

**WORKERS
AND
CAPITAL
MARIO
TRONTI**

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The Struggle Against Work!

To finish, let's go back to the start: to the double, divided and self-counterposed nature of labour. But now we are speaking not of the labour contained in the commodity, but the working class contained within capital. The *zwieschlächtige Natur* of the working class consists in its simultaneous existence as both concrete and abstract labour, labour and labour-power, use-value and productive labour, capital and non-capital – that is, both capital and working class. It is here we find that the division is already a counterposition. And counterposition is always struggle. But struggle is not yet organisation. It is not enough for labour and labour-power to be objectively divided within the working class: in fact, this is precisely how they present themselves as united within capital. They must be divided through a subjective action: only in this way do they become the means for building an alternative form of power. It is true that *Trennung*, separation, division, is the normal relation in this society. But it is also true that precisely capital's strength is its ability to hold together what is divided – a strength that has underpinned its history and will be the basis of what remains of its future. Capital can live exclusively by keeping the working class within and against it, and on this basis it imposes the laws of its own development on society. It is thus necessary to find the point where it would be possible to impede this unity, where it becomes possible to block the mechanism of synthesis, forcibly separating the opposite poles to the point of rupture and *beyond*. And this point lies within the working class, just as the working

class is within capital. This point is precisely the separation of the working class from itself, *from work*, and thus from capital. It is the separation of the political force from the economic strategy. And we need to speak of more than just division and separation: what is needed is struggle, opposition, counterposition. To fight against capital, the working class must fight against itself *qua* capital. This is the height of contradiction not for the workers but for the capitalists, and it is necessary to expand and organise this contradiction. The capitalist system will no longer function and the plan of capital will begin to retreat, not as a development of society but as a revolutionary process. A working-class struggle against work, the worker's struggle against her own condition as a wage-labourer, labour-power's refusal to become labour, the working-class's mass rejection of the use of its labour-power: such are the terms in which the initial division-counterposition that Marx's analysis first discovered within the nature of labour are here repropounded strategically, after the tactic of research. The *Doppelcharakter* of the labour represented in commodities is thus discovered to be a *dual nature of the working class* – dual and at the same time divided, divided and at the same time counterposed to itself, counterposed to itself and at the same time in struggle with itself. We should understand that the bases of the vast political complexity of all the great problems of organisation, and of their solution in the rediscovery of an organic relation between class and party, all lie in this critical relation internal to the working-class itself. And this relation becomes an even deeper unresolved problem as the working class grows into a dominant force. Both the well-honed weapons of theory and the blunter material weapons of daily practice should henceforth be aimed at precisely this point. And here, too, there is not much more that needs inventing.

Contemporary forms of working-class struggles in the heartlands of advanced capitalism all bear, in the rich content of their own spontaneity, the slogan of the struggle against work as the only possible means of striking a blow against capital. Again, the party presents itself as the organisation of what already exists within the class, but which the class alone cannot succeed in organising. No worker today is prepared to recognise the existence of work outside capital. Work equals exploitation: this is the logical prerequisite and historical result of capitalist civilisation. From here, there is no point of return. The worker has no interest in the 'dignity of work'; she can leave the 'pride of the producer'

