the various transformations it has undergone in order to persist as such. But such reasoning would begin to smell of metaphysics in that it would lead us to the question: is it power that determines history, or something in history that determines power in one form or another? Let us put such reasoning aside. History is marked by many events that are more or less constant throughout its development: the State, religion, production, sex, and the struggles of the exploited. In fact it would be impossible to construct an historical development of any one of those elements, thereby giving us a history based on the State, religion, production, sex, the struggles of the exploited, etc..

And let it not be understood that we believe possible a military history, a history of religion, an economic history, a sexual history, and a history of the struggles of the exploited. We know, like everyone else, that history is an indissoluble unity. We are only saying that, for the sake of argument, it would be possible to single out the above mentioned elements.

That proves, or at least it seems so to us, that it is always possible to construct an external model, whether be dialectical (the metaphysical model), idealist (the religious model), materialist (the economic model), or descriptive (the empirical model): but that also proves that such work would be quite pointless.

For anarchists, history is all these elements together, and many other things besides. We can also include irrational and metaphysical aspects: they too are history, and although from time to time they should be isolated and condemned, not for this can they be eliminated. If we did otherwise we should fall into two indissoluble alternatives, such as that between ideas and action, or the other way around. In practice all that does not matter to us: we can leave such work to the philosophy professors.

This places us before one last metaphysical obstacle: should we ask the meaning of reality? (This is no idle question. Marxism is due much credit for having managed to camouflage it by postponing it to infinity). Reality is at the same time power, religion, production, sex, the struggle, and many other things as well that we do not remember or that we do not know. What matters is not interpreting it in its totality (which would be the metaphysical model of 'thing in itself') but interpreting the main elements that are useful for the construction of a programme of action.

Every attempt at analysis should have this aim. Let us take an example, starting from the model that takes into consideration the struggle of the exploited, a constantly recurring fact in history. The common lot of these struggles is to be reabsorbed by the State. This process, which has cost millions of lives and incredible suffering, has not killed the will to struggle.

We thus have two elements: the struggle, and the will to struggle. Now we must ask why this struggle has constantly had a negative outcome, and what is significant about this. The first point can be partly explained by the presence of a minority 'leading' this struggle; a minority which, if

on the one hand it takes itself as being the 'head' of the movement of the exploited, on the other adopts the role of 'ascending elite', that is a minority that intends to take power itself, taking the place of the elite who were previously in charge. There is another, deeper reason for the first point: the persistent 'religiosity' of the exploited masses, hence their 'need' for a 'guide', a group or a person capable of materialising their desire for vengeance. This takes us to the second point: what significance should be given to the constant negative outcome of these struggles? The conclusion is linked to the discourse on the autonomy of the individual. Only the will to freedom, at the same time the fruit of and the reason for the struggle, can eliminate the sentiment of religiosity that is still intrinsic in the struggles of the workers today.

This model might explain the great flood of reformist and authoritarian parties in that they become, in our opinion, the symbol of vengeance. The masses see in these organisations the sacerdotal caste and church that will lead to their millenary dream. For their part, the bureaucrats of power (the trade unions should be included in this argument) who present themselves as ascending elites, have every interest in exploiting this sentiment, while their very nature prevents them from stimulating any initiative towards a process of liberalisation.

But the sum of these struggles throughout the course of history can be seen as a progression. Certainly we must not fall prey to the progressivist illusion, but in our analysis, the acknowledgment of a certain progress is based on observable facts. For example, the reduction in working hours and improvement in working conditions are objectively progress compared to previous situations, although they can become a part of a process of recuperation, rendering the struggle just as necessary as before. What matters here is the obvious fact that this process transforms the type of religiosity in a situation of exploitation. To the old religiosity instrumentalised by the Church, we can compare the lay religiosity instrumentalised by the political parties today. The comparison is useful and allows us to see the differences.

If the identification of the class of exploited is vague and cannot be otherwise once we have deliberately left history and, as we shall see, reality in the realm of vagueness, on the other hand we now have the possibility of using various elements in our analysis that would otherwise have remained irremediably outside it in the case of an a priori choice of a precise system (for example, dialectics, religion, economics, metaphysics, etc.). If the construction of the analytical model is more difficult, the richer should be the result of its application, it neither having to work for the construction of a party, or in defense of a preestablished order.

A rough conclusion would be one linking the working class to a progressive elimination of the religious sentiment that gives rise to the need for a 'guide'. Every attempt to do 'for oneself' is for us a sign of acting in first person on the situation of exploitation. The struggle, taken in itself as the phenomenon of an amorphous mass more or less sensitised under the teachings of a church or party, is not enough to define a class. Nor is the productive process as a whole, as a precise repartition of the ownership of the means of production that excludes a part of the human race, enough to define a class.

Marxists can also speak of class 'consciousness'; the term does not worry us. But not for this should we be drawn into their philosophical arguments on this pseudo problem. We have often said that the autonomy of the individual is determined by his or her acceptance of responsibility in making decisions concerning his or her life: this responsabilisation can also be called 'consciousness'. It would be preferable to define it 'will'. The will to do for oneself, the will to intervene in first person, the will to break the spellbound circle of religiosity, the will to overturn tradition, the will to break with orders from above: in a word, the will to build one's own

autonomy. And it is here that the discourse on the autonomy of the individual meets that of the autonomy of the working class.

The active minority

The conclusion for working class autonomy comes to us, as we have seen, from the impossibility of breaking through the counterrevolutionary circle in any other way. That this impossibility is supposed to be due to some historical process does not concern us. Workers' autonomy is not another philosophical 'form' like so many others, it is an objective necessity. Workers must look after their own interests: the religious stimulus towards a delegate to take care of their interests must be fought.

Here a question arises. What determines the birth and development of the autonomous organisation of the struggle within the working class? Is it automatic, a direct consequence of the impossibility of a revolutionary outlet due to the 'holy alliance' between capital, parties and trade unions? Or does a precise minority exist, acting within the masses, developing a progressive clarification of the dangers, obstacles and possibilities: i.e. pushing the masses to act for themselves?

The most exact answer would be an illustration of the two factors alongside each other. But in practice the most serious problem that arises is that of the precise historical character of the industrial proletariat, and their 'hegemonic' role in the revolutionary perspective. It would seem to some that without the birth of the industrial proletariat the tendency towards autonomous organisation would not have come about. We find such reasoning curious for two reasons: first, it insists on giving the industrial proletariat the historic role of 'guide', and proposes an illogical alternative in history, the possibility of a 'nonexistence' of the proletariat. But the proletariat does exist. Industry and its development have their place in history, the industrial revolution determined the birth of capitalism and this has evolved to the present day as we know it, and shows clear signs of going in a certain direction. All this leads to a simplification of our problem. A large part of the working class today is made up of the industrial proletariat. They are directly linked in their class configuration to the development of the industrial revolution, which is logical. But we do not understand how from this we can pass to the affirmation that the industrial workers must play a predominant role over the rest of the working class. Not only that, we do not understand the second question: why autonomy must only come about within the industrial proletariat.

If we allow such reasoning, we must admit that the crisis of capitalism to be a 'mortal' one, and not one of 'transformation'. If the industrial proletariat are the most sensitive edge of the working class, they would also be the most fitted to perceiving the sickness of capitalism and of opposing it with a specific form of struggle, i.e. autonomous organisation. The other strata, the peasants for example, not being immediately in contact with the privileged stratum of production, would not heed these stimuli, and the possibility of autonomy would not arise.

It does not seem to us that capitalism is in 'mortal crisis'. On the contrary, it seems to us that it is as lively and vigorous as ever. Its very obvious crisis is manifesting itself as a passing one, an evolution towards a very different type of capitalism far more capable and efficient than that of the present time. Therefore we cannot speak in terms of a 'final crisis'. Nevertheless, a tendency for autonomous working class organisation does exist.

In fact, the present position of the reformists (parties and trade unions) is not a 'response' to capitalism's 'final crisis' any more than proletarian autonomy is. The collaboration of the unions and parties is not a new strategy but is the normal response from developing institutions to those in power. They would like to destroy the latter but must allow them to subsist so that the changeover can come about with the least possible damage to the structure, otherwise the ascending elite, when they come into power, will find themselves with a heap of rubble in their hands. That is the real position of the reformists. In the same way, working class autonomy intended as the remaining possibility of struggle, is not derived from capitalism's 'final crisis', but is part of the constant attempts of the class to free themselves from exploitation. In this sense we can see how workers have always looked for new and autonomous organisations in contrast to preceding ones (out of date or absorbed by the system), with the aim of surviving or fighting, and we can also see how these organisations have been consigned into the hands of the ascending elite, reached power, and denied the autonomous instance of the base of the workers.