entirely for the boss. Indeed, only the boss now remains to eulogise work. True, in the organised workers' movement, there is still a place for such ideology, but not in the working class itself. Today, the working class need only look at itself to understand capital. It need only combat itself in order to destroy capital. It has to recognise itself as a political power and negate itself as a productive force. For proof of this, we need only look at the moment of struggle itself: during the strike, the 'producer' is immediately identified as the class enemy. Labour standing counterposed to the working class, as an enemy – such is the point of departure not only for antagonism, but also for its organisation. If the alienation of the worker has any meaning, its essence is highly revolutionary. *The organisation of alienation*: this is the obligatory path that the party must impose on working-class spontaneity. The goal is, again, refusal, but at a higher level – it becomes active and collective, a political refusal on a mass scale, organised and planned. Hence, the immediate task of working-class organisation is now to *overcome passivity*. This is possible on one condition: that this passivity is recognised as an elementary, spontaneous form of refusal by the working class. For mass passivity always follows a political defeat of the workers, to be blamed on their official organisations, or after a leap forward in capitalist development – that is, in the appropriation of socially productive forces. Everyone knows that, over the past few decades, these two objective preconditions of working-class passivity have combined. Indeed, they have ever more become the absolute despotic power of capital. While capital was conquering the whole of society at the international level and becoming socialised, the idea of giving working-class movements the political role of managing the national social interest risked a historic suicide. The result was an interruption of the revolutionary process that had advanced through stages from 1848 and 1871 to 1917. From 1917 onward, the annals of the revolution carried the mark of *working-class defeat*. What intervened at this point to block the further progress of the revolution? What prevented the process from reaching its intended end goal? The deeper we look, the more we see that passivity has been the most powerful barrier in blocking all future revolutionary possibilities. The truth is that the working class's massive refusal to consider itself an active participant in capitalist society already represents a decision to opt out, a stance against the social interest. Hence, what appears as integration of the working class into the system does not in fact represent a

renunciation of the struggle against capital; rather, it indicates a refusal to develop and stabilise capital beyond certain given political limits, beyond a fixed defensive cordon, from which aggressive sallies can then be launched. If the working class had to find a single response to both capitalist production and the official workers' movement, the only possible one was a specific form of entirely working-class self-organisation, based on a spontaneous passivity. An organisation, in other words, without organisation, meaning a working-class organisation not subject to bourgeois institutionalisation. The result was one of those organisational miracles that are possible only from the working-class point of view, like Lenin's 'bourgeois state without a bourgeoisie': an organisation no longer seen as an intermediate form of the workers' state, but as a preliminary form of the working-class party. Today the basic planks of the party must be laid across a political void in terms of both practical experience and theoretical research. But this does not alter the fact that colossal foundations have already been laid on the decisive terrain of direct class struggle, marking out where the offensive must begin and where it must reach. *Passive* non-collaboration in the development of capitalism and *active* political refusal of its power are the beginning and end point of this breakthrough. The opening of the revolutionary process lies entirely beyond this point; on this side lie all the present problems of building organisation for the revolution. *We need the tactics of organisation in order to arrive at the strategy of refusal.* And it is here, in the middle, that we need continually to point against the class enemy the only subversive weapon capable of reducing him to a subaltern force: namely, the threat of denying him the mediation of the working class in the social relation of capitalist production. The working class must no longer shoulder the requirements of capital, even in the form of its own demands; it must force the class of capitalists to present its own objective needs and then subjectively refuse them; compel the bosses to ask, so that the workers can answer with an active, organised 'no'. This, today, is the only possible route to overcoming working-class passivity, overturning the spontaneous form this passivity presently takes while furthering its present political content of negation and revolt. The workers' first organised 'no' to the capitalists' first demands will then explode as a declaration of total war, a historic call to the decisive struggle, the modern form of the old revolutionary slogan, 'Workers of the world, unite!' None of this will be possible without the greatest degree of

violence – this, we know from experience. In all the upheavals of the past, the *type* of productive activity was left intact. It has always exclusively been a question of the distribution of productive activity, redistributing labour to new groups of people. Only the communist revolution, as Marx said, or, as we can today begin to say, simply the revolution, the only plausible present-day minimum programme for the working class, challenges for the first time the whole of productive activity that has hitherto existed. This challenge will abolish work. And in so doing it will abolish class domination. The abolition of work by the working class and the violent destruction of capital are one and the same. What, then, of labour as ‘the prime necessity of human existence’ (Marx)? Perhaps it would be better to transport it from the future prospect of communism to the present history of capitalism – let the capitalists do it rather than the workers. Does this mean that if confronted with Marx, the working-class point of view would arrive at a kind of parricide? This is a question we cannot yet answer. The continuation of the research presented here will be decisive for the solution of this and all the other problems it raises. There are no pre-given solutions. Once again, everything remains to be done. To this end, we have to keep our eye on the most obscure aspect of the whole process – until, that is, we have reached the point at which we can distinguish *what has happened within the working class since Marx*.