We must study this mechanism of 'consigning' autonomy into the hands of the 'leaders' and guiding parties more closely. We must examine the causes of this 'religiosity', irrational motivations that act on and become a part of the structure, the lack of self-confidence that seems to afflict the masses and throws them into the hands of the reformists.

We have asked what the role of the active minority should be within the perspective of working class autonomy. The conclusion is a constant measuring of the forces that determine the failure of class autonomy, i.e. the forces we have perhaps incorrectly summarised as 'religiosity' in order to underline their irrational essence. It is impossible to theorise the formation of an anarchist minority group acting on the masses beyond the level of their own interests in abstract. What we can agree upon is the essence and content of these interests. The smokescreen drawn by the reformists is hindering a proper evaluation of the workers' interests far more drastically than the brutal power of the bosses and the fascists did in the past. Social democracy's alliance with the bosses is the worst imaginable obstacle in the path of workers' freedom.

We must therefore establish a point of reference for anarchist action within the area of workers' autonomy. This can be found in the latter's' objective interests, the clarification of which constitutes an initial contribution by the anarchist minority. But this does not mean within the perspective of 'leadership' which, even if adopted by the most orthodox anarchist tendency, would end up tracing the path of social democracy, agent of the power structure. On the contrary, it means action within the workers' movement itself, starting from the concept of autonomy and autonomous organisation concerning the workers' interests, linked to that of individual autonomy lived through the class perspective of revolutionary liberation.

The failure of so many concrete instances is that the action of anarchists, if clear at a certain analytical level, often errs in the choice of means, a decision that raises the whole question of ends to be attained. To attack the project of the parties and trade unions requires a clear idea of the means to be employed in the struggle, and not just a blind postponement to workers' spontaneity. The question of autonomy is not separate from the question of the choice of means in the struggle: the two are linked, and condition each other in turn. The violent perspective, workers' direct action such as sabotage, the destruction of work, etc., are not actions 'more to the left' than some other supposedly left-wing action. They are precise choices dictated by autonomy of interests, choices where the active presence of anarchists is of very great importance.

We must now stop and reflect carefully on the problem of the workers' 'interests'. If they were to emerge, as in the Marxist analysis, from a concrete situation—the dominion of capital—one

could, with a logical effort, talk of 'interests in themselves', corresponding to 'class for itself'. But these interests are only really those of the working class on condition that they recognise themselves as such and manage to overcome the obstacles that have been deliberately constructed by the State, reject the false proposals of the reformists, and so on. In other words, we see a voluntaristic aspect in the autonomous action of the workers, an aspect that reaches the centre of their 'objective' class interests, but only on condition that this is obtained through struggle and awareness. And it is here that the positive action of anarchist fits in.

To become aware of one's own interests, a subjective rediscovery in objective form, is the essential condition for the verification of social revolution without first passing through State communism.

Another aspect of anarchist action in the region of autonomy is that aimed at clarifying the relationship with power, leading to a solution of the above-mentioned problem of the religiosity of the 'guide'.

Power does not solidify in one precise point of the forces of reaction. There are substantial differences between capitalists, bureaucracy, middle class and petty bourgeoisie, intellectuals and other elements, all within a very complex framework. No less substantial differences exist between parties in government, reformist parties, trade unions, the repressive organs of capital (army, police, judiciary, fascists. etc.). But beyond the specific differences in constitution and employment, all of these forces are united by the one basic need of every organisation of power : survival. In the first place they struggle for their own survival and self-perpetuation in the situation that makes their existence possible; then, to make this survival easier they move on to the phase of development and the desire for even greater dominion.

That the Marxist doctrine is the expression of a certain middle class that aspires to power and the overcoming of the final obstacle that separates them from it, is an attractive and valid hypothesis, but one that needs to be gone into more deeply in our opinion. We cannot agree to simply see this as something to be found in the attitudes and interests of the middle and petty bourgeoisie alone. An equally important reflex exists in the irrational residual within the working class, which allows the development of the interests of the intermediate class that aspires to power. In this case the ascending elite is not the whole of the middle or petty bourgeois class, but a minority among them, the political parties and trade unions, who define themselves as the representatives of the workers' interests and those of the less financially endowed bourgeoisie.

That is why anarchists in the sense of an active minority should not define themselves a vanguard that is sensitive to a certain level of struggle and authorised to represent the masses. This would open the way to violent action as an end in itself, with the claim that it could solicit the workers' movement from outside as a consequence of certain actions 'exemplary' by their very isolation. The very principle of workers' self-management and direct action as the patrimony of the exploited masses, and not the prerogative of a minority, would come into contrast with such a limited vision of the revolutionary task.

Relations within the working class

The 'religiosity' that we have spoken of is not the only characteristic of the working class. This is more a basic sentiment than a precise element, something irrational that persists within the class, and which finds its origins in exploitation itself. It is concretised in the demand for

‘vengeance’, a kind of millenarianism that accompanies every kind of religion, and in the positive evaluation of certain principles—shared with the enemy—and which the latter are accused of having profaned.

Let us take an historical example. In the Middle Ages the German peasants rose up against the lords and the Church, demanding vengeance for the suffering and privation they had always been subjected to, but at the same time asking for the restoration of the Christian principle of poverty and morality in custom that had been profaned both by the lords and the Church. They were therefore fighting in the name of a desire for vengeance, hence put themselves—with great reticence in this case—into the hands of a leader in the name of a moral code shared by the exploiters who were considered profane by the people.

Today, changing the conditions of production and the composition of the classes involved in the social conflict, these relations remain constant within the working class. First of all religiosity, then morals. The first is the essential condition for falling into the hands of an elite aiming for the conquest of power and denying the existence of autonomy once again; the second is the condition for operating a radical selection within the working class itself, establishing the existence of a privileged strata that would be the first to be instrumentalised by the ascending elite.

The reason is simple. The moral values of the shop-keeping bourgeoisie persist within the working class. On this basis a division exists between ‘skilled’ and ‘manual’ workers, between professionally qualified workers who have a decent ‘honourable’ socially esteemed past, and those who live from day to day, the so-called rabble, usually present in the large cities. Marxism, typical product of the moral mentality of the bourgeoisie, has always insisted on this point, relegating the lumpen-proletariat to the margins of the revolutionary discourse, considering them with suspicion, washing their hands every time they find themselves obliged to approach them.

What is more serious is the fact that this is not simply a literary component that belongs to the priests of the Marxist church, but is also a common sentiment among the mass, one of so many factors of corporate origins which, out of interest, has not been fought by the reformists. The latter’s collaboration has in fact hindered any action capable of confronting the State with an irrecoverable situation of conflict.

We thus have: religiosity in general, which determines the acceptance of a leader identified in the ascending elite, and the moral residual that causes a deep division within the autonomous movement of the workers, laying the foundations for their instrumentalisation by the future power structure.

The first consequence of this moral residual is the refusal of every spontaneous tendency in the organisation of the struggle, any recourse to illegality, any action beyond the ‘canons’ of the current morality that has been artfully exploited by the bourgeoisie for many centuries. The division within the workers’ movement causes a division in the choice of strategy to be used in the struggle. The indiscriminate condemnation of the use of criminality is a notable example of this perspective.

We do not want to take up an argument here that would require going into in great detail. We only want to say that the seeds of bourgeois morals, if not eradicated in time, are serious enough to cause a fracture of considerable importance.

Going into the problem we realise that if the ‘religiosity’ of vengeance is essentially a fruit of exploitation, therefore belongs to the class of producers themselves, the bourgeois moral conception is not a fruit of exploitation, but reaches the class of producers through their contamination from the petty bourgeois class that is not easily distinguishable from themselves.

All the models that fill the Marxists' pages certainly do not help to clarify this distinction. The petty bourgeois class consists of shopkeepers (distribution), administrators (control), and police (repression). Shopkeepers represent the traditional bourgeoisie with their antiquated forms of distribution, and are in the process of being transformed, at least in the advanced capitalist countries. Their moral thought is diffused among other strata, for example the skilled workers. The administrators represent the part that controls the circulation of surplus value extracted by the capitalists. This is the most obtuse and retrograde class, the one most tied to a vision of life based on the values of the past, and careful to defend the privileges they have obtained up till now. In the growing phase of the State's contractual strength, this class identifies with the bureaucracy. The policing class cover all the elements of repression. Included in this class are the politicians, trade union officials, police force, priests, and all those who live on the margins of the producing class, repressing or helping to repress any sign of revolt. All of these brave people exalt and guarantee the continuation of bourgeois morality. The stratum of privileged producers, approximately identifiable with the industrial proletariat by their situation and privilege, end up accepting these morals and imposing them on the lumpenproletariat through their negative judgement.

In the same way the ideology of work and production is imported from the class of the petty bourgeoisie. The work ethic, typically bourgeois, also covers a large part of the producing class with its essential condition: the safeguarding of production. Clearly those who have most interest in spreading such an ideology are the bourgeoisie themselves and the strata who safeguard their existence. An instructive parallel could be drawn between bourgeois morals, the ideology of production, and Marxism. In any case we cannot deny that even this aspect constitutes a great problem, alimented by the specific interests of the bourgeoisie and the parties in their service.

But relationships within the working class are affected by constant changes in production relations. The analysis of the latter enables us to identify the development of the workers' defense against exploitation as this exploitation, although constant, does not always express itself in the same way. The workers defend themselves and attack their exploiters, but this struggle and offensive take on different aspects in relation to the development of accumulation, the ultimate result of capitalism.

Today, within the very complex structure of advanced capitalism it would be a mistake not to see the interdependence that exists between the producing classes of different countries due to capitalism's links at an international level clearly. This interdependence exists at two levels: first, as unequal exploitation depending on whether capitalism is in an advanced or an underdeveloped stage, and secondly according to the unequal development of capitalism within one country. The relationship between centre and periphery both at world and international level conditions relationships within the working class.

In Italy we can see a certain type of relationship in force between employers and producers, but we cannot crystallise this in one model that is valid for the whole of the country. In the first place we must see its relationship to the international situation. Secondly, we must see it in relationship to the South of Italy. For this reason the autonomous structure of the struggle must not close itself within the manufacturing dimension, but must include the situation of international and national conflict.

The problem is not an easy one. Many comrades have seen it simply as a problem of political equilibrium. To us it seems that, although it remains a political problem, it also presents the important technical aspect of how to organise the struggle from an autonomous point of view. Let us try to go into this a little further.

The groups of producers who, as we have seen, are making plans for a struggle based on autonomy, i.e. the refusal of an intermediary such as parties or trade unions, must know the productive capacity of the manufacturing or agricultural complex and how to adapt their struggle in relation to autonomous management based on the choice of production perspectives (rational distribution of work). To do this it is necessary to know that surplus-value can be formed beyond the manufacturing and agricultural situation, extracted directly through the situation of underdevelopment in which one part of the country (or the world) is being held. In other words, the economic calculation based on autonomy, and therefore the very possibility of a future communist form of production, and the basis for the autonomous of struggles today, must not only bear in mind the extraction of profit at the centre of the capitalist complex, but also that which is reached through the simple existence of a centre and a periphery. The colonialist and imperialist situation opens vast horizons for recuperation and communist accumulation (not to be confused with the capitalist or State-capitalist kind). This must be clarified in order to understand that autonomy is not just a contingent factor, a way of building the struggle, only to consign it into the hands of an ascending elite, but is a new way of conceiving production relations, a revolutionary way of completely eliminating the surplus value that is derived from exploitation.

But the presence of a periphery is not just an objective fact, it brings in subjective reality as well: men and women who suffer incredibly, exploited like beasts, who die of hunger. Men and women who live from chance, stamped with the infamous brand of criminality. This constitutes a whole explosive area that capitalism at a national and international level is hunting down with police and army, cudgels and bombs, with every means and no pity. But this is at the same time a periphery that is managing to open up the road towards a new society considered far nearer than is normally believed, because it is not seen through the deforming lens of 'professionalism'. They are starting to rebuild the faith they had lost, a faith that comes into contrast with 'religiosity' and those who instrumentalise it: the parties and unions.

Not to bear this dualistic reality in mind means to fail to understand that even autonomous action can fall into the contradictions of particularism and racism. Even the revolutionary workers' councils, if composed of workers closed within their 'specialisation', not opportunely vitalised by the presence of an active minority who are against the idea of party or union—expressions of a manufacturing centre that looks with disdain upon the underdeveloped periphery—can before long turn into imperialist workers' councils, anti-room of instrumentalisation by the parties and of an even more terrible form of exploitation.

The Anarchist Library
Anti-Copyright



Alfredo M. Bonanno
After Marx, autonomy
1975

Retrieved on 2020-04-15 from archive.elephanteditions.net
Original title: Alfredo M. Bonanno, *Autonomia dei nuclei produttivi di base*, Anarchismo n. 3,
1975. Translated by Jean Weir.

theanarchistlibrary.